introduction
INTRODUCTION

Immediately after the death of Asoka, the Mauryan administration started showing signs of disintegration and soon the Greeks started threatening the country. At that time Pushyamitra was the commander-in-chief of the Mauryan emperor Brhadratha. It appears from the story of Harahacharita\(^1\) that he was assassinated by his Senapati Pushyamitra Suhga at a military parade and review. This successful coup d'etat ended the rule of the Maurya dynasty. According to Panini\(^2\), Pushyamitra belonged to the Suuga family, Brähmana clan of the Bhāradvāja gotra. The Mālavikāgnimitram\(^3\), on the other hand refers to Agnimitra, the son of Pushyamitra, as a scion of the Baimbika family of the Kādyapa gotra. The Brhadāraṇyaka upanishad\(^4\) mentions Sauṅgīputra as a teacher. There are also many other references to Suuga teachers in vedic texts and the Sūtras\(^5\). The Suuga origin of Pushyamitra is, therefore, generally accepted.

Pushyamitra's dominions extended to the river Narmada and included the cities of Pāṭaliputra, Ayodhya and Vidiśā. According to Divyāvadāna\(^6\) and Tārānātha Pushyamitra's dominions extended in the north upto Jālandhara and Sākala. According to Mālavikāgnimitram\(^7\), a part of Vidharbha (Berar) was ruled by Mādhavasena who was a partisan of Agnimitra.

Pushyamitra died after a reign of thirty six years. He was succeeded by his son Agnimitra. According to the Purāṇas, Vasu-Jyesṭha or Su-Jyesṭha is known as the successor of Agnimitra.
He is also identified on coins as Jeṭhamitra. The fourth king in the Śuṅga dynasty was vasumitra, the son of Agnimitra whose reference is found in the Mālavikāgnimitram as a great warrior. According to Bāna, Vasumitra is identified with Śumitra who was killed by Mitradeva in the course of a theatrical performance. Vasumitra’s successor is known as Bhadraka in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Ārdraka in the Viṣṇu, Āndhraka in the Vāyu and Antaka in the Matsya Purāṇa. Nothing is known about the three immediate successors of Bhadraka. The ninth king Bhagavata who ruled for about thirty-two years, is identified with the king of Besnagar inscription, which records the erection of Garuda column in honour of Lord Vāsudeva by a Yavana. The last king of the Śuṅga dynasty was Devabhūti or Devabhūmi who was a young and desolate king. According to the Purāṇas, he ruled for about ten years. Bāna mentions in his Harshacharita that Devabhūti was bereft of his life by his amātya Vasudeva with the help of the daughter of a dāsāl disguised as his queen.

On the whole ten Śuṅga kings ruled for a period of about one hundred and twelve years. The minister, vasudeva who managed to kill the last sunga king, founded a new royal dynasty in Magadha known as Kāṇvas which consisted only of the four kings vasudeva, Bhūmimitra, Nārāyaṇa and Suśārman. They ruled for about forty-five years. However, the Puranic statement that the Andhra king not only destroyed the Kāṇvas but also “whatever was left of the power of Śuṅgas” indicates that even after the death of Davabhūmi and the over-throw of the Śuṅga dynasty, some members of their family continued to rule till they were swept away by the rise of the Andhras-Satavāhanas.
The age of the Śuṅgas is memorable in Ancient Indian History for a variety of reasons. It is generally believed that it was ushered in as a result of the Brahmanical reaction to the later Mauryan rule. It witnessed, for the first time, a determined foreign invasion— the Indo-Greek Invasion— which resulted in the establishment of Indo-Greek rule over a part of northern India for about 150 years. This long period of foreign domination was bound to produce far reaching effects on India in political as well as cultural domains. The land routes thrown open by this invasion facilitated commercial and cultural inter-course between India and the outside world. The period was also marked by intense creative activities in the fields of religion, literature and art. The revival of Brahmanism, the adaptability of Indian culture leading to the complete Indianisation of foreign elements, the composition of the Mahābhāshya of Patañjali and the Manusmṛti along with the re-edition of certain portions of the Mahābhārata as also the development of the stūpa and cave architecture tend to impart additional significance to this age.

Unfortunately, the age of the Śuṅgas has not been culturally studied in its entirety so far. A critical and comparative study of the literary sources, epigraphic evidences, foreign testimony and art motifs is bound to reveal a fascinating picture of the cultural life of the people of that age. It is for this purpose that we have chosen the age of the Śuṅgas for our study.
REFERENCES

1  Bāṇa, Harshacharita ed. P.V. Kane VI. P. 50.
2  Pān. IX. 1, 147.
3  Mālavikāgnimitram IV. 14.
5  Āś.Śr. Sū. XII. 13.5.
6  Divyāvadāna, P. 434.
7  Mālavikāgnimitram I.7.
8  Allen, Coins of Ancient India P. 74.
9  JASB, 1922 No. 19 PP. 269-271.
10  Pargiter, Dynasties of the Kali Age P. 74.