

Lalitaditya, The Alexander of India

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He was the ever undefeated King of Kashmir who tasted victory everywhere he went. Chinese, the Turkish and the Tibetan legends referred to him as a great conqueror. He was the first Indian king who gave a befitting reply to the invading Arabs; one of the few Indian kings who was able to capture Central Asia. A Kashmiri king, his influence spread even to South India and played an important role in the foundation of the Rashtrakuta empire there, which became one of the most powerful kingdoms to have ever existed in South India. He was the

king who blasted the myth that Indians were never able to capture any foreign lands.

This great son of India who hailed from Kashmir was none other than Lalitaditya Muktapida of Karkota dynasty, the mightiest Indian king of his times and beyond. Believed to be the youngest of the three sons of Kashmiri king Durlabhaka (alias Pratapaditya), Lalitaditya ascended the throne in 724 AD at a time when the Karkota dynasty ruled over the present day Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and Haryana. Lalitaditya not only stopped the Arabs from entering

India but also conquered parts of Iran and extended his kingdom upto Tibet and China. His successful efforts to protect Kashmir and India is something which the Indian nation cannot and should never forget. But it is really sad that the story of this greatest of kings remains virtually dead and finds no place in history books of schools and colleges even in post-independent India.

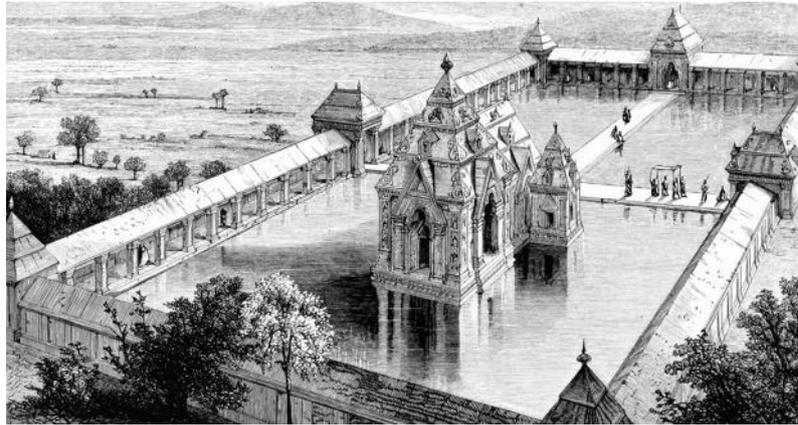
Very early in his youth the great warrior king had understood that Kashmir was facing two enemies at the same time; one was the Arab caliphate which had captured Sindh after defeating Raja Dahir and the other was the Tibetan empire. It was getting difficult to ward off both the invasions at the same time. So, the strategist king allied with Yashovarman of Kannuj, to defend India from the invasions of both Tibetans and Arabs.

Legend has it that the Arab Caliphate had allied with Tibetans who were in perpetual conflict with the Chinese rulers represented at that time by the Tang dynasty. The alliance was also encroaching on the lands of Tang Empire even though it was regarded as a powerful regime

around 7th century A.D. Lalitaditya having found a natural ally in China, made a smart diplomatic move by aligning with the latter and took advantage of the advanced Chinese military technologies that helped him in upgrading his own army.

The famous Iranian scholar and historian Al Beruni records the victory of this newly formed alliance over the invading Arabs in a battle that was fought somewhere near Punjab. He even mentions that a festival was held on the second day of *Chaitra* (March) every year for centuries to celebrate the victory. Later, Yashovarman defeated the Tibetan king and wrestled kingdoms of the North-East and Bengal which were under the dominance of Tibetan rulers. Lalitaditya did not allow the





The ruins of the Martand Temple

Arabs to regroup and continued expanding his kingdom in Central Asia capturing parts of Afghanistan and Transoxiana which comprised the modern-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and south-west Kazakhstan.

Lalitaditya soon became wary of the increasing power of Yashovarman, who seemed to be getting arrogant. This led to the breaking up of the alliance. Consequently in a subsequent battle, Yashovarman also was defeated and he accepted the vassal status under Lalitaditya regime. Because of this new status, Yashovarman was obliged to later support Lalitaditya in defeating the latter's arch rivals—the later Guptas who controlled the Bengal region. It is believed that the queen

regent of the Deccan had approached Lalitaditya for help when her brother-in-law was trying to usurp the throne. Lalitaditya helped her in restoring her kingdom and placed her son Dantidurga on the throne. Dantidurga is said to have gone on to establish one of the biggest empires of South India known as Rashtrakutas.

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The battles Lalitaditya fought have been described by the renowned Kashmiri historian Kalhana in his classic history of Kashmir, the *Rajatarangini* (River of Kings), in which he writes, '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'.

On the development front Laliditya was a great builder. He reportedly cleared the silting of Vitasta (the present day Jhelum) river to prevent flooding and directed the water through canals to far-flung regions. He even reclaimed swamps to boost agriculture. He is also said to have founded many present-day cities of Kashmir. Throughout his empires, he built the temples of many gods including Buddha which shows his respect for other faiths. But sadly again, there is nothing that remains of these grand temples today owing to the barbarity unfolded by the Muslim invaders. However, the

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grandeur of these temples could be gauged even today by having an in-depth look at the ruins of the rare Martand Sun Temple and scores of other temples which were pulled down around 15th century AD.

Ironically, as in life so in death, Lalityadita's death remains a mystery. There are two versions relating to the death of this brave son of India and Kashmir. One version is that he perished during a military campaign in Aryanaka (Eastern Iran) due to heavy snowfall which occurred out of season. The other version, which is unlikely of a brave warrior of his stature, is that he committed suicide after being separated from his army on a difficult mountain route. Whatever may have happened, in reality India lost one of its greatest sons, who made us all proud. ●

