

Saka Dynasty

The Saka Dynasty began with the accession of King Chashtana. Iranian pastoral nomads known as Scythians, or Sakas in Indian literature. The Scythian-inhabited region of modern-day Kazakhstan was invaded by central Asian nomadic tribes as well as tribes from the Chinese region in the second century BC. The Scythians were urged to move to Bactria and Parthia as a result.

After overthrowing the Parthian king, they marched toward India. Scythians who migrated to India are known as Indo-Scythians. The first Saka king in India, according to historians, was known as Maues or Moga. He consolidated his authority in Gandhara before expanding his dominance to nearly all of Northwest India. He overthrew the Indo-Greek provinces (in what is now Pakistan) and established his rule all the way to the Jhelum River.

- The Saka Era spans 11 to 52 years. The inscriptions left by King Chashtana provided this information.
- With the help of victories over the Indo-Greeks and other regional kingdoms, the Indo-Scythians expanded their dominance across northwest India.
- The Indo-Scythians appear to have been subdued by the Kushan Empire, possibly under Kujula Kadphises or Kanishka.
- However, the Saka, who made up the Northern and Western Satraps, continued to rule .. as satrapies.

Rulers of Saka Dynasty

There were three main rulers of the Shaka Dynasty, namely:

Maues or Moga (Reign 98/50 BC to 60/57 BC)

- Maues, also referred to as Moga, was the first Indo-Scythian emperor.
- He was the Gandhara king (present Pakistan and Afghanistan).
- His home base was Sirkap (Punjab, Pakistan).
- It has been discovered that Maues gave many coins. They feature Hindu and Buddhist images. Greek and Kharoshti tongues were used to make these coins.
- His son Azes I took control of the remaining Indo-Greek territories by conquering Hippostratos.

Chashtana (Reign 78 AD to 130 AD)

- As a ruler of the Western Kshatrapas (Satraps) Dynasty, Chashtana ruled over Ujjain.
- His rise to power in 78 AD is said to have signalled the start of the Saka Dynasty.
- He is referred to as Tiasthenes or Testenes by Ptolemy.
- Chashtana was the one who discovered the two important Saka Kshatrapa dynasties, the Bhadramukhas, in northwest India.

Rudradaman I (Reign 130 AD to 150 AD)

- The greatest Saka emperor is thought to have been Rudradaman. He comes from the Western Kshatrapa family, and was the grandson of Chastana.
- The Konkan, the Narmada valley, Kathiawar, as well as other regions of Gujarat and Malwa, fell within his sphere of influence.
- In Kathiawar, he was in charge of fixing the Sudarshana Lake.

- After marrying a Hindu woman, he converted to Hinduism.
- He also released the first lengthy inscription in pure Sanskrit.
- After ascending to the throne, he was given the name Makakshatrapa.
- He was related to the Satavahanas through marriage. He had Vashishtiputra Satakarni as his son-in-law. However, he fought beside them in innumerable battles.
- He supported the literature and arts of Sanskrit culture.
- The Greek author Yavaneshwara, who lived in India during Rudradaman's rule, converted the Yavanajataka from Greek to Sanskrit.

Shaka Dynasty: Coinage

The Saka currency is often very creative, although it is obvious that it degrades as Indo-Scythian control breaks down around AD 20. In general, the coins from the Saka dynasty were very realistic, with an aesthetic style that fell between between Indo-Greek and Kushan coinage.

- By employing the Greek language on the front and the Kharoshthi language on the reverse, they carried on the Indo-Greek heritage.
- However, the king's portrait is never displayed; instead, the monarch is always represented riding a horse, occasionally on a camel, or occasionally resting cross-legged on a cushion.
- Greek divinities are frequently depicted on the back of their coinage.
- The Saka coinage is replete with Buddhist iconography.

Art and Architecture During the Shakas

Foreigners are seen in several Gandharan sculptures with soft tunics and the distinctive Scythian pointed hats. They stand in contrast to representations of Kushan males, who appear to wear bulky, stiff tunics and are frequently shown in a far more primitive manner.

- Many of the stone palettes that were found in Gandhara are thought to be excellent examples of Shaka art.
- The specialty of the Saka was of similar types to other Iranian steppe ethnic tribes, and is generally referred to as Scythian workmanship.
- The installation of a Buddha relic in a stupa is recorded in the Mathura lion capital, which is connected to various Indo-Scythian kings, including Maues and Rajuvula.
- Alongside reliefs of standing Buddhas, several reliefs in the same location show Sakas wearing their characteristic tunics and pointed hats in a Buddhist setting.

Decline of the Sakas Dynasty

The Sakas went into decline following their loss at the hands of Satavahana Emperor Gautamiputra Satakarni. Northwest India and Pakistan were dominated by the Sakas until Azes II's (12 BC) death, at which point the Kushanas seized control of the region.

When Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty overthrew the final Western Satrap Saka monarch, Rudrasimha III, the Saka Dynasty's rule over western India came to an end.