

New Light on the Khingal, Turk and the Hindu Śāhis

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The history of Afghānistān and north-western Pakistan (ancient Gandhāra and the Panjāb) from about the sixth to the tenth century AD, when these areas were under the sway of the successive Khingal, the Turk and the Hindu Śāhi dynasties, is, except for stray references to individual rulers, lost in the mists of time. The available information in whatever form leaves much to be desired. Thanks however to the diligent efforts of modern scholarship that we now have at least an outline of the major political events.

The first problem in this context is the name Khingal. This enigmatic name (variously spelt as Khinjil, Khinkhila, Khiṅgāla) is known, although sparingly, to historical literature as the name of a ruler. Of all our sources the Chinese annals of the Tang period¹ are a little more informative and record that (i) Khingal was the first king of Kāpiśī (generally identified with Begrām) and that (ii) prior to Ghar-ilchi (one of Khingal's descendants) the rule of that country had passed from father to son for twelve generations. The Cefu Yuangui (vol. 970), another Chinese source, records that diplomatic mission from Jibin (Kāpiśī) reached the Tang court in AD 653 and brought the news that the crown prince had succeeded his father. This shows that Khingal was the ancestor of a distinct line of rulers who had their base in the northern part of the Kabul-Begrām valley, i.e., Jibin or Kāpiśī. Kuwayama refers to these rulers as Khingal dynasty.

When did this Khingal line of rulers (or Khingal dynasty) rise to power is not known for certain. A clue however may be taken from Jinagupta's biography and Hsüan Tsang's travel accounts. Jinagupta, a Buddhist monk from Gandhāra, who stayed in the Kabul-Begrām valley on his way to Bāmiyān around 554, mentions Kāpiśī for the first time. This is the first ever mention of Kāpiśī in any kind of literature (Kuwayama 1999: 41). Jinagupta does not name the ruler, but Khingal's association with Kāpiśī is known as mentioned above. Taking clue from Jinagupta's mention of Kāpiśī in 554 one may assume that Khingal laid the foundation of an independent kingdom sometime in the middle of the sixth century AD. At the time of Hsüan Tsang's visit to Kāpiśī in 629, the ruler, whose name is not recorded, was a Kṣatriya (Beal 1888: 54). It follows therefore that ethnically at least Khingāla was neither Hun nor Turk but a son of the soil and belonged to the Kṣatriya or warrior class.

Kalhaṇa records Khinkhila, also called Narendrādityā, as the name of a king of the dynasty of Gonanda who ruled Kashmīr before the Kārkoṭas (Stein 1900: 1, 52, Taraṅga 347). It was during the reign of the founder of the Kārkoṭa dynasty, Durlabhavardhana, that Hsüan Tsang visited Kashmīr in AD 631-633. Stein suggests that we must recognise in Khinkhila the Ephthalite ruler who calls himself on his coins "Deva Śāhi Khingila". A fragmentary inscription found recently at Hund also mentions the name of a certain Narendrādityā. The epigraph is engraved upon a white marble slab in Śāradā characters of about the sixth or seventh century AD. (Nasim Khan 1998).

If all these diverse sources are referring to one and the same person, which is quite likely, for, in terms of time they almost all converge in the sixth century, then we must assume that Narendrādityā of Hund (Udabhāṇḍapura inscription) was mistakenly included in the list of the kings of Kashmīr by Kalhaṇa and that, although the silver coin (see Cunningham 1962: 97,110) with the legend "Deva Śāhi Khiṅgila" is of the type generally associated with the Ephthalites, our Khingal ethnically did not belong to that racial group. As a successor to the Ephthalites in Gandhāra he may have simply continued the earlier type and introduced his own name without changing the general pattern.

To this list may be added Khingāla who is mentioned as mahārājādhirāja Śrī Śāhi Khiṅgāla (Tucci 1958) on the Kabul image inscription and Khinkhil or Khinjal of Ya'qūbī (Houtsma 1969:

ii, 479). The Kabul Image inscription has been variously dated from the end of the fifth to the eighth century AD. Depending upon one's own understanding of the problem but Ya'qūbī's Khinjil carries a fixed date. He was contemporary with the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdī (775-785). If the eighth century date of the Kabul image inscription is correct, for which there is no incontestable proof, the Khingāla mentioned therein may be the same as reported by Ya'qūbī. This shows that there were more than one Khingals.

The rise of the Khingal dynasty owed much to the political strife between the Sāsānians and Turks as allies on one side and the Ephthalites on the other. The Turks, after defending the Ephthalites in 558, occupied most of their useful pasturelands in Tukhāristān. By 629, the time of Hsüan Tsang's visit, the Turks had already overrun the entire territory extending from Balkh to the foot of the Hindu Kush Mountains. Curiously, in spite of their successive victories over the Ephthalites and complete dominance over Tukhāristān, the Turks, it seems, never tried to cross over the Hindu Kush to the south into Kāpīśī or south-east into Gandhāra. However their presence in Tukhāristān as a dominant power did have its impact on the course of events in the neighbouring countries. The Ephthalites of Gandhāra were now cut off from their power base in Tukhāristān with the result that their power and prestige quickly faded away. This provided an opportunity to the local *rājās* to rise and make a bid for the throne. It is in this chaos that the Khingal dynasty took its roots.

According to the Tang-shu Jibin (Kāpīśī) consisted of eleven principalities. This is nearly borne out by Hsüan Tsang who says that there were more ten. More interesting is however Hsüan Tsang's statement that he was received at Hund by the king of Kāpīśī suggesting that Kāpīśī and Gandhāra were under one rule. Apparently Kāpīśī served as the summer and Gandhāra as the winter headquarters.

When precisely did the rule of this Kṣattriya dynasty come to an end we do not know for certain. Once again we go back to Chinese literature for information however sketchy it may be. When China under the Tang dynasty finally established its control in Central Asia about 661, we learn from these sources, the position of the governor-general of Kāpīśī was reconfirmed. Who precisely was the king of Kāpīśī at that time is not mentioned. It may however be assumed that Ghar-ilchi, who had succeeded his father in about 653 was still on the throne. He was probably the last in the Khingal line, for, he is not mentioned in any of our sources after 661. Ghar-ilchi's disappearance from subsequent Chinese literature presumably marks the end of the Khingal dynasty.

What precise circumstances led to the decline of the Khingal dynasty is hard to say. The answer may be sought in the gradual deployment of Turkish mercenaries in various parts of the country. Although we do not have the slightest clue in our literary sources regarding the western Turks ever crossing over the Hindu Kush to the south any time between 558 (when the Western Turks defeated the Ephthalites) and 629 (the time of Hsüan Tsang's visit), we do hear of bands of Turkish horsemen in the hilly regions to the east of Sīstān shortly afterwards. Similarly the *Da Tang Xiyu ji* (Vol. 12) suggests, although vaguely, the presence of Turkish tribes in and around Kabul. But these Turks to the south of the Hindu Kush in the first half of the seventh century appear to be quite mysterious and different from the Western Turks. Albīrūnī's story (Sachau 1888: I, 10-14) regarding the rise of the Turkish power in Afghānistān, although greatly marred by occultism, does at least explicitly mention the name of its founder as Barhatigīn. Hyech'o's remarks (AD 726) in this context are very interesting. He records:

In the past this country (Gandhāra) was ruled by a king of Jibin (Kāpīśī). So the 'aye' (father) of the Turkish king was under that Jibin king, Keeping with him the military force and his *ulaqs*. Later, however, as the Turkish military power became strong, he ascended the throne assassinating the king of Jibin (Fuch 1938).

The above statement clearly shows that:

1. The Turks (not necessarily Western Turks) had reached Gandhāra prior to AD 726.
2. The Turk who brought about dynastic change in the Kabul valley first established himself in Gandhāra as a vassal of Kāpiśī.
3. He, while under Kāpiśī, went on increasing his strength till he was powerful enough to give the *coup de grace* to his erstwhile master who was killed and his throne usurped.
4. The aggressor had died prior to 726.
5. The Turkish king of Gandhāra and Kāpiśī at the time of Hyech'o's visit was a son of this aggressor.

Putting the scattered pieces of information from different sources together, one may conclude that a certain Turk, named Barhatigīn², first established himself in Gandhāra sometime in the first half of the seventh century as a vassal of Kāpiśī. During presumably the time of Ghar-ilchi (653-661) when he had already gathered strength, he revolted, killed his erstwhile master and usurped the throne of Kāpiśī. Barhatigīn thus stands at the head of a new dynasty known to history as the Turk Śāhi.

It has recently been suggested that this revolution did not effect the northern part of Jibin (Kāpiśī)—the power base of the Khingāla dynasty—and that kings related to this dynasty continued to rule Jibin long after this fateful event (see Kuwayama 1999: 65). But the evidence adduced in support of this thesis is not conclusive and can be interpreted differently. Moreover, this suggestion ignores the fact that Barhatigīn could ill-afford to leave an enemy in Jibin to stab him at the back particularly at a time when Sīstān-based Muslim armies were pressing wave after wave towards Kabul with hegemonic intentions. A person like Barhatigīn, who appears to have risen to the exalted position of a king by sheer acumen and prudence, could not have lost sight of the ground realities of the time. Neither is the archaeological evidence of Begrām III (last phase) so definite as to unambiguously show continuity of Khingal rule. Begrām as a city no doubt lived on for a while even after changing hands from Khingals to the Turks. There is evidence to show that its decline was gradual (see Ghirshman 1946). But it must have lost its status as a capital city after the dynastic change in the sixties of the seventh century. The evidence of the two little fortress-like structures hardly warrants bold conclusions regarding the part they could play in the defence of the city at the time of crises. These buildings because of their small size could neither defend the city against a multitudinous invading force nor serve as a station headquarters in peacetime. Apparently the buildings served merely as administrative centres and could provide protection to the persons of local commanders/administrators rather than the general public. Albīrūnī's narrative suggests that the Turkish dynasty was inaugurated at Kabul and this is probably where the last Jibin king lost his life and kingdom. In spite of an imminent danger from Sīstān, it seems, Kabul henceforth gained prominence over Begrām to become the chief city of the entire Kabul-Begrām valley.

Like their predecessors the Turk Śāhis continued to send diplomatic missions to China. In our Chinese sources they are referred to as kings of Kāpiśī. But this hardly suggests that the Chinese had blundered regarding the real import of this name. The fact is that the Turks were the real masters of the entire Begrām-Kabul valley and could justifiably be called rulers of Kāpiśī. We do not need to shift the name Kāpiśī from Begrām to Kabul at this stage.

Having assumed sovereignty at Kabul Barhatigīn seems to have moved promptly to bring, through peaceful means or coercion, Kāpiśī-Begrām on one side and Zābulistān on the other under his control. That this precisely was the case is shown by the subsequent course of events. Referring to the time of the Umayyid Caliph Mu'āwiya (661-680) or his son Yazīd (680-683) Ṭabarī (i: 2706)

says that the ruler of Zābulistān was a brother of the Kabul Shāh (Barhatigīn). Similarly in 726 when the Korean monk Hyech'o passed through this area, the ruler of Zābulistān was a nephew of the Kabul Shāh. This shows that Barhatigīn was not content merely with assuming power at Kabul; he may have brought the neighbouring regions as well under his control and appointed his brother in the government of Zābulistān under the Turkish title *Itabar* (a subordinate high official) mentioned by Muslim historians as Rutbīl. The Rutbīl is for the first time mentioned in about 666 by Muslim historians. This then may approximately be the date of the beginning of the Turkish rule.

In about 680 to 683 the Kabul Shāh fled from his brother Rutbīl and approached Salm b. Ziyād at Āmul in Khurāsān accepting his overlordship. This shows that Barhatigīn was still very much alive and enjoyed the throne of Kabul. Why was the Shāh so scared of his brother as to take refuge with his enemy is not known. After his brilliant successes in Zābulistān the Rutbīl may have assumed a threatening attitude toward him, which induced the Shāh to beg the help of his enemy. An agreement was reached between Salm and the Shāh but the precise terms are not known. Apparently the Shāh accepted all terms and conditions in return for help against his own brother. What did Salm get as *quid pro quo* for his help is not known. In consequence arrangements were made for the Shāh to settle down at Āmul (or in the area under the jurisdiction of Āmul, i.e., somewhere to the north of the Hindu Kush). Salm felt quite elated at this development and boastfully reported the matter to Mu'āwiya terming it as a victory over the Shāh. Mu'āwiya did not like the new arrangement. "I feel quite perturbed (concerned/uneasy) and (I think) my nephew (i.e. Salm) should also feel the same way." When asked why, he said "there is a lot of ill-will and bad feeling in Zaranj and Āmul. The people living in the lands between these two places are disloyal and treacherous. They are likely to take advantage of the moment of our weakness and, then, it would be easier for them to capture the territory upto Āmul". This is precisely what happened, Ṭabarī says, after Mu'āwiya's death when the Caliphate plunged into chaos for a few years the Shāh captured the entire territory and became so powerful as to threaten the Rutbīl as well, who had to hide himself somewhere in the country under his control. The story has some inherent discrepancies for the characters involved such as Salm and Mu'āwiya were not acting simultaneously. Salm became governor of Khurāsān for the first time during the reign of Yazīd (680-683) who succeeded Mu'āwiya on the throne. This chronological confusion appears to be due to the narrator's attempt to expatiate on Mu'āwiya's political wisdom to foresee matters. Whatever the case may be there is no doubt that mutual suspicion and mistrust between the two brothers (Barhatigīn and Rutbīl) led to the creation of two independent kingdoms one of which was centred in the Kabul valley and the other in Zābulistān. In 684-85, the Rutbīl, together with a large number of his Turkish allies (or most probably mercenaries) was killed in a battle. He was succeeded by his son³ (Balādhuri 1968: 399) whose name is not known but who is designated by Balādhuri as Rutbīl II.

How long did Barhatigīn live after his brother's death is difficult to say. But he was certainly dead before 726 when Hyech'o saw his son on the throne of Kabul and Gandhāra. Our next question is how long before 726? No clear-cut and distinctly defined answer is available. An approximate answer can however be worked out from Hyech'o's statement that the king of Zābul was a nephew of the Kabul Shāh. We have seen above that Rutbīl I, who was a brother of the Kabul Shāh (Barhatigīn), was killed in 684-85 and was succeeded by his son, Rutbīl II, whose relationship to the Kabul Shāh was that of a nephew. This shows that Hyech'o actually meant Barhatigīn and Rutbīl, for, after the death of Barhatigīn no such relationship could be established. Thus Barhatigīn may have died only shortly before Hyech'o's visit after a long reign of about 60 years. Hyech'o came to know of it only in 726 when he included this information in his travel account. This lapse on the part of Hyech'o has become a source of endless confusion in modern accounts.

Barhatigīn was succeeded by his son who is recognised as 'Khurasan Tegin Shah' of certain coins.⁴ In 739 Khurasan Tegin Shah asked the Chinese emperor to accept his abdication in favour of his son, Fulin Jisuo, which was accepted.

Ya'qūbī (ii: 479) has recorded an isolated incident which might have happened any time in the reign of al-Mahdi (775-785). It is stated that al-Mahdi wrote letters to different kings inviting them to tender their submission to his authority. Among those who complied with his orders were "Khinkhil or Khinjil" (the Kabul Shāh), the Rutbīl (of Zābulistān) and ash-Shīr (of Bāmiyān). Obviously this 'Khinkhil' has nothing to do with the Khingal dynasty mentioned above.

Encouraged by the weakness of the Caliphate at the time of the civil war between Māmūn and Amīn, the Kabul Shāh laid claim to some of the adjoining territories of Khurāsān (Ṭabarī, iii: 815). By the year 815, as Māmūn emerged victorious from the struggle he made up his mind to punish the Shāh whose name is recorded in an extremely disfigured form as "Pati Dumi" (Azraqi: 243) which may in fact be Spalapatideva of the bull and horseman type of silver coins usually assigned to the Hindu Śāhi period. In the ensuing battle, fought somewhere in the Kabul valley, the Shāh suffered a crushing defeat. His crown and throne were carried away to Mecca and placed in the Ka'ba (Azraqi: 243). Pati Dumi was presumably succeeded by al-Kitorman or Lagaturman who was overthrown by his minister Kallar about AD 822 (Rahman 1993: 29-31). This brought an end to the Kabul branch of the family. The Rutbīl however continued a little longer in Zābulistān.

Kallar laid the foundation of a new dynasty and was followed by Sāmantadeva (850-870), Khudarayaka (870-880), Lalliya (880-902), Toramāna/Kamalu (903-921), Bhīmadeva (921-964), Jayapāladeva (964-1002), Ānandapāla (1002-1010), Trilocanapāla (1010-1021) and Bhīmapāla (1021-1026).⁵ In modern historical literature these rulers are referred to as Hindu Śāhis. Like their predecessors the Hindu Śāhis had their winter capital at Hund and summer capital at Kabul.

To what ethnic group did the Hindu Śāhis belong is nowhere recorded except for Albīrūni's ambiguous information that Kallar was a Brahman. This much is however certain that they were neither Kushans, nor Ephthalites or Turks. Their origin must be sought in a local dynasty. They have been variously described as Bhatti Rajputs, Janjuas or simply Brahmans in modern historical literature. But these identifications have no legs to stand upon, for, there is no positive evidence to support them. More precise in this context is the evidence of folklore which even children in the former Hindu Śāhi capital, Hund, still remember after the lapse of more than one thousand years. It is generally believed that the pre-Muslim rulers of Hund were Hoḍis. This evidence was known even before the last century (see Cunningham 1871: 52) but it was generally ignored for lack of any supporting information. This definitely has now been amply supplied by new epigraphical discoveries. We now know for certain that Uḍis/Oḍis were powerful local *rājās* during the Kushan times (Bailey 1980). Moreover the evidence of nomenclature such as Uḍigrām (Uḍi Town) and Uḍiyāna (Uḍi Land) pushes the history of the Uḍis/Oḍis back to the 4th century BC. Several villages bearing the name Uḍigrām still exist in different parts of Gandhāra (Rahman 1999: 16). Uḍigrām in Swat (Greek Ora) was visited by Alexander in 326 BC (Stein 1929: 60). Turning Uḍi into Hoḍi or Rājagadhā⁶ into Rājā Gira is not difficult for a people who have nothing to do with the earlier population; neither do they know their language nor culture. The Uḍis/Oḍis or Hoḍis were therefore an ancient tribe of Gandhāra who were pushed *en bloc* out of their habitat by the present Pathan population in about the 14-15th centuries AD.

The Hindu Śāhis were therefore neither Bhattis, or Janjuas, nor Brahmans. They were simply Uḍis/Oḍis. It can now be seen that the term Hindu Śāhi is a misnomer and, based as it is merely upon religious discrimination, should be discarded and forgotten. The correct name is Uḍi or Oḍi Śāhi dynasty.

The Hindu Śāhis suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the Ghaznavid rulers who gradually pushed them out of Afghānistān and the Indus zone. The last ruler of this dynasty was Bhīmapāla who, having been reduced to the position of a petty chieftain, was killed in 1026 by his own mutinous troops.

Notes

- ¹ *Jiu Tangshu* (vol. 16.5309), *Tungshu* (Vol.20.6241) and *Tang Huiyao* (vol. 99).
- ² Kuwayama (1999: 73) however puts it differently. He considers 'Khorasan Tegin Shāh' as 'the first Turkish ruler and the usurper.' 'He is identifiable with Barha Tegin of Albīrūni and 'aye" of Hyech'o', he further remarks.
- ³ This relationship is known from Balādhuri.
- ⁴ The identification of Wu-San-te'kin-sha of the *Tangshu* with Tegin Shāh of the coins is due to Humbach (1966:i.110). But Humbach goes a step further and connects these names with Vahitigin. This however is not supported by the evidence of coins(see Rahman 1979:181).
- ⁵ For details see Rahman 1979.
- ⁶ Name of the castle occupying a dominant position within the ancient Uḍigrām fort.

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