

# Lalitaditya Muktapida of Kashmir

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Lalitaditya Muktapida of Kashmir, an eminent 8th-century ruler, is a significant yet often overlooked figure in Indian history. Known for his unparalleled military prowess, Lalitaditya never lost a battle, whether against the Arabs or his contemporaries. Beyond his martial achievements, he was a prolific builder, responsible for the construction of numerous cities and monumental structures, including the grand Martand Sun Temple and his capital, Parihaspura. His reign in Kashmir was characterised by wide territorial control and cultural flowering.

Lalitaditya Muktapida

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Rajatarangini

Kalhana

Martand sun temple

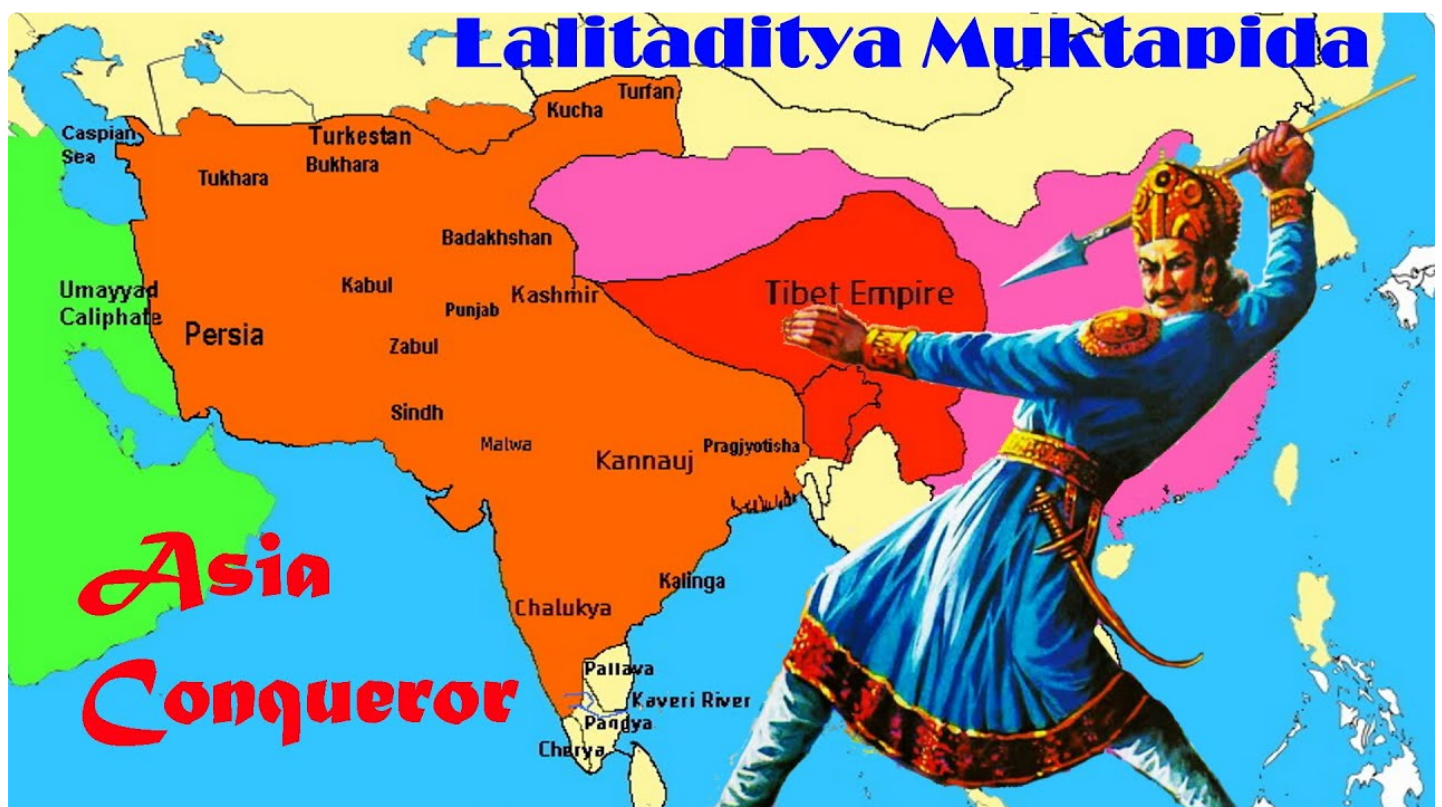
Parihaspore

Parihaspura

Kashmir

## 1. Early Life and Ascendancy

Lalitaditya Muktapida ascended to the throne of Kashmir around the mid-8th century, inheriting the throne from his predecessor, Durlabhaka-Pratapaditya II. He belonged to the Karkota dynasty, which ruled Kashmir from the 7th to the 9th centuries. His reign is known through the "Rajatarangini," an extensive historical account written by the Kashmiri scholar Kalhana in the 12th century.



## 2. Military Exploits

Lalitaditya is known to have endeavored far-flung military campaigns that substantially enlarged his kingdom. Lalitaditya emerged victorious against several enemies, including the invading Arab forces in the west. His military genius, through warring and conquering, kept Kashmir unbreached during his times. The huge extent of land under his control stretched from Tokharistan in northwest, covering present-day Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, to parts of South and Northeast India.

Kalhana's "Rajatarangini" vividly describes Lalitaditya's military expeditions. He took his armies through the passes of the Hindu Kush, dominated and subdued the rulers of the Punjab, and asserted supremacy over the kingdoms of Central India. Skillful use of strategic alliances and endless pursuit of expansion firmly established him as an invincible warrior-king.

## 3. Architectural Legacy

Lalitaditya's contributions to architecture are as remarkable as his military achievements. He was a patron of art and architecture, commissioning the construction of numerous cities and temples that reflected the grandeur of his reign. His capital, Parihaspura, stood as a testament to his vision and ambition.

Parihaspura, located near present-day Srinagar, was a marvel of urban planning and architectural innovation. The city housed a colossal Buddha statue made from 62,000 kilograms of copper, reminiscent of the Bamyán Buddhas, which were within his realm of influence. Parihaspura also featured grand temples, monasteries, and public buildings, showcasing a blend of Buddhist and Hindu architectural styles.

One of his wives, Chandradevi, contributed to the city's infrastructure by constructing a massive dam, exemplifying the era's engineering prowess. Unfortunately, Parihaspura was later destroyed by invaders, erasing much of its physical legacy but not its historical significance.

Lalitaditya is also credited with building the Martand Sun Temple, one of the most impressive architectural feats of ancient Kashmir. Situated near Anantnag, the temple, dedicated to the Sun God, exemplified the zenith of Kashmiri temple architecture. Although now in ruins, the Martand Sun Temple's grandeur remains evident in its surviving structures, reflecting the artistic and cultural zenith achieved during Lalitaditya's reign.

## 4. Cultural and Economic Flourishing

Under Lalitaditya's rule, Kashmir experienced a period of cultural renaissance. His patronage extended to scholars, artists, and religious institutions, fostering an environment of intellectual and artistic growth. The confluence of Buddhist and Hindu traditions during his reign enriched the region's cultural tapestry.

Economically, Lalitaditya's expansive empire facilitated trade and commerce. Kashmir's strategic location along the Silk Route enabled it to become a thriving center of trade, connecting Central Asia with the Indian subcontinent. The prosperity brought by trade contributed to the flourishing of arts, crafts, and urban development.

## 5. The Forgotten Warrior

Despite his monumental contributions, Lalitaditya Muktapida remains a relatively obscure figure in mainstream historical narratives. His military victories, architectural achievements, and cultural patronage have not received the recognition they deserve. The neglect of his legacy is partly due to the subsequent invasions and political upheavals that altered the course of Kashmir's history.

The story of Lalitaditya, however, comes alive in the ruins of his architectural projects and the writings of ancient texts. His era could rightly be called the golden age in the annals of Kashmiri history, an era of territorial expansion, cultural syncretism, and commercial prosperity.

## 6. Conclusion

Lalitaditya Muktapida of Kashmir was an extraordinary ruler whose military, architectural, and cultural achievements have left an indelible mark on Indian history. His empire's vast expanse, from Central Asia<sup>[1]</sup> to South India, and his patronage of monumental architecture underscore his unparalleled legacy. Despite being overshadowed by the tumultuous events that followed his reign, Lalitaditya's contributions continue to inspire and inform our understanding of ancient India's rich and diverse heritage.

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## References

1. Vikram Sampath. Bravehearts of Bharat; Penguin random house India: India, 2022; pp. 1-35.

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