

# Significance of Karkota Empire to Indian Subcontinent in Development of Scientific Study and Architecture

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to study **Karkota Empire** a major power in the Indian subcontinent during 7th and 8th century enumerating scientific study and architecture. It was founded by Durlabhavardhana during the lifetime of Harshavardhan. Karkota Empire (c. 625 - 885 ) was a major power in the Indian subcontinent during 7th and 8th century. It was founded by Durlabhavardhana during the lifetime of Harshavardhan. The dynasty marked the rise of Kashmir as a power in Northern India. Avantivarman ascended the throne of Kashmir on 855 A.D., establishing the Utpala dynasty and ending the rule of Karkota dynasty.

The 12th-century chronicler Kalhana characterizes Lalitaditya as a world conqueror, crediting him with extensive conquests and miraculous powers in his *Rajatarangini*. Lalitaditya defeated the central Indian king Yashovarman, and then marched to eastern and southern parts of India. He subjugated several more rulers on his way back to Kashmir, and then subjugated several northern kings. Based on a reconstruction of Kalhana's account, art historian Hermann Goetz (1969) theorized that Lalitaditya managed to create a short-lived empire that included major parts of India as well as present-day Afghanistan and Central Asia. Goetz' analysis was accepted and cited widely by subsequent authors writing on the history of Kashmir. Lalitaditya is generally accepted as the most powerful king of his dynasty. He built a number of shrines in Kashmir, including the now-ruined Martand Sun Temple. He also established several towns, including a new capital at Parihasapura, although he also maintained the dynasty's traditional capital at Srinagara. The main source of information about Lalitaditya is *Rajatarangini*, a chronicle of the rulers of Kashmir, by the 12th century Kashmiri writer Kalhana. Lalitaditya also finds a brief mention in the *New Book of Tang* (Xin Tang shu), a record of the Tang dynasty of China. This text mentions him as "Mu-to-pi" or "Muduobi" (a variation of Muktapida). The 11th century Persian chronicler Al-Biruni mentions a Kashmiri king called Muttai, who was most probably Lalitaditya, "Muttai" being derived from the Apabhramsha form of "Muktapida". The *Rajatarangini* names Lalitaditya as the youngest son of the Karkota king Durlabhaka (alias Pratapaditya) and queen Narendraprabha. His mother Narendraprabha was previously married to a foreign merchant settled in Kashmir. He had two elder brothers named Chandrapida (alias Vajraditya) and Tarapida (alias Udayaditya), who preceded him as the rulers of Kashmir.

*Key words scientific study , architecture, Rajatarangini , Lalitaditya , Karkota*

## Introduction

Karkota Empire (c. 625 - 885 ) was a major power in the Indian subcontinent during 7th and 8th century. It was founded by Durlabhvardhana during the lifetime of Harshavardhan. The dynasty marked the rise of Kashmir as a power in Northern India. Avanti Varman ascended the throne of Kashmir on 855 A.D., establishing the Utpala dynasty and ending the rule of Karkota dynasty. The 12th-century chronicler Kalhana characterizes Lalitaditya as a world conqueror, crediting him with extensive conquests and miraculous powers in his Rajatarangini. Lalitaditya defeated the central Indian king Yashovarman, and then marched to eastern and southern parts of India. He subjugated several more rulers on his way back to Kashmir, and then subjugated several northern kings. Based on a reconstruction of Kalhana's account, art historian Hermann Goetz (1969) theorized that Lalitaditya managed to create a short-lived empire that included major parts of India as well as present-day Afghanistan and Central Asia. Goetz' analysis was accepted and cited widely by subsequent authors writing on the history of Kashmir. Lalitaditya is generally accepted as the most powerful king of his dynasty. He built a number of shrines in Kashmir, including the now-ruined Martand Sun Temple. He also established several towns, including a new capital at Parihasapura, although he also maintained the dynasty's traditional capital at Srinagara. Lalitaditya's reign lasted for 36 years, 7 months and 11 days. Kalhana suggests that Lalitaditya ruled during 700-736 AD. This is not correct, as Lalitaditya's predecessor is known to have sent an embassy to the Tang capital Chang'an in 720. This predecessor, mentioned as "Tianmu" in the Tang records, was probably Tarapida, although some scholars have identified him as Chandrapida. Modern historians date Lalitaditya's reign to c. 724/5 - c. 760 AD.

Lalitaditya boasted to be a descendant of the mythical Nāga king Karkotaka. Kalhana describes Lalitaditya as a universal monarch, who spent most of his life in military expeditions. He gives the following account of Lalitaditya's career: Lalitaditya invaded the Antartika country, whose capital was located at Gadhipura or Kanyakubja. The defending king Yashovarman submitted to him after a long war and offered a peace treaty. Yashovarman drew up a document outlining the terms of this treaty, titled "The treaty of Yashovarman and Lalitaditya". Lalitaditya's minister Mitrasharman objected to this title, and insisted that Lalitaditya's name appear before Yashovarman's name in the title. Lalitaditya's generals, who were uneasy about the long duration of the war, blamed Mitrasharman for delaying the treaty. But Lalitaditya himself was pleased with Mitrasharman: he broke off the peace negotiations, and "uprooted" Yashovarman. As a result of this defeat, Yashovarman, who had been served by the court poets such as Vakpati and Bhavabhuti, himself became a panegyrist of Lalitaditya. The land of Kanyakubja, located between the Yamuna river and the Kalika river, possibly modern Kali Nadi, came under Lalitaditya's control. Lalitaditya instituted five new offices, which were occupied by Shahi and other princes. After consolidating power in Kanyakubja, he proceeded to the eastern ocean, just like the Ganges river flows from the Himalayas to the eastern ocean. During this expedition, the elephants in this army saw the land of their birth. Lalitaditya reached Kalinga and Gauda, and a number of elephants joined his army from Gauda. From the eastern sea-shore, Lalitaditya proceeded to the southern region, where the Karnatas bowed down before him. The sovereign of Dakshinapatha at this time was a Karnata queen named Ratta. She had constructed

obstacle-free roads over the Vindhya mountains, and was as powerful as the goddess Vindhyavasini, Durga. Even a powerful figure like her bowed down to Lalitaditya. In the south, Lalitaditya's soldiers forgot their fatigue, as they sipped wine of the coconut trees and enjoyed the breeze on the banks of the Kaveri river. The snakes dropping from the sandalwood trees on Chandanadri, the Malaya mountains, appeared like curved swords falling from the arms because of the fear of an attack by Lalitaditya.

The Kashmiri king crossed the oceans via the islands, as one crosses a rivulet by stepping over stones. After crossing the ocean, Lalitaditya reached the seven Konkans. Dvaraka, located on the western sea shore, inspired Lalitaditya's soldiers with desire [to enter that city]. Lalitaditya's elephant army then marched into Avanti. The dust raised by his army's crossing of Vindhya mountain made the Vindhya appear red with anger. In Avanti, the tusks of his elephants were split only by the moonlight falling on the diadem of Mahakala- a reference to the traditional myth that the moonlight can split the elephant tusks. Having defeated most of the other kings, Lalitaditya proceeded from Avanti to Uttarapatha (the northern region), where he fought with several mighty kings. His army emptied the Kamboja stables of horses-a reference to the Kamboja country's reputation for good-quality horses. The resulting darkness made them appear as if they were filled with black buffaloes instead. The Tuhkharas fled to mountain ranges on Lalitaditya's approach, leaving behind their horses. He also defeated Mummuni three times in a battle, and made the Bhauttas very anxious. Lalitaditya was too dignified to tolerate the wine-drinking Daradas.

### **Objective:**

This paper intends to explore the Karkota period of Kashmir is the most significant in terms of architecture comprehensiveness to sculpture, temple architecture mainly King Lalitaditya of the Karkota dynasty of Kashmir ruled for 37 years from 724.

### **Historical Context Karkota period**

India has seen hundreds of Kings who were known for their exceptional bravery and courage, but most of these Kings did not find place in the history books of our country due to political interference post independence. The generations missed out the opportunity to know about these great men and women who ruled our country for centuries protecting every border from foreign invasion and preserving the rich culture and heritage. The battle Lalitaditya fought has been described by Kashmiri historian Kalhana in the classic history of Kashmir, the 'Rajatarangini' in which he says "The king, who carried his prowess, abandoned his (war-like) fury (only) when the (opposing) kings discretely folded their palms at his victorious onset. At the sound of his drums (beaten) in attack, the dwellings of his enemies were diverted by the (frightened) inhabitants and thus resembled women dropping in fright the burden of their wombs."

In the early 8th century, Kashmir faced problems from both Arabs and Tibetan empire. At the same time, a fight broke out between Lalitaditya and Yashovarman due to land issue and both raged into war in which Yashovarman was defeated badly by Lalitaditya. Yashovarman's kingdom Kannuj was occupied by Lalitaditya 733 AD. He later extended his Kingdom to Gauda and Vanga (Both of Bengal region). However the Tibet army grew very strong and Lalitaditya wanted more support to attack the Tibetans.

Lalitaditya was born in the year of 699 AD as the third son of Durlabhak-Pratapaditya of Kashmir. He was from the Nagvanshi Karkota Kayastha Dynasty of Kashmir. Karkota kayastha families were mainly serving in the army of the kings of Kashmir since decades. They were known for their remarkable courage in the battle field. The Kings of Kashmir had given them the title Sakhasena for their immense contribution. In the year 624 AD, a commander called Durlabh Vardhana belonging to the Karkota dynasty married the Kashmir King's daughter and then founded the Karkota Vansha dynasty. According to historian C. V. Vaidya (1861–1938), Kalhana's account is corroborated by the 13th century text Chach Nama. A letter in this text, addressed by Raja Dahir to Muhammad bin Qasim, mentions "the King of Kashmir on whose royal threshold the other rulers of Hind had placed their heads, who sways the whole of Hind, even the countries of Makran and Turan, whose chains a great many noblemen and grandees have willingly placed on their knees and against whom no human being can stand." This letter is stated to have been written in 712 AD; So Vaidya theorizes that Lalitaditya's conquests must have occurred during 700-712.

Hermann Goetz devised a historical reconstruction supporting Kalhana's account, although he admitted that "this reconstruction cannot claim to be more than a working theory trying plausibly to interconnect the sparse and uncertain data". Goetz argued that Kalhana's account of Lalitaditya's military exploits is not only probable, but also supported by other evidence. Lalitaditya's extensive conquests were possible because the other contemporary kingdoms in the region had been weakened by foreign invasions and wars. Goetz speculated that Lalitaditya managed to create a powerful army as a result of superior China-influenced military organization, administrative set-up and weaponry. Goetz identified several persons mentioned in Kalhana's account as historical figures, and argued that a distant writer like Kalhana could not have invented such historical persons. In Valukambudhi ("sea of sand"), where the mirage resulted in an illusion of water, Lalitaditya's elephants appeared like large crocodiles. The women of Stri-rajya (literally "women's kingdom") melted the hearts of Lalitaditya's warriors by showing their "high breasts". When the trembling queen of Strirajya met Lalitaditya, no one could determine whether the emotion displayed by her was the terror or the desire of love. On Lalitaditya's approach, the Uttarakurus took shelter in the trees just like snakes hide in holes on seeing a Garuda. Lalitaditya returned to Kashmir with the immense wealth obtained from his conquests. He appointed his attendants as the kings of Jalandhara, Lohara and other countries. By Lalitaditya's order, the Turushkas and Dakshinatyas in his kingdom had to display a badge of shame. The Turushkas had to carry their arms at their backs and shave half of their heads, to mark their bondage. The Dakshinatyas had to wear a tail that swept the ground, to signify their similarity to beasts. Lalitaditya established several cities and shrines during his stay in Kashmir. Once, he

invaded and conquered the kingdom of Sikata-sindhu ("Ocean of the Sand"), after crossing a massive wasteland. After some time, he marched towards the "boundless regions of the north", because he was curious to visit the lands where no one had reached before.

### **Lalituditya was one of the most brave Kings India ever saw.**

He had to first tackle few conventional enemies before he stopped the Arabs. He fought the daradas, kabhojas and bhuttas of Ladakh who were under the Tibetan rule. It is said that Lalituditya himself led the army into the war defeating all Kings and established control over the regions of Ladakh.

Junad who was appointed as governor of Sindh in AD 730 wanted to conquer whole of India. But however the task wasn't easy since he had to face the Lalituditya in Kashmir. Yashovarman, the king of Kannuj was also in support of Lalituditya, the Yashovarman Kingdom consisted of UP, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, parts of Bengal and Jharkhand. Lalituditya had Kashmir, Haryana, and North Punjab under his control. The alliance between Lalituditya and Yashovarman defeated the Arabs from entering Kashmir. It is said that Lalituditya was so angered about the Arabs treatment of Hindus in the Afghan region, so when he defeated them he had ordered them to shave off half of their heads as a symbol of their submission.

Lalituditya was very keen of teaching a lesson to the Arabs, so he conquered Dardistan (northern Pakistan, and Kashmir in India and parts of north-eastern Afghanistan) Turkestan and Transoxiana (portion of Central Asia corresponding approximately with modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan and southwest Kazakhstan.) He later invaded the Turkestan via Kabul. Mumin who was the ruler of Bukhara fought with Lalituditya four times, but not once he was able to stop him and with fear for life he surrendered to Lalituditya and agreed to pay taxes as a mark of respect. The battle Lalituditya fought has been described by Kashmiri historian Kalhana in the classic history of Kashmir, the 'Rajatarangini' in which he says "The king, who carried his prowess, abandoned his (war-like) fury (only) when the (opposing) kings discretely folded their palms at his victorious onset. At the sound of his drums (beaten) in attack, the dwellings of his enemies were diverted by the (frightened) inhabitants and thus resembled women dropping in fright the burden of their wombs."

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Lalituditya made a master plan and approached the Tang Dynasty for support. The Tang dynasty was on its zenith of power in the beginning of 7th century but had lost many territories in central China to the Tibetan Empire in the 8th century. Being a smart diplomat, Lalituditya convinced the Chinese to support them against

the Arabs and Tibetans in 736 AD. The Chinese provided advanced infantry armour, heavily armoured Sassanid-Chinese cavalry to Lalitaditya and the duo were able to defeat the mighty Tibetans and conquer Kucha and Turfan along with Assam and Bangladesh which were under the Tibetan control.

After the great win, Lalitaditya expressed his desire to conquer the entire world for which he prepared a massive army with advanced weapons and armours. Lalitaditya acquired most of the places in the west and south of India starting from Rastrakutas in Maharastra, Pallavas and Kalinga in the southern part. He also extends his kingdom to central China after defeating the Chinese. After which he was compared with Alexander the great. Under Lalitaditya, the Kingdom extended from Tibet in the east to Iran in the west and Turkestan in the north. He transformed Kashmir into the most powerful military centre in India and central Asia. The Kashmir Kingdom gained enormous wealth and Lalitaditya utilized the wealth to build massive infrastructure in Kashmir, construction of temples were taken up and Kashmir saw extensive development under Lalitaditya. The famous Martand Sun Temple in Anantnag, Kashmir was constructed during this period.

Lalitaditya was a very liberal King, though he was a strong follower of Hindu tradition, he respected all religion. He is said to be very compassionate ruler who responded to people's voice. He was an able administrator and a very smart ruler. He always believed that "If they should keep more wealth, they would become in a single year very formidable and strong enough to neglect the commands of the king." He always advised his people to be extra cautions while selecting cavalry and the infantry. He had even ordered that no two people from the same place were to be put together. In the year 1760 AD, the Lalithaditya era came to an end by his sudden death. There are two version of his death mystery, one is that he perished while he was in a military camp near Aryanaka (Eastern Iran) due to heavy snowfall and avalanche. The other version is that his army was perished in a Sinkiang in 756-57 AD, after which Lalitaditya was taken by a shock, unable to bear the loss it is said he immolated himself along with his generals. Lalitaditya was regarded as the mightiest warrior in the history of India who not only stopped the Arabs from entering India but also conquered parts of Iran and extended his Kingdom upto Tibet and China. His efforts to protect Kashmir and India is something which the country can never forget.

### **Historical and scientific studies**

M. A. Stein (1900), who translated Rajatarangini into English, accepted Lalitaditya's subjugation of Yashovarman as a historical fact. He rejected the subsequent victories described by Kalhana as "manifestly legendary", given the absence of historical details. According to him, the kingdom of Kashmir did not have manpower or resources to carry out such extensive campaigns.

André Wink (2002) described Goetz' theory as convincing, but Ronald M. Davidson (2012) dismisses Wink's affirmation of Goetz's analysis as uncritical. Davidson rejects the argument that the conquests described by Kalhana must have been real, because Kalhana could not have invented historical persons. Davidson presents the example of the Nilamata Purana, which is one of Kalhana's sources for Rajatarangini, and which ascribes fictional events to historical persons. He argues that Kalhana's dubious sources could have fabricated a conquest



of known parties. Davidson points out that Yashovarman's court poet Vakpati credits him with similar conquests in Gaudavaho ( Slaying of the King of Gauda ), according to which Yashovarman conquered not only eastern and southern India, but also defeated the king of Persia. Davidson dismisses both Gaudavaho and Rajatarangini as poetic boast, describing Kalhana's account as "Kashmiri boosterism". He, however, believes that Kalhana's claims might be closer to the truth than Vakpati's claims. According to Davidson, Lalitaditya launched his attack in 733 , advanced up to Magadha in the east, and then returned to Kashmir in 747.

Tansen Sen (2004) similarly rejects the claims about Lalitaditya's conquest of Hindukush-Pamir region, based on numismatic evidence and contemporary records other than Rajatarangini. According to him, Lalitaditya provided military and logistical support to the Tang campaigns against Tibetans, and the success of these campaigns later led to Kashmiri legends describing him as a great conqueror.

### **Others also constructed Vishnu shrines during his reign:**

Lalitaditya's queen Kamalavati established Kamalahatta (a market), where she installed a silver idol of Kamala-Keshava.

Kayya, the king of Lata, built the famous shrine of Kayyasvamin. Kalhana also mentions a legend describing the discovery of two ancient idols: Lalitaditya, who was a skilled horse-rider, once took an untrained horse to a wasteland alone. There he saw some lovely dancing girls, who said that they belonged to a temple in the Suravardhamana village located in the wasteland. Next, day the king had the wasteland dug up. This excavation resulted in discovery of two decayed temples, each with an idol of Keshava. The inscriptions on these idols indicated that they had been made by Rama and Lakshmana. The king brought these idols to Parihasapura, where he erected a stone shrine beside the Parihasa-Keshava temple. He installed the Rama-svamin ,Rama's idol, in this stone building. His queen Chakramardika installed the Lakshmana-svamin ,Lakshmana's idol, beside her Chakreshvara shrine. According to Kalhana, the Rama-svamin idol was later destroyed by the men of Gauda to avenge their king's assassination by Lalitaditya. The Gauda king had come to Kashmir on a visit, and the idol of Parihasa-Keshava had been made a surety for his safety. Despite this, Lalitaditya had him assassinated in Trigami (modern Trigam). To avenge their king's treacherous murder, his servants came from Gauda to Kashmir, determined to destroy Lalitaditya's beloved Parihasa-Keshava idol. They entered Kashmir under the pretext of visiting the shrine of the goddess Sharada. Lalitaditya was away from Parihasapura at that time, and the attendants of the Parihasa-Keshava temple closed its gates to prevent the Gauda men from entering the shrine. The Gauda men mistook the Ramasvamin idol for the Parihasa-Keshava idol, and destroyed it, before being killed by Lalitaditya's soldiers. Kalhana also credits Lalitaditya with building the following Buddhist shrines: Built a large vihara with stupa at Hushkapura -modern Ushkur, where the remains of a stupa and a Shiva shrine have been discovered. The Chinese pilgrim Ou-Kong mentions the "Moung-ti" vihara among his list of Kashmiri monasteries; Stein identifies this vihara with the Ushkur site, and theorizes that "Moung-ti" is the Chinese transcription of "Mukta". Built the Rajavihara with a large chatuh-shala (square), a large chaitya, and a large image of the Jina ,the Buddha. Erected a very high statue of the Brhadbuddha ("Great Buddha"), made of

84,000 prasthas of copper (the prastha is an ancient unit equivalent to 64 tolakas). The king's subjects are also said to have built Buddhist shrines: Kayya, the king of Lata, also built the famous Kayya-vihara, which later became the residence of the bhikshu Sarvajnamitra. Chankuna established Chankuna-vihara (Cankunavihara), which included a tall stupa and golden image of the Jinas. Chankuna also established another vihara (with a chaitya) in Srinagara. Chankuna's son-in-law and physician Ishanachandra also built a vihara after obtaining wealth through the blessings of Takshaka. According to Kalhana: Lalitaditya took 1 crore from Bhutesha (shrine of Shiva) while embarking on world conquest, and gave 11 crores as expiatory offering upon his return to Kashmir. He constructed the Jyeshtharudra stone temple dedicated to Shiva, and granted land and villages to the shrine. The Bhutesha shrine is identified with modern Wangath (Bhutser or Buthser). His minister Mitrasharman installed a Shiva linga called Mitreshvara. A teacher named Bhappata built the linga called Bhappateshvara. Other people also built several lingas, known as Rakchatesha.

## Conclusion

Historian R. C. Majumdar who among those who are wary of the ancient accounts of conquests, believes that Yashovarman was "unquestionably the most powerful king [in the region] about this time." He believes that diplomatic relations existed between the Chinese court and that in Kannauj, evidenced by Yashovarman sending a minister to China in 731, and that he was for a time in alliance with Muktapida, with the two rulers defeating the Tibetans. These two diplomatic events may be connected because China was at that time at war with Tibet but it is also possible that the Chinese relationship grew from a shared concern about the growth of Arab power.

The alliance with Muktapida collapsed around 740, according to Majumdar because of jealousy felt by the Kashmiri king. While Majumdar says that Lalitaditya then defeated Yashovarman and annexed his lands, Ramachandra Tripathi believes that Kalhana's account of what happened is inconsistent and that Yashovarman may have been allowed to remain on his throne after a "nominal acknowledgement of supremacy" to Lalitaditya. Little physical evidence exists of Yashovarman's reign, although he is reputed to have constructed the temple at Harischandranagari, present-day Ayodhya. An inscription has been found at Nalanda, and some coins elsewhere, that may relate to him but there is no certainty. According to the Jain chronicles, Yashovarman had a son named Āma, who succeeded him as the king of Kannauj during 749-753 . C. V. Vaidya theorized that the Ayudha rulers were descendants of Yashovarman, but no historical records connect the two dynasties. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar similarly proposed that Vajrayudha and Indrayudha were names of Āma. But this theory is contradicted by the Jain accounts.



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