

NOTES ON HISTORY OF INDIA

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More important for the history of India were the conquests of the Sakas and Yueh-chih, nomad tribes of Central Asia similar to the modern Turkomans*^[f1] The former are first heard of in the basin of the river Hi, and being dislodged by the advance of the Yueh-chih moved southwards reaching north-western India about 150 B. C. Here they founded many small principalities, the rulers of which appear to have admitted the suzerainty of the Parthians for sometime and to have borne the title of Satraps. It is clear that western India was parcelled out among foreign princes called Sakas, Yavanas, or Pallavas whose frontiers and mutual relations were constantly changing. The most important of these principalities was known as the Great Satrapy which included Surashtra (Kathiawar) with adjacent parts of the mainland lasted until about 395A.D.

The Yueh-chih started westwards from the frontiers of China about 100 B. C. and, driving the Sakas before them, settled in Bactria. Here Kadphises, the chief of one of their tribes, called the Kushans, succeeded in imposing his authority on the others who coalesced into one nation henceforth known by the tribal name. The chronology of the Kushan Empire is one of the vexed questions of Indian history and the dates given below are stated positively only because there is no space for adequate discussion and are given with some scepticism, that is desire for more knowledge founded on facts. Kadphises I (c. 15-45 A. D.) after consolidating his Empire led his armies southwards, conquering Kabul and perhaps Kashmir. His successor Kadphises II (c. 45-78 A. D.) annexed the whole of north-western India, including northern Sind, the Punjab and perhaps Benares. There was a considerable trade between India and the Roman Empire at this period and an embassy was sent to Trojan, apparently by Kanishka (c. 78-123), the successor of Kadphises. This monarch played a part in the later history of Buddhism comparable with that of Asoka in earlier ages^[r2] He waged war with the Parthians and Chinese, and his Empire which had its capital at Peshawar included Afghanistan, Bactria, Kashgar, Yarkhand, Khotan^[r3] and Kashmir. These dominions, which perhaps extended as far as Gya, in the east, were retained by his successors Huvishka (123-140 A. D.) and Vasudeva (140-178 A. D.) but after this period the Andhra and Kushan dynasties both collapsed as Indian powers, although Kushan kings continued to rule in Kabul. The reasons of their fall are unknown but may be connected with the rise of the Sassanids in Persia. For more than a century, the political history of India is a blank and little can be said except that the kingdom of Sirastra continued to exist under a Saka dynasty.

Light returns with the rise of the Gupta dynasty, which roughly marks the beginning of modern Hinduism and of a reaction against Buddhism. Though nothing is known of the fortunes of Patali-putra, the ancient imperial city of the Mauryas, during the first three centuries of our era, it continued to exist. In 320 a local Raja known as Candragupta I increased his dominions and celebrated his coronation by the institution of the Gupta era. His son Samudra Gupta continued his conquests and in the course of an extraordinary campaign, concluded about 340 A. D. appears to have received the submission of almost the whole peninsula. He made no attempt to retain all this territory but his effective authority was exercised in a wide district extending from the Hugli to the rivers Jumna and Chambal in the west and from the Himalayas to the Narbuda. His son Candragupta II or Vikramaditya added to these possessions Malwa, Glijarat and Kathiawar and formorethan half a century the Guptas ruled undisturbed over nearly all northern India except Rajputana and Sind. Their capital was at first Pataliputra, but afterwards Kausambi and Ayodhya became royal residences.

The fall of the Guptas was brought about by another invasion of barbarians known as Huns, Ephthalites^[4] or White Huns and apparently a branch of the Huns who invaded Europe. This branch remained behind in Asia and occupied northern Persia. They invaded India first in 455, and were repulsed, but returned about 490 in greater force and overthrew the Guptas. Their kings Tormana and Mihiragula were masters of northern India till 540 and had their local capital at Sialkot in the Panjab, though their headquarters were rather in Barnyin and Baikh. The cruelties of Mihiragula provoked a coalition of Hindu princes. The Huns were driven to the north and about 565 A. D. their destruction was completed by the allied forces of the Persians and Turks. Though they founded no permanent states their invasion was important, for many of them together with kindered tribes such as the Glirjars (Gujars) remained behind when their political power broke up and, like the Sakas and Kushans before them, contributed to form the population of north-western India, especially the Rajput clans.

The defeat of the Huns was followed by another period of obscurity, but at the beginning of the seventh century Harsha (606-647 A. D.), a prince of Thanesar, founded after thirty five years of warfare, a state which though it did not outlast his own life, emulated for a time the dimensions and prosperity of the Gupta Empire. We gather from the account of the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Chaung, who visited his court at Kanauj, that the kings of Bengal, Assam and Ujjain were his vassals but that the Panjab, Sind and Kashmir were independent. Kalinga, to the south of Bengal was depopulated but Harsha was not able to subdue Pulakesin II, the Calukya king of the Deccan.

Let us now turn for a moment to the history of the south. It is even more obscure both in events and chronology than thatofthe north, but we must not think of the

Dravidian countries as Uninhabited or barbarius. Even the classical writers of Europe had some knowledge of them. King Pandion (Pandya) sent a mission to Augustus in 20 B.C.^[15] Pliny^[16] speaks of Modura (Madura) and Ptolemy also mentions this town with about forty others. It is said that there was a temple dedicated to Augustus at Maziris, identified with Craganore. From an early period the extreme south of the peninsula was divided into three states known as the Pandya, Cera and Cola kingdoms^[17]. The first corresponded to the districts of Madura and Tinnevely. Cera and Kerala lay on the west coast in the modern Travancore. The Cola country included Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madras, with the greater part of Mysore. From the sixth to the eighth century A. D. a fourth power was important, namely the Pallavas, who apparently came from the north of the Madras presidency. They had their capital at Canjeevaram and were generally at war with the three kingdoms. Their king, Narasimha-Varman (625-645 A. D.) ruled over part of the Deccan and most of the Cola country but after about 750 they declined, whereas the Colas grew stronger and Rajaraja (985-1018) whose dominions included the Madras Presidency and Mysore made them the paramount power in southern India, which position they retained until the thirteenth century.

As already mentioned, the Deccan was ruled by the Andhras from 220 B. C. to 236 A. D., but for the next three centuries nothing is known of its history until the rise of the Calukya dynasty at Vatapi (Badami) in Bijapur. Pulakesin II of this dynasty (608-642), a contemporary of Harsha, was for some time successful in creating a rival Empire which extended from Gujarat to Madras, and his power was so considerable that he exchanged embassies with Khusru II, King of Persia, as is depicted in the frescoes of Ajanta. But in 642 he was defeated and slain by the Palavas.

With the death of Pulakesin and Harsha begins what has been called the Rajput period, extending from about 650 to 1000 A. D. and characterized by the existence of numerous kingdoms ruled by dynasties nominally Hindu, but often descended from northern invaders or non-Hindu aboriginal tribes. Among them may be mentioned the following :—

1. Kanauj or Panchala. This kingdom passed through troublous times after the death of Harsha but from about 840 to 910 A. D. under Bhoja (or Mihira) and his son, it became the principal power in northern India, extending from Bihar to Sind. In the twelfth century it again became important under the Gaharwar dynasty.

2. Kanauj was often at war with the Palas of Bengal, a line of Buddhist kings which began about 730 A. D. Dharmapala (c. 800 A. D.) was sufficiently powerful to depose the king of Kanauj. Subsequently the eastern portion of the Pala Kingdom separated itself under a rival dynasty known as the Senas.

3. The districts to the south of the Jumna known as Jejak-abhukti (Bundelkhand) and Cedi (nearly equivalent to our Central Provinces) were governed by two

dynasties known as Candels and Kalacuris. The former are thought to have been originally Gonds. They were great builders and constructed among other monuments the temples of Khajurao. Kirdvarman Chandel (1049-1100) greatly extended their territories. He was a patron of learning and the allegorical drama Prabodhacandrodaya was produced at his Court.

4. The Paramara (Pawar) dynasty of Malwa were likewise celebrated as patrons of literature and kings Munja (974-995) and Bhoja (1018-1060) were authors as well as successful warriors.

II Saka Period

According to Vincent Smith, after first adopting A. D. 78 which appeared the most probable, finally chose 120 A. D. and we may agree that this date marks the beginning of the Saka period inaugurated by Kanishka.

The order in which the chief Kushan kings followed doubtful. It is generally agreed that Kanishka came after Kujula Kara Kadphises I (Kujula Kara Kadphises) and II (Vima Kadphises) former of these two, a Bactrianised Scythian, must, in Dr. Smith's view, have assumed power about 40 A. D. He seized Gandhara and the country of Taxila from Gondophares, the Parthian prince who, according to the apocryphal acts of the apostles, received St. Thomas. His son Vima (78-110) carved out a great empire for himself, embracing the Punjab and the whole western half of the Ganges basin.

There seems to have been an interval of about 10 years between Kadphises and Kanishka, the latter was the son of one Vajheshka and no relation of his predecessor, he seems to have been from Khotan, not Bactria, and indeed he spent the summer at Kapisi in Paropamisadae . . . [18] and the winter at Purushapura (Peshawar) the axis of his empire was no longer in the (midst) [19] of the Graeco-Iranian country.

The empire of Kanishka did not last long. Of his two sons, Vasishka and Havishka only the second survived him.

The power of the Kushans in the third century was reduced to Bactria with Kabul and Gandhara, and they fell beneath the yoke of the Sassanids.

Kshatrapas or Satraps.

This title, which is Iranian, is borne by two dynasties founded by the Sakas who had been driven from their country by the Yuch-chi invasion.

I. The first was established in Surashtra (Kathewar). One prince of this line Chasthana, seems to have held Malwa before the great days of the Kushans and to have become a vassal of Kanishka; he ruled over Ujjayini, which was the centre of the Indian civilisation.

II. The second line to which the name of Kshaharata is more particularly attached, was the hereditary foe of the Andhras ; it ruled over Maharashtra, the country between modern Surat and Bombay. It was this latter Saka state that was

annihilated by the Satakarni and it was the former which arranged it, when Rodraman, the Satrap of Ujjayni conquered the Andhra King. The antagonism between the eastern & western states seems to have been accompanied by a difference of ideals. The Sakas, like all the Scythians of India or Serindia, such as the Thorkhans, retained from their foreign origin a sympathy for Buddhism, whereas the Andhras were keen supporters of Brahmanism.

The Guptas

The events of the third century are unknown to history and we have very, little information about the Kushan empire.

Day light returns in 318-19, when there arises in the old country of Magadha a new dynasty-Gupta.

The Guptas-Chandragupta II conquered the country of Malvas, Gujrathand Surashtra (Kathiwar) overthrowing the 1st great Satrap of the Saka dynasty of Ujjain. As an extension of his territory westward he made Ayodhya and Kausambi his capitals instead of Pataliputra. About 155 (B.C.) he conquered the whole of the lower Indus and Kathewar, waged war in Rajputana, and Oudh but took Mathura (Muttra) on the Jumna, and even reached Pataliputra.

He was severely defeated by Pushyamitra (?). Bactriana was at least in the north, a barrier between Parthia and India. India was therefore less exposed to attack from Parthia. Nevertheless, there was at least one Parthian ruler, Mithradates 1(171-136) who annexed the country of Taxila for a few years, about 138.

End of the independence of Parthia and Bactria

The event that put an end to the independence of Parthia and Bactria was a new invasion, resulting from a movement of tribes, which had taken place far away from India in the Mongolian steppes.

About 170 (B.C.) a horde of nomadic Scythians, the Yuch-chi or Tokharians, being driven from Gobi, the present Kansu, by the Hiang-nu or Huns, started on a wild migration which upset the whole balance of Asia.

They fell on the Sakas, who were Iranianised Scythians dwelling north of the Persian empire and settled in their grazing grounds north of the Jazartes. The expelled Sakas fell on Parthia and Bactriana, obliterating the last vestiges of Greek rule, between 140 and 120 (B. C.) Then the Tokharians, being defeated in their turns by the Wu-Sun tribe, established themselves on the Oxus, and after that took all the country of the Sakas in eastern Iran at the entrance to India. That entrance was found in the first century after Christ.

The conquest of India was the work of the Kushans (Kushana), a dynasty which united the Yue-Chi tribes and established their dominion both over their own kinsfolk the Sakas of Parthia and over peoples of the Punjab.

The accession of the principal King of this line, Kanishka, was placed at

uncertain dates between 57 B. C. and A. D. 200.

Pushyamitra—a mayor of the Palace as Sybrani Livi called him.

The Selected Empire ruled by Antiochos III (261-246 B.C.) and lost two provinces Parthia and Bactriana which emancipated themselves simultaneously. The Parthians whom the Indians called Pahalvas, were related to the nomads of the Turkoman steppes and occupied the country south-east of the Caspian. The Bactrians bordered on the Parthians on the north-east and were settled between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus ; the number and wealth of their towns were legendary. These two peoples seem to have taken advantage of the difficulties of Antiochos and his successors, Seleucos II (246-226 B.C.) and III (226-223 B.C.) in the west to break away.

The Parthian revolt was a natural movement, led by Arsaces, the founder of a dynasty which was to rule Persia for nearly 500 years.

The Bactrian rising was brought about by the ambition of a Greek satrap. Diodotos, represents an outbreak of Hellenism in the heart of Asia.

There is no doubt that the formation of these enterprising nations on the Indo-Iranian border helped to shake the empire of Ashoka in the time of his successors.

The Punjab, once a Persian satrapy and then a province of Alexander, was to find itself still more exposed to attack, now that smaller but turbulent states had arisen at its doors. After Diodotos I & II, the King of Bactria was Euthidemes, who went to war with Antioches the Great of Syria. Peace was concluded with the recognition of Bactrian independence about 208. But during hostilities Syrian troops had crossed the Hindu Kush and entering the Kabul valley had severely dispoiled the ruler Subhagasena. Demetrius, the son of Enthidemos, increased his dominion not only in the present Afghanistan but in India proper, and bore the title of King of the Indians (200-190). Between 190 and 180 there were Greek adventurers reigning at Taxila, named Paleon & Agathocles. From 160 to 140 roughly, Kabul and the Punjab were held by a pure Greek, Milinda or Minander, who left a name in the history of Buddhism.

III Huns

In the last years of Kumargupta new Iranian peoples assailed the empire, but they were kept back from the frontiers. Under Skandagupta, the first wave of formidable migration came down upon the same frontiers. This consisted of nomad Mongoloids to whom India afterwards gave the genuine name of **Huna**, under which we recognised the Huns who invated Europe.

Those who reached India after the middle of the fifth century were white Huns or Ephthalites, who in type were closer to the Turks than to the hideous followers of

Attila. After a halt in the valley of the Oxus they took possession of Persia and Kabul. Skandagupta had driven them off for a few years (455 A. D.) but after they had slain Firoz the Sassanid in 484, no Indian state could stop them. One of them, named Toramana, established himself among the Malavas in 500 and his son Mihirgula set up his capital at Sakol(Sialkot) in the Punjab.

A native prince Yeshodharman shook off the yoke of Mihirgula. The expulsion of the Huns was not quite complete everywhere. A great many resided in the basin of the Indus.

At the beginning of the 7th century a power arose from the chaos in the small principality of Sthanvisvara (Thaneshwar, near Delhi). Here a courageous Raja Prabhakar Vardhan organised a kingdom, which showed its mettle against the Gurjars, the Malwas and other neighbouring princes. Shortly after his death in 604 or 605 his eldest son was murdered by the orders of the king of Gauda in Bengal. The power fell to his younger brother Harsha.