

Buddhist Monuments as Described in the Rajatarangini of Kalhana

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ABSTRACT

Through this paper an attempt has been made to link the beginnings of the architectural trends in Kashmir to the Buddhist stūpa and the caitya, foundations of which were the excavation at Harwan and Uskar respectively. But it is not accepted by all. So special references are taken from the *Rajataranginī* the work of Kalhana we get the information that the foundation of beautiful structures was laid by kings and queens long before the date of Harwan and Uskar. We have a definite assertion in the *Rajataranginī* that Aśoka founded the city of Srinagar and also Buddhist settlements with a number of stūpas in the valley at Śuskaletra (modern village of Hukhlitr) and Vitastātra (modern village named Vithvutur).

1. Introduction

No traces of any Buddhist monuments are now left at these places located near Verinag, but we have a glimpse of the grandeur of Srinagar in the account of Hsuen Tsang who refers to it as 'old capital'. It is, therefore, not improbable that the stone architecture as depicted in the monuments still extant, had a much earlier tradition. So Harwan and Uskar can neither, by any stretch of imagination, be considered early specimens of Kashmir stone architecture, nor do they explain the origin of building art in Kashmir. At Harwan, the excavations have revealed the foundation of a monastic establishment with a stūpa and a caitya. The stūpa was square in plan with its base in three tiers and approached by a flight of steps on its western side, the whole being contained within an open quadrangle. If the terracotta plaques found on the site are any indicator, it had a several tiered pyramidal umbrella on the top. The caitya or the temple occupied a more prominent position and had a hall with an apsidal end.

2. Parihāsapura

Parihāsapura is situated on a Karewā plateau at a distance of 28 km from Srinagar on the Srinagar-Baramulla highway. Alexander Cunningham placed Parihāsapura on the right or eastern bank of the Behat near the village of Samba. But his identification is not supported by any evidence. According to Stein, ancient Parihāsapura lay in the present *parganā* of Paraspor and comprised the little tract lying between the marches of the Manyor and Hartrath on the left bank of the Vitastā, immediately to the south-west of Shādipūr. The site of Parihāsapura was chosen by king Lalitāditya for founding his capital. Amongst the towns that were founded by him are Parnotsa (modern Poonch) and Lalitapura (modern Latpura on Srinagar-Jammu highway). Lalitāditya chose Parihāsapura as his capital in preference to the larger and more conveniently situated Pravarapura and embellished it with a group of temples, caityas and monasteries. Kalhana mentions in the *Rajataranginī* that Lalitāditya built at Huviskapura a large viharā with a stūpa. The plateau was studded with heaps of ruins. The *Rajataranginī* tells that Lalitāditya Muktāpīā confronted local problems by putting disorderly administration into a shape. He realized that his elder brothers (Candrāpīā and Tārāpīā) did not manage

the affairs of the state efficiently and there was total bankruptcy. To put things in order, he organized an expedition with a view to strengthen his political superiority over his contemporaries and to collect wealth for putting his disorderly house in order.

In this expedition Lalitāditya received many tributes and also collected a large booty. This large booty of Lalitāditya had golden and silver images, jewelry and treasures of every type. Such economic prosperity encouraged Lalitāditya to embellish his capital with permanent religious foundations for the well being of his subjects. The varieties of buildings viz. temples, stūpas, caityas and viharās which were built during Lalitāditya's reign have been termed as the monuments of Lalitāditya and represent the early mediaeval art of Kashmir. These monumental ruins after identification were first put to systematic excavation by Daya Ram Sahni in 1914-15. During the course of this excavation, Sahni salvaged a good number of monolithic sculptures and also traced out the plans of the structures. Amongst all the structures exposed, the important were a stūpa, a monastery and a caitya.

The first monument which was constructed during Lalitāditya's period is the stūpa of Parihāsapura. It is recorded by Kalhana that this stūpa was founded by Cankuna; the Tukhāra minister of Lalitāditya. The identity of this stūpa, the only building of this kind to be found at this place, with the lofty structure of Cankuna is likely. When Daya Ram Sahni undertook the excavation in 1914, he encountered massive piles of stones covering huge bases of a massive structure and it appeared as though a massive structure had been completely razed to the ground by the destroyer, and with the passage of time the debris became a hill of stones. After excavation, what came to his notice was a big basement in an excellent state of preservation, besides numerous carved architectural members and structural fragments. The basement of the stūpa consists of a double platform providing passage, one above the other for circumambulation around the stūpa. The upper platform is 3.65 m high and the lower 2.65 m. These platforms are grim and stark in character and built with cyclopean blocks of stones. The only decorated elements apparently visible are simple bands over the stones and the mouldings. The base of the stūpa is square in plan and measures 74.50 x 74.50 m including projections on

each side. The stairways which are on the cardinal points are placed in the middle of the projections. Much of these steps have completely withered away but the side walls are fairly intact. The front of each of these flank walls is occupied by a square panel containing a figure of an Atlantes sated cross-legged and ornamented with garlands and jewellery. The upper stairs are almost missing and even the flank walls have not survived at many places. The drum of the *stūpa* must have been ornamented with niches containing standing and seated figures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The Buddha figures found during the clearance of fallen parts of *stūpa* in 1988-89, indicated a late Gupta tradition of Sārnath. It appeared that the entire structure was surrounded by an enclosure wall which, according to Sahnī, must have been from north to south 400 ft. (120m) and east to west 300 ft. (90m).

By the side of the *stūpa*, the other structure built during Lalitāditya's time, is a square structure which has been termed as Rājavihāra, or the royal monastery. Kalhana says that Lalitāditya built a large monastery in the town of Parihāsapura, called Rājavihāra. Much of the details of the structure have disappeared and at many places it is difficult to reconstruct even its plan. On the basis of the traces available at the site it appears to be a quadrangle with an open courtyard in the middle surrounded by twenty-six cells on all sides. The cells were preceded by verandahs supported by columns. However, none of the columns have survived and of the twenty-six cells only the foundations remain. The basement of this monastery is 3.05 m high and it faces east. The central cell on the east is somewhat larger than the others. The inner courtyard was probably paved with stone slabs, the traces of which however, could not be found in the excavations. But Daya Ram Sahnī claimed to have seen such slabs when he exposed the structures in 1914-15. The rain and used water was carried away by two stone-built drains which pass through the cells. A stone trough cut in a single block of a stone is embedded in the courtyard which, it appears, was intended for storage of water. For bringing water to the monastery, probably, a covered aqueduct was used through cell No. 1. Who patronized the construction of this monastery is always a matter of dispute. Daya Ram Sahnī during the course of excavation encountered an earthen jar in front of cell No. 25 containing 44 silver coins of Durlabhadeva, grandfather of Lalitāditya Muktāpīā, Jayāpīā, Vinayāditya, and Vighraṭunga. During the excavation we encountered two copper coins minted on the pattern of Kidāra Kusāna and probably belonging to Durlabhadeva's time. It indicates that the currency of the grandfather of Lalitāditya was also under circulation during his reign and the occurrence of the coins appears as though somebody had left those coins or they were lying with some monks residing in the monastery. As no coins of Lalitāditya's period are found there, it is quite possible that either he did not issue coins or he continued to use the currency of his predecessors.

The third structure built at Parihāsapura is a *caitya* temple. It is a square chamber on a raised plinth and measures 8.23 x 8.23 m. it is surrounded by a circumambulatory passage and supported at the corners by a set of four stone columns. Today only the bases of these columns have survived and from the remnants of the architectural members and the position of the pillar bases it appeared that the roof of the *caitya* was of

pyramidal type. The plinth of the *caitya* is built with missives ones and many of the fine architectural fragments of the plinth have also disappeared leaving behind a disjointed structure. When excavation was done in 1987 a serious problem of its layout was faced, which due to recurring damage and neglect was in a mess. With careful examination of the huge blocks of stones it became possible to trace out the orientation of the structure and it appeared that the whole *caitya* was conceived on a huge plinth with massive pillars and a pyramidal roof. The traces of *Kirtimukha* stone slabs and trefoil arches indicated a stage of ornamental development Parihāsapura, which probably paved way for the construction of the Parihāsakeśava and the Muktakeśava temples dedicated to Visnu on the opposite *karewa* of the capital town of Lalitāditya Muktāpīā.

3. Stūpa Of Ushkar

The village of Ushkar is situated at a distance of half a mile from the Baramula Dak Bungalow. According to Kalhana this name is a corruption of Huviskapura, which was originally the name of a city founded by Huviska, who was a great Kusāna king of the second century CE. Lalitāditya built here a shrine of Visnu named Muktaśvāminanda large *vihāra* with *stūpa*. General Cunningham found an ancient coin of the Taxila type in this *stūpa*. According to Stein it is quite possible that this large *vihāra* with *stūpa* was identical with the one which King Lalitāditya erected at Huskapura. Hsuan-Tsang, the famous Chinese pilgrim who visited Kashmir in CE 631, entered the valley by the Baramula pass, and spent his first night at one of the monasteries here. Of the monasteries and the temples which Hsuan-Tsang saw and which are mentioned by Kalhana, none now remain above ground, except the ruins of *stūpa* and its surrounding walls, a few yards to the west of the village. Only the lowest courses of its base are now in position. An interesting fact about this *stūpa* is that it seems to have been built over an older structure of nearly the same type, stones of which were found *in situ* when the silt round the base was removed some years ago. That structure may have belonged to the Kusāna times. This surmise is strengthened by the discovery, outside the north-eastern corner of the surrounding wall, of eleven terracotta heads beside a number of fragmentary limbs of images which display the unmistakable influence of the Gandhāra School of the third and fourth century CE.

Kalhana has referred to several other *caityas*, *stūpas*, *vihāras* and *maihas*, the traces of which are not available at present. They seem to have vanished forever. Mention must be made at least some of them. The most popular amongst these was perhaps Jayendra vihāra, constructed by Jayendra maternal uncle of the king Pravarsena II. A great image of the Buddha was installed here by the former. The place was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang who mentions it as the convent of *Che-ye-in-to-lo*. Partha (906-921 CE), the son of Nirjitavarman, during the last days of his reign took shelter in the monastery and was provided for by the monks living there. The famous *Vihāra* was ultimately burnt down by the wicked king Ksemagupta and the statue of the Buddha was melted down for its metal. Likewise, Bhadreśvara is said to have built a *vihāra*. Ministers of

Pravarasena II, namely Sarvaratna, Jaya and Skanda are also said to have constructed several *vihāras* and *dcaityas*. Lalitāditya is said to have built a *vihāra* named *Krīāārāma*. Vajrendra son of Jayendra also

constructed a *caitya* at Bhavaccheda. These and several other references by Kalhana clearly depict a flourishing state of Buddhist architectural monuments.

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