

Didda, as Agent & as Queen...



Queen Didda ruled from 958- 1003 AD. She was the granddaughter of Bhima, Shahi king of Kabul and daughter of Simharaja, chief of Lohara. This territory which had left its name to the present valley of Lohrin, comprised the mountain districts immediately adjoining Kashmir valley on the southwest and now included in the Poonch district.

King Simharaja gave away his daughter, Didda in marriage to Kshemagupta, who was son of Parvagupta, and succeeded his father in 950 AD as a ruler of Kashmir. This marriage was of considerable political importance in many ways. It appears from the account of chronicle that the Didda began to wield considerable influence of Kshemaguptas from the very beginning. The king was so enamored of his wife that people nick named him 'Diddakshema'. He also married the daughter of Phalguna, his chief minister named Chandrulekha. Unfortunately for him this marriage disturbed the harmony of his harem and caused considerable misunderstandings and heart burning between the two ladies Didda and Chandrulekha, the minister's daughter. While the affairs of state had little chance to stabilize, Kshemagupta died rather suddenly in 958 A.D after having ruled for about 8 year.

Didda as a Regent (958 -972 AD)

When Kshemagupta died following a fever contracted after a hunt in 958 A.D, he was succeeded by his son, Abhimanyu II. As Abhimanyu was still a child, Didda acted as Regent (as was the contemporary norm in the region), and effectively exercised sole power. The younger Abhimanyu was yet a minor and consequently unable to play any leading role in the contemporary politics of Kashmir. His nominal rule of 12 years was marked by rebels and events of considerable importance but in almost all of them, the regent mother Didda figures prominently.

The early years of queen's regency were full of trouble and risks. Didda had been in enmity with Prime Minister Phalguna owing to the jealousy, she had with her rival, his daughter. The old commander in chief Rakka, now poisoned her mind against him saying that he was preparing to usurp the throne. The Phalguna came to know of this and to avoid a mishap to himself left for Poonch. Where he intended to stay until the return of his son, Kardamaraja, who had gone to dispose the ashes of Kshemagupta into the Ganga.

The regent Queen, growing suspicious sent men after him, calling him back, but Phalguna by lying down his sword before a deity and dispelling all fears of a possible revolt, could reach Parnotsa (Poonch) in safety. The exit of the Phalguna from the active political scene saved the valley from the threats of a possible civil war and Didda, who was afraid of his influence and power now began to breathe freely. She got an opportunity to assume full control of the affairs of the court.

Rebellion of Mahiman

Didda had yet to face the rebellion of the Mahiman and Patala, both were king paravaguptas' grandsons, both born to his two daughters & were eager to seize the throne. The queen had ordered to deport them, but they collected a force and arrayed themselves for a battle at Pampore. At this critical hour only Naravahana. Only Naravahana, the able and experienced minister, stood firm in his loyalty to the regent queen and was the main pillar of support to her during this critical hour of trial.

The rebel forces soon marched down to the temple of Padmasvami for a test of fortunes and the queen, anxious for the safety of her minor son, Abhimanyu, went to Suramatha where the young prince was saved from the attackers. At the same time, Didda won over an appreciable section of the rebels led by Brāhmanas through a plentiful offering of gold & peaceful settlement was arrived at between the queen and Mahiman.

On Naravahana, she conferred honours with his advice. But the royal favours, as in the case of others before him, were a prelude to his destruction. Other officers got envious of Naravahana &

the intrigue began to be directed against him. The fickle minded queen was led astray by them and her ears were poisoned against Naravahana. When one day the minister invited her to a feast, she refused to accept the invitation & this and other insults drove the loyal minister to suicide. Didda now wanted a strong minister to assist her in carrying on the government and she recalled Phalguna from Poonch. The minister once hated and dreaded, became the favourite & paramour of this dissolute old woman.

Death of Abhimanyu 2nd

Death of Abhimanyu (11). Abhimanyu (II), who was now growing up with signs of promise, was a helpless spectator of the events around him. Unfortunately, he contracted tuberculosis and died in 972 A.D. Over and above the repression suffered by the people as a result of the misrule of his mother, a devastating fire destroyed a large part of Srinagar during his reign.

Nandigupta (972-73)

Abhimanyu was succeeded by his son, Nandigupta (972-73). The grief of her lost son softened for some time the heart of Didda and she, in expiation of her immoral acts, founded several temples and villages different parts of the kingdom, amongst which were Diddamatha, now known by the name of Diddamar, a mohalla in Srinagar on the right bank of the river near the 7th bridge. But his conduct of her lasted for a year only. She then forgot her grief and her lust for pleasure and power returned. She destroyed Nandigupta by witchcraft as also her another grandson, Tribhuvana (973-75) who had ascended the throne after his brother's death.

Bhimagupta (975-981)

Didda's third and last grandson, Bhimagupta who was yet a child, was installed as king under her guard. Sometime after, the minister Phalguna died. The wicked queen was, out of respect for him, so far concealing her shameless acts but as soon as he died she began to commit excesses with impurity.

Didda as a Queen (981-1003)

The reign-period of Diddä as the full-ledged ruler of the valley soon covered a quarter of a century, yet, since Kalhan had devoted only a few verses in accounting for it, it may reasonably be concluded that, beyond a few unsuccessful rebellions and some minor military engagements, nothing of note took place. However, the closing years of her reign were marked by certain political arrangements which, as shall be presently seen, ushered in the rule of a new dynasty in the valley. Soon after Diddâ had ascended the throne, Tunga took advantage of his intimacy with the queen and, gradually asserting himself, came to occupy the office of the chief minister superseding several others. He also placed his brothers on other responsible posts and thus caused considerable heart-burning amongst the high officers of the state who had been so displaced.

The discontented ministers and officers who were ousted entered into league to raise a rebellion. They brought Vigraharaja, a relative of Didda, into the conspiracy and spread disaffection among the Brahmins inducing them to hold solemn fasts (prayopavasa) against the queen and Tunga. But Tunga's valor and Didda's cunning diplomacy and bribes defeated these attempts. During her reign of 25 years, there were political intrigues, murders, banishments and denunciations.

The chief of Rajouri, Prithvipala, showed signs of unrest and Tunga led an expedition against him. Prithvipala attacked Kashmir troops in a defile and killed two of the ministers. Then Tunga together with his brothers entered Rajouri by another road and set fire to the town. By this successful attack, Prithvipala was to surrender and pay tribute. Tunga, victorious and triumphant, returned to Srinagar and in recognition of the victory was made also commander-in-chief of Didda's army.

Appointment of Sangramaraja as Yuvaraja

Appointment of Sangramaraja as Yuvaraja. It has already been noticed that there was no rightful claimants left to the throne after the murder of the last of the grandsons of Didda. Accordingly, Didda chose Sangramaraja, son of her brother Udayaraja, as her successor and appointed him yuvaraja after a farcical test of intelligence if we are to believe the story related by Kalhan. Thus, with the passing away of the queen in 1003 A.D., the throne of Kashmir passed into the hands of another dynasty-that of the Loharas.