
SECTION III

KASHMIR UNDER THE UTPALAS

CHAPTER VI

RISE OF THE UTPALAS

The subsequent years after the death of Jayāpīḍa ushered in an era of distress, oppression and spirit of self-aggrandisement amongst officers of the State which, unhappily for the people of Kashmir, continued with unbridled force during the rule of his successors. The Kārkotas, who had brought peace and prosperity to the country, finished ingloriously, as we have already noticed above. Given to worst human weaknesses, the subsequent rulers allowed free reins to their favourites and officers with the result that the people were drained dry of all their wealth. There was no security of life and property, the vast dominions, earned at great costs of men and money, had shrunk and the feudal lords as well as enterprising men were strengthening themselves; there was utter disregard of affairs and events on the

border-lands and the pleasure-seeking rulers were completely devoid of political vision, shutting themselves up to events of far-reaching consequences all around them. Ultimately, the minister Śūra was able to enthrone Avantivarman, grandson of Utpalaka, who, incidentally, was the founder of a new dynasty after the name of his grandfather, on the Kashmir throne.¹

Avantivarman

The advent of Avantivarman at the helm of affairs in the Valley ushered in a new era in the history of that country. His reign not only brought relief to the suffering masses of Kashmir but also restored, to a great extent, the glory of the Kārkotas, as we shall presently notice. As pointed out earlier, Avantivarman was a scion of the family of Kalyapāla, one of the spirit-sellers who had played a fateful role in the closing years of the Kārkota rule.² Though by no means a descendant of some noble and illustrious family, Avantivarman possessed those qualities of head and heart for which he is ranked as one of the ablest rulers of the Valley.³

1. R.T., I, IV, 679.

2. Ibid., I, IV, 677, 679, 708, 715.

3. Ibid., I, IV, 714-18. Kalhana does not make any attempt to conceal this fact.

Avantivarman came to the throne in C. 855 A.D. with the help of Sūra, his step-brother and also a minister, as noted earlier. Though his reign is devoid of the glamour of foreign conquests or acquisition of fresh territories like those of the mighty Kārkotas, yet he was successful in establishing order, stability and peace in the Valley.

Influence of Sūra

It is indeed a commendable page in the history of Kashmir that the ruler and the minister Sūra maintained cordial relations between themselves.¹ The latter gave his unstinted support to the king at the cost of his personal likings and blood-relations, even sacrificing his own son - a thing rare in the annals of any country.²

Achievements of Avantivarman

The later Kārkota rulers not only exploited the people and robbed them of all their wealth, but also left them at the mercy of their selfish and exacting officers who had fleeced the masses for their own gains. At the same time, there was no organized force or an equipped army to aspire for territorial

1. R.T., I, V, 2.

2. Ibid., I, V, 47, 58.

gains. Amid such conditions Avantivarman's first and foremost task was to gain the confidence of the people through an organized machinery of government which could restore normalcy in the Valley and look after the welfare of the masses -- a task which had been neglected for many decades by the earlier rulers. Kalhana devotes some (ten) verses to sum up his attitude towards his subjects.¹

Avantivarman's first task was to look for arable land, the shortage of which had always its effects upon the economy of the country. Also, the Valley had been ravaged by the floods of Mahāpadma lake whose waters were formerly drained out through suitable channels during the days of Lalitāditya and which had also provided some land fit for cultivation. These outlets had been neglected during the reign of the later Kārkota rulers and blocked for years by boulders which had not been removed. To add to these misfortunes, the country had been visited by a great famine which had added to the miseries of the masses.²

1. R.T., I, V, 7-17.

2. Ibid., I, V, 68-71.

Fortunately, one Suyya of uncertain lineage and brought up by a Sūdra woman, caught the attention of the king and was able to come to the rescue of the people.¹ Suyya insisted that, given an opportunity and means to carry out his scheme, he could relieve the sufferings of the people.² Avantivarman was impressed by his confident tone and allowed him free reins to carry out his plan of clearing the Vitastā of its boulders. The poet has given a graphic account of his schemes.³ Soon the bed of the river was cleared and a dam constructed for storing its waters for agricultural purposes.⁴ Suyya also planned the confluence of the Sindhu (Indus) and Vitastā (Jhelum) near Srinagar which had their junction near the temple of Vainyasvāmī.⁵ The collected waters of the river were allowed for irrigational purposes to different villages through minor streams and these were rendered safe through embankments — constructed at suitable distances.⁶ These and food-grain storehouses (Kundala)⁷ established at a number of places brought immediate relief to the people who had more land at their disposal to cultivate with assured

1. R.T., I, V, 72.

2. Ibid., I, V, 80.

3. Ibid., I, V, 84-90.

4. Ibid., I, V, 91, 95.

5. Ibid., I, V, 97-98.

6. Ibid., I, V, 103-04.

7. Ibid., I, V, 106.

supplies of water, and Suyya indeed deserves the praises heaped upon him in the Chronicle for his untiring efforts.¹ Prices of food-grains, which had rocketed as high as 1050 dīnāras per khāri during the days of famine, fell startlingly from 200 dīnāras to 36 dīnāras per khāri.² Thus the engineering dexterity and genius of Suyya was fully utilized by Avantivarman and the Valley was once more on the path towards prosperity.

Avantivarman gave proof of his political wisdom by associating his near relatives in administration. This step, more or less, lessened the probabilities of possible revolts by his own kith and kin. His ste^p-brother, Sūrarvarman, was styled Yuvarāja, whereas his two nephews, Dhīra and Vinṇapa, were entrusted with important offices in the accounts section.³ Subsequently, he granted certain royal prerogatives permanently to Sūra and his sons.⁴

Rebellion of Dhanva Dāmara

The only disturbance in his long and peaceful reign seems to have been that of a Dāmara chief, Dhanva by name. It appears from the Chronicle that the latter was in the good books of the minister

1. R.T., I, V, 103-04.

2. Ibid., I, V, 71, 113, 116-17.

3. Ibid., I, V, 22, 26.

4. Ibid., I, V, 42.

Sūra and had appropriated the income of the villages granted by the king to the temple of Bhūtesā.¹

Dhanva, however, was beheaded at the instance of the minister himself and his militia easily disbanded.²

Avantivarman was also noted for his liberality and munificence which was not confined to the Brāhmanas alone but lavished on the poor, the needy the faithful and relatives.³ Emulating Meghavāhana, he had prohibited animal slaughter throughout his kingdom for 10 years.^{3A}

Having ruled the Valley peacefully for a little more than 23 years, Avantivarman breathed his last at the mountains of Tripuresvara (modern Tripur) in C. 883 A.D.⁴ He was a devoted Vaishnava and died listening to a recitation of the Bhagavadgītā.⁵ According to Vaidya, this probably is the first instance in recorded history of the Gītā being used as a book of religious recitation.⁶ Himself a Vaishnava, he was liberal in his religious outlook and also honoured Śiva. His qualities have been extolled by Kalhana who compares him with Māndhātā.⁷

1. R.T., I, V, 51.

2. Ibid., I, V, 52-60.

3. Ibid., I, V, 18.

3A. Ibid., I, V, 64-65; see also iii, 79.

4. Ibid., I, V, 123, Stein's note, 126.

5. Ibid., I, V, 125.

6. Vaidya, C.V., H.M.H.I., I, p. 222.

7. R.T., I, V, 122.

Though his reign was devoid of the glamour of military conquests, Avantivarman, through his qualities of head and heart, proved an able ruler and real founder of the glory of the Utpala House in Kashmir.

Saṅkaravarman (C. 883-902 A.D.)

The death of Avantivarman, like that of many a ruler of the Valley, was followed by a war of succession in which two rivals aspired for the throne. Saṅkaravarman, son of Avantivarman, ascended the throne and his cause was espoused by the Royal Chamberlain, Ratnavardhana, and many others¹. The other claimant to the throne was

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1. It should, however, be noted here that the designation pratihāra applied (in the R.T.) to Ratnavardhana does not denote his Pratihāra or Gurjara-Pratihāra lineage but his office or post. We are unable to accept the suggestion of Munshi (The Glory That Was Gurjaradeśa, Paperback ed., p. 112) who relates Ratnavardhana with the Imperial Pratihāras on the following grounds: Firstly, Kashmir did not have any relations with the Imperial Gurjara-Pratihāras nor is it known from any source that a member of this clan migrated to Kashmir. Secondly, Kashmir, during the reign of Avantivarman, was a no mean power and could not countenance any interference from the Gurjara-Pratihāras. Thirdly, had Ratnavardhana belonged to that family, he would certainly have dissuaded Saṅkaravarman from attacking his blood-relations in the Punjab, as we shall presently see. Fourthly, Kalhana speaks of Ratnavardhana as Pratihāra (R.T., V, 128) and immediately

(Contd.)

Sukhavarman, son of Śūravarman, the latter having been raised to the status of a Yuvarāja by Avantivarman during his life-time. We may safely assume here that Śūravarman was dead by this time as his son, and not he himself, was a claimant to the royal throne.¹ The cause of Sukhavarman was championed by Karṇapa, a councillor-associate of Vinṇapa, the former having proclaimed Sukhavarman as Yuvarāja.² It is easy to comprehend that the officers of the state played ^a major role in this war of succession by aligning themselves with ^{the} two rivals. Śaṅkaravarman had further strengthened his position by contracting matrimony with Sugandhā, daughter of

in the following verse (V. 129) mentions the designation of Karṇapa who was an amātya of Vinṇappa. All translators have, accordingly, interpreted the appellation Pratihāra as referring to the office of the Royal Chamberlain and we see no reason to differ from them.

1. The alternative suggestion of Wilson (H.H.K., p. 61) that 'that office of Yuvarāja conferred no title to the succession, and was held at pleasure' does not hold good in view of the fact that Śūravarman was not a claimant for the throne and that the office of Yuvarāja had also fallen vacant, to which his son, Sukhavarman was raised by his supporters. Both these facts were only possible when he was dead. We, therefore, feel fully justified in assuming that Śūravarman was dead by that time and had, very possibly, predeceased Avantivarman.
2. R.T., I, V, 129.

the Darad ruler Siṃharāja¹. The trial of strength was not between Śaṅkaravarman and Sukhvarman but in reality between Ratnavardhana and Karṇapa, respectively. It appears that the followers of Śaṅkaravarman were offered many temptations, but their devotion was steadfast and he was able to overcome all opposition by inflicting a crushing defeat upon Sukhavarman and his supporters after several engagements.²

Conquests

Having stabilised his position on the throne, Śaṅkaravarman sought to emulate the exploits of Pravarasena, Lalitāditya and Jayāpīḍa.³ It appears from the Chronicle that, earlier in his life, his father Avantivarman had trained him to bear all hardships and physical discomforts.⁴ Soon he was at the head of a large army (the number --nine lakhs -- seems exaggerated) and marched out on a conquering expedition.⁵ Gradually, however, the numerical strength of his forces swelled up as the feudatories aligned themselves with him together with

1. R.T., I, V, 157.

2. Ibid., I, V, 132, 134.

3. Ibid., I, V, 136.

4. Ibid., I, V, 193-202.

5. Ibid., I, V, 137.

their forces¹. Kalhana furnishes an account of the numerous petty states subdued by him and Vaidya is of the opinion that the names of the kings and the countries conquered or subjugated during this expedition are of great importance to history.² Also, since some of these are, as we shall notice, supported by epigraphic evidence of the times, these augment the value of the Chronicle as an historical work.

War Against Dārvābhisāra

Śaṅkaravarman proceeded first against the country of Dārvābhisāra which lay below Pir Panjal and stretched towards the upper plains of the Punjab.³ The ruler of these regions first sought refuge into the mountains but ultimately surrendered without any resistance. Another petty ruler, Harigana, was overwhelmed and made prisoner.⁴

1. R.T., I, V, 140.

2. Vaidya, C.V., H.M.H.I., I, p. 222.

3. R.T., I, V, 141.

Geographically, the term comprises the whole tract of the lower and middle hills lying between the Vitastā and the Chandra-bhāgā, Ibid., I, 1, 180 (Stein's note).

4. Ibid., I, V, 142.

It is not clear from the narrative of Kalhana (V. 141-42) whether the ruler of Dārvābhisāra and Harigana were one and the same person. If the verses are taken together, it may be inferred that Harigana was the ruler of Dārvābhisāra and was taken prisoner while trying to escape from some hilly fort. Since the mountain setting serves as a background in both the verses, the suggestion cannot be resisted.

Victory Over the Ruler of Trigarta

Saṅkaravarman next marched his formidable forces against Prithvīchandra, ruler of Trigarta.¹ The latter had, earlier, offered his son as a hostage for reasons undisclosed in the Chronicle, and we may safely presume that he was a vassal chief.² It is quite possible that Prithvīchandra had formerly sympathised with the cause of Su^kphavarman, an adversary of Saṅkaravarman and pretender to the throne of Kashmir. Naturally, therefore, Saṅkaravarman had made demands on Prithvīchandra, who had offered his son ^{as a} hostage for good conduct. However, he had run away before Saṅkaravarman could actually measure swords with him and the Kangra regions were conquered.³

Victory Over the Gurjara Chief in the Punjab

While Saṅkaravarman was marching down towards the plains of the Punjab, the Gurjara-Pratihāra dynasty had been firmly established at Kanauj. Mihira Bhoja, the most distinguished ruler of that dynasty, was a contemporary of Saṅkaravarman. It appears from the Pehoa Inscription that Mihira Bhoja had extended his suzerainty towards the Punjab as well and placed a feudatory, Alakhāna by name, to

1. R.T., I, V, 143.

2. Ibid., I, V, 145.

3. Ibid., I, V, 146-47.

rule over those regions¹. From the narrative of Kalhana, it appears that Bhoja had conquered these regions (the Takka land) from some Thakkiya chieftain². The discomfited chief had sought refuge and service at the court of Saṅkaravarman³.

It is clear from the narrative that Alakhāna ruled or governed quite a large tract of land in the Punjab, and, after his defeat, had to cede only the Takka land, which the Gurjaras had seized from the Thakkiya chief⁴.

We need not go into the details of the relations between Alakhāna and Bhoja. According to Puri, Alakhāna "had nothing to do with the Imperial line at Kanauj" and was a feudatory of Bhoja⁵. Ray, however, interpreted the verses to show that there was an alliance between Bhoja and Alakhāna and Munshi took the latter to have been Bhoja's feudatory⁶. We might add here that the use of the connotation "adhirāja" for Bhoja is significant and, in a way, supports the subordinate status of Alakhāna. This conquest of Saṅkaravarman must have taken place

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1. R.T., I, V, 149; Epigraphia Indica, I, pp. 170, 186-88.
 2. R.T., I, V, 151.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 150.
 5. Puri, B.N., The Gurjara-Pratihāras, pp. 12, 57.
 6. Munshi, K.M., The Glory That Was Gurjaradesa, p. 119.

after 882-83 A.D. (i.e., the date of the Pehoa record in which Bhoja is extolled as a master of those regions) when Mihira¹Bhoja was too old to retaliate, or was dead and had been succeeded by Mahendrapāla¹.

According to Kalhana, Alakhāna expected support from the Shāhi ruler Lalliya². Earlier, Lalliya had sought to win favour from Saṅkaravarman and it is possible that, still hoping to gain favour from the Kashmir king, he did not come to the rescue of Alakhāna. Another possibility is that he might have been too busy in his own affairs as his territories lay between those of the Darads and the Turushkas. Saṅkaravarman had married Sugandhā, daughter of the Darad chief, Svāmisena, and this matrimonial alliance must have deterred Lalliya from coming to the rescue of Alakhāna. Munshi, on the other hand, thinks that Saṅkaravarman's success against Alakhāna took place in the reign of Mahendrapāla, successor of Mihira³Bhoja, and that the former (Mahendrapāla) was, at that time, busy in Bengal³.

1. Puri, B.N., The Gurjara-Pratihāras, p. 57; Munshi, K.M., The Glory That Was Gurjaradesa, p. 112.

2. R.T., I, V, 152-55.

3. Munshi, K.M., Ibid., I, pp. 112, 119.

These conquests of Śaṅkaravarman cannot by any means be compared with those of Lalitāditya or Jayāpīda, and can be termed military adventures. Though, according to the Chronicle, he started with quite a sizable army, his successes were confined to the borderlands only. At the same time, the enormous cost at which these expeditions were led did not bring any monetary gains and depleted the treasury which subsequently turned him ⁱⁿ to a tyrant.¹

Atrocities of Śaṅkaravarman

It is easy to understand that Śaṅkaravarman was an ambitious monarch and more of a dreamer and wished to emulate the exploits of the illustrious Kārkoṭas. Avantivarman had restored economic stability in the Valley to a great measure, but Śaṅkaravarman exhausted the royal coffers on military preparations as well as in extravagance. Unable to edify his newly founded city, he had to rob Parihāsa-pura of its embellishments, as we have seen. He, therefore, levied new taxes and did not spare even temples whose main sources of income were charities and public benefactions. These fresh taxes were realised with severe strictness and he also created

1. R.T., I, IV, 620-21; V, 165.

two new offices - those of attapatibhāga and Griha-kṛitya for controlling domestic affairs.¹ Even articles like incense, sandal-wood and others used in worship were not exempted.² Certain extraordinary steps like reduction in weights and measures were introduced and the masses had to undergo severe hardships. Even the remonstrations of the Crown-prince, Gopālavarmaṇ, were of no avail and the officials - Kayasthas - misappropriated much of the royal income.³

End of Śaṅkaravarman

Such a state of affairs was not conducive of any literary activity and there was marked cultural decline during the reign of Śaṅkaravarman. The people groaned under the weight of heavy taxations and illegal extortions by Kayastha officials. The king would not associate himself with men of learning and eminence for fear of handing them out rewards and was always surrounded by a band of flatterers. The affairs were so bad that the eminent Sanskrit scholar, Bhallaṭa, had to accept a job much below his dignity for his livelihood.⁴ While men of culture,

1. R.T., I, V, 167.

2. Ibid., I, V, 169.

3. Ibid., I, V, 193-203.

4. Ibid., I, V, 204.

Bhallaṭa is known as the author of Bhallaṭa-Sataka and the dictionary Paḍmañjarī. (See Pandit's note).

breeding and learning went without adequate remunerations and jobs, ordinary officials, even load-carriers, were getting astounding salaries.¹ Sanskrit gave way to apabhraṃśa and cultivation of literature was neglected.²

Towards the closing years of his reign, Śaṅkara-varman treacherously murdered the ruler ^{of} Dārvābhisāra, Naravāhana by name.³ There was general discontent among the people and one of his officers, a relative of his favourite minister Sukharāja, was killed at Virānaka, the modern village of Viran, on the north-west.⁴ Angered, the king himself proceeded towards the northern regions (Uttarāpatha) and vented his wrath upon its inhabitants. After gaining some victories against petty chiefs on the banks of the Indus, he proceeded towards Urasā, where ^{he} was stuck by an arrow in the neck and died shortly after, though for reasons of safety, his death was announced later after the forces accompanying him had returned from those regions.⁵ He was soon forgotten and even the name of the city founded by him was changed to Pattan^a shortly afterwards.⁶

1. R.T., I, V, 205.

2. Ibid., I, V, 206 (See Pandit's note).

3. Ibid., I, V, 209. Probably this Naravāhana belonged to the Lohara family (Stein's note).

4. Here 'dvāra' signifies 'draṅga', a watch-station on the frontiers mentioned in the Chronicle very often (Ibid., I, V, 214, Stein's note).

5. Ibid., I, V, 215-16, 222.

6. Ibid., I, V, 213.

Gopālarman (C. 902-04 A.D.)

Gopālarman, yet a minor, was proclaimed king after the death of his father, Saṅkaravarman, and was placed under the regency of his mother Sugandhā, an ambitious lady.¹ Young Gopālarman held out promise of a just and benevolent king but he could not exert himself against his regent mother, who had now bestowed her affections on Prabhākara, a minister.² This intimacy between the two turned the head of Prabhākara who became arrogant and an oppressive administrator, often insulting the courtiers and high officials of the State. The frontiers of the Valley were neglected and there was a general discontent in the defence-forces.³ Court-intrigues, depletion of treasury and neglect of the armed forces worsened the situation. Amid such circumstances arose the power of the Tantrins.

Rise of the Tantrins

The Tantrins were a band of people organized militarily and played the same role in the history of Kashmir as the 'Praetorian Guards' of the Roman

1. R.T., I, V, 228.

2. Ibid., I, V, 230.

3. Ibid., I, V, 235.

empire or the Turks under the Caliphs of Baghdad. Rapidly, they rose to such supreme power that, thenceforth, their favour and support virtually decided the succession to the Kashmir throne. Hereafter, a marked change into the affairs of the Valley is to be noticed in which bribery, corruption, sons rising against their parents, and maladministration figure prominently. Later, however, their power and hold was considerably lessened by the rise of another military organization during the reign of the succeeding dynasty, as we shall subsequently notice.

Gopālarman was completely overshadowed by his regent-mother, Sugandhā, and her paramour-minister, and the two were controlling the administrative machinery.¹ Matters came to such a climax that, out of infatuation for Prabhākara(Varman), the Queen vested in him all the powers of the State.²

Shāhi Rebellion

Early in the reign of Gopālarman a Shāhi chief, finding a minor on the throne of Kashmir and taking advantage of the situation, rose into

1. Bazaz, P.N., Daughters of Vitastā, p. 25.

2. R.T., I, V, 231.

rebellion¹. The queen-regent, whatever her faults might have been, rose to the occasion and fearing that other subordinates might also behave likewise, sent Prabhākarvarman to crush the rebellion. The latter inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Shāhi rebel chief, who was dethroned and Toramāna, also known as Kamaluka and a son of Lalliya, was placed on the Shāhi throne.²

The circumstances leading Toramāna to seek shelter at the court of Kashmir (whose king was an enemy of his father) need explanation. According to Ganguly, Saṅkaravarman could not gain success against Lalliya Shāhi but, after the latter's death, the Shāhi throne was usurped by Sāmanta, also a scion of the Shāhi family. He also brings to notice certain coins found in Afghanistan bearing the legend 'Sri Sāmanta'³. Consequently, Toramāna sought shelter at the Kashmir court and requested for help. According to Vaidya, Lalliya was defeated by Saṅkaravarman who placed Sāmanta on the Shāhi throne.⁴ Later, after the death of Saṅkaravarman and during the period of regency, Sāmanta was emboldened to

1. R.T., I, V. 232-33, 237.

2. Alberuni, India, II, p. 13; R.T., I, V, 232-33 (Stein's note).

3. Majumdar, R.C., Age of Imperial Kanauj, p. 112.

4. Vaidya, C.V., H.M.H.I., I, p. 194.

shake off the allegiance of Kaśmir and was defeated by Prabhākara. Subsequently, the latter placed Toramāna on the Shāhi throne at Udabhānda (Und) and gave him the new name Kamaluka. It may be noted here that Śaṅkaravarman is credited with some victories in territories around the banks of the Indus and, as the Chronicle informs us, wanted to remove Lalliya 'from his sovereign position¹. Now Udabhānda lay on the western bank of that river and it is quite probable that Vaidya's suggestion might be true.²

Death of Gopālavarman

For some time, Prabhākavarman gained popularity because of his successful handling of the revolt of the Shāhis. But, within a very short period, he began misusing his powers and embezzled the royal treasures. Gopālavarman soon came to learn of his intimacy with his mother and also of the misuse of royal treasures and demanded an explanation from Prabhākavarman. The minister pleaded that the money had been spent on the Shāhi expedition which, however, did not satisfy the king.³ Fearing that the king might resolve to get

1. R.T., I, V, 152-55.

2. Ibid., I, V, 216.

3. Ibid., I, V, 238.

rid of him, Prabhākara managed to get the king killed with the help of Rāmadeva, a relation of his. Thus ended the nominal rule of Gopālarman after he had been on the throne for only two years.¹

Saṅkata (904 A.D.)

After Gopālarman, the crown of Kashmir passed on to Saṅkata (Varman) who had so far lived in complete anonymity. But he seems to have had a brief stay of merely 10 days on the throne.² Thereafter, at the request of her subjects, Sugandhā herself assumed all authority and began to rule as the Queen.

Sugandhā (904 - 06 A.D.)

Since there was none in the direct line of descent from Saṅkaravarman to be enthroned, Sugandhā, as seen above, was proclaimed queen on popular choice.³ The lady, despite her weakness of character, had earlier given proof of foresight and capability in her handling of the Shāhi rebellion. Earlier, she had also accompanied her husband on military expeditions.⁴ Her career may be viewed in two capacities viz., (i) as regent and (ii) as queen.

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1. R.T., I, V, 239-40 (Rāmadeva was an expert in witchcraft).
 2. Ibid., I, V, 242.
 3. Ibid., I, V, 243.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 220.

We have already noticed the events during her career as a regent. After the death of Śaṅkara-varman, she managed to keep the news of his decease secret quite long so as to reach her own frontiers. Further, she had the discernibility to choose the right course in her dealing with the Shāhis, though she subsequently fell a victim to her own weakness of character.

Queen Sugandhā had to contend and maintain a precarious balance between two new groups of armed bands - the Tantrins and the Ekāṅgas. The Tantrins, a band of organized militia, as noted earlier and elsewhere, were entrusted with the defence of the Valley and were, therefore, strong enough to create problems for the Queen¹. They openly disobeyed her commands and in desperation, Sugandhā had to bestow her favours upon another military group - that of the Ekāṅgas². Soon the Queen and the Tantrins fell out on the vital question of succession. Sugandhā favoured Nirjitavarman, son of Sukharāja and related to her from the mother's side, and she was supported

1. R.T., I, v, 248-50.

2. Ibid., I, V, 249 (Stein's note).

Who these Ekāṅgas were - is not clear, but as they are mentioned along with the ministers, high officials and the feudals, they must have been an organized group wielding enough power.

by the Ekāṅgas also.¹ But this was opposed by her ministers and officials who had also the backing of the Tantrins. Nirjitavarman, from the accounts in the Chronicle, appears to have been a cripple and of dissipated nature.² The Tantrins enthroned Pārtha, a 10 year old son of Nirjitavarman, and the Queen had to take refuge at Hushkapura.³ Here she was joined by the Ekāṅgas who had resolved to champion her cause and marched forth for a trial of strength. The Tantrins, however, defeated the Ekāṅgas signally; the Queen was captured and put to death in 914 A.D. (It appears that, since 906 A.D., Sugandhā had been in exile and mustering strength to capture power with the help of the Ekāṅgas.)

1. R.T., I, V, 251-52.

2. Ibid., I, V, 253.

3. Ibid., I, V, 259.

CHAPTER VII

THE DOWNFALL OF THE UTPALAS

The death of Queen Sugandhā at the hands of her captors and the subsequent affairs in the Valley dealt severe blow to the power of the Utpalas. Sugandhā^k had failed to check the high-handedness of her corrupt officials and a string of weak rulers after her proved to be mere puppets in their hands. Added to this was the rise of the Tantrins and Ekāṅgas^{the} who played vital roles in the seating, unseating and sometimes, reseating of their nominees on the throne of Kashmir. According to the Chronicle, 8 kings ruled the Valley within a short period of some 33 years, and we often find the father and the son contending for the crown.¹ Amid such conditions Pārtha, a mere lad, was enthroned by the officials and the Tantrins.

1. R.T., I, V, 253-468.

Pārtha (C. 906 - 21 A.D.)

Pārtha, a son of Nirjitavarman the cripple, was placed on the throne when the Valley was passing through chaotic conditions¹. We have also seen that Sugandhā, the displaced Queen, made a vain attempt to recapture power with the help of the Ekāngas and was finally defeated, captured and put to death by the well-organized Tantrins, who also had the support of the court-officials². Henceforth the Valley was subjected to one of the worst kinds of maladministration known in its history. Pārtha was placed under the regency of his father, Nirjitavarman, as the former was a mere child³. Himself a cripple and given to vices, he allowed free reins to his ministers, officers and the Tantrins, to wax fat on the masses⁴. Henceforth the power and hold of the Tantrins on the affairs of the State was more pronounced as the king, unable to meet their exacting monetary demands, started handing out bills of exchange (hundikā) to them for their favour⁵. Kings were mere titular heads while the

1. R.T., I, V, 251-55.

2. Ibid., I, V, 251, 259.

3. Ibid., I, V, 264.

4. Ibid., I, V, 265.

5. Ibid., I, V, 266, 275.

real power was vested in the hands of the ministers and the Tantrins. This hold and power of the Tantrins was, however, reduced by Chakravarman and Saṅgrāma Dāmara, and finally wiped off by Kamalavardhana, as we shall notice later, but, in the meantime, their atrocities and exactions reduced the Valley to abject poverty.¹

As stated in the Chronicle, Pārtha was merely a titular figurehead and real powers were vested in the hands of Nirjitavarman and some of the ministers. Of the latter group, one Meruwardhana, deserves notice. He had built the shrine of Meruwardhanasvāmī at Purānādhishthāna and along with his many sons, amassed great wealth.² Śaṅkaravardhana, the eldest of his sons, was in league with others and had systematically dipped into the royal treasures.³ Meanwhile, the subjects groaned under the exactions of these officers.

The Great Famine (917-18 A.D.)

The miseries of the masses were further augmented by natural calamities and the Valley witnessed one of its worst famines in 917-18 A.D. Thousands died

1. R.T., I, V, 327-37, 452.

2. Ibid., I, V, 257-68. (Stein's note).

3. Ibid., I, V, 269.

for want of food and prices rose sky-high, one khāri of rice selling for a thousand dīnārs¹. The corpses were thrown into the Jhelum (Vitastā); the entire land was laid waste and parched bones covered the open spaces making the country look like a huge burial-ground². Meanwhile, the officials, aided and abetted by the Tantrins, acquired, accumulated and sold grains (rice) from the royal stores at phenomenal prices and amassed wealth at the cost of the people.³ Amid such conditions the king (really the regent Nirjitavarman) often elevated such persons to ministership who could meet the bills of demand (hundikā)⁴ of the Tantrins. The regent, it appears, was seeking his own comforts and Pārtha was a helpless onlooker. He seems to have made several attempts to gain control but was defeated in these⁵ by his pleasure-seeking regent-father.

The situation worsened gradually because of court intrigues. Nirjitavarman the cripple had contracted matrimony with Meruwardhana's daughter and this had increased the power and hold of Meruwardhana's sons.⁶ Nirjitavarman's two queens, Bappatadevī and Mrigāvatī (daughter of Meruwardhana) exercised

1. R.T., I, V, 271.

2. Ibid., I, V, 273.

3. Ibid., I, V, 274.

4. Ibid., I, V, 275, 279-80.

5. Ibid., I, V, 280.

6. Ibid., I, V, 282-84.

their feminine charms on one Sugandhāditya (probably a leader of the Tantrins) to secure the throne for their issues.¹ Amid such chaotic conditions, Pārtha was overthrown by Nirjitavarman with the support of the Tantrins and the latter was installed as full-fledged king in 921 A.D.

Pārtha was really a victim of the circumstances and it was not possible for him to assert himself against his scheming father and the Tantrins. He tried to gain control but was, each time, unsuccessful. Even after he had gained maturity, he was unable to cope with the crafty Meruwardhana's sons and the Tantrins, at whose activities Nirjitavarman connived. Thus his rule ended in a failure, but he was, however, destined to come to the throne a second time later.²

Nirjitavarman (C. 921-23 A.D.)

Nirjitavarman, who had played such a dominant role during the rule of his son, Pārtha, was, at last crowned king after the removal of the latter from the throne.³ But he was destined not to rule long and died in C. 923 A.D. after nominating Chakravarman, his child-son, to the throne.⁴

1. R.T., I, V, 281, 286.

2. Ibid., I, V, 295, 296.

3. Ibid., I, V, 287.

4. Ibid., I, V, 288.

Nirjitavarman had every opportunity both as a regent and finally as a ruler to have distinguished himself as a capable ruler, but as he was a moral leper and addicted to cups, he never cared for the welfare of the people and delighted in his own debauch habits.¹

Chakravarman (C. 923 - 33 A.D.)

As related above, Chakravarman, a child, had been nominated to the throne by Nirjitavarman. This move evidently was made to disbar Pārtha, who had been ousted by his father. It appears from the Chronicle that Pārtha had come to some understanding with the powerful Tantrins who were now willing to support his cause.² On the other side, Chakravarman, who was under the guardianship of his mother and grandmother, Bappaṭadevī and Kshillikā Devī, respectively, was supported by the Ekāṅgas, who were also out to gain from fishing into the troubled affairs of Kashmir.³ Pārtha did make another attempt to seize royal powers, but it seems that he was unsuccessful, for Chakravarman ruled for some ten years. It is also likely that the latter had been able to win over the Tantrins and thus continued his precarious hold on the throne.

1. R.T., I, V, 253-55.

2. Ibid., I, V, 289.

3. Ibid., I, V, 289-90.

But the Tantrins were soon displeased, overthrew Chakravarman in C. 933-34 A.D., and placed Sūravarman, another son of Nirjitevarman and Queen Mṛigāvatī on the throne.¹

Sūravarman (C. 933-34 A.D.)

Sūravarman, from the accounts of Kalhana, seems to have been a man of calibre and character but was a victim of circumstances.² The ministers and officials of the State, together with royal relatives, contrived to bring about a rift between Sūravarman and the Tantrins as he was unable to meet their heavy monetary demands.³ Ultimately, the Tantrins, unable to get as much as they expected from Sūravarman, displaced him and reinstalled Pārtha on the throne after the former had ruled for about a year.⁴

Pārtha (C. 934-35 A.D.)

Pārtha had been waiting for his chance and was able to win over the confidence of the Tantrins through big promises. In this, he was aided by his mistress who was a skilful plotter and the Tantrins seated him on the throne.⁵ But it appears that Pārtha was unable to satisfy the greed of the Tantrins who

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1. R.T., I, V, 292.
 2. Ibid., I, V, 294.
 3. Ibid., I, V, 293.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 295.
 5. Ibid., I, V, 295-96.

ultimately once again took up the cause of Chakravarman, the latter having offered them 'great riches'¹.

Chakravarman (C. 935 A.D.)

Chakravarman once again ascended the throne of Kashmir and set about creating a ring of official supporters around him². The sons of Meruwardhana, Saṅkaravardhana and Sambhuwardhana, who had earlier gained considerable notoriety, were elevated to the offices of Akshapatala and Grihakṛitya, respectively³. But Chakravarman, too, could not meet the demands of the Tantrins, ^{and} had, in desperation, to run away and seek refuge in Madavarājya⁴.

The Intrigues of the Vardhana Brothers
Sambhuwardhana (C. 935-36 A.D.)

The flight of Chakravarman to Madavarājya afforded an opportunity to the notorious Vardhana brothers to aspire for the throne. Saṅkaravardhana, son of Meruwardhana, soon dispatched his younger brother, Sambhuwardhana, to the Tantrins for

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1. R.T., I, V, 297.
 2. Ibid., I, V, 298.
 3. Ibid., I, V, 301.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 303.

negotiations ~~and~~ to be made king. The latter, however, proved much more wily and procured the throne for himself.¹

It would thus be quite apparent that the Tantrins were in complete command of affairs at the Kashmir court and could seat or unseat any one on the royal throne provided the person of their choice was able to meet their demands at the cost of the people who were suffering under the exactions of the corrupt court officials as well as the throne-seekers.

Chakravarman and Saṅgrāma Dāmara

Meanwhile, Chakravarman was biding his time in exile and came in contact with the powerful chief of the Dāmaras, Saṅgrāma, who ruled from Śrīdhakka.² Though the Dāmara chief at first entertained some misgivings about the fidelity of Chakravarman to him, yet he agreed to deal with the Tantrins and promised martial help to the deposed and exiled king.³ The friendship was cemented by sacred oaths and both proceeded to crush the power of the Tantrins.⁴

Restoration of Chakravarman (C. 936 A.D.)

Chakravarman and the Dāmara forces were opposed by the Tantrins and Śaṅkaravardhana, who took the

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1. R.T., I, V, 304.
 2. Ibid., I, V, 306.
 3. Ibid., I, V, 310, 324.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 326-27.

field on behalf of his ruling brother, Śambhuvardhana¹. After a severe battle, in which he showed extraordinary courage and valour, Chakravarman killed Śaṅkaravardhana near Padmapura, which apparently broke the back of the opposition and thousands of Tantrins were slain by the Dāmaras and his forces². Śambhuvardhana, too, took the field but was defeated, captured and ultimately put to death³. Chakravarman once again came in possession of the royal throne for the third time and it goes without saying that the Tantrins were dealt with a severe blow by the Dāmaras, Ekāṅgas and his supporters⁴.

But this signal victory over the Tantrins and his opponents turned the head of Chakravarman who soon became "overbearing and committed cruel and evil acts"⁵. He became infatuated with a couple of dancing girls of the Domba clan and even elevated one of them to the rank of the Chief Queen⁶. Their father and other relatives were placed at high offices, much to the disgust of the Dāmaras⁷. The Dombas, for a time, were prominent at the court and the king rewarded their chief and father-in-law

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1. R.T., I, V, 328.
 2. Ibid., I, V, 330, 334.
 3. Ibid., I, V, 348-49.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 341-42.
 5. Ibid., I, V, 351.
 6. Ibid., I, V, 387.
 7. Ibid., I, V, 389.

by grant of some villages¹. Soon Chakravarman got some ^aDāmaras treacherously murdered and for this heinous act, had to pay^{for} with his own life. A band of Dāmaras fell upon him one night, slew him in his chamber and also looted the Valley². Thus, after having succeeded to the throne thrice and ruled the Valley for 12 years, rather ingloriously, Chakravarman met a sad end at the hands of his own supporters.

Unmattavanti³ (C. 937 - 39 A.D.)

But worse was to follow. Chakravarman was followed on the throne by Unmattāvanti(varman) (or Avanti(varman)-the madly wicked), a son of Pārtha, who was a choice of the vicious ministers headed by Śarvata⁴. Unmattāvanti(varman) was a vain and characterless person, hostile even to his parents and

1. Kalhana relates an incident^t here; "the recorder of official documents (pattopādhyāya) did not execute the document relating the grant (dāna-pattaka), then Raṅga proceeded to the Aksāpa-tāla (office) and thus addressed that (official) in anger: "You son of the slave, why do you not write 'Raṅgassa Helu dinna' (Helu to be granted to Raṅga)". Due to his fear, he wrote accordingly. (R.T., I, V, 397-98).

2. Ibid., I, V, 408-13.

3. According to Stein, the name of the king was Unmattāvanti, to which the family suffix 'varman' may be added (Unmattāvantivarman). But Sastri breaks the word into two and takes 'unmatta' (i.e., mad or mentally deranged) as an adjective of Avantivarman. Thus, according to him, the name of the wicked ruler was Avantivarman, who was drunk with power or authority to the point of madness. (Ibid., I, V, 414, p. 155. Pt. Ram Tej Shastri, Text & Hindi Trans.)

4. Ibid., I, V, 414.

the family.¹ Early in his reign, he came under the influence of one Parvagupta, who himself was an aspirant for the Kashmir throne.² Parvagupta soon entered into a conspiracy with other five ministers, Bhūbhata, Sarvaṭa (who had been instrumental in securing the throne for Unmattāvanti), Chhoja, Kumuda and Amṛitākara by name and, being far-sighted, instigated the king to kill all his blood-relations.³

Very soon the King, acting on the advice of Parvagupta starved his brothers (including Śaṅkara-varman) to death.⁴ Then his wrath fell upon his parents and Pārtha was murdered by his favourites; the latter were even rewarded by the King for their complicity in imprisoning him (Pārtha).⁵ It goes without saying that the King was aided and abetted in his foul deeds by his counsellors, ministers and the Tantrins.⁶ Parvagupta, we can easily surmise, had regained the confidence of the king.⁷

Meanwhile, the land of Kashmir, already looted by the Dāmaras after the death of Chakravarman, was subjected to some of the worst exactions by the Kāyastha officials whom the king had favoured.⁸

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1. R.T., I, V, 417.
 2. Ibid., I, V, 420-21.
 3. Ibid., I, V, 427.
 4. Ibid., I, V, 429.
 5. Ibid., I, V, 430-34.
 6. Ibid., I, V, 431.
 7. Ibid., I, V, 438.
 8. Ibid., I, V, 439.

Already the king had furnished proof of his vile nature and his atrocities increased day by day¹. Licentious of habits, he died of consumption in C. 939 A.D. after placing Sūravarman on the throne².

Sūravarman II (C. 939 A.D.)

Sūravarman II, who followed Unamattāvanti(varman), seems to have had a doubtful ancestry³. It appears from the account of the Chronicle that he was afraid of Kamalavardhana, the Commander-in-Chief, who had distinguished himself against the Dāmaras. Sūravarman was yet a child and depended for support upon the sympathy of the Ekāngas, Tantrins, counsellors and a few chiefs loyal to the throne⁴. Such a state of affairs was exploited by Kamalavardhana, who held control of Madavarājya and rose in rebellion⁵.

Kamalavardhana and Contemporary Politics

According to Kalhana, Sūravarman was surprised by Kamalavardhana while on a visit to a temple⁶. The child-king was supported by the combined strength of the Ekāngas, Tantrins, feudatory chiefs and also

1. R.T., I, V, 440-41.

2. Ibid., I, V, 448.

3. Ibid., I, V, 445-48. Kalhana states in these verses that Sūravarman was not a son of the deceased king (445-46) but in the following verses refers him as his son (449).

4. Ibid., I, v, 445⁵-49.

5. Ibid., I, V, 451.

6. Ibid., I, V, 449-51.

ministers.¹ But Kamalavardhana, after routing the Dāmaras on the way, gained a decisive victory over the royal supporters and entered the royal palace.² Śuravarman was carried away to safety by his mother.³

Kamalavardhana, however, exhibited an utter lack of foresight and did not ascend the throne; instead, he left the decision for the throne in the hands of a council of the Brāhmanas.⁴ Very possibly, he was too sure of his choice by the aforesaid council. The council, however, assembled at the Gokula temple for this very fateful decision and continued its deliberations for several days.⁵ When Kamalavardhana, after a few days, reminded the Brāhmanas about his candidature for the vacant throne, the latter drove him away by pelting stones at him.⁶ Similar approaches by the widow of Unmattāventi of the parricidal notoriety - were also rejected and,

1. Syālahāraka here denotes a kind of cavalry force as Pandit and Shastri translate it and, most likely, they might be kings' guards as their number is given only one thousand. (R.T., Pandit's trans. of I, V, 452, note; 454 note; R.T., Shastri, Hindi trans., I, V, 454.)

2. R.T., I, V, 454.

3. Ibid., I, V, 455.

4. Ibid., I, V, 456-57.

5. Ibid., I, V, 461.

6. Ibid., I, V, 464.

ultimately, the choice of the council fell on Yaśaskara, a man of erudition and one who had returned to the Valley from abroad.¹

The royal house of the Utp^pgalas thus came to an inglorious end. The dynasty had had its share of worthy rulers of ^{the} calibre of Avantivarman and Gopālarman, who not only consolidated the fortunes of the family but also proved capable rulers by alleviating the sufferings of the people of the Valley brought upon them by the later Kārkoṭas. But the later rulers of this dynasty viz., Pārtha, Chakravarman, Ummattāvanti, etc., cast all moral obligations to the winds and oppressed the masses through tyrannical exactions. The Tantrins and the Ekāṅgas wrought havoc by their extortions in the name of the kings and, since they were virtual king-makers, the rulers would not take steps against them. Administrative machinery was corrupt and unscrupulous; even ministers hoarded food-grains, and connived with the Tantrins in creating famine conditions thereby selling their hoards (of grains) at exorbitant prices and fleecing the people of their wealth. There was an utter dearth of able ministers and men of letters at the royal courts.

1. About the ancestry of Yaśaskara, Kalhana informs us that his grand-father was Vīradeva, who was a common householder. His father, Kāmadeva,
(Contd.)

Another noticeable factor of the age was a marked degeneration in social and human values resulting in the fall of moral standards. This was the natural outcome of various factors - licentiousness of the kings and the courtiers, poverty, non-adherence to caste-regulations, non-observance of marriage rules, etc. The lead was taken by kings themselves who married women of low classes and elevated them even to the rank of chief queens.¹ The royal harem, housing several queens, became notorious for laxity of morals amongst the queens, as already noted above. At the same time, the paramours of such queens often conspired against the ruling kings and at times made bold bids for the throne themselves. It was quite natural, under the circumstances, for the royal seraglio to become a centre of intrigues and conspiracies with little regard to stability of succession and welfare of masses.

Yet, at the same time, the Utpalas have a bidding place in the history of Kashmir for some of their

was at first a teacher of the sons of Minister Meruwardhana and, later on, when latter's son, Prabhākaradeva, became the Treasurer of the State (Gaṇjādhikāri), Kamadeva became his family treasurer. But it seems that he was dead, otherwise Yaśaskara would not have reached the Valley in poverty with his friend Phalguṇa (Ibid., I, V, 468-73).

1. R.T., I, V, 387.

activities towards ^{the} betterment of the lot of the masses, and one such feature deserves special mention. Irrigation was given its due importance by Avantivarman whose able minister, Suyya, had realized its benefits. Irrigational facilities provided for at the cost of the State went a long way in improving the agricultural output of the Valley. At times, the prices of foodgrains touched the lowest levels of index never before noticed in the Valley. These facilities brought about the maximum amount of available land under the plough and, but for the irresponsible and extortionist attitude of the subsequent rulers, their ministers and other officials of the State, the Valley would have flourished and the masses been content.

Another noteworthy feature and closely allied to these irrigational facilities was the construction of numerous bunds and bridges, tanks and reservoirs. These not only checked the recurrent havoc caused by floods and scarcity, but also helped in affording better means of communications.

Also, it goes to the credit of the Utpalas that the boundaries of the State were again restored and even extended far beyond. It should be noted that the Utpalas had succeeded to a State whose boundaries had considerably shrunken during the regime of the

later Kārkotas. In fact, the last few of them were practically ruling over a very limited area within the Valley itself. But the conquests of some of the Utpalas, specially those of Śaṅkara-varman, restored the former dimensions of the empire.