CHAPTER I
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The presence of the Śakas in early India is well-known to scholars. In the present thesis, we use the term “India” to denote, unless otherwise indicated, the Indian subcontinent comprising the territories of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Śakas had some political dominations in North-West India from circa first century B.C. and, along with the Parthians, they were continually in power in parts of North-Western India, Gujrat, parts of central India and upper western Deccan till the latter part of the second century A.D. The territories of the Śaka-Kshatrapas in western Deccan were eventually incorporated in the Gupta Empire by Chandragupta II (376 A.D. to 414 A.D.) at the end of the fourth century A.D.

It is also known that the Śakas were a part of the Scythians. The term Scythian is generally employed to denote numerous groups of nomadic tribes from the borders of China to the Carpathians. Also, the Scythians constituted a subdivision within the larger group of Scytho-Siberian early nomads inhabiting the Eurasian steppes and forest steppe-zones during the first millennium B.C.
This broad cultural grouping is identified with the early Eurasian Iron Age and is believed to have emerged from the Bronze Age cultures that dominated Siberia, Kazakhstan and adjoining steppes of Central Asia, Western China and the Southern Russian steppes with its adjoining regions, in the late second and early first millennium B.C. This broad Scythian cultural group included the Šakas in the eastern section. In the eastern section, the Šaka/Scythians ruled over portions of the Indo-Iranian borderlands including the area of modern Afghanistan and the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. The regions which were incorporated in Afghanistan in the late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries were Bactria, Paropanisadai, Arachosia, Gedrosia and Drangiana. Bactria\(^1\) (in Northern Afghanistan) was bounded on the north and also on the east by Sogdiana (situated in Uzbekistan), on the west by Margiana (part of modern Turkmenistan), and on the south or south-west by a part of Aria (modern Herat region in Afghanistan). Below it was Drangiana\(^2\) (or Šakastâna, modern Seistan). According to Ptolemy, India Intra Gangem\(^3\) (Indian subcontinent minus the area to the north and north-east of the Ganges) lay on the east of Paropanisadai\(^4\) (modern Kabul-Begram region to the

\(^1\) Geog. Cia. Pt., p. 142.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 147.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 147.
south-east of the Hindu Kush was within its limit), Arachosia¹ (south-eastern Afghanistan around Ghazni and Kandahar) and Gedrosia² (in a part of Baluchistan). The territory of Afghanistan outside the Hindu Kush was generally called Ariana. Therefore, "Scythian Elements in Early India Art" would be of considerable help to ascertain the importance of the Śaka /Scythian elements in the formation of the composite nature of Indian culture.

The historiography devoted to the Scythians and their art is vast. The "animal style" was the chief characteristic of the art of the Scythians, Scytho-Siberians, Śaka and other Eurasian nomads. Throughout the twentieth century, this "animal style" has been studied in specialist and general works like *The Scythians and Greeks* by E.H.Minns, *Scythian Art* by G. Borovka, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* by M. I. Rostovtsev, *The Splendour of Scythian Art* by M. I. Artamonov and others. Minns’ book is invaluable for the study of Black Sea antiquities of the Scythians. Texts representing museum exhibitions or publications of major burials (as for example, L. K. Galanina’s work on Kurdzhipsikiy Kurgan, 1980 etc.) are mostly in Russian or Ukrainian, and they contain the heart and matter of Scythology. Veronique Schiltz in *Les

¹Geog. Cl. Pt., p. 147.
²Ibid., p. 148.
Scythes et les Nomades des Steppes speaks of the Scythian animal style as a precise lexicon of forms and she identifies individual elements of the Scythian art language, which has made its syntax possible. On the other hand, Russian archaeologists have worked extensively on Saka burials, in the territories of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Indologists have studied extensively Saka/Parthian numismatic and archaeological evidences, as mentioned above in our Preface; but no comprehensive study of Saka influence in early Indian art has so far been attempted. The increasing number of the known Indo-Parthian and Scytho-Parthian coins were taken into account for discussing the history of the Indo-Scythians. In this connection, special reference may be made to A. Cunningham’s Coins of Alexander’s Successors in the East, originally published in a few numbers of the Numismatic Chronicle from 1868 – 1873, published in a book form in London 1884 with a reprint from Delhi in 1970.

An account of the Sakas with cogent arguments was published by B. N. Puri in his chapter ‘The Saka and Indo-Parthians’ in Volume II of the History of Civilizations of Central Asia, New Delhi, 1999. It is, however, to be noted that almost all the writings on Scythian art deal with its forms in the western section and parts of the eastern section. Archaeological reports from India and
Pakistan and elsewhere also contain materials for writing an art history of the Šaka/Scythians in India and its borderlands. But no such attempts have been made so far. Indeed a more comprehensive study in this respect seems to be a crying need to understand the impact of the Scythian elements in the Indian subcontinent.

This is a desideratum for evaluating the syncretistic trends in Indian culture and my efforts are aimed at fulfilling this need.

The utility of such a study, as intended, can hardly be over-estimated, since the importance of the Scythian/Šaka power in the annals of the ancient Orient is at least apparent from the numerous widely known sources (both literary and archaeological) alluding to them. In the present thesis, all relevant sources, both archaeological and literary, have been taken into account.

The archaeological discoveries, which initiated from the latter half of the eighteenth century, continue unabated till now. The archaeological discoveries till 2004 as found from the reports of the Academics of Sciences of different territories belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States (former Soviet Central Asian republics) have added new dimensions to the relevant study. Archaeological reports of India and Pakistan have also been taken into
consideration. John Marshall’s *Taxila* and V. Sarianidi’s *Bactrian Gold* have been exhaustively used. The Asian connections of the Scythian culture, which were formerly not easily traceable, are now studied with fresh perspectives as revealed by new archaeological data. Certain methodologies have been used by archaeologists, especially, in relating archaeological evidence with ethnological probabilities. It is often found that the conflicts raised by archaeological data are persistently ignored vis a vis the data obtained from literary sources. There has also been a tendency for continued reconsideration of unprovenanced materials, for strengthening hypotheses. There is also the problem of translating the archaeological terminology into a language customary in the historical social life. But one thing is certain. The archaeologists are unanimous on the fact that the steppe desert zones of Central Asia, Sinkiang, Mongolia and South-Western Siberia are to be grouped together as one on the basis of vegetation and topography.\(^1\) Regarding the present thesis, it is important to state here that much of the North-Western Himalayas are also considered to belong to the steppes of Central Asia.\(^2\) Another common yardstick of the archaeologists (and also used here) is the theory of the homogenization of the steppes. The entire steppes shared an economy based on stock dependency, with a basic relative mobility and portability of goods. With

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this yardstick, the archaeologists have agreed upon the diagnostic features of Scythic culture as follows:

1. Adoption of iron metallurgy;
2. The use of the akinakes, a short sword, of specific design and systematic development;
3. The customary conservative use of certain artistic motifs;
4. The pastoral nomadic life and a patriarchal, little-centralized social organization;
5. Use of improved compound bows;
6. Use of bronze cauldrons;
7. The appearance of complex horse harnesses; and
8. Deer stones on most burial sites;

Coins and inscriptions (Persian and Indian) have also provided significant data, regarding the Śaka/Scythian way of life.

The literary sources, used in the present work include

a. Greek and Roman texts.
b. Chinese literary accounts.
c. Middle Iranian accounts, and

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d. Sanskrit literary works.

The Greek and Roman texts include Agatharchides’ *Peri Tes Erythras Thalasses*, Ammianus Marcellinus’ *Res Gestae*, Arrian’s *Anabaseos Alexandrou*, Diodorus’s *Bibliothekes Historikes*, Herodotus’s *Historiae*, Isidore of Charax’s *Statthoi Parthikoi*, Orosius’ *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, Pliny’s *Naturalis Historiae*, Ptolemy’s *Geographike Huphegesis*, Strabo’s *Geographikon*, and *Periplus Tes Erythras Thalasses* or *Periplus Maris Erythraei* of anonymous authorship. Many Scythians like Toxaris settled in Greece. He moved to Athens and excelled in the practice of medicine. His fame rests on the vivid tales of his native Scythia as recorded by Lucian.¹ The ancient author most often quoted as a major source for the Scythians is Herodotus; and indeed much of Book IV, and scattered sections of Books I and III of his *Historiae* are devoted to the Scythians and to related nomadic groups. However, in the course of this study, it has been found that it is not sufficient to continue to insist on the model offered by Herodotus. The ability to consider objectively the art of the Saka/Scythians is often highly complicated by the historical perspectives of the literary sources.

Chinese literary sources, utilised in this work include Fan Yeh’s *Hou Han-shu*, Pan Ko’s *Ch’ien Han-shu* and Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s *Shih-chi*. It is probable

that the Chinese had a restricted idea of the western regions of the present Indian borderlands (which included Shen-tu, probably the lower Indus valley, Ferghana and Bactria).¹

Middle Iranian literary accounts of Al-Tabari and Ibn-Khurdâdbeh are used for corroborations. Sanskrit and Prakrit sources include Kālakāchārya-kathānaka, and Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya. However sketchy in outline, the main endeavour here is to study the Śaka/Scythian influence in early Indian art and this work is undertaken with an awareness of the inherent problems and prospects.

In the history of art, the Scythian art, the Scytho-Siberian art and the Śaka/Scythian art occupy a special place. They not only added several interesting facets but also a general evolution of their own. Such is the fame of Scythian Art that its influence can be seen in Pan-Asian and Pan-European art as well.

Although the excavated barrows of the Śakas-Scythians-Siberians and the extant remains from there are quite extensive, archaeology will probably

never be able to provide, like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, more than a hint of the wonder that was nomadic art or animal art.

Scythian and Scytho-Siberian-Śaka antiquities have been obtained from many sites. The basic nature of the antiquities (in spite of the plurality of sites) remained the same. This was due to tribal movements. Premierly it was the pre-historic exchange system, which was responsible for the spread of cultural materials before the arrival of controlling authority as well as state control mechanism. The functional analysis of seals, sealings, coins, charters, inscriptions betray the existence of an authority of state control.

The problem of how the culture was conceived and its survival strategy can be solved by understanding the tradition of that culture. In India, the beginning of Śaka-Sātavāhana, Śaka-Kshatrapa and Śaka-Kushāṇa culture is a dichotomy. The survival of Śaka cultural antiquity in different geographical zones exhibit the power structure of that particular geographical zone during a particular period. The contemporary Kushāṇa or Sātavāhana empire mattered especially in the nature of royal patronage and enroute the socio-cultural-economic base.
Throughout the twentieth century, a series of imposing researches attracted the attention of the world. However, as with so many contested issues in academe, we have come to something of a theoretical and methodological impasse. In spite of such researches at our disposal, some aspects of the highly peripatetic art like the Śaka art of the Indian subcontinent and its borderlands are not properly documented. It needs to be stressed on the latter aspect, since it holds a key position in understanding Indian art and reconstructing its history and also its crosscurrents with the art of the neighbouring countries. In spite of so many years of excavations, archaeologists, historians, and art historians still face a major task in exposing the Saka (Śaka) art forms in the Indian subcontinent vis a vis a broader context in the macro level, i.e. Indian art, along with Oriental art and their extensions.

In addition to the art objects themselves, the epigraphic evidences are of basic importance. With the help of the latter, some speculations have been cleared and corroborations made on information based on literary sources, both indigenous and foreign. Often, in the methodology of this study, it becomes imperative that the chronological attribution of some artifacts has to be based entirely on their stylistic elements. We have tried to take due notice of the decorative details (the individual or set of motifs) which were usually drawn from a common repertoire of the period and definitely have been current in a
much wider geographical area. Hence it has been necessary to undertake occasional visual explorations of other art centres pertinent to this study, so as to have a better understanding of the Śaka/Scythian elements in early Indian art. After all, no art can possibly develop in total isolation, and Śaka/Scythian art was no exception to this general rule.