



A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE LEGACY OF UTPALA DYNASTY IN KASHMIR, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AVANTIVERMAN (855-883 A.D.)

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Abstract

Jammu and Kashmir, often referred to as "heaven on Earth," has long captivated rulers and poets alike. The famous Persian couplet by Amir Khusrau describes it as unparalleled in beauty, inspiring numerous rulers to vie for control over the region. The *Rajatarangini*, a metrical chronicle, narrates Kashmir's dynastic history from the *Mahabharata* era to Sangrama Deva's reign. Avantivarman, a significant ruler of the Utpalas dynasty established in 855 CE, heralded a golden age for Kashmir. Eschewing military conquests, he prioritized peace and prosperity, ushering in a period of unparalleled stability and contentment. His reign, approximately 25 years into his rule, marked Kashmir's zenith in terms of happiness and economic well-being. Avantivarman, though not from a distinguished lineage, exhibited exceptional leadership qualities. His administration not only alleviated the populace's suffering but also revitalized the region's cultural and political legacy, symbolizing a transformative era in Kashmir's history.

Keywords: *Dynasty, Legacy & Achievements.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 855 and 883 CE, Avantivarman, the founder of the Utpalas dynasty, distinguished himself as an exceptional administrator in Kashmir. He implemented significant reforms to restore law and order, reestablish administrative control, and curb the influence of the rural aristocracy known as Damaras, whose power had fueled civil unrest. Avantivarman prioritized irrigation development and flood control to mitigate the devastation caused by the Jhelum River, particularly addressing the flooding from Wular Lake (Mahapadma). These efforts significantly enhanced the region's agricultural productivity, improving economic stability and bolstering his popularity as a ruler. His era also witnessed cultural and religious advancements, as Brahmins were granted religious freedom, and monumental temples and monasteries dedicated to Hindu deities like Shiva and Vishnu, as well as Buddhist practices, were constructed. Notable architectural contributions include the Avantiswara and Avantiswami temples. Avantivarman also founded the cities of Avantipura and Suyapur, leaving a lasting legacy of urban development and administrative efficiency. His reign symbolizes a period of peace, prosperity, and cultural revival in Kashmir's history.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To explain and assess the history and significance of the Utpalas Dynasty, with particular emphasis placed on Avanti Varman, the dynasty's founder.

3. METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this work, primary and secondary sources were mostly used to collect data for the current study. The data was obtained with the intention of reaching an unbiased conclusion. It was intended to be used to examine the beginnings and achievements of the Utpalas administration, with a special emphasis on Avantivarman, the dynasty's founder. The study's framework was constructed using the objectivity of historical and contemporary works, yielding an unbiased result.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Achievements of Avantivarman

The later rulers of the Karkota dynasty not only exploited the populace but also depleted the state's resources, leaving the people vulnerable to the whims of self-serving and oppressive officials. These officials prioritized their own financial gain by exploiting the masses. Simultaneously, the state lacked a well-organized administrative system and a sufficiently armed military to ensure internal stability or pursue territorial expansion. In this context, Avantivarman faced the critical challenge of restoring trust among the people. His foremost priority was to establish an effective and organized governance system capable of reinstating order in the valley and safeguarding the interests of the populace—tasks that had been neglected by his predecessors for decades. Avantivarman's efforts aimed to address these long-standing deficiencies and rebuild the foundations of governance. The chronicler Kalhana, in his *Rajatarangini*, devotes ten verses to detailing Avantivarman's approach toward his subjects, highlighting his efforts to rectify the mismanagement of previous rulers and reestablish stability and confidence within the region.

The nation's economy was suffering as a result of a lack of arable land, thus Avantivarman's first duty was to find more. The waters of Mahapadma Lake were previously drained through suitable channels during Lalitaditya's reign, providing some fertile land for farming. Additionally, the valley has been destroyed by floods caused by Mahapadma lake. These passages had been overlooked during the reigns of the later Karkotas rulers, and for years they had been blocked by boulders that had not been removed from the location. In addition to all of these sad events, the country had been devastated by a severe hunger.

King Avantivarman's reign benefited greatly from the contributions of Suyya, a man of obscure origins raised by a Sudra woman, whose innovative solutions alleviated the region's hardships. Suyya proposed a plan to address the people's plight and, impressed by his confidence, Avantivarman granted him full authority to implement his ideas. Suyya's engineering initiatives included clearing the boulders from the Vitasta (Jhelum) riverbed, constructing a dam for water storage, and designing a system of irrigation channels and embankments. These efforts expanded cultivable land and ensured reliable water supplies, aiding farmers and reducing famine-induced grain prices from 1,050 dinars to just 36 dinars per Khari. Suyya's ingenuity significantly contributed to the valley's recovery and prosperity. Politically astute, Avantivarman minimized rebellion risks by appointing close kin to key positions. His stepbrother Suravarman was made Yuvaraja, while his nephews Dhira and Vinnapa assumed important financial roles, strengthening familial loyalty and administrative stability.

The reign of Avantivarman marked a period of stability and prosperity for Kashmir, following years of internal conflict under his predecessors. Unlike Jayapida, who exhausted the kingdom's resources on futile expeditions, Avantivarman focused on consolidating the valley's peace and refrained from attempting to reclaim lost territories—a judicious approach that fostered progress in philosophy, art, and literature. His selflessness was evident in his appointment of his stepbrother Suravarman as *Yuvaraja* despite having a son of his own. Suravarman, a capable administrator, was guided by philosophical ideals emphasizing the fleeting nature of fortune and the importance of benevolence.

The era saw extensive temple and town-building activities, reflecting the prosperity of the period. Avantivarman founded Avantipura, where he constructed temples like Visnu Avantivarman and Siva Avantesvara, showcasing remarkable Kashmiri architecture. Suravarman similarly contributed, establishing Surapura near modern Shopian and temples like Suresvariksetra. Their collaboration was marked by mutual respect, exemplified by Suravarman's decisive action to address a temple's grievances, restoring harmony and royal favor. The origins of Suyya, a figure pivotal to Kashmir's prosperity, are shrouded in mystery. Abandoned as an infant in an earthen pot by a distressed woman, he was discovered by a Chandala woman, who entrusted him to a Sudra caretaker. Named after his biological mother, Suyya grew into an intelligent young man, eventually working as a tutor. Known for his ingenuity, he claimed he could eradicate famine if provided with resources. King Avantivarman, intrigued by these assertions, entrusted Suyya with funds to implement his plans. Suyya initiated a series of unconventional yet effective measures, such as throwing coins into rivers to prompt their clearance by locals. He widened and deepened the Vitasta (Jhelum) riverbed, raised embankments, and rechanneled tributaries, improving irrigation and reclaiming submerged and marshy lands. He established villages, including the round-bowl-like Kundala settlements, and founded Sopore. Suyya's efforts significantly boosted agricultural productivity, reducing

famine-induced grain prices dramatically, and his contributions are immortalized through places like Suyya Kundala and Suyya-Setu, named in honor of his mother.

5. CONCLUSION

Avanti Varman's reign was a period of peace and prosperity for Kashmir. He focused on the welfare of the people, ensuring their rights were respected and fostering growth in the arts and general well-being. His leadership spared the region from natural and human-made disasters. Avantivarman passed away in June 883 A.D. while listening to a Bhagavad Gita recital and was buried near the Jyeshthwara shrine in Triphar. During the later Karkota period, the kingdom faced political and economic challenges but made efforts to stabilize. New temples were built, and privileges were granted to Brahmins. The dynasty ended after Gopala Varman's death in 939 A.D.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Regarding the research, writing, and/or publication of this manuscript, the author has stated that no conflict of interest exists.

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