

External Influences On The Sculptural Art Of Kashmir Under Lalitaditya

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Lalitaditya Muktapada greatly expanded the boundaries of Kashmir. He defeated the then greatest ruler of India, namely, Yashovarman of Kanauj[1] and made his kingdom the tributary of the Kashmir Empire. To quote Kalhana, "The land of Kanyakubja from the bank of Yamuna to that of the Kalika was as much in his power as the courtyard of his palace"[2]. After conquering Kanauj, Lalitaditya, according to Kalhana, made a triumphal conquest of Kalinga, Karnata, regions of Kaveri and Gauda[3]. Infact, the rulers of a large part of India were defeated one by one by Lalitaditya[4]. The coins of Lalitaditya have been discovered at Kanauj, Banda, Faizabad, Nalanda and Monghyr[5]. Equally important conquests were made in the northern regions (Utrapatha). Lalitaditya defeated the rulers of Kamboja, Tukharistan (upper Oxus valley including Balakh and Badhakshan) and Tibet[6].

The emergence of Kashmir as a great power left a profound impact on its arts and crafts as men of talent from the conquered territories were brought to Kashmir. In his poetic language, Kalhana tells us that, Lalitaditya collected from different countries various talented men, "as the wind collects masses of full-blown flowers from the trees"[7]. The streaming of talent into Kashmir greatly enriched its sculptural art as is evident from stone, copper, bronze and ivory sculptures of the period[8].

Lalitaditya built some of the largest and most magnificent temples, which amongst others include the Sun temple at Martanda and those structures built at his famous capital at Parihasapura. The sculptures from Parihasapura are comparable to the post Gupta sculptures from North India in their plastic qualities, though regional features are present in details[9]. The sculptures of the period achieved a refinement in carving, vigor and grace that are unequalled in Indian art[10]. Lalitaditya commissioned artists from Kannauj, Bengal and Deccan, besides artists from China. Hermann Goetz has drawn our attention to the prevailing crisis in contemporary Byzantine Empire, which eventually led to migration of Syrian and Roman artists towards East and some of them seem to have been given refuge by the king Lalitaditya, who ushered in an era of glory and prosperity for the kingdom[11]. The various and extensive conquests of Lalitaditya brought new elements and influences in the existing art of this area, as some master artists of these troubled and unstabilized regions were recruited during his time for various artistic activities, which is very well documented by the various art forms produced during this period, which made Kashmir for the time being the most powerful empire that India had seen since the days of the Gupta period[12].

The sculptures of Parihasapura seems to have been modeled after the Chinese provincial art in Khotanese work or the late offshoot of the Wei style as can be observed from the few Buddhist images preserved in the S.P.S Museum, Srinagar[13]. Among them the crowned Buddha images from Parihasapura are based on Chinese models not only because of facial features but the triangular cape and having shoulder effulgence. The art of Martanda and Parihasapura adds a new chapter to the iconographical framework of Kashmir and Central Asia. Tang influence finally crystallized during the Lalitaditya period, while trefoil arch appeared in its full form. The colonnaded peristyles took birth in Kashmir due to presence of various artists from various areas that carved with their own physiognomy. The dress of Surya image of Cleveland Museum of Art, USA and the National Museum, New Delhi consisting of long gown and of triangular cape etc., emphasizes the Persian and Central Asian influences on the sculptural art of Kashmir. This did not confine to Brahminical images alone but we find such influences on the Buddhist images of Parihasapura as well. The extraneous influences are observed on the famous Avaloketisvara image reminding us of a few bronzes of Nalanda thereby confirming Kalhana's account that Lalitaditya imported a number of artists from Eastern India during his advance as far as Garuda now in Bangladesh[14]. The emergence of Kashmir as an empire under Lalitaditya had a great impact on the various aspects of Kashmir. The most important change which followed this development was that Kashmir underwent a remarkable cultural transformation following the encounter of Kashmiris with a variety of cultures spanning a large area from "Dakshanpatha" to "Utrapatha".

1. M. A. Stein, *Kalhana's Rajataranjini Vol I*, Book IV, sqq.133.
2. Ibid; Book IV sqq. 145.
3. Ibid; Book IV sqq.146.
4. Ibid. Book IV sqq.146-152.
5. K.S. Saxena, *Political History of Kashmir* (B.C. 300 – A.D. 1200), p. 6.
6. M. A. Stein; op. cit., Book IV sqq 163-177.
7. Ibid; . Book IV sqq 245.
8. Pratipaditya Pal, (ed.) *Art and Architecture in Ancient Kashmir*. Marg Publications, 1989.
9. J. L. Bhan, , *Kashmir Sculpture*, Vol, I, 2010, p. 34.
10. R.C. Kak, *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*, p. 146.
11. H. Goetz, *The Medieval Sculptures of Kasmir* Marg Publications, 1955.
12. J. L. Bhan, op. cit., p. 34.
13. H. Goetz, op. cit.,
14. J. L. Bhan, op. cit., p. 38.