

Study Material for Semester- II
Paper – Mauryan and Gupta Empire (Core-3)
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A note on Controversy about the date of accession of Kanishka:

There is a sharp controversy about Kanishka's date centering round two points:

- (1) Whether the Kanishka group preceded or succeeded the Kadphises group, and
- (2) Whether Kanishka started his rule in 78 A.D. or later or earlier.

Cunningham was the first writer to sponsor the theory that Kanishka's era started from 58 B.C. which came to be known after-wards as Vikrama Samvat: Cunningham, however, gave up this theory later on, but Fleet and after him Kennedy held this view with all earnestness. As a corollary of the above contention it follows that Kanishka group of kings preceded Kadphises group of kings.

But on a careful analysis of the archaeological and numismatic evidences scholars have come to the conclusion that there can be no doubt that the Kanishka group of kings did not precede but followed the Kadphises group of kings.

In support of this view scholars point out if the series of coins issued successively by alien rulers of India upto Vasudeva-I, are care-fully studied it will be evident that the coins of the Kadphises kings were issued immediately after those of the Sakas and the Parthians.

Again, the coins of Kanishka and Huvishka, although differ in some details, they seem to be largely prototypes of Wima Kadphises.

It must also be noted that the practice of issuing bilingual and by scriptural coins introduced by the Indo-Greek kings was continued throughout the Saka-Pahlava period upto the time of Kadphises. The continuity of the practice without break till the time of Wima Kadphises was broken only at the time of Kanishka who gave up the practice of issuing bilingual coins.

The legend of his coins was Greek but most of them were not, however, in Greek. Kanishka and Vasudeva followed the practice of Kanishka. Thus we find that while there was a continuity in the method of the striking coins followed upto Wima Kadphises from the line of the Indo-Greeks a different method was followed and continued by Kanishka and his successors. These two different

sequences when compared leave no doubt that the Kushana group followed Kadphises group of kings.

Turning to the second point, we find that scholars like Sir John Marshall, Sten Konow, Vincent Smith, Van Wijk and some other scholars are of the opinion that Kanishka began his rule in the first quarter of the second century A.D., sometime between 125 to 128 A.D. which lasted for about a quarter of a century.

But Ferguson had held long before that Kanishka started his first regional year in 78 A.D. and inaugurated an era from that date which came to be known as the Saka era (Sakabda) which is still current in different parts of India. Ferguson's view has been supported by scholars like Oldenberg, Thomas, Rapson, R. D. Banerjee, Dr. Raichaudhuri and others. One of the latest scholars to support the view that Kanishka started his rule in 78 A.D. which was also the beginning of an era is Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw.

It has been argued against the above view held by most of the scholars, that if we agree that Kadphises-I reigned about 50 A.D. and Kanishka about 78 A.D. then we are left with only 28 years roughly for the two reigns of Kadphises-I and Kadphises-II which is a very short span for two reigns. But when we remember that Kadphises died at the age of eighty, his son Kadphises-II must have ascended the throne at pretty old age. This makes accession of Kanishka in 78 AD. quite tenable.

Marshall, Sten Konow and others who are of the opinion that Kanishka ruled in the first quarter of the second century A.D. is- directly against the evidence of Junagarh inscription of Rudradamana. Dr. Raichaudhuri draws our attention to the fact that it is clearly mentioned in the Junagarh inscription that Rudradamana held sway over the lower Sindhu region in the first half of the second century A.D.

The South Bihar (Sui-Bihar) inscription of Kanishka mentions lower Sindhu area as within the dominions of Kanishka. Obviously, both Rudradamana and Kanishka were not rulers over the same region simultaneously. This proves the untenability of the view that Kanishka ruled in the second century A.D. There is also no evidence to show that there was the inauguration of any era in the second century A.D.

Dr. Majumdar's contention that Kanishka was the founder of Traikutaka-Kalachuri-Chedi era of 248-249 A.D. is absolutely untenable in view of the Chinese evidence that An-Shi-Kao who lived during the second century A.D. translated a work Margabhumi-sutra written by Sangharaksha, chaplain of Kanishka. This precludes placing Kanishka in the third century A.D. as Dr. R. C. Majumdar has done. Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar's view that Kanishka ascended the throne in 278 A.D. is untenable on the same grounds.

Thus most of the scholars are of the view that Kanishka started his rule in 78 A.D. which was also the year from which the Saka era is counted.

It has been contended by some scholars that if the era was found-ed by Kanishka why should it have been named Saka era and not Kushana era, after all the Kushanas were not Sakas. But it may be pointed out that the close association of the Yue-chi people of which the Kushanas were a branch, with the Saka-Pahlava made them a com-posite people with a composite culture in which the contributions of the Sakas was quite large.

Further, the Kushanas were not Greeks but some of Kanishka's coins bore Greek legend on them. It is therefore no conclusive argument to say that since the era was called Saka era Kanishka could not be its founder. Likewise the contention that the Saka era was not followed in northern India although Kanishka was a ruler of the north is untenable.

Facts are, however, otherwise. This era was abandoned temporarily during the Gupta rule when it was confined to the south where its use was spread by the Jainas. But with the end of the Gupta rule the Saka era came back into use and continues to be used even today in different parts of India.

Thus after an analysis of evidences, literary, numismatic as well as epigraphic, the balance of arguments remains in favour of placing the Kanishka group of kings after the Kadphises group of kings and fixing 78 A.D. as the starting point of Kanishka's rule, and also the beginning of the era known as Saka era or Sakavda.

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