

Shakas

- **The Shakas**, also known as the Indo-Scythians or Indo-Sakas, were a nomadic Iranian people of Scythian ancestry who moved from Central Asia southward into northern and western portions of ancient India between the middle of the **second century BCE** and the **fourth century CE**.
- The ascension of King Chashtana marks the beginning of the Saka Era.

Origin

- The succession of King **Chashtana** marks the beginning of the Saka Era.
- The Saka Era spans 11 to 52 years.
- This information was obtained from King **Chashtana's inscriptions**.
- Scythians (also known as Sakas in Indian literature) were nomadic pastoral nomads from Iran.
- In the second century BC, central Asian nomadic tribes and tribes from the Chinese area entered the Scythian-inhabited territory of modern-day Kazakhstan.
- This encouraged the Scythians to migrate to **Bactria and Parthia**.
- They marched towards India after conquering the Parthian monarch.
- **Indo-Scythians are Scythians** who moved to India.
- The Sakas possessed a greater Indian dominion than the Indo-Greeks.
- **Maues/Moga** (1st century BC) was the first Saka monarch of India, establishing Saka dominance in Gandhara and the **Indus Valley**.
- The **Indo-Scythians** consolidated their control over northwestern India, defeating the **Indo-Greeks** and other local kingdoms.
- The **Kushan Empire**, either Kujula Kadphises or **Kanishka**, appears to have subdued the Indo-Scythians.
- Nonetheless, the Saka continued to reign as satrapies, constituting the Northern and **Western Satraps**.
- The **Indo-Scythians** appear to have been Buddhists, and many of their customs appear to have maintained those of the Indo-Greeks.

- After the Satavahana monarch **Gautamiputra Satakarni** conquered the Indo-Scythians in the 2nd century CE, the Saka kings' influence began to wane.

Rulers

Maues (Reign 98/50 BC – 60/57 BC)

- The first Indo-Scythian monarch was **Maues**, also known as Moga.
- He was the ruler of Gandhara (present Pakistan and Afghanistan).
- He attempted but failed to attack the Indo-Greek provinces.
- Sirkap was his capital (Punjab, Pakistan).
- Many **Maues coins** have been discovered.
- They include Buddhist and Hindu symbols.
- Greek and Kharoshti were the languages used on these coins.
- By conquering Hippostratos, his son **Azes I** gained control of the remaining **Indo-Greek lands**.

Chashtana (Reign 78 AD – 130 AD)

- He reigned over Ujjain as a Saka monarch of the Western Kshatrapas (Satraps) dynasty.
- The **Saka Era** is thought to have begun with his ascent to power in 78 AD.
- Ptolemy calls him "Tiaesthes" or "Testenes."
- He founded the **Bhadramukhas**, one of the two great Saka Kshatrapa kingdoms in northwest India.
- The other dynasty was the Kshaharatas, who featured King Nahapana (who was defeated by **Satavahana king Gautamiputra Satakarni**).

Rudradaman I (Reign 130 AD – 150 AD)

- He is regarded as the greatest Saka ruler.
- He is a descendant of the **Western Kshatrapa dynasty**.
- He was Chastana's grandchild.
- His domain encompassed the Konkan, Narmada valley, Kathiawar, and other portions of Gujarat and Malwa.
- He was in charge of repairing **Sudarshana Lake** in Kathiawar.
- He turned to Hinduism after marrying a Hindu woman.

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- In addition, he published the first extended inscription in chaste Sanskrit.
- After becoming king, he acquired the title Makakshatrapa.
- He had **marital ties** with the Satavahanas.
- His son-in-law was **Vashishtiputra Satakarni**.
- He did, however, fight in countless conflicts alongside them.
- He reclaimed most of the regions previously held by Nahapana via conquests.
- He was an advocate for Sanskrit literature and cultural arts.
- During **Rudradaman's** reign, the Greek writer **Yavaneshwara** lived in India and translated the Yavanajataka from Greek to Sanskrit.

Coinage

- The Shaka (Indo-Scythian) currency is typically of great aesthetic quality, however it plainly deteriorates when Indo-Scythian power crumbles about AD 20.
- The **Western Satraps** maintained a high-quality but conventional coinage until the 4th century.
- **Indo-Scythian coinage** is often highly realistic, falling halfway between Indo-Greek and **Kushan coinage** in terms of aesthetic quality.
- It is often assumed that Indo-Scythian coinage benefited from the assistance of Greek celators (Boppearachchi).
- By employing the Greek language on the obverse and the Kharosthi language on the reverse, Indo-Scythian coins effectively continue the Indo-Greek heritage.

Art and Architecture

- Several **Gandharan sculptures** depict foreigners dressed in soft tunics and wearing the pointed headdress typical of Scythians.
- They contrast with depictions of Kushan males, who appear to wear thick, stiff tunics and are often shown in a much more basic fashion.
- Numerous stone palettes discovered in Gandhara are regarded as good examples of the **Shaka art**.
- These colours incorporate Greek and Iranian inspirations and are frequently implemented in a basic, ancient style.

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- The **Mathura lion capital**, which is associated with several Indo-Scythian monarchs from Maues to Rajuvula, records the consecration of a Buddha relic in a stupa.
- Several reliefs in the same place depict Indo-Scythians with their distinctive tunics and pointed hoods in a Buddhist atmosphere, beside reliefs of standing Buddhas.

Indian Literature

- In India, the Indo-Scythians were known as "Shaka," an outgrowth of the Persian word Saka for Scythians.
- Shakas are mentioned multiple times in writings such as the Puranas, Manusmriti, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Patanjali's Mahabhasya, Vraha Mihira's Brihat Samhita, Kavyamimamsa, Brihat-Katha-Manjari, Katha-Saritsagara, and others.
- They are regarded as part of a conglomeration of other northwest warlike tribes.
- The **Valmiki Ramayana's** Bala Kanda has several references to the fighting Mleccha hordes of the Sakas, Yavanas, Kambojas, and Pahlavas.

Decline of the Shakas

- After their defeat at the hands of Satavahana Emperor Gautamiputra Satakarni, the Saka Empire began to decline.
- The Sakas ruled northwest India and Pakistan until the death of Azes II (12 BC), when the territory was taken over by the Kushanas.
- Their dominion in western India ended in the 4th century AD, when the last **Western Satrap Saka** monarch, **Rudrasimha III**, was defeated by Chandragupta II of the **Gupta dynasty**.