

UNIT 129 – UPSC - Indian History - Kushans and Kanishkas

India History - Kushans and Kanishkas

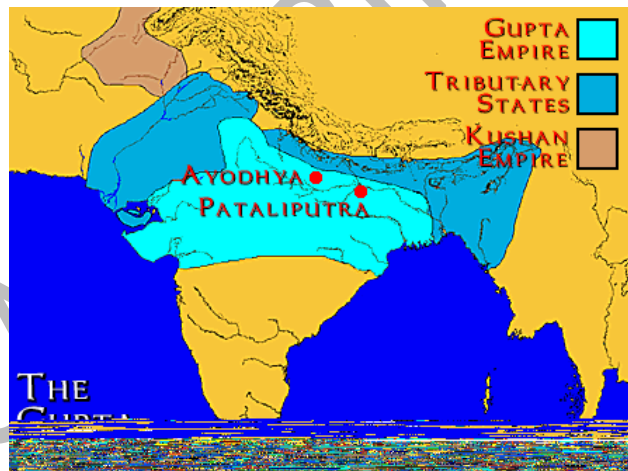
AD 50: Establishment of Kushans - [AD 50 - 300]



Kushana Coin

The Kushans were a branch of the nomadic Yeuhchi tribe of China. The Yeuhchi tribe was in conflict with another tribe and so was forced to leave China. They came to Central Asia and then spread to Bactria, Paritha and Afghanistan. Gradually they were divided into five branches. One of these branches -- Kouel Chougang (Kushans) -- was superior to all. The Kushans under Kujala attacked the Parithans, took possessions of Ki-pin and Kabul and became the complete master of the Indian borderland.

Kujala became the first king of the Kushans and was known as Kadphises I. He was a great warrior. He was succeeded by his son Wima Kadphises known as Kadphises II. He conquered the north-western region of India. He defeated Saka Satraps in the north-west. Punjab and Sind were his dominions.



AD 120: Reign of Kanishka

Kanishka was the most famous of the Kushan kings. It is not known how he became the king but he ascended the throne in AD 120. When Kanishka ascended the throne, his empire consisted of Afghanistan, Sind, Punjab and portions of the former Parithan and Bactrian kingdoms. His empire extended from the north-west and Kashmir, over most of the Gangetic valley. He annexed three provinces of the Chinese empire, namely, Tashkand, Khotan and Yarkhand. He was the only king who ruled over these territories. He had two capitals at



Kanishka

Purushpura (Peshawar now in Pakistan) and at Mathura in west Uttar Pradesh. Kanishka proved that he was a great conqueror.

Successors of Kanishka

Kanishka's immediate successor was Vashiska who was then succeeded by Huvishka. Mathura became the centre of Kushans. Many monuments were erected during Huvishka's reign. The last great king of Kushans was Vasudev I. The Kushans were overthrown by the Sassanians of Persia in the north-west and the Guptas in the north. The rule of Kushans ended almost at the same time as that of the Satavahans in the south.

Buddhism during the Kushans



Gandhara Buddha

Kanishka embraced Buddhism towards the middle of his reign. He is said to have been Zoroastrian before he became Buddhist. He spent his resources in spreading Buddhism. Mahayana was the new form of Buddhism that was followed during this period where the Buddha was worshipped as God. Old monasteries were repaired and many new ones were built.

Art, Science and Literature

Kanishka was a great patron of art and literature. A new form of art Gandhara Art was developed. Beautiful images of Buddha were developed in a Greek-Roman style. These images were carved in a realistic way, with graceful bodies and curly hair.

Kanishka's court was adorned by many scholars like Ashvaghosha, Vasumitra, Nagarjuna and Charaka. Ashvaghosha was a great poet and a master of music. He wrote *Buddhacharita*, a biography of the Buddha. Charak was a great physician and he wrote a book *Charak Samhita*, which is based on the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

89-105 AD Kushan king repulsed by the Chinese General Pan Chao

148-170AD An-Shih-Kao translates a work by Kanishka's Chaplain

152 AD China loses Khotan

230 AD The Yueh chi king Vasudeva sends an embassy to China

276-293AD Sassanian conquest of parts of North-West India