

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF ANCIENT KASHMIR DURING KARKOTA DYNASTY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LALITADITYA MUKTAPIDA (724-761 A.D)

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Abstract

The Karkota dynasty of Kashmir reached its zenith under the reign of Lalitaditya Muktapida (724–761 A.D.), widely regarded as its most illustrious ruler. His reign marked a golden age in the political, cultural, and artistic history of Kashmir. Lalitaditya's achievements were remarkable not only for his extensive military campaigns, which earned him enduring historical recognition, but also for his enlightened governance. He pursued a policy of religious tolerance, extending patronage to both Buddhism and Brahmanism by commissioning temples, monasteries, and viharas that became important centres of learning. Scholars from within and beyond the region were welcomed and generously supported, fostering a vibrant intellectual environment. The administration undertook significant public works, including the improvement of infrastructure, irrigation facilities, and relief measures during natural calamities. Charitable institutions ensured regular support for the poor and destitute. Often described by historians as the “Alexander of Kashmiri history” or the “Samudragupta of Kashmir,” Lalitaditya presided over a flourishing of art, architecture, culture, and learning. This study examines the artistic and architectural traditions of the Karkota period, emphasizing their enduring significance within India's cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Reign, Art and Architecture, Glorious, Temple, Viharas*

1. INTRODUCTION

Between the years 724 and 761 A.D., the Karkota dynasty was firmly established in the Kashmir region of the Indian subcontinent, and one of its great rulers was named Lalitaditya Muktapida. The historian Kalhana paints a picture of Lalitaditya as a world conqueror in his work *Rajatarangini*, which he penned in the 12th century. In this work, he also gives Lalitaditya credit for enormous victories and supernatural powers. According to Kalhana, after Lalitaditya victory against Yashovarman, the king of central India, he continued his conquest of India by marching through the country's eastern and southern provinces. While he was travelling back to Kashmir, he defeated a number of other kings and monarchs, and after he arrived in Kashmir, he defeated a number of kings and monarchs stationed in the northern region. The art historian Hermann Goetz (1969) proposed a theory that suggested that Lalitaditya was successful in establishing a brief empire that encompassed significant portions of India in addition to what is now Afghanistan and Central Asia. This theory was based on a reconstruction of Kalhana's report and suggested that Lalitaditya was successful in establishing a brief empire. The book *Rajatarangini*, which is a chronicle of the rulers of Kashmir and was written by Kalhana in Kashmir in the 12th century, is the most important source of information about Lalitaditya. The *New Book of Tang* (*Xin Tang shu*), which is a record of the Tang dynasty that thrived in China, makes a brief mention of Lalitaditya. This is the only mention of him in the entire book. Both “Mu-to-pi” and “Muduobi” are aliases that are used to refer to him in this record (a variation of Muktapida). In his writings from the 11th century, the Persian historian Al-Biruni mentions a monarch of Kashmir by the name of Muttai. This ruler was most likely Lalitaditya (“Muttai” being derived from the Apabhramsha version of “Muktapida”). According to Kalhana, the total amount of time that Lalitaditya was able to rule was 36 years, 7 months, and 11 days. Lalitaditya made the claim that he was a descendant of the famous Naga monarch Karkota. He supported this claim by providing evidence.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine and illustrate the art and architecture of ancient Kashmir under the Karkota dynasty (724-761 A.D.), with special emphasis on Lalitaditya Muktapida.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present Study looks both forward and past in great detail. This suggests that the audience might view the research. The research is supported by both mandatory and optional sources of data. Additionally, some subjective research was done. Data from supplemental sources, including books, internet articles, printed publications, and international journals and magazines, were examined in the inquiry. Additionally, the study incorporates the opinions of many other people.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

It is believed by Kalhana that the well-known king Lalitaditya was in charge of building all of Kashmir's towns and cities. After realising (sunishchita) that he will rule over the entirety of the cosmos, he went on to build the city of Sunishchita-pura. He performed these acts when he founded Darpita-pura, which was a time of tremendous pride for him. Before giving his speech, he went and collected some fruit after finishing the work on Phala-pura. This was prior to his announcement (phala). M. A. Stein claims that the ancient city of Phalapura was found nearby Parihasapura at the confluence of the Vitasta and Sindhu rivers. The ancient city's position is indicated by this point on the map. As soon as Parnotsa got a hold of some vegetation, it started to grow (parna). Stein stated that he believed there was no way to distinguish this town from Poonch in its present configuration. The monarch was also in charge of building Lokapunya Town, which was a prominent town. This town can be found not too far from the modern city of Larkspur, in the area of the Lokabhavana spring. Parihasapura was by far the most enticing place to call home than any other region, by a considerable margin.

Lalitaditya made the decision to spend some time at this city while Srinagar was still the main capital. Despite this, he ultimately relocated to Srinagar. The city of Parihasapura had been abandoned for a long time and, as a result, had fallen into disrepair when Kalhana assumed control of the government. Several towns were built in the dry, arid wastelands to provide a place for those who were parched to obtain water. To accommodate the demand, this was done. Additionally, according to Kalhana, despite Lalitaditya absence from his kingdom during the city's construction, one of its architects decided to honour him by renaming it Lalitapura in his honour. The architect made this selection. Lalitaditya blood started to boil incredibly fast as a result of this. There is a school of thinking that claims this is where the present-day city of Lethipora can be found (or Latpor). According to a folktale, Chakram Ardika, who was married to Lalitaditya, was also in charge of building the city of Chakrapura, which had 7,000 homes overall when it was finished. Kalhana claims that Lalitaditya, who was inebriated at the time, gave the order to set Paravarapura on fire. He supposedly did this while in charge of the circumstance. Parihasapura was a town that had been built by a monarch by the name of Pravarasena, and Lalitaditya did not want another city to have the same attractiveness as it did. The city had been constructed by Lalitaditya. Lalitaditya, however, was able to gather his composure, and as a result, he felt regret for the things he had done in the past as a result of losing it. When his ministers told him that they had not done what he had asked of them, he felt a wave of comfort wash over him and a flood of relief flood over his entire body. When his ministers made such a wise decision, he showed his satisfaction and advised them to come to the same conclusion themselves while in a state that could be described as intoxicated.

Shrines

According to Kalhana, Lalitaditya built shrines on every island, as well as in every town, village, river, and body of water. Inside of these temples, a vast number of statues were built by his wife, clergy, and servants. These shrines were ornamented by Lalitaditya with golden and silver statues of the gods' attendants. Kalhana claims that Lalitaditya ordered the building of shrines honouring the numerous manifestations of Vishnu, including Keshava, Nihari, and Muktasvamin. In Darpitapura, he created a shrine dedicated to Keshava. At Straiya, a portrait of Nihari was also on display. Magnets were positioned above and below this painting to prevent it from falling to the floor. Constructed the Muktasvamin temple in Hushkapura (now Ushkur). He gave Vishnu a gift after completing the construction of the Loka punya city. A lot of paintings that show Vishnu in all of his forms have been hung up in the city of Parihasapura. A sterling silver sculpture of Parihasa-Keshava (made of 84,000 of palas; the pala is ancient unit equivalent to 4 tolakas). A golden statue carved in the likeness of Mukta Keshava (made of 84,000 tolakas of gold). A gold representation of Mahabartha. A silver miniature depicting Govardhana-Dhar was created.

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He built a 54-hand-tall pillar and ornamented the summit with a carving of Garuda, one of Vishnu's mounts. People from many nationalities also built temples to the god Vishnu during his rule. The market that is currently known as Kamalahatta is said to have been built by Lalitaditya queen Kamalavati. She built a silver monument there with a picture of Kamala Keshava. The magnificent shrine of Kayyasvamin is attributed to King Kayya of Lata. Kalhana also recounts the discovery of two antique idols. Lalitaditya was a proficient horse rider who once went alone into the midst of the desert on an untrained horse. He saw a number of beautiful young women dancing there. They claimed to come from a temple in Suravardhamana, a village in the desert that they said was in the middle of nowhere. The monarch gave the order to dig up the desert the next day. Two old temples were found during of them was an idol of Keshava. The writing on the idols stated that Rama and this excavation, and within each Lakshmana were the ones who created them.

The king brought these statues to Parihasapura and built them a stone shrine next to the Parihasa-Keshava temple. He erected an idol of Rama known as the Rama-svamin within this stone building. Chakramardika, Lakshmana's queen, placed the statue of Lakshmana, also known as Lakshmana-svamin, close to the shrine she had devoted to Chakreshvara. A safeguard in the form of an idol of Parihasa-Keshava was installed to ensure that the King of Gauda would return home safely while he was travelling to Kashmir, but according to Kalhana, the people of Gauda destroyed the Rama-svamin idol as a means of exacting revenge on Lalitaditya for killing their ruler. Even though this was the case, Lalitaditya nonetheless gave the order to have him killed at Trigrami (modern Trigram). In punishment for the traitors who had slain their monarch, his followers travelled all the way from Gauda to Kashmir to destroy Lalitaditya's beloved Parihasa-Keshava idol. They were allegedly travelling to Kashmir to see the temple honouring the goddess Sharada. The people who worked at the Parihasa-Keshava temple barred the doors to prevent the Gauda men from entering because Lalitaditya wasn't in Parihasapura at the time. The Gauda tribal members destroyed the idol of Ramasvamin because they thought it was actually the idol of Parihasa-Keshava. Then, Lalitaditya's troops put them all to death.

Buddhist shrines

According to Kalhana, Lalitaditya was responsible for the construction of the following Buddhist shrines: At Hushkapura, he constructed a sizable vihara in conjunction with a stupa (modern Ushkur, where the remains of a stupa and a Shiva shrine have been discovered). A Chinese traveller by the name of Ou-Kong included the "Moung-ti vihara" on the list of Kashmiri monasteries that he compiled. Stein believes that "Moung-ti" is the Chinese manner of writing "Mukta," and he establishes a connection between this vihara and the Ushkur location. He constructed the Rajavihara, which consisted of a sizable square known as a chatuh-shala, a sizable temple, and a sizable image of the Jina (the Buddha). He constructed a statue of the Brhadbuddha, which literally translates to "Great Buddha," and it is rather tall. It consisted of 84,000 copper prasthas in its construction (the prastha is an ancient unit equivalent to 64 tolakas). It is believed that Buddhist shrines were constructed by the same people who worked for the king. For instance, Kayya, the king of Lata, is credited with the construction of the renowned Kayya-vihara, which was subsequently adopted as the residence of the bhikshu Sarvajnamitra. Chankuna constructed Chankuna-vihara, also known as Cankuna vihara, which had a golden statue of the Jinas as well as a stupa of considerable height. Chanukah also established a vihara in Srinagara, which included a chaitya in its architecture. Ishanachandra, who was a physician and the son-in-law of Chankuna, grew wealthy thanks to the Takshaka Shiva shrines in the area and afterwards constructed a vihara.

According to Kalhana:

Lalitaditya took 1 crore from Bhutesa (Shiva's shrine) before setting out to conquer the world. When he got back to Kashmir, he gave 11 crores as an apology. He built the Shiva temple of Jyeshtharudra out of stone and gave land and villages to the shrine. The modern Wangath is the same place as the Bhutesha shrine (Bhutser or Buthser). Mitrasharman, one of his ministers, put up a Shiva linga called Mitreshvara. The linga called Bhappateshvara was made by a teacher named Bhappata. Other people also made several lingas, which are called Rakchatesha.

Surya shrines

Kalhana says that Lalitaditya built a shrine to the sun god Aditya in Lalitapura and gave this shrine the land of Kanyakubja and the villages there. He also ordered the Martanda sun temple and the town around it to be built.

Martand Sun Temple

The Martand Temple is in the southern part of Kashmir, about five miles from the town of Anantnag. It is one of the oldest "Sun temples" in India, but because it hasn't been taken care of, it is in ruins today. King Ranaditya built the first part of it between the 3rd and 5th centuries. and around the 6th century A.D., he added the rest. King Lalitaditya Muktapida of the Karkota Dynasty finished it (c.625-885 A.D.) King Lalitaditya military victories made him a powerful emperor with the most power in Kashmir, which he ruled for more than 30 years along with other areas. His efforts to use soft power in the religious world made Hinduism stronger. Along with Shaivism and Vaishnavism, the Vedic deity "Sun" became a popular "God," especially among the warrior royals (Kshatriyas), who called themselves "Suryavamshi" (lineage of "Sun"). The "Temple," which was dedicated to the "Sun God" and called "Martand" in the Sanskrit language, stood in Kashmir for hundreds of years as an architectural and religious wonder that could not be topped. But around the 15th century A.D., the area came under the control of the Islamic ruler Sikander Butshikan. His monotheistic beliefs and intolerance, along with his hard-power iconoclasm, turned the powerful Martand Temple into the ruins we see today. After India gained its independence in 1947, the Martand Temple was named an archaeological monument and given to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which has, for the most part, avoided becoming an obstruction. The name Martand originates from the Arabic word for "Sun and it is currently often used to refer to the temple of the Sun that has since been dismantled. It is located on the highest point of the elevated plateau, which is where the place gets its name, and it provides a breathtaking view of the valley that is located below.

The temple's location is one of the things that adds to its outstanding appearance and is one of the reasons why so many people enjoy it. This is one of the reasons why so many people admire the temple. According to Fergusson, "It is the architectural lion of Kashmir, and all tourists feel the urge to go into raptures about its beauty and splendour, comparing it to Palmyra or Thebes or other beautiful groups of ancient ruins." This is because it is the architectural lion of Kashmir. "Every tourist feels compelled to fall into raptures about its beauty and splendour," the author writes. The Sun Temple in Martand is one of the most well-known and interesting works of Indian art, and it may be found in that city. It is said by the local clergy that the sun god was born in a tank that can be found in Kashmir at Bhavan (Matan), which is around six miles from Anantnag (Islamabad). The water from this spring flows into the tank after emerging in Kashmir at the base of a massive plateau there. From further than a mile away, the temple may be made out rising on the plateau in the distance. It once looked out over a mighty town that was located in the middle of irrigated gardens, and it still affords a panoramic view over the entirety of the Kashmir valley in the direction of where the sun sets behind the peaks of the Pir Panjal Mountains. There are illustrations of this ruin included in almost all of the books that are dedicated to the subject of Kashmir, India, or Indian art.

The Kashmir Archaeological Department has dug up the shrine's court in order to prevent it from falling further into disrepair. Both Sir Alexander Cunningham and James Fergusson have been known to visit the location in order to express their respect. In his book titled *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*, R.C. Kak presents a detailed analysis of this subject matter for the reader to peruse. However, the temple has never been researched in great depth, and Brown is the only person known to have recognised how extraordinary the Martand temple is in terms of its place in the annals of Indian art. This is the case because the temple has never been investigated. It is reasonable for him to assume that it has some connection to Indian art in some way. His opinion that it is reminiscent of Roman architecture is spot-on accurate and I wholeheartedly agree with it. The layout of Martand is very similar to that of the vast majority of the other mediaeval temples that can be found in Kashmir. It is composed of a courtyard that houses the central shrine in the middle and a peristyle that is flanked by columns.

The second one has dimensions of 142 feet in width and 220 feet in length, and it has 84 fluted columns that face the courtyard in the direction of their orientation. The exterior of the peristyle is very bare, with the exception of the western side. On this side, there was once a row of columns very much like the ones that can be found in the temples of Avantipura. The entrance, which can also be referred to as the gateway, can be found on the west side of the square in the exact same location as the temple, and it is the same width as the temple. This magnitude is suitable when considered in light of Hindu ideas of the majesty of architectural design. According to Ram Razz, the rules that they lay out give diverse sizes for each form of gateway, ranging from the simplest to the most magnificent. These sizes range from six-sevenths to ten-elevenths of the width of the temple. There is a wide range of sizes available, from six-sevenths to ten-elevenths of the width of the temple. When viewed from the outside, the Martand entrance gives the appearance that it is a part of the temple due to the way its components are positioned as well as the ornamentation on its pediments and pilasters. It included entrances that faced both the west and the east, and it was separated into an inner and an outer portico by a wall in the shape of a cross that featured a doorway in the middle of it. There was perhaps a door made of wood that was blocking the entrance to the room.

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Large fluted pillars that reached a height of 17 feet stood on either side of the entryway to provide support for the pediment. The pillars that were in the quadrangle were a height that was 8 feet less than this height. There is evidence that one of these buildings is still standing to the south of the entrance. People are under the impression that water formerly covered the entirety of the interior of the quadrangle all the way up to a distance of approximately one foot from the bases of the columns. This is a common myth. People were able to reach the temple by walking along a raised pathway made of slabs that were supported by solid blocks at regular intervals. This pathway led up to the temple. By taking this path, one could connect the set of stairs that led up to the entrance with the set of stairs that lead up to the temple. The identical kind of walkway could be followed all the way across the quadrangle; it started at one of the side doorways and ended at the other.

Because there was a canal that ran up the side of the mountain and connected to the River Lidar, the community that was located in the immediate vicinity of the mountain always had access to clean water. A number of archaeologists are of the opinion that the construction of this temple took place at some point during the eighth century. Cunningham places date between 370-500 A.D. However, Ferguson does not believe that it was started any earlier than the seventh century. It is likely somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 years old. This age range is most likely accurate. Within the walls of the Martand temple, you can still make out the ruins of an older, larger temple that formerly stood there. This temple had a length of 63 feet and was surrounded on all sides by cloisters made up of columns and arches. The width measures 142 feet, and the length measures 200 feet. The majority of the carved pillars are currently dispersed around the ground, and there is a total of approximately 84 of them. The poet Heber was motivated to think of a Heber as a result of the beauty that may be discovered in the lack of anything, and the most perceptive critics of Indian art have been forced to genuflect before it as a result of this. It is a dream fashioned out of stone by Titans, and jewellers put the finishing touches on it. The only thing that was necessary was a display case made of glass. Its architectural design is on a level that is higher than that of the Parthenon, the Taj Mahal, St. Peter's Cathedral, and the Escorial.

Other things to do

According to Kalhana, Lalitaditya conceived of a scheme at Chakradhara that needed the use of a number of water wheels in order to transport water from the Vitasta River to a number of different settlements. This plan was carried out in accordance with the directives of Kalhana. The fact that Lalitaditya resided at Chakradhara served as the foundation for this idea. It is said that Chakradhara resided on the plateau that is now known as Tsakdar Udhar and that is situated in close proximity to Bijbehara. You can find Tsakdar Udhar by looking for Bijbehara. Ishanadevi, who was married to Chakradhara's minister Chankuna, dug a well and stocked it with purified water in order to facilitate the treatment of people who were unwell. She acted in this manner so that the efforts of others may be utilised to their advantage. Continued Kalhana, "Just as the wind gathers a vast quantity of blooming flowers all at once," "so did Lalitaditya gather wise men from a wide variety of regions." Following his departure from Tuhkhara, he brought Chankuna, who in IAST is known as Cakua, along with him. Cakua was an exceptional example of the human race.

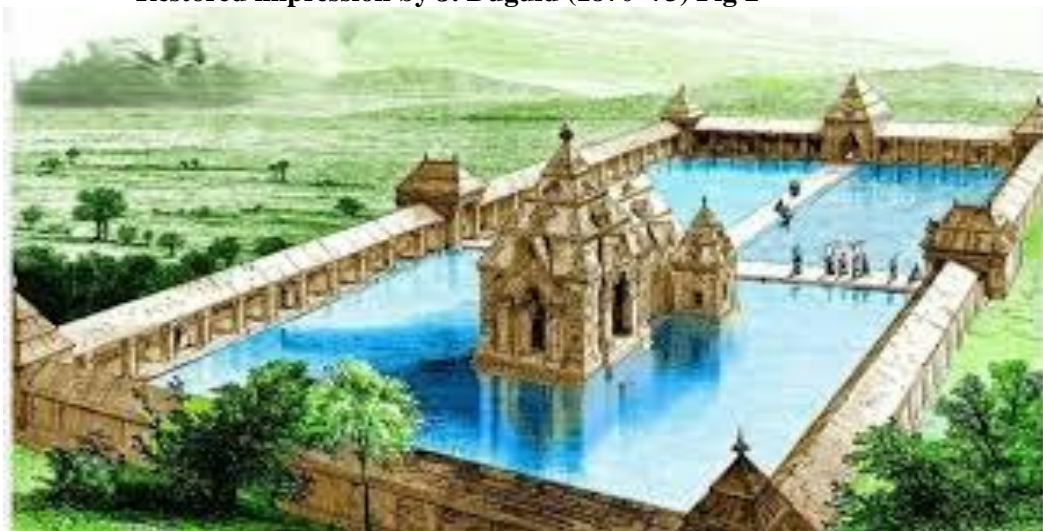
At least according to Kalhana, it is believed that Lalitaditya was the first person in all of Parihasapura to celebrate the Sahasra-bhakta festival. This is based on the information provided by Kalhana. During the course of this occasion, he not only handed out dakshinas, but also one hundred thousand and one meal (donations). According to Al-Biruni, a Persian author who lived in the 11th century, the people who lived in Kashmir conducted a festival once a year on the second day of the Chaitra month to honour their ruler Muttai, who they say defeated the Turks. This event took place on the second day of the Chaitra month. This event was held on the same day of each year at the same location. This incidence took place on the second day of the month of Chaitra. The month in question was Chaitra. In addition, some people call Lalitaditya by the name "Muktapida," which is another name for this Muttai. This Muttai goes by both of these names. According to Al-Biruni, the people who lived in Kashmir had the misconception that their previous monarchs, including Muttai and the majority of the others, "controlled over the whole cosmos." This was a conviction that had remained with them throughout their whole history. According to Al-Biruni, these assertions are not true because, when considered from the perspective of time, they do not make sense. This is why Al-Biruni believes they are not true. In particular, Al-Biruni contends that these arguments should not be taken seriously because they are illogical

The Wantagh Temple complex, identified as the Bhutesa shrine Mentioned in Kalhana's account Fig 1



Source: Wikipedia

Restored impression by J. Duguid (1870–73) Fig 2



Source: Wikipedia

Ruins in summer of 2011 Fig 3



Source: Wikipedia

Ruins in winter of 2012 Fig 4



Source: Wikipedia

5. CONCLUSION

In short, Lalitaditya has left many marks on the stands of time as a conqueror, administrator, and patron of architecture and literature. But as great men's faults are seldom small, he had a serious shortcoming also; he drank like a fish. It is said that once in a fit of drunkenness, he ordered his officials to burn down Pravarapura, a town founded by king Pravarasena. But his wise officials set on fire some ricks of grass at a distance and Lalitaditya, like Nero of Rome, "stood and rocked with crazy laughter, thinking that Pravarapura was up in flames. After some time, however, when the effects of wine had disappeared, he was "touched by the fire of regret." At that time, the officials apprised him of the facts, where up on so much was he delighted that he asked them not to obey any of his orders which he gave while in cups. Acknowledgement I want to express my deep gratitude to all of you for helping me complete my article. I owe a great deal of gratitude to everyone whose suggestions and motivation allowed me to organise my article in a way that was suitable for the time it was written. Aside from that, I want to thank the experts and writers who successfully finished their papers on a related topic for their significant input; the references they provided helped me come up with an excellent plan to finish my piece in a helpful way.

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