

Ideology, Archaeology and Discourse: Examining the Nomadic and Dynastic Courtly Culture of Early *Kushana* Empire of Central and South Asia

Agnik Bhattacharya,
M.Phil Research Scholar, Department of History,
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi (India)

Abstract:

In this paper I highlight the importance of the *Kushana* Empire (1st century CE- 4th century CE) within the larger contours of early Central Asian and South Asian history. I argue that the rule of the *Kushana*'s brought significant transformations within the Central and South Asian socio-political and cultural landscapes. Nicola di Cosmo has argued that there is no general model for nomadic empires. Engaging with his scholarship, in this paper I analyze the specific political techniques used by a Central Asian nomadic community (*Kushanas*) for transforming itself into a sedentary structure. I argue that the process of transformation was performed with the help of several courtly decisions which were influenced by various multi-lingual and cross cultural exchanges that the Empire had with other trans-cultural empires of ancient China and Central Asia.

The historiography of Early South Asia has mainly been concerned with 'indigenous' empires. It has often ignored empires or communities, which were identified by the Indian nationalist historians as 'outsiders', 'foreigners' and 'invaders'. This has left a large research gap on the *Kushana* polity. In this paper I use the tools of epigraphic, numismatic and other archaeological sources along with literary evidences for mapping early *Kushana* rule.

The introduction of new norms of courtly rule affected the cultural landscape of South and Central Asia as the tracts were exposed to numerous trans-cultural and multi-lingual ideas; visualized via the depiction of Gandhara art (amalgamation of Hellenistic art with indigenous art forms) and the introduction of worship of anthropomorphic deities. The paper will underline the importance of the Cult of the Empire and Emperor-(an imperial courtly and dynastic project to deify the ancestors of the empire and the existing monarchs for seeking legitimacy from the subjects. The epigraphic sources along with several numismatic and literary evidences prove that the early *Kushana* monarchs used the title *devaputra*(son of the god), *Bogopouro*(son of divine entities) and *devamanusa*(god-man) which in turn influenced them to construct *devakulas* (abode of gods) or dynastic sanctuaries. I shall analyze the nexus between this courtly-dynastic project and larger issues of state formation, foregrounding the constructive role of nomadic origin of rulers.

Studying the *Kushana* Empire opens up new avenues in the field of early Central and South Asian rulership and dynastic formation which instigates a comparative study of several princely regimes across numerous continents, particularly from 1st century CE in and around Central

Asia. The examination becomes essential as recent scholarship and especially the works of Jeroen Duindam, have emphasized comparative studies of kingship, dynasty and courtly culture.

Key words: Kushana Empire, *Gandhara* art, *devakulas*(dynastic sanctuaries), *devamanusa*, *devaputra*, *Bogopouro*