

# Impact of Greek Classics Model on Indian Era

Ms. Sangeeta\*

Assistant Professor, Arya Kanya Gurukul, Village More -Majra, Distt. Karnal, Haryana, India

**Abstract –** *The ancient Greeks were the “inventors” of more elements of civilization than any other people of the world. These elements of civilization can be viewed among historical writings especially associated with Herodotus and Thucydides, and the evolution of Democracy having foundational seeds in Athens. The Greeks view of the world was predominantly secular and rationalistic. It exalted the spirit of free inquiry and preferred knowledge to faith. With only a limited cultural inheritance of the past upon which to build, the Greeks produced intellectual and artistic monuments that had served ever since as standards of achievement. So in some ways the single most legacy of the ancient Greece is the civilization in India and ancient era is particularly influenced by the Greeks, especially in Art, language, culture and mostly covers the all aspects of Human life. This article is an attempt to explore cultural and religious evolution of India as an outcome of Indo Greek interaction. It further attempts to answer that why and how the India was influenced by the Greeks, Subsequently the Indian art particularly Gandhara appeared as the world’s famous Art of India.*

**Keywords:** *Greek, Classics Model, Indian Era, Culture, People, World, Civilization, Evolution, Achievement, Human Life, etc.*

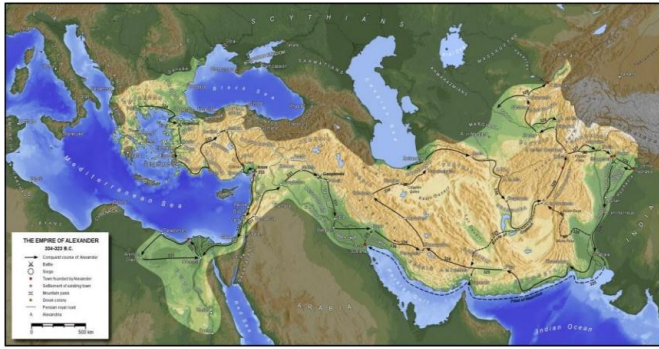
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## INTRODUCTION

The advent of Greeks in India dates back from 6th century (BC) to 5th century (AD) as an outcome of Greek expedition towards Persia. They intended to explore intellectuals and savvy conversant people in the fields of Philosophy, sea trade, Art, Diplomacy, administration, and empire governance. Their quest is manifested through materialization of long list comprising Kingdoms and Greek rulers who reigned India (Sanujit, 2011). Greeks invaded Indus and the Ganges, the Plateaus of the Deccan and the Beaches of Gujrat; However, their infiltration into India remained void of some geographical parts (Sanuji, 2011). Greeks came into India as merchants and traded to Malabar Coast of Coromandel, and the mercenaries they served in the places of Tamil kings (Sanuji, 2011). Until the British came no European race so thoroughly traversed and explored the great Sub-continent. Though Greeks were also an alien nation like British; however unlikely British, the Greeks adapted to Indian climate and customs. Their progenies received eloquent influence of Indian religions and their contribution in Buddhism is obvious. Regarding religious contribution and their involvement in Buddhism, the role of seer king Menander is most significant. Moreover, the Greeks added value to Indian intellect and cultural heritage in forms of introducing industrial techniques, development of Astronomy, and building the great school of Gandhara sculpture whose influence penetrated into the far corners of Asia.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The role of Greeks in India is largely associated with invasion of Alexander on India; whereas, the historical accounts suggest arrival of Greeks in India long ago the Alexander. It can be commented that huge historical coverage of Alexander has eclipsed the contribution of earlier Greek arrivals in India. It is narrated that at the time of invasion on India through the Passes of the Hindu Kush, Alexander got conversant with the fact that a number of Greeks from Bactria had already established in the fertile mountains that overlooked the valley of the Indus. The historical literature also suggests that Bactria Greeks ruled the parts of India that remained unknown to the Alexander. Various historical accounts suggest that the arrival of earlier Greeks in India took place approximately 2 centuries before the advent of Alexander. Their route of travel remained along the trade routes linking India, Persia, Ionian cities of Asia Minor. Some other accounts suggest that these journeys were glorified through expedition tales of Greek gods Dionysus and Heracles. It is narrated that these glorified legendary tales of Greek expedition to India inspired the Alexander to campaign for India in search of finding the great Ocean which he believed brought the world to an end somewhere beyond the Hindu Kush (Krishana, 1996).



## THE EMPIRE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

The validation of the claim that Indo Greek interaction took place long before the military campaign of the Alexander can be verified through ancient Greek and Sanskrit literature. Sanskrit literature suggests these people as formidable warriors and conversant with the knowledge of science that was strange to indigenous people (Buchtal, 1995). The contribution of Greeks in Indian knowledge and culture is so profound that it has maintained to survive more than two millenniums. It can be commented that their additions to Indian culture have become integral and considerable part of Indian cultural melting pot. During reign of Greek Bactrians in India, mutual exchange of skills took place that benefitted India with Greek expertise in sculpture making. Gandhara school of sculpture served as guiding institute in that regard. Similarly, Indian astronomy impressed the Greeks enough to innovate Zodiac sign. These inklings can be drawn from classical Indian literature of Mahabharata and Yuga Purana (Dhavalikar, 2002).

**The Greeks in Ancient India:** It is believed that the Alexander was ambitious military leader whose ambitions were curtailed owing to geographical and climatic constraints of Monsoon in India. However, post Alexandrian period observed infest of Bactrians Greeks which was catalyzed with the decline of Mauryan empire in India. It resulted augmentation of Greek influence in India up to a level of managing various Bactrian kingdoms in India (Allan, 1996).

**The Greek and Classical Indian Literature:** The classical Indian literature comprising Yuga Purana, Mahabharata, and Buddhist literature provide historical narrations of Indo Greek interaction in ancient times. The information through these accounts suggests that Greeks were called “Yavanas” by the indigenous people. These accounts are also mentioned in an Astrology book named “Gargi Samhita” (Nath & Benerjee, 2002). The passages of this work, there we can found more unanimity of interpretation than about the account of Pushyamitra’s death. This information found from a main source on the Greek invasion of Pataliputra (Woodcock, 1999). Among available historical literature, there is narrative dearth regarding Indo Greek wars. Yuga Purana elaborates military campaign of the Greeks mainly mentioning their resistance against Sketa in Oudh, and annexing of

Panchalas between the Ganges and the Jumna. Moreover, it gives speculative information about their period of stay in Pataliputra. The exact chronological accounts regarding these events are missing in ancient either Indian or Greek literature (Sastri, 1997).

**Buddhism in India:** Actually Buddhism in India is a very turning point in the world of art and culture, as well as in philosophy and religion. The Greek- Indian Buddhist religious thought appeared as the new dawn across Asia and Europe more than all other religious faiths. There is an opinion that the Buddha neither thought to set up a new religion nor looked upon his doctrine as a different form of the popular cults of the time. [9] But here a question is arose that his followers raised his status almost to divinity even during his life time; and after his death they worshiped him by his symbols the stupa, recalling his parinivana and the Bodhi tree. During the reign of Ashoka such kinds of stupas were built all over the India. But in all these Buddhist sculptures of that concerned era there is no show of Buddha himself. But displayed by such emblems as a wheel, an empty throne, a pair of footprints or a pipal tree.

**Greek Influences on Indian Sculpture:** The Greek artistic approaches largely influenced on Indian art by the Buddhist tradition and persisted into the later Gupta period. The Greeks are very famous for their innovative and the anthropomorphic representation of the Buddha in Indian sculpture In the Greeks” campaigns, The Buddhists were oppressed in the Eastern side by Sunga dynasty. Between the two cultures, they also lead the artistic commerce. The Ghandhara School of Buddhist art hence grown up under the great influence of the Greeks. The Greek initiation of sculpting the Buddha in human form matured and it became a major part of the Buddhist iconography. The Greeks also introduced their own architectural and sculptural forms, like cupids, friezes and Corinthian columns into the Buddhist school. Several Greek mythological figures were incorporated into Buddhist architectural works, including Heracles, who became equated to Vajrapani. The Greek skills and techniques were endured till the epoch of Gupta. Gupta’s realistic anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha reflect the legacy of the Greek artistic influence.

**Gandhara Art, Exquisite Touch of the Buddhism:** During the reign of Kushana Kings, the Gandhara School of art and sculpture much flourished in the area of lower Kabul Valley and upper Indus side around Peshawar and Mathura. This geographical belt earned status of founding the place to honor the Buddha’s images. Mostly Indian dynamic regimes regard that the presentation of Buddha images originated at Mathura, South of Delhi. Around 140 B.C after the death of Menander, the Central Asian Kushana infested with Bactria and terminated the Greek rule there. Around the 80 B.C the Sakas were disported by their Parthian cousins from Iran. They

moved into Gandhara and in different parts of Pakistan and in West India. After a time an Indo-Parthian dynasty succeeded to accede to governance control at Gandhara. And thus the Parthians continued to give favor to the Greek artistic traditions. Gandhara art largely expanded in Keshena's reign, thus the Kushana's era is considered the golden period in the development of Gandhara civilization. In this epoch Gandhara art produced some of the best pieces of Indian sculpture. The Gandhara Civilization reached its epitome in the period of great Kushan King Kanish (128-151 A.D). Taxila and Peshawar were expanded and Peshawar was declared as the capital of the Eastern province of India to central Asia a great empire stretching from Bengal.

The Buddhist faith was most significant for Kanishka, and it quickly spread from central Asia to the East. From this point Kanishka's empire met with the Chinese Han Empire. The Buddha's sculptures and the Buddhist beliefs gravitated the Chinese pilgrims to visit the monuments that were associated with tales and Jatkas. In this way, Gandhara turned from profane to sacred land of Buddhism.



**Gandhara Buddha**

Interestingly, however, a vestige survived in one Indian region where the Greeks had never ruled; In Kashmir until the tenth century A.D. Temples with Corinthian pillars were still being built in a degenerated Gandhara style.

**Coins:** The innovations in Indian culture credited to the Hellenistic Greeks by the mostly scholars of the last century. It is a fact that the invasion of Alexander the great India came into close contact with the classical world, subsequently the Indian culture was influenced to a considerable extent by Greek culture. Indian history started to take this influence in 327 B.C with the invasion of Alexander in India. It was, therefore thought the coinage was also introduced into India by the Greeks of Bactria. However, now takes this argument seriously as there is the most persuasive evidence to prove the coinage existed in India before the Indians came in contact with the Greeks. In this context the discovery of Taxila of a large hoard of over a thousand punch-marked; together with two coins of Alexander the great and the coins of Philip Arridaeus is of great importance.



**Mint Coins at Taxila 450 B.C**



**Philip III Arridaeus 323-317 B.C**

The punch marked coins from the collections were very effective. These coins suggested that they must have been in circulation for a considerable time long before the advent of the coins of Arridaeus and Alexander. These coins were incidentally in mint condition. Carbon dating process manifests that these hordes of coins were buried approximately in 317 B.C. The archeological estimates suggest currency of these coins almost century older than their burial period of 317 BC. It leads to infer that there is no evidence to support the theory of the Greek origin of Indian coinage. Moreover, there is no similarity whatsoever between the punch-marked coins of India and the Greek drachm.

The coins of Kanishka's epoch considered the legends in Greek script and describe the Greek Theology. Consequently coins put up with legends in Bactrian, and the Kushana's Iranian Language, and Greek religious beliefs were substituted by corresponding Iranic ones. The modified Greek script was written on all Kushan coins that represented the words of Kushan and Kanishka. While, the Buddhist coins of Kanishka are rare and it's hard to find them as compared to others.





### Kushana Gold Coins



### Kanishka in Buddhist Tradition

**The Origin and Development of Mathura Art:** A parallel school of Buddhist art to that of Gandhara had arisen during the second century A.D. Among the native Indian artists of Mathura One of the chief deities in Hindu religious center beside Jumna. It is situated almost 145 KM in the south of Delhi. Mathura and Gandhara had both formed the part of the realm of Menander<sup>36</sup>. Besides this the Mathura art is considered as one the first two centers of production for images of the Buddha and the other being Gandhara. And in the second century A.D they both were under the control of Kushana Kings, who established a winter palace in Mathura and patronized Buddhism there as strongly as they had done in Taxila and Peshawar.

Taxila And Mathura were rival holy cities and their rivalry passed into the realm of art when Mathura became a center of Indian sculpture in the second century; and it began to distribute over Northern India the large numbers of Buddhist images which its workshops produced from the mottled red stone of the local quarries. It could be seen that in this era the Mathura's native Indian art reached maturity; but many historians thought that this development was much influenced by the contemporary movement of Greek-Buddhist Art.

The both centers Gandhara and Mathura started to make human images of Buddha in first century A.D yet maintaining their artistic distinction. The Style of Buddha's wearing wavy locks tucked up into a chignon and heavier toga-like-robos. In Mathura the Buddha's production resembled some of the older Indian male fertility gods: curlier and shorter hair, the shoulders are broad and chest swells and the legs are firmly planted with feet spaced apart and shaven head. Under such kind of characteristics Mathura art reached its epitome during the reign of Kushan dynasty and Mathura city got the status of capital of the state.



**The Greeks influence on Indian Astronomy:** In the earlier ancient Indian culture, the advancement of astronomy in India came from the practice of astrology and the recognition of Indian astronomy is due to that of the ancient Greeks. The Gargi Samhita of the Yuga Purana accredits as the mastermind of astronomy to the Greeks as well as the Aryabhata ascribes the Zodiac to the Greeks. The Indian astronomy found many innovations by the influence of Greek astronomical tradition. Such as India contributed in giving the name of the days of the week and precise calculation of the length of a year, this contribution to the science of astronomy go back to the Greeks period. In the earlier era the astronomical texts were found in Rigveda, approximately it was written during 1700 to 1100 B.C.<sup>46</sup> However, The Greek astronomers, too, enjoyed and further imminent approaches gained from the Indian Vedas with two great ancient civilizations mostly glad to learn from each other in the interest of scientific progress, and the study of Indo-Greek astronomical knowledge and queries became more visible on post-Vedic tradition. The ancient Greeks came across and ingested astronomical information that was arising from a well-developed Mesopotamian civilization. Consequently the ancient Greek astronomy brought forth the magnificent scientists; they transferred the astronomical approaches into theoretical science. According to this science the Universe is moving along with mathematical objectives that could be inferred by logic and reason as well.

### CONCLUSION:

In short the complex political and undeveloped social factors were the reason of Greek influence on Indian culture, art and many other fields of life. Somehow these influences can be finding even in present Indian society. For Instance, Zodiac is widely known in Indian astrological practice. And Indian people commonly use some names that are signed with Greeks in some aspects. The Temples of ancient India era and particularly the Buddhist stupas are ever considered the major and the most important Indian heritage.

Thus, in this way the Greek influence in present era is a prominent element of India's cultural heritage. So in some ways the single most legacy of the ancient Greece is the civilization in India and ancient era is particularly influenced by the Greeks, especially in Art, language, culture and mostly

covers the all aspects of Human life. This article is an attempt to explore cultural and religious evolution of India as an outcome of Indo Greek interaction. It further attempts to answer that why and how the India was influenced by the Greeks, Subsequently the Indian art particularly Gandhara appeared as the world's famous Art of India.

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## **Corresponding Author**

**Ms. Sangeeta\***

Assistant Professor, Arya Kanya Gurukul, Village More  
-Majra, Distt. Karnal, Haryana, India

E-Mail – [arora.kips@gmail.com](mailto:arora.kips@gmail.com)

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**Ms. Sangeeta\***