

SUNGA AND KANVA DYNASTY

Sunga Empire (187 to 78 BCE)

Pushyamitra Sunga (187–151 BCE):

- The dynasty was established by Pushyamitra Sunga, after the **fall of the Maurya** Empire (when the emperor **Brihadratha**, the last of the Mauryan rulers, was assassinated by the then Senapati of the Mauryan armed forces, **Pushyamitra Sunga**). Its capital was Pataliputra, but later emperors such as Bhagabhadra also held court at Besnagar, modern Vidisha in Eastern Malwa.
- The empire of Pushyamitra was extended up to Narmada in the south, and controlled Jalandhar and Sialkot in the Punjab in the north-western regions, and the city of Ujjain in central India. The Kabul Valley and much of the Punjab passed into the hands of the Indo-Greeks and the Deccan to the Satavahanas.

Origin

- Patanjali in his Mahabhashya and Panini in his Ashtadhyayi clearly states Pushyamitra Sunga was a Brahmin from *Bhardwaj Gotra*.
- The meaning of “Sunga” is the fig tree in Sanskrit. So Sungas took their dynastic name from the fig tree. (Other example of Indian dynasties like Kadamba (a tree name) of Banavasi, Pallava(Sanskrit word for “branch and twig”) of Kanchi who took their dynastic name from tree.)

Prosecution of Buddhists?

- It believed by some historians to have persecuted Buddhists and contributed to a resurgence of Brahmanism that forced Buddhism outwards to Kashmir, Gandhara and Bactria.
- The earliest reference to persecution of Buddhists by Pushyamitra Sunga is from the Sarvastivadin Buddhist text of 2nd Century CE, *Divyavadana* and its constituent part, the *Ashokavadana*. Tibetan Buddhist Historian Taranatha also mentions prosecution.
- Pushyamitra Sunga might have withdrawn royal patronage of Buddhist institutions. With patronage shifting from Buddhism to Brahmanism, the Buddhists sided with Sunga’s enemies, the Indo-Greeks.
- According to some historians, Pushyamitra Sunga prosecuted Buddhists because:
 1. There is evidence of damage to Buddhist establishments at Takshashila around the time of Sunga.
 2. Sanchi stupa was **destroyed** by Pushyamitra Sunga, but later **restored** by his successor Agnimitra.
 3. The Bharhut Stupa gateway was not constructed during the time of Pushyamitra Sunga, but was constructed by his successors who had a more tolerant attitude to Buddhism, compared to Pushyamitra Sunga.
 4. The destruction of Ghositarama monastery at Kaushambi, in 2nd century CE, is attributed to Pushyamitra Sunga.
 5. Deokothar Stupas (located between Sanchi and Barhut) suffered destruction during the same period, also suggesting some kind of involvement of Sunga rule.

Some historians have expressed skepticism of Pushyamitra’s persecution of Buddhists because:

1. The account of the Tibetan Buddhist Historian Taranatha is absurd.
2. Archaeological evidence casts doubt on the claims of Buddhist persecution by Pushyamitra.
3. The Ashokavadana legend is likely a Buddhist version of Pushyamitra’s attack on the Mauryas, reflecting the declining influence of Buddhism in the Sunga Imperial court. The very same Ashokavadana attributes similar cruelty to Ashoka against the Ajivikas.
4. Support of Buddhism by the Sungas at some point is suggested by an epigraph on the gateway of Bharhut, which mentions its erection “during the supremacy of the Sungas(but they may be Pushyamitra’s Successor)

5. The existence of Buddhism in Bengal in the Sunga period can also be inferred from a **terracotta tablet** that was found at **Tamralipti**.

Sunga Dynasty ended, Buddhism flourished under the Kushanas and the Shakas; and hence Buddhism did not suffer any real set-back due to the Sunga Dynasty.

Agnimitra (149–141 BCE)

- He was the **second King** of the Sunga Dynasty of northern India. He succeeded his father, Pushyamitra Sunga.
- He was **hero** of Kalidasa's play **Malavikagnimitra**. According to Kalidasa in the Malavikagnimitra, Agnimitra belonged to the Baimbika family (Baimbika-kula), while the Puranas mention him as a Sunga.
- The Malavikagnimitra, informs us that, a war broke out between the Sungas and neighboring Vidarbha kingdom during Agnimitra's reign. Before the rise of the Sungas, Vidarbha (under Yajnasena) had become independent from the Mauryan Empire. Yajnasena was defeated and recognized the suzerainty of the Sunga rulers.

Vasumitra

- In the Malavikagnimitram, Kalidasa tells us that Vasumitra guarded the sacrificial horse let loose by his grandfather Pushyamitra, and he defeated the armies of the "**Yavana**" (or Indo-Greeks) on the banks of the Sindhu River.

Devabhuti (83–73 BCE)

- The last of the Sunga emperor was Devabhuti (83–73 BCE). He was assassinated by his minister (Vasudeva Kanva). The Sunga dynasty was then replaced by the subsequent Kanvas.

Cultural contributions of Sungas

- Art, education, philosophy, and other learning flowered during this period. Most notably, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and Mahabhasya were composed in this period.
- It is also noted for its subsequent mention in the Malavikagnimitra. This work was composed by Kalidasa in the later Gupta period, and romanticized the love of Malavika and King Agnimitra, with a background of court intrigue.
- Artistry on the subcontinent also progressed with the rise of the Mathura school of art, which is considered the indigenous counterpart to the more Hellenistic Gandhara school of art.
- During the historical Sunga period (185 to 73 BCE), Buddhist activity also managed to survive somewhat in central India (Madhya Pradesh) as suggested by some architectural expansions that were done at the stupas of Sanchi and Bharhut, originally started under Emperor Ashoka. It remains uncertain whether these works were due to the weakness of the control of the Sungas in these areas, or a sign of tolerance on their part.
- Later Sunga emperors were seen as amenable to Buddhism and as having contributed to the building of the stupa at Bharhut.

Kanva dynasty (75 BCE – 30 BCE)

- Kanva dynasty was the successor of the Shunga dynasty in Magadha. They also known as Kanvayanas.
- They ruled for very short time duration of 45 years (75 to 30 BCE).
- Like Shungas, Kanvas were also from Brahmin origin. They considered themselves as decedents of Rishi Kanva.
- Vasudeva Kanva was the **founder** of the dynasty. He killed last ruler Devabhuti Shunga of Shunga Dynasty and ascended the throne.
- During their time in north Yavanas (Greeks) were became strong and occupied Punjab region. When Kanva Dynasty established their rule in Magadha, Shunga princes were still ruling in Vidisha. At the same time Satvahanas (Andhras) in south declared themselves independent under the rule of Simuka and started to attack Magadha.

- The Second king of the Kanva dynasty was Bhumimitra , who fought many wars against Satavahanas. After that Satvahana got busy with their internal problems and stopped attacking Magadha. Kanva rulers after Bhumimitra, ruled peacefully.
- Bhumimitra succeeded by Narayana, who ruled for 12 years and then succeeded by his son Susaraman.
- Around 30 BCE Satavahana again attacked Magadha, this time they defeated last Kanva king Susharman and annexed their kingdom.
- This put to an end to Kanva dyansty as well as the Magadhan Empire.
- Even though Satavahana conquered Magadha, it is not possible to assign them in the history of the Magadha, because the Satavahanas was originally ruling dynasty from Deccan.
- Magadha was ruled by four Kanva rulers. Much detail about these kings has been ascertained only on the basis of Numismatics. Last ruler was Susharman (40 – 30 BCE).
- Their dynasty was brought to an end by the ruler of the **Satavahana Dynasty** or ‘Andhra bhritya’ dynasty in Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh.

Objective Questions

- The Sunga dynasty had made __ the official religion of their kingdom.**
 (A) Buddhism
 (B) Brahmanism
 (C) The Ajivika Sect
 (D) Jainism
Correct Answer: (B) Brahmanism
- Pushyamitra Sunga :**
 (A) defended the Magadhan empire against the Bactrian Greeks
 (B) was persecutor of Buddhism according to the Divyavadana
 (C) is said to have performed Asvamedha sacrifice
 (D) did all the above
Correct Answer: (D) did all the above
- During the period of Sungas there was a revival of ____.**
 (A) Jainism
 (B) Buddhism
 (C) Zoroastrianism
 (D) Brahminism
Correct Answer: (D) Brahminism
- Kanva dynasty was established by**
 (A) Vasudeva
 (B) Rudradaman
 (C) Nagarjuna
 (D) Kadphises
Correct Answer: (A) Vasudeva
- The Sunga ruler Bhaga erected a monolithic ‘Garuda’ at ____.**
 (A) Besnagar
 (B) Varanasi
 (C) Rajagriha
 (D) Pataliputra
Correct Answer: (A) Besnagar
- Which religion flourished during the Sunga period?**
 (A) Saivism
 (B) Buddhism
 (C) Brahmanism
 (D) Nature worship
Correct Answer: (C) Brahmanism
- Pushyamitra Sunga was a staunch ____.**
 (A) Buddhist
 (B) Hindu
 (C) Jain
 (D) Atheist
Correct Answer: (B) Hindu
- What is said to be the original home of the Sungas?**
 (A) Vidisha
 (B) Kalinga
 (C) Berar
 (D) Bharhut
Correct Answer: (A) Vidisha
- The last ruler of Sunga dynasty was:**
 (A) Bhaga
 (B) Devabhuti
 (C) Vasudeva
 (D) Sujyeshtha
Correct Answer: (B) Devabhuti
- The founder of the Achaemenian Empire was**
 (A) Darius
 (B) Xerxes
 (C) Cyrus
 (D) Cambyses
Correct Answer: (C) Cyrus
- The first to establish trade contacts with the Roman empire were:**
 (A) Indo Greeks
 (B) Tamils
 (C) Kushanas

(D) Sakas

Correct Answer: (B) Tamils

12. **The last Mauryan ruler, who was killed by his Commander-in-Chief was ___?**

(A) Dasaratha

(B) Kun-ala

(C) Samprati

(D) Brihadratha

Correct Answer: (D) Brihadratha

13. **Who was the founder of Sunga Dynasty?**

(A) Pushyamitra

(B) Agnimitra

(C) Vasumitra

(D) Vajramitra

Correct Answer: (A) Pushyamitra

14. **Who was contemporary of Pushyamitra Sunga?**

(A) Patanjali

(B) Kalidas

(C) Heliodorus

(D) Vasudeva

Correct Answer: (A) Patanjali

15. **Pushyamitra, the founder ruler of Sunga Dynasty performed how many Ashvamedha sacrifices?**

(A) None

(B) 1

(C) 2

(D) 3

Correct Answer: (B) 1

16. **Who wrote Mahabhashya?**

(A) Panini

(B) Patanjali

(C) Kalidas

(D) Tulsidas

Correct Answer: (B) Patanjali

17. **Who wrote Malvikagnimitra?**

(A) Kalidas

(B) Tulsidas

(C) Agnimitra

(D) Chanakya

Correct Answer: (A) Kalidas

18. **The last ruler of the Mauryan Dynasty, who was assassinated by Pushyamitra Sunga, his commander-in-chief was ___ ?**

(A) Bindusara

(B) Chandragupta

(C) Brihadrata

(D) Ashokavardhan

Correct Answer: (C) Brihadrata

19. **Who was the first Indo-Greek king, who became Buddhist?**

(A) Antiochus II

(B) Apollodotus I

(C) Apollodotus II

(D) Menander II

Correct Answer: (D) Menander II

20. **Agnimitra, who is the hero of Kalidasa's 'Malvikagnimitram' was a king of which of the following dynasties?**

(A) Sunga

(B) Kanva

(C) Satavahana

(D) Maurya

Correct Answer: (A) Sunga

21. **Which among the following kings assassinated Brihadrath, the last Maurya King?**

(A) Agnimitra

(B) Pushyamitra Shunga

(C) Vasujyeshtha

(D) Vasumitra

Correct Answer: (B) Pushyamitra Shunga

22. **Pushyamitra Shunga, who was originally a Senapati of the Mauryan Empire and assassinated the last Mauryan Emperor Brihadrath in 185 BC was a ____?**

(A) Brahman

(B) Kshatriya

(C) Vaishya

(D) Shudra

Correct Answer: (A) Brahman

23. **What is the correct Chronological Order of Nandas, Sungas, Mauryas & Hayankas dynasties of Ancient India?**

(A) Nandas, Sungas, Mauryas, Hayankas

(B) Mauryas, Hayankas, Sungas, Nandas

(C) Hayankas, Nandas, Mauryas, Sungas

(D) Nandas, Mauryas, Sungas, Haranyakas

Correct Answer: (C) Hayankas, Nandas,

Mauryas, Sungas

24. **In which of the following works is mentioned the conspiracy hatched by Pushyamitra Shunga to eliminate the last Mauryan King Brihadratha?**

(A) Mahabhasya of patanjali

(B) Rajtarangini of Kalhan

(C) Harshacharita of Baanbhatta

(D) Malvikagnimitra of Kalidasa

Correct Answer: (C) Harshacharita of

Baanbhatta

25. **The railings of the Sanchi Stupa were made during?**

(A) Maurya Period

- (B) Sunga Period
- (C) Kushana Period
- (D) Gupta Period

Correct Answer: (B) Sunga Period

26. **The following were the immediate successors of imperial Mauryas?**

- (A) Pandyas
- (B) Kushans
- (C) Nandas
- (D) Sungas

Correct Answer: (D) Sungas

27. **During the reign of which of the following some Yavans' or Greeks were converted to the Vaishnava Cult?**

- (A) Shungas
- (B) Nandas
- (C) Shakas
- (D) Satavahans

Correct Answer: (A) Shungas

28. **Who among the following was commander in chief of Brihadratha?**

- (A) Agnimitra
- (B) Pushyamitra Sunga
- (C) Vasumitra
- (D) Muladeva

Correct Answer: (B) Pushyamitra Sunga

29. **How the hero of Malvikagnimitra of Kalidasa was related to Pushyamitra Sunga?**

- (A) His son
- (B) His grandson
- (C) His father
- (D) His brother

Correct Answer: (A) His son

30. **Which among the ancient Indian Play has referred to the defeat of Yavanas on the bank of River Sindhu in the hands of**

Vasumitra?

- (A) Raghuvamsa
- (B) Malvikagnimitram
- (C) Vikramorvashiyam
- (D) Dasakumarcharita

Correct Answer: (B) Malvikagnimitram

31. **Who among the following succeeded Pushyamitra Shunga?**

- (A) Agnimitra
- (B) Sujyestha
- (C) Vajramitra
- (D) Devbhuti

Correct Answer: (A) Agnimitra

32. **Agnimitra was the son of which Sunga dynasty ruler?**

- (A) Devabhuti
- (B) Vasumitra
- (C) Pushyamitra Sunga
- (D) Brihadratha

Correct Answer: (C) Pushyamitra Sunga

33. **The court of which Sunga dynasty ruler was visited by Greek ambassador Heliodorus?**

- (A) Pushyamitra Sunga
- (B) Agnimitra
- (C) Devabhuti
- (D) Bhagabhadra

Correct Answer: (D) Bhagabhadra

34. **Which ruler of Sunga dynasty was killed by Vasudeva Kanva who laid the foundation of Kanva dynasty?**

- (A) Agnimitra
- (B) Devabhuti
- (C) Pushyamitra Sunga
- (D) Vasumitra

Correct Answer: (B) Devabhuti