

When a Boy from Cambodia became a Pallava King - India's Shared History with Cambodia and Vietnam

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Abstract

The Hindu cum Buddhist temple at Angkor Wat in Cambodia is the biggest religious temple complex in the world and it speaks of the close ties that India and Cambodia have shared for over two thousand years. This article puts the spotlight on an incidence (and the history behind it) when a Cambodian prince came to India and took up the mantle of the Pallavas in the 8th century AD.

Keywords

Pallava king, Nandivarman II, Indian history

Introduction

In 731 CE, a 12-year-old boy named Pallavamalla from present-day Cambodia undertook a 3000 plus kilometer sea-journey in order to accept a very unusual offer from the noblemen of Kanchipuram, the capital city of the Pallava Kingdom which flourished in present-day Tamil Nadu, India.

The then Pallava ruler, King Parmesh Varman had been killed in a war with the Chalukyan King Vikramaditya II and had died without an heir. The noblemen had, therefore, come up with a unique solution that was acceptable to all. And thus, an invitation had been sent to Champa, a land which was 3450 km and 2 month's sea journey away in present-day Cambodia, to accept the kingship and rule as a Pallava king. This boy, whom history knows as King Nandivarman II, went on to become a very beloved Pallava king and ruled for 64 years till his death. This wonderful story is a key point in highlighting the shared history between India and Cambodia.

Our Shared History

India has always had very good trade relations with countries as far as Arabia in the east and present-day Indonesia in the west. This was due to the connection we had with these countries due to the seas and oceans we shared coupled with the famed shipbuilding capabilities that the Indians possessed. To understand this story, we need to go back a few hundred years from that day in 731 CE.

There are two stories that link India with Cambodia and Vietnam. One of them is a part of the folklore of Cambodia and the second one (which replicates the folklore story) is well documented in both the Pallava kingdom's Indian history as well as in Cambodian history.

As per the folklore, a Brahmanical Hindu king from India named Khambujaraja came to present-day Cambodia which was being ruled by a woman, a mountain warrior named Mero. He defeated her and thereafter wooed and married her. The kingdom that they established was named Khambujadesha and their descendants were the Khmers. Khambujadesha was later known as Kampuchea and is now called Cambodia. The people of Khambuja Desha adopted Hinduism and Lord Vishnu was their main deity.

Many centuries later, Cambodia was ruled by a king who had no sons and, upon his death, one of his daughters took it upon herself to rule the kingdom. A woman ruler was unthinkable and unacceptable in society and this inspired many 'men' and kings to wage a war on that region. The man who finally won the war was the brother of the Pallava king Simha Vishnu Varman (r. 575 to 600 CE). His name was Bhimavarman and he had traveled from Kanchipuram to Champa (present-day Vietnam) to defeat, woo and marry the princess who dared to rule!

This re-established and re-enforced the Hindu rule in Cambodia and for the next 600 years, Hindu rule flourished. After Bhimavarman's rule, all kings in Cambodia took up the suffix 'Varman' after their name. This practice of adding 'Varman' after their name was common among the Pallava kings in India. This practice continued for many centuries, even when the Khmer dynasty was overthrown by kings from Java and Indonesia.

In 731 CE, when King Parmesh Varman died without an heir, the noblemen had turned to Khambujadesha and requested the then ruler of Khambujadesha, the grandson of Bhimavarman to take up the rule of the Pallava dynasty. The King sent his youngest son, Pallavamalla, who was 12 years old at that time, to become the Pallava king. Thus, though King Nandivarman II was not born of the soil, he reversed the situation which his great grandfather had set. Bhimavarman was an Indian who became the king of Cambodia, while Nandivarman II (Pallavamalla) was a Cambodian who became an Indian king!

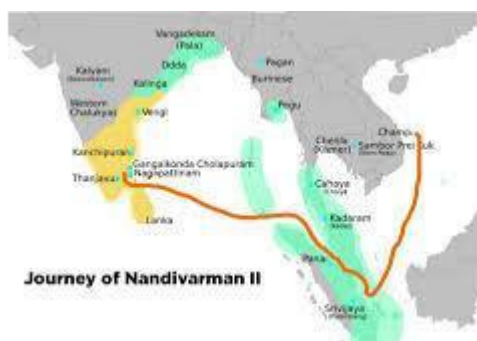


Image 1: Journey was undertaken by Nandivarman II in 731 CE

Initially, his rule was not smooth sailing but with patience, calculated wars and strategic marriage alliances, Pallavamalla or rather King Nandivarman II was able to not only get back his kingdom but also expand it to form the entire Tamilakalam.

Among the Pallava kings, Nandivarman II's name is counted along with Mahendravarman, who definitely was their most powerful ruler. Nandivarman II was a connoisseur of art and literature and contributed majorly in the field of poetry and building of temples, the most famous of these, which still stand are the Kanchipuram Vaikuntha Perumal temple in Kanchi and the Durga temple in Nagarcoil, Kerala.



Image 2: The Vaikuntha Perumal Temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India

He is credited to have composed dance-dramas in Kutiyattam and Chakyar Koothu (dance forms prevalent in present-day Kerala) and also composed poems and dramas in Tamil. His composition "Nandikkalambakam", testifies his erudition in Tamil. The Alwar saint Tirumangai Alwar, who was a contemporary of Nandivarman II dedicates several verses in his 'Divyaprabhandam' to describe successful wars at waged by him and establishing the mighty Tamilkalam in present-day Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.

It is essential that we document and honor these histories and pass them on to future generations so that they too can celebrate our shared past.

References

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2. Nandivarman II, the Pallava Prince from the article under creative commons and retrieved from <https://peoplepill.com/people/nandivarman-ii/>
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Images Used and Their Sources

Image 1:

Description: Journey was undertaken by Nandivarman II in 731 CE

Source: History of the Pallavas by VV Raman

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Image 2:

Description: The Vaikuntha Perumal Temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India

Source: The Magnificent Vaikuntha Perumal Temple of Kanchipuram (Part 3) by Rucchi Pritam

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