CONCLUSION

The early centuries of the Christian era witnessed the rise and establishment of the vast Kushana empire extending from river Oxus to the banks of the Ganges. The Kushanas restored the partial political unity in northern India which was destroyed with the disintegration of the Mauryan empire and maintained it for about a century. Under the Kushana rule north India was integrated into an imperial system of world order which connected the Roman west to the Chinese east, through trade. People of diverse ethnic backgrounds, living in parts of erstwhile Soviet Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and north India were brought together due to political unification, providing a conducive atmosphere for intermingling of art and culture.

The Kushana state was apparently created and also maintained by force. We can discern different stages in the growth of Kushana power. Before circa 130 B.C., the Yueh Chihs had established their own kingdom in eastern Bactria, north of river Oxus, which was divided among five chiefs. Sometimes after circa 30 B.C., one of the five tribal chiefs, the Kushanas became supreme and conquered the area ruled by the other four chiefs. Under the leadership of Kujula Kadphises, the Kushanas consolidated their power in Bactria which provided a sound base for future expansion. They embarked upon the policy of territorial expansion, extending their rule to the south of Hindukush, in the Kabul valley. It was Wema Kadphises, who carried forward this policy of aggrandizement and established the Kushana hegemony in the heartland of India, extending his sway over some parts of the Ganga-Yamuna doab. During the rule of Kanishka-I, their power reached its zenith when they enjoyed supremacy over a large mass of land and its people, extending from Bactria to Bihar. In the light of Rabtak inscription, we can conclusively argue that the Kushanas had established their rule over north India upto Pataliputra and Champa in Bihar and Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, atleast by the year one of Kanishka era. The findspots of Kushana coins and inscriptions attest to this growth of the empire. The Rabtak
inscription also adds the name of Wema Takto as the son of Kujula Kadphises and father of Wema Kadphises, in Kushana genealogy, who was the grandfather of Kanishka.

The indigenous people were subdued by the military might of the Kushana monarchs and their army. In order to consolidate this military conquest, it was imperative for the Kushana rulers to win over the allegiance of their multi-racial subjects comprising of Greeks, Shakas, Pahlavas and Indians. The Kushana kings tried to impress their subjects by adopting the concept of exalted monarchy holding high sounding titles like Maharaja, Rajatiraja, Devaputra and Kaisara in different languages. Religion and politics were never divorced by the Kushana rulers. They emphasized on the divinity of kingship which is evident from their titles, the semi-divine delineation of the royal portraits on their coins and the practice of erecting Devakulas, to apotheosize the deceased rulers. In the Rabtak inscription, Kanishka is described as ‘...the god, one who is worthy of worship...’ and he claims to have obtained kingship through the agency of a number of deities, headed by Goddess Nana. The royal figures on a great number of coins and some sculptures are robust, majestic and awe-inspiring, conveying the great powers of the Kushana emperors. Thus, an attempt was made to create the cult of the emperor who was absolute, worthy of worship and could command the allegiance of his subjects.

A detailed study of the Kushana coins and inscriptions throws light on different aspects of Kushana polity, economy and the social and the religious conditions under their rule. In absence of any literary records by the dynasty, the pre-eminence of archaeological sources for the study of Kushana history is uncontested. Archaeology continues to reveal the wealth and power of this great empire. On the basis of the archaeological finds we can conclusively argue that the Kushana age marked the zenith of urbanization and habitational expansion in north India when new habitational pockets were formed and old ones were consolidated. Many old settlements attained urbanism during the Kushana period while earlier cities reached their peak of
prosperity. During the detailed study, archaeological artifacts related to the Kushana age have been discovered from as many as 165 excavated sites and around 1500 explored sites, from different parts of north India. The inclusion of large parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and some parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, within the Kushana empire is sufficiently proved by archaeological finds. The states of Himachal Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal seem to be included in the area of Kushana economic influence. Almost all the excavated sites in north India have revealed flourishing Kushana layers, rich in terms of their thickness and cultural assemblage. We can discern substantial expansion both in terms of occupational area as well as in economy, which was a result of unprecedented growth of trade, industry and craft. The construction of huge irrigation canals in Central Asia and a number of wells and tanks in India is also attested by archaeology, which must have provided a spurt to agricultural development. As many as 16 dated Kushana inscriptions refer to construction or restoration of tanks and wells. This economic growth combined with political unity and spread of Buddhist ideology added a fillip to the process of urbanization. The extensive use of currency facilitated trade and was an effect of this increased commercial activity.

The large number of beautiful gold coins and extensive copper currency issued by the Kushanas furnishes direct evidence of the economic prosperity of their empire. Kushana rulers were the first to issue an extensive imperial gold coinage in India. Wema Kadphises seems to have introduced a regular gold coinage, in order to meet the demands of brisk international trade carried on between Roman empire, India and China. The gold coins of the Roman emperors that poured into India, appear to have been melted down and recoined as Kushana coins. The Kushanas issued very limited silver coins and a large number of copper coins which were utilized for day-to-day local transactions. The numerous copper coins that are retrieved all over north India during explorations and excavations attest to the wide penetration of money economy into towns as well as rural areas. Three denominations of
gold coins, viz. double dinaras, dinaras and quarter-dinaras and four denominations of copper coins, viz. tetradrachms, diadrachms, drachms and hemidrachms were in circulation during this period, attesting to a high level of monetization. On the strength of epigraphic evidence we can surmise that some silver coins minted officially or locally in pre-Kushana or Kushana period also formed a part of the Kushana monetary system. The Kushana coinage was indeed the most powerful coinage issued by any dynasty, in ancient Indian history, in terms of its intrinsic value, wide circulation and credibility.

The strength of the Kushana monetary system can be gleaned from the fact that it seems to have outlived the Kushana empire. The discovery of a large number of Kushana coins from areas which were outside the political boundaries of the Kushana empire like West Bengal and Orissa speaks about the credibility of the Kushana currency as a medium of exchange. The extremely worn out condition of a large number of later Kushana copper coins suggests that they remained in circulation for a long time even after the eclipse of Kushana power in India. Imitations of Kushana coins are encountered in the post Kushana layers as well. The most popular Kushana obverse device of ‘Standing king at the altar’ was adopted by the successors of the Kushanas in the Punjab area and subsequently found its way on some of the early coins of imperial Guptas as well. The depiction of 'Seated Goddess Ardoksho' and 'Goddess riding on Lion' on some Gupta coins seem to be inspired by the Kushana reverse devices.

Apart from its essential role of economic exchange Kushana coinage was utilized as a potent instrument for the expression and dissemination of ideas. The awe-inspiring, majestic portrayal of Kushana monarchs with semi-divine features and impressive titles on the obverse of their coins helped in creation of an image of a powerful emperor. The representation of a bewildering variety of deities borrowed from Hellenistic, Iranian and Indian pantheon, on the reverse of their coins betrays the eclectic attitude of the Kushanas towards religion. The Kushana rulers encouraged the representation of various faiths practiced in their empire without any
discrimination. But it must be pointed out that while Buddha was represented in human form on the coins of Kanishka, Jaina pontiffs were never depicted on the Kushana coinage. The idea behind the representation of Pharro (personification of Iranian concept of glory and legitimacy of the kings) and Shaoreoro (desirable kingdom), was to assert the divine right and imperial glory of the Kushana kings. Some deities also indicate the syncretistic trends in religious and iconographic development, reflecting the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the people of this vast empire. On some coins of Huvishka, Nana, the mother goddess of the orient, is depicted standing by the side of Shiva, indicating an intermingling of the cult of Nana, with that of Uma, the Indian mother goddess and consort of Shiva. Similarly, the representation of Nana seated on lion, on some coins of Kanishka-III betrays the association of Nana with the Indian Durga whose mount is the lion. The iconographic conventions of images of many Hindu and Buddhist deities were being established during Kushana times when devotional worship of images in shrines became a norm. The Kushana empire created a cosmopolitan atmosphere, encouraging interaction and accommodation, conducive for the florescence of art and religion. The development of Mathura and Gandhara school of art as well as spreading of Buddhism in Central Asia were a product of this fertile atmosphere. Catholicism and syncretism seem to be the cornerstones of Kushana state policy.

The nomadic tribe Yueh-Chih, which came from the weird environment of Central Asian steppes, succeeded in carving out an extensive Kushana empire on the basis of military might. The political stability provided by the Kushana rulers along with their cosmopolitan approach created conditions for the development of inland and foreign trade, crafts and blossoming of art and culture. The spurt in urban development and a high level of monetization were a natural corollary of the emergence of a large empire with flourishing trade and commerce. In order to checkmate the centrifugal forces and win over the allegiance of their diverse subject the Kushana rulers emphasized the concept of divine and exalted monarchy. They harnessed the religious sentiments of
the people for their political consolidation and utilized the medium of coinage for this purpose. It is perhaps by employing these means that the Kushana succeeded in bringing about imperial unity for more than a century and establishing a peaceful synthesis among different cultures. I hope that this study of Kushana rule in north India would open Kushana history to wider debate and prove to be a reference work for future researchers.