

Kashmir-Kānyakubja Struggle The Rājatarāṅgiṇi and Beyond

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Kānyakubja, modern Kanauj, Latitude 27°5'N and Longitude 79°55'E, in Uttar Pradesh, which rose to eminence during the rule of the Maukharis in the post-Gupta period in the second half of the sixth century CE, became the imperial seat during the rule of Harṣavardhana (c 606-650 CE) and remained the hub of political activity for the next five hundred years.¹ There was a scramble for supremacy over Kanauj after the death of Harṣavardhana and the 'rulers of the most distant corners of India counted it their proudest boast to have captured Mahodaya-śrī, i. e., the royal splendour of Kanauj. Bitter contests ensued for the possession of the imperial city'.² Popularly given the title of the 'Tripartite Struggle', most of the writers have ascribed this scramble for supremacy to the three powers - the Gurjara-Pratihāras of Rajasthan, the Pālas of Bengal and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of the Deccan.³ But this picture is far from being complete. The role played by Kashmir in this struggle has never been fully realized and often been completely ignored.

The *Rājatarāṅgiṇi* of Kalhaṇa contains an interesting account of Lalitāditya Mukṭāpīḍa's conquest over Yaśovarman of Kanauj⁴ that has been given a scholarly treatment by Sir M. Aurel Stein.⁵ Stein⁶ has also taken notice of Kalhaṇa's narrative about the conquest of Kānyakubja by Jayapīḍa Vinayāditya,⁷ the grandson of Lalitāditya Mukṭāpīḍa, but has not dwelt upon the political significance of the either in detail. This is understandable as it was perhaps outside the scope of his work. The scholars who followed Stein such as Tripathi, Raychaudhuri, Majumdar, Jagannath, Sircar, Puri and others have also dwelt upon the issue as unrelated separate incidents without attempting to co-relate them in the light of Kalhaṇa's repeated reference to Kānyakubja throughout his narrative. Even the political significance and fresh interpretation of these references seems to have

escaped the notice of these scholars. An attempt to have a fresh look at Stein's work on the *Rājatarāṅgiṇi* in the light of some new epigraphical material and other sources has been made here as a tribute to the great scholar for furtherance of his work.

The earliest reference to the conquest of Kanauj by a ruler of Kashmir is made by Kalhaṇa in the first *tarāṅga* of his narrative.⁸ Here, Jalauka, a supposed son of Aśoka, unknown from any other source, is referred to by Kalhaṇa as a great conqueror having many virtues that are described at much greater length as compared to those of Aśoka himself. Stein calls this Jalauka as a 'popular hero of many wonderful stories'⁹ and rightly observes that, 'it is impossible for us to indicate what historical elements, if any, there are in the Kashmirian tradition regarding Jalauka'.¹⁰ To these observations of Stein we may add Kalhaṇa's specific mention of Kānyakubja as one of the territories conquered by Jalauka and all others under a single vague term 'and other countries'. We know from other sources that Pāṭaliputra continued to be the imperial capital during the time of Aśoka's successors till the end of the Mauryan rule and even afterwards. Kānyakubja simply does not figure anywhere much less as an important political centre. It betrays Kalhaṇa's lack of the accurate knowledge of the early history on one hand and his obsession with Kānyakubja on the other. Kānyakubja that became the imperial seat in the post-Gupta period had no political significance during the Mauryan period. Though it finds mention in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, yet the historical sources clearly show that since the time of the Sixteen Mahājanapadas till the end of the Gupta period, the city had no political significance. It simply shows that Kalhaṇa was trying to associate this important city of the later times to the legendary past of Kashmir.

In the fifth *tarāṅga* of his narrative of the dynasty of Utpala, after the fall of the Kārakoṭas, Kalhaṇa talks of Pārtha (906-921 CE), the successor of Sugandhā, who was enthroned with the help of Tāntrins. Here he again extols Kashmir's conquest over Kanauj in the following words, 'In this land, the rulers of which had conquered Kānyakubja and other [countries], the kings [now] maintained themselves by giving bills of exchange (*huṇḍikā*) to the Tāntrins'.¹¹ Reference to Kānyakubja and its rulers again finds the attention of the Kashmirian author once in the seventh *tarāṅga*¹² and three times in the eighth *tarāṅga*.¹³ Why is Kalhaṇa

giving so much importance to the conquest of Kānyakubja in preference to all other cities in the plains of northern India including Pāṭaliputra? It must have occupied some significance in the history of Kashmir. An attempt to connect the events from the beginning may bring some new facts to light and is worth a serious consideration.

Kalhaṇa's sources for the early history of Kashmir were clearly scanty and unreliable that makes his narrative a confused version leading to several disagreements and controversies amongst the modern scholars. For instance, Kalhaṇa's references to Vikramāditya Śakāri (II.6) and Vikramāditya of Ujjaini, the patron of Mātr̥gupta (III.125-264) still lack final identification. Stein¹⁴ seems to have agreed with Hultzsch¹⁵ who tried to identify Vikramāditya either with the founder of the Vikrama or the Śaka era. But Kalhaṇa himself makes no such statement and distinguishes Vikramāditya of Kashmir from Vikramāditya Śakāri. Had Kalhaṇa considered him founder of an era he would have mentioned it. As such emphasis should have been given on the name Vikramāditya Śakāri, a well-known epithet of Candragupta II Vikramāditya of the imperial Gupta dynasty who ruled c 380-412 CE and was responsible for bringing an end to the Śaka rule in Western India.¹⁶ This Vikramāditya is also famous as king of Ujjayini in Indian legend, probably due to the fact that he occupied Ujjain after his conquest over the Śakas.¹⁷

The third *taraṅga* of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇi* contains an interesting story about one Mātr̥gupta, who was made the king of Kashmir by his patron Vikramāditya. Kalhaṇa informs us that the glorious Vikramāditya, the sole sovereign of the world, lived at Ujjayini at that time (when Mātr̥gupta was made king) and also bore a second name of Harṣa.¹⁸ Further this Vikramāditya is said to have destroyed the Śakas.¹⁹ Stein has identified Vikramāditya-Harṣa with the father of Śilāditya-Pratāpaśīla presuming that "the latter cannot be anyone else but the king Śilāditya mentioned by Hiuen-tsiang (*Si-yu-ki*, ii, p.261) as having ruled about 580 CE in Mālava".²⁰ For this he has relied on another statement of Kalhaṇa that Pratāpaśīla Śilāditya son of Vikramāditya was restored to the throne by Pravarasena II.²¹ At the face of it the identification appears to be correct but it does not stand minute scrutiny. Hsuan Tsang does not talk of Vikramāditya as the father of Śilāditya of Mālava, which was expected if the former was such a great monarch who sent his

nominees to far off lands like Kashmir to rule there. There is no other source of information that may indicate the existence of Vikramāditya-Harṣa around 580 CE. The famous astronomer Varāhamihira, who wrote around this time talks of Dravyavardhana, his patron, as the ruler of Avanti thus ruling out the existence of another king Vikramāditya over there. Moreover, Kalhaṇa specifically credits Vikramāditya, the patron of Mātṛgupta, of destroying the Śakas. The only Vikramāditya who ousted the Śakas of Western India was Candragupta II of the imperial Gupta dynasty as already noted above. Since Kalhaṇa was relying on legend it is quite possible that he mistook Harṣa as a title of Vikramāditya-Śakāri, the patron of Mātṛgupta. Though this identification is hypothetical yet it makes better sense, as the Guptas are known to have influence in Kashmir as indicated by the recent discoveries in the Hunza region of their graffiti inscriptions bearing the legends which read: (i) *Śrī Vikramāditya Jayati Śrī Candra* (the last words look like copy of a signature), (ii) *Śrī Candra*, (iii) *Candra Śrī Deva*, (iv) *Śrī Candradevasya*, (v) *Siha-samprāpta Candra-śrī Deva Vikramāditya*, etc.²² From Kalhaṇa's eloquent references to Vikramāditya-Śakāri and the testimony of the Hunza graffiti inscriptions, it appears that the imperial Guptas were held in great esteem in Kashmir, possibly after Candragupta's campaign to Vālhika and the consequent conquest of the Hūṇas over there.²³ This must have resulted in Candragupta's contact and possibly conquest of Kashmir.²⁴ This would easily explain his sending Mātṛgupta to Kashmir as his nominee. However, the Gupta influence over Kashmir ended soon as Mātṛgupta is said to have abdicated soon after his patron's death in favour of Pravarasena II.

After Vikramāditya Śakāri, Kalhaṇa makes a cryptic reference to the subjugation of Kashmir by a certain king Harṣa for a short while due to the internal dissensions in the country (II.7). Again considering the element of doubt due to chronological problem, Stein refrained from definite identification but hinted at the possibility of his being Harṣavardhana (c 606-650 CE), the ruler of Kanauj. He was fully aware of the story given by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-Tsang that talks of Harṣavardhana's use of force against the ruler of Kashmir to obtain the sacred tooth of the Buddha from that land.²⁵ The contemporary of Harṣa in Kashmir was Durlabhavardhana (c 601-637 CE), the founder of the Kārakoṭa dynasty and probably the first historical king in Kalhaṇa's narrative. He is described by the

Chinese pilgrim as having suzerainty over Taxila, Ūraṣā (Hazara District), Siṁhapura (Salt-range), Rājāpurī (Rajauri) and Paṁotsa (Punch) that seems to have brought it into clash with Harṣavardhana whose authority extended over Jālandhara.²⁶ 'Behind the apparently religious character of this move on the part of Harṣa, there appears to have been a deeper political motive. It was impossible for Harṣa to permit the ruler of Kashmir to extend his authority to the very frontier of his empire, and the demand for the relic must have served as a convenient excuse for the display of his military might'.²⁷ Though Durlabhavardhana might have submitted to the demand of Harṣavardhana due to the latter's superior strength but the heart burning it must have caused appears to be the beginning of Kashmir-Kānyakubja struggle.

The position of Kanauj seems to have weakened when the anarchy prevailed after the death of Harṣavardhana. The grandson of Durlabhavardhana, Lalitāditya Mukṭāpīḍa who ascended the throne of Kashmir in 724 CE was an ambitious king whose reign saw a lot of military activity. Kalhaṇa²⁸ gives a graphic account of his conquests, the most important of which was his expedition against Yaśovarman of Kanauj in the Gangetic Doab. Yaśovarman, the hero of Vākpati's *Gauḍavaho*, was also a valiant conqueror but had to suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of Lalitāditya of Kashmir and was forced to enter into a treaty with the latter. However, as Kalhaṇa tells us, the language of the treaty affronted Mitraśarman, the foreign minister of Lalitāditya, and at his instance Yaśovarman was completely uprooted and reduced to servitude. Lalitāditya is said to have conquered Bengal, Kalinga, Karnataka, etc. after that the veracity of which has been doubted by competent authorities and is beyond the scope of discussion here.

The next glimpse of clash between Kashmir and Kānyakubja comes during the reign of Jayāpīḍa Vinayāditya who ascended the throne in 773 CE. Like his grandfather Lalitāditya Mukṭāpīḍa, Jayāpīḍa was also a great conqueror, who according to Kalhaṇa, revived the tradition of world-conquest (*Digvijaya*). He set out with a great army but soon fell victim to misfortune and his troops deserted him. He somehow reached Puṇḍravardhana, Rajshahi district in North Bengal where he impressed king Jayanta by his valour when he killed a lion single-handed. Jayanta²⁹ married his daughter Kalyāṇadevī to Jayāpīḍa who was soon

joined by Mitraśarman, the son of his faithful minister Devaśarman and was able to raise a fresh army. Jayāpīḍa defeated other kings of Gauḍa and made his father-in-law the supreme ruler of eastern India and marched back to Kashmir. On his way back he conquered the ruler of Kānyakubja, who was either Vajrāyudha or his successor Indrāyudha, and carried away the royal throne to Kashmir. If Jayanta's identification with Ādiśūra Gopāla, the founder of the Pāla dynasty, is accepted it further adds importance to this struggle. Both Vajrāyudha and Indrāyudha were protégé of the Gurjara-Pratihāras and Kanauj was bone of contention between them and the Pālas of Bengal.

Jayāpīḍa's conquest over Kanauj was not only short lived but it also brought him into clash with the Gurjara-Pratihāra ruler Vatsarāja, starting a new phase in the Kashmir-Kānyakubja struggle. A recently discovered inscription of this ruler dated Śaka 717 (795 CE) from near Sirsa in Haryana throws some welcome light on the subject.³⁰ Verse 5 of this inscription says, 'By whose soldiers, having caused affliction to Jayāpīḍa produced by his (Vatsarāja's) victory (over him) and having roamed in the quarters, the icy-water was drunk with great difficulty, by means of the open cavities, their lips, having become benumbed as they had reached the mountain of snow (Himalaya)'. This reference leaves no doubt about Vatsarāja's march against Kashmir and consequent defeat of Jayāpīḍa sometime before 795 CE that resulted in the loss of his hold over Kanauj. Verse 19 of this inscription further tells us that Indrabhaṭa, i.e. Indrāyudha, was reinstated in his own kingdom by Gallaka, a vassal of Vatsarāja. It stands to reason that the Pratihāra ruler after the successful invasion of Kashmir in which he defeated Jayāpīḍa, 'made, Indrabhaṭa, who is possessed of merits, and who knows the essence of what is to be done, an all pervading lord, in his own kingdom'. Gallaka must have accompanied his overlord Vatsarāja to the region of the snowy mountains with his troops.

The struggle between Kashmir and Kānyakubja seems to have continued even after the end of the Kārakoṭa dynasty for in Book V of his narrative Kalhaṇa talks of Śaṅkaravarman's (883-902 CE) conquest of Gurjara and the consequent cessation of Ṭakkadeśa (the land between the Chenab and the Ravi) by its king Alakhāṇa. Verses 143-155 of the fifth *varaṅga* of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* that contain an

account of Śaṅkaravarman's conquest of Gurjara and annexation of Ṭakkadeśa have probably been completely misunderstood by Stein and the scholars who followed him. Stein took Gurjara to be a place name and identified it with the region of Gujarat in Pakistan. However, the context makes it highly unlikely identification. Śaṅkaravarman is said to have set out for this conquest at the head of an army that numbered almost one million that would have been hardly justified for the conquest of a small territory like Gujarat. Next we are told that Pṛthivīcandra, the king of Trigarta, who had previously given his son as hostage to Śaṅkaravarman and was proceeding towards him to pay homage fled away on seeing the army of that [king?] with which moved many feudatory princes. That king has generally been taken to be Śaṅkaravarman but why Pṛthivīcandra had to flee away if he was going to pay homage to Śaṅkaravarman only. To us the reference here appears to be to the Gurjara-Pratihāra ruler Ādivarāha Bhoja³¹ mentioned in verse 151, who was a senior contemporary of Śaṅkaravarman and had several feudatories, as known from his inscriptions, Alakhāṇa of Ṭakka-land being one of them. Pṛthivīcandra obviously wanted to be caught between two great powers, the Pratihāras under Bhoja and Śaṅkaravarman of Kashmir and thought it wise to flee away at this critical juncture. Bhoja, however, did not come into actual clash with the Kashmir army, only his feudatory Alakhāṇa fought with Śaṅkaravarman and was defeated. He had to cede the region of Ṭakkadeśa that now slipped away from the Pratihāra influence and was placed under some scion of Ṭhakkiya family by Śaṅkaravarman.

Troubled times started after this period both for the Gurjara-Pratihāras of Kanauj and the rulers of Kashmir and it appears that hostilities between the two ceased in the 10th-11th century CE. Kalhaṇa refers to Kānyakubja in the eighth book of his narrative but not in hostile terms. He does not even talk of the conquest of Kashmir kings over Kānyakubja rather with reference to Jayasimha (1128-1149 CE) he talks of the latter's friendship with the rulers of Kānyakubja³² thus bringing the era of struggle to an end.

References & Notes

1. For the early history of Kanauj see R.S. Tripathi, 1964, pp.1ff.
2. H.C. Raychaudhuri and S.N. Sen, 1935, p.80.
3. H.C. Raychaudhuri and S.N. Sen, *ibid.*; H.C. Ray, 1931, Volume I, p.285; B.C. Sen, 1942, p.318; R.C. Majumdar, 1984, p.23; B.N. Puri, 1981; R.S. Tripathi, 1964, pp.219ff.
4. *Raj.*, IV.132-146.
5. M.A. Stein, 1979, pp.88-89 and 132-33, n.133ff.
6. Stein, *ibid.*, p.94.
7. *Raj.*, IV.471.
8. *Raj.*, I.117.
9. Stein, 1979, p.75.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Raj.*, V.266.
12. *Raj.*, VII.237.
13. *Raj.*, VIII.81, 2052-53, 2453.
14. *Raj.*, II.6n.
15. E. Hultzsch, 1890, pp.261-262.
16. For details see Ashvini Agrawal, 1989, pp.174-176.
17. R.G. Bhandarkar, p.398.
18. *Raj.*, III.125.
19. *Raj.*, III.128.
20. Stein, 1979, p.83n.
21. *Raj.*, III.330.
22. A.H. Dani, 1983, *Human Records on Karakoram Highway*, Islamabad, pp.80ff. Also see B.N. Mukherjee, 1981-82, pp.561-62.
23. Ashvini Agrawal, *Indologica Taurinensia*, XXXVI, 2010, Turin, pp.13-19.
24. Cf. *Raghuvamśam* of Kālidāsa, Canto IV.
25. Hwui Li Shaman, 1914, pp.181-83; D. Devahuti, 1998, pp.111-112; R.S. Tripathi, 1964, pp.85-86; R.K. Mookerji, p.40; B.N. Sharma, 1970, pp.189-93.
26. Jagannath, 1981, p.530.

27. *Ibid.*
28. *Raj.*, IV.126ff.
29. This ruler is not known from any other source. V.A. Smith, took him to be mythical character, *EHI*, p.387, Lassen identified him with Jayadhara, the last ruler before the rise of the Pālas, *Ind Alt*, iii, p.720 (quoted by Stein, iv.421n), others have identified him with Ādiśūra Gopāla, the founder of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal, Jagannath, 1981, p.536n. Jayanta's identification with Gopāla is significant, as it would further support Jayāpīḍa's action against Kanauj that was under the protégé of Gurjara-Pratihāras, the sworn enemies of the Pālas.
30. K.V. Ramesh & S.P. Tewari, 1989, pp.49-57; Ashvini Agrawal, 2003, pp.335-336.
31. An inscription of Bhoja dated year 276 (882 CE) is known from Pehowa in the Kurukshetra district of Haryana that clearly indicates the Pratihara hold over Punjab at this time.
32. *Raj.*, VIII.2453.

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4. R.G. Bhandarkar, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, volume XX, p.398.
5. Bhau Daji, 1861. *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, pp.208ff.
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