

Indo-Greek Rule

Northern India was split into several kingdoms after the decline of the Mauryas. In 185 BC, the Magadha region, the Sungas, came to power. After that, Northwest India was constantly under attack from powers in northwest and Central Asia. Around 180 BC, the Indo-Greek kingdom was established when king Demetrius invaded the Indian subcontinent.

Cause of Indo-Greek Invasion

The cause of the Indo-Greek invasion is as follows:

- The Seleucid empire present there had been weak and hence suffered several invasions.
- There was increasing pressure from the Scythians, and hence later, Greek rulers were unable to hold their powers in Iran and Parthia.
- Also, the construction of the Wall of China stopped the forward march of Scythians, and they couldn't push the Chinese further.
- As Scythians turned their attention towards Greek and Iran, Bactrian Greeks were forced to enter the country.

Famous Indo-Greek Rulers

The first to invade the country was the Bactrian Greeks. Also referred to as Indo-Greeks, they ruled to a much greater extent than Alexander. Many parts of north-western India, as far as Ayodhya and Pataliputra, were under their rule.

- Menander was the most famous Indo-Greek ruler of all. His rule lasted for 20 years, from 165 BC to 145 BC.
- He is also referred to as Milinda. He made Sakala, a modern Sialkot in Punjab, his capital. He also invaded Ganga-Yamuna Doab.
- Nagasena, also known as Nagarjuna, converted Menander to Buddhism. The king was very much curious about Buddha and asked several questions related to it.
- The questions were recorded in the book called Milinda Panho or The Questions of Milinda.

Coins of Indo-Greeks

The coins used in the north of the Hindu Kush region during the Indo-Greek rule are gold, silver, copper, and nickel. These coins had greek legends on them. The Indo-Greek coins had portraits of greek deities on the reverse.

However, in the South of the Hindu Kuch region during the Indo-Greek rule, there were silver and copper coins mostly of square shape. In these coins, Indian weight standards were used and had bilingual inscriptions.

Importance of Indo-Greek Rule

The Indo-Greek rule had an impact on polity, trade, religion, art & culture, and technology. We have discussed it below in brief.

Indo-Greek Rule Impact on Polity

- Greeks introduced the feature of Military Governorship. They called the governor's Strategos.
- The system in the same or different form continued for a long time in the country, even till the Mughals.
- Military Governorship provided foreign rulers' necessary process to maintain power and rule over conquered territories and people.

Indo-Greek Rule Impact on Trade

- The Indo-Greeks introduced a large number of coins in the country. They were the first in the country to issue coins that can definitely be attributed to kings.
- Indo-Greeks were also the first to issue gold coins in the country, which were later issued on a wide scale by Kushans.
- Hippalus, one of the Greek sailors, in 47 AD discovered the Monsoon sea route from West Asia to India, giving a major push to trade. This also led to the creation of important ports.
- Barygaza (Bharuch) and Barbaricum on the Western Coast and Arikamedu (Poduku, according to Periplus) on the East coast were major important ports in the country.

Indo-Greek Rule Impact on Religion

- Indo-Greeks brought with them a Hellenistic art feature, which mixed with Indian art and gave rise to the Gandhara school of art.
- Foreign rulers also actively promoted Indian art and literature. The amalgamation led to the development of Buddha images in Graeco-Roman style.
- Three distinct but equally important schools, Gandhar School (50 BC to 5th Century AD), Mathura School (150 AD to 300 AD) and Amravati School (150 BC to 400 AD) developed during this period.
- Indo-Greeks helped in developing Indian theatres, Curtains used in the theatre is borrowed from the Greeks. It came to be known as Yavanika. The word is derived from the term Yavana, Sanskritized form of Ionian, a branch of Greek.

Indo-Greek Rule Impact on Technology

- Indo-Greeks contributed to the development of Astrology in the country. Several Greek terms about the movements of planets feature in Indian Sanskrit texts.
- Horasastra, a term used for astrology in Sanskrit, could have been derived from Horoscope in Greek.
- However, India didn't get anything striking in medicine, botany or chemistry from them. India was already well equipped in these subjects. These were dealt with by Charaka and Sushruta in India.

Decline of Indo-Greek Rule

The last king of Indo-Greek was Strato II, and he ruled the Punjab region until 55 BC. but some say it was until 10 AD,

- The Indo-Greek rule ended with the invasions of Indo-Scythians (Sakas).
- Saka, Parthians and Kushana rulers followed the Greeks and controlled larger areas than the Greeks.

- However, the kingdoms didn't decline rather were assimilated and absorbed into the country.

The rise of the Gupta empire in due course around the 4th Century AD officially ended the small empires of both native and foreign princes.

