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Nanyadeva

By

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Nanyadeva occupies an important place in the Vamshavalis of Nepal. Kings who ruled Nepal during the 17th century have described Nanyadeva as the founder of their dynasty or a prominent ancestor. King Jagajjyoti Malla of Bhaktapur, in a drama called Muditakuvalayashwa written by him in 748 Nepal era (1628 A.D.), has traced his descent from Nanyadeva. Similarly, King Pratapa Malla of Kathmandu, in an inscription dated 769 Nepal era (February 22, 1649 A.D.),² has claimed that his dynasty commenced from King Nanyadeva, who belonged to the same solar dynasty as Ramachandra.

Nanyadeva belonged to the Karnata region in the south. This region includes Mysore and Hyderabad where the Kannad language is spoken. Bengali scholars have admitted that like Nanyadeva the Sena Kings of Bengal came mostly from the Karnata region. In their inscriptions, the Sena Kings described themselves as Karnata Kshatriyas. They described their caste as Brahmakshatriyas. Our Vamshavalis too describe Nanyadeva as a Karnata Kshatriyas.

It is not yet clear how the Senas came to northern India. Similarly, it is difficult to say how Nanyadeva came here. According to available evidence, the Kings of the South attacked northern India many times during the middle of the 11th century. Someshwara, the Chalukya King of Kalyani, Bhim I of Gujarat and Karna of Dahal jointly defeated King Bhoj I and led to the disintegration of the Paramara dynasty of Malwa. Before his father, Someshwara I, died, his son, Vikramaditya VI, invaded Gaur, Kamarup and other areas in northern India. The soldiers of the Chalukya Kings may have entered into northern India during these invasions. In the opinion of a historian of Bengal,³ they started the Sena dynasty in Bengal and the dynasty of Nanyadeva in Mithila.

1. Surya Bikram Gnyawali, Nepal Upatyakako Madhyakalin Itihas (Medieval History of Kathmandu Valley), Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2019 (1962 A.D.), Chapter 3, pp. 28-33.
2. Bhagvanlal Indraji, Twenty-Three Inscriptions From Nepal; Together With Some Considerations on the Chronology of Nepal, Bombay, Education Society's Press, 1885, 53 p. (Translated from Gujarati by G. Buhler), No. 18.
3. R.C. Majumdar (ed.), History of Bengal, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1943, Part I, pp. 205-206.

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According to the Vamshavalis of Nepal, after Nanyadeva of Karnataka conquered northern Bihar, he established his capital at Simraungarh. According to an inscription discovered at Simraungarh,⁴ this event took place in 1019 Shaka era (1097 A.D.). Additional evidence is available in favor of this date. In his drama, *Muditakuvalyashwa*, King Jagajjyoti Malla has given the date of Nanyadeva as 1019 Shaka era. There is other evidence also to prove that Nanyadeva established his capital in Simraungarh that year.

At present, Simraungarh is situated on the border between India and Nepal. According to the treaty signed between Nepal and the British at Sugauli in 1816 A.D., the boundary has been demarcated through Simraungarh. According to Tavernier, a French merchant who visited India during the time of Aurangzeb, the boundaries of the Mughal Empire were situated at a distance of 8 or 9 Kosh 150 years previously. His accounts show that at the time Simraungarh was a part of the Kingdom of Makwanpur. According to the accounts of Capuchin missionaries who visited Tibet through Nepal some time thereafter, Maisi was the last town in Hindustan. The Kingdom of Makwanpur was situated near Maisi. These Capuchin missionaries have stated that the ruins of Simraungarh were situated inside the Kingdom of Makwanpur.

It is difficult to speculate about the condition of Simraungarh during the 11th century on the basis of evidence dating to the 17th and 18th centuries. Even though it is possible that, as at present, Simraungarh was situated inside Nepal at the time when Nanyadeva conquered it and made it his capital.

According to contemporary inscriptions available in south India, the Kings of that region were highly impressed by Nanyadeva's conquest of Simraungarh. In his inscriptions of 1124 A.D. and 1127 A.D., Vikramaditya VI claimed to have conquered Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Gaur, Magadha and Nepal. Someshwara III (1126-38 A.D.), in one of his inscriptions, claimed that he had placed his feet on the heads of the Kings of Andhra, Dravina, Magadha and Nepal. His Minister, Vijjala (1145-67 A.D.) claimed to have conquered Banga, Kalinga, Magadha and Nepal. Scma, son of Vijjala, similarly claimed to have conquered Nepal and Kalinga. However, there is no evidence that these Kings conquered so many kingdoms in northern India. They may have made these claims only on the basis of ordinary raids or journeys. Alternatively, they may have regarded the conquest of Bengal and Simraungarh (Nepal) by the Senas and Nanyadeva as their own.

4. "Mithilatattvavimarsha". (An Account of Facts About Mithila), *Sahitya* (Monthly), October 1958.

However, the Vamshavalis of Nepal betray confusion regarding the time of Nanyadeva as a result of a wrong reading of the Simraungarh inscription mentioned above. According to these Vamshavalis, Nanyadeva attacked Simraungarh in the Nepal Year 9. It is possible that the Nepali Vamshavalis omitted one word (which was used to describe a figure) in this inscription. The Shaka Year 1019 was thus wrongly read as 871.⁵ One mistake gave rise to several. Since the Nepal year commences in the month of Kartik and since a similar system was in vogue in Karnataka, where Nanyadeva came from, it would be easy to ascribe some sort of connection between the founding of the Nepal era and the invasion of Nanyadeva. Subsequently, the Vamshavalis stated that the Nepal era was founded during the reign of Jayadeva and Ananda Malla, because of ignorance about the exact date of these Kings. For this reason, the Vamshavalis stated that the invasion of Nanyadeva occurred during the reign of Jayadeva and Ananda Malla.⁶ The Malla Kings of the 17th century described Nanyadeva as their ancestor. The authors of the Vamshavalis therefore gave the imaginary story of Nanyadeva having conquered and ruled over Bhadgaun. Similarly, the story that the Nairs of the south came to Nepal along with Nanyadeva was due to the similarity between the terms Nepal or Newar and Nair. The Vamshavalis contain many such fanciful accounts. The truth they contain is meager. It is limited to the fact that Nanyadeva, who belonged to Karnataka in the south, entered into Simraungarh in south Nepal. The rest is mere imagination.

Nanyadeva conquered Simraungarh in 216-17 Nepal era (1097 A.D.). Harshadeva was King of Nepal at that time. There is evidence that Harshadeva and his descendants remained independent and sovereign Kings for a long time thereafter. Nowhere do the Vamshavalis of Nepal state that they were defeated. Nanyadeva on his part appear to have established in Simraungarh and brought Mithila in the south under his rule. It is clear that his conquest of Simraungarh did not have any repercussion in the north. There is no truth in the claim that the Kings of Nepal acknowledged the suzerainty of Nanyadeva. The Malla Kings of divided Nepal may have traced their dynasty from Nanyadeva. However, Nanyadeva had no political relationship of any kind with Nepal. He was King in a Tarai region on the border of Nepal. It is natural that in those times, when transport facilities were not available, Nanyadeva should have left no impact on Nepal across the mountains.

5. The verse containing the date in the Simraungarh inscription as published in the Sahitya reads as follows: "Nandendu-Shunya-Shashi-Sammita-Shakavarsh". The words, translated into figures, refer to Nanda (9), Indu (1), Shunya (0) and Shashi (1), or 1019 Shaka. However, a Vamshavali in the possession of the author gives the following reading: "InduschaSoma-Vasu-Sammita-Shakavarsh", or Indu (1), Soma (1) and Vasu (8), that is, 811 Shaka. It is clear that the word "Nanda" was omitted during transcription.

6. Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha, Bharatiya Prachin Lipi Mala. (Ancient Indian Scripts), pp. 180-181.

Notes On The History Of Morang District-I

The Kingdom of Vijayapur was conquered by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in July 1774. This kingdom was situated between the Koshi river in the west and the Tista river in the east. It possessed territories both in the hill regions (the modern districts of Dhankuta, Panchthar, Taplejung, Terhathum and Sankhuwa-Sabha) and the Tarai (the modern districts of Morang, Sunsari and Jhapa).

After it was annexed by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Kingdom of Vijayapur was split into two administrative units with headquarters in Chainpur and Morang, for the hill territories and the Tarai respectively.

The 1770 Famine

On the eve of the Gorkhali conquest of Morang, the area appears to have been devastated by famine. Nepali source materials are not available to indicate the extent of the devastation in Morang, but conditions across the border, in Purnea, are revealing. According to one source:¹

The famine of 1770 was an "appalling spectre on the threshold of British rule in Bengal."² There was no such widespread devastating famine in Bengal in the seventeenth century or in the first half of the eighteenth. ... The famine did not rage with equal fury in all districts. Ducarel, supervisor of Purnea, reported that two lakhs of people perished in that district. One thousand died in three days after his arrival. He wrote, "The famine continued for about twelve months in a degree of severity hardly to be paralleled in the history of any age or country." The soil of Purnea being very dry and wells being so few the district depended entirely on regular rainy seasons. The least failure of the rains subjected the labourer to the loss of his harvest. The famine therefore raged in Purnea with greater severity than in any other district in Bengal. We can form some idea of the fury of the famine in Purnea from the report received some time after the famine ended that only five were left of the 150 people who prepared Chunam in the Parganas bordering on Purnea.³ The supervisor

1. Narendra Krishna Sinha, The Economic History of Bengal From Plassey To The Permanent Settlement, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962, Vol. II, pp. 48-55.

2. Bengal at that time included Bihar and Orissā.

3. Proceedings of The Controlling Council, VI, 20 December, 1771, III, 8 July 1771; Select Committee Proceedings, 28 April, 1770.

wrote in April 1770, "In many of the Parganas one-half of those who were to pay the revenues and cultivate the lands will unavoidably perish with hunger whilst those remaining by being obliged to purchase their subsistence at least 500 per cent dearer than usual will be drained of that little stock which is the only resource for future revenue and cultivation." ... The famine swept away nearly half the people of Purnea.

The Administrative System

According to Francis Hamilton, "the Mogul system of finance had been completely introduced" in Morang district during the eighteenth century. Actually, it was the pre-Mughal or Pathan systems which had been limited by the Kings of Vijayapur in their Tarai territories.⁴ A general description of the system of revenue administration in the eastern Tarai districts, including Morang, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century is given in: "Revenue Functionaries In The Eastern Tarai Districts", Ragmi Research Series, Vol. 2, No. 5, May 1, 1970, pp. 107-109. The following document contains additional information in this field for Morang district:-

Appointment Of Narapati Das

From King Rana Bahadur Shah,

To Narapati Das.

We hereby appoint you in the offices of the Subba and the Bakshi in Vijayapur, in the regions situated east of the Koshi river up to Bhötgaun. You are already functioning as Peshkar in Morang and as Kanugoye in all Pargannas. We hereby reconfirm your appointment with effect from Baisakh Badi 1, 1837 (Vikrama). With due assurance, draw a sum of Rs 101 as monthly emoluments as detailed below for 3 clerks (Nausinda) in the office of the Subba, 2 clerks in the office of the Bakshi, and 5 clerks in the office of the Peshkar, thus making a total of 10 clerks.

For the office of the Kanugoye in Morang district, appoint clerks (Nausinda) yourself and have the official work performed. Do what is necessary to insure economy for the government and welfare for the ryots. Submit accounts at the end of every year. Appropriate the perquisites of your office, in addition to the fees pertaining to the offices of the Peshkar and the Kanugoye, at the rates prevalent in Saptaria. Also appropriate the fees pertaining to the office of the Patuwari in Morang district.

4. cf. R. Po Tripathi, Some Aspects Of Muslim Administration, Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1964, Chapters VII-X.

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ParticularsClerks (Nausinda) In The Office Of The Subba

<u>Name</u>	<u>Monthly Emoluments</u>
1. Narapati Das	Rs 12
2. ...	Rs 9
3. ...	Rs 11

Clerks (Nausinda) In The Office Of The Bakshi

1. ...	Rs 11
2. ...	Rs 9

Clerks (Nausinda) In The Office Of The Peshkar Of Morang

1. ...	Rs 11
2. ...	Rs 11
3. ...	Rs 9
4. ...	Rs 9
5.	Rs 9

Total - 10 Nausindas Rs 101

Kartik Badi 1, 1837 Vikrama,
Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 36, pp. 482-483.

Notes

This document indicates that there were mainly two authorities in charge of the district administration: the Subba and the Bakshi. However, the functions performed by these authorities, and the extent of their jurisdiction, are not clear. In India, the "Bakshi" or "Bukhshee" was

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"a paymaster, an officer whose especial duty it was also to keep an account of all disbursements connected with military tenures, as those of Mansabdars and Jagirdarss Paymaster of the forces. Under the Mogul system, frequently one with the Commander-In-Chief." The same source defines "Bakshi" as "a superior magistrates A superintendent of revenue officers."⁵

Narapati Das, who was already Peshkar, Kanugoye and Patuwari, has been appointed also as Nausinda in the office of the Subba, but his special status and responsibility is evident. Definitions of the terms Kanugoye and Patuwari have been given in the Regmi Research Series article mentioned above.

A Peshkar, in India, was "an agent, a deputy, a manager in general for a superior or proprietor, or one exercising in revenue and custom officers a delegated authority; in Bengal the native officer in a judge's or collector's office, next in rank to the Sarrishtadar; a subordinate officer, who is employed to keep the accounts, a subordinate revenues officer."⁶ In the eastern Tarai districts of Nepal, there is evidence that the Peshkar functioned as a judicial officer.⁷

Navis or Navisandah is a Persian term which denotes "a writer, a clerk, a secretary, a transcriber."⁸

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5. H.H. Wilson, Glossary Of Judicial And Revenue Terms And Of Useful Words Occurring In Official Documents Relating To The Administration Of The Government Of British India From The Arabic, Persian, Hindustani, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Vriya, Morathi, Guzarathi, Telugu, Karnata, Tamil, Malagalam and Other Languages, London: W.H. Allens Co. Ltd, 1855, p. 49.
 6. H.H. Wilson, op. cit. p. 415.
 7. Appointment of Bhatan Das As Peshkar In Saptari And Mahottari, Baisakh Badi 1, 1836. Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 5, p. 623; Appointment Of Khelapati Das As Peshkar In Saptari and Mahottari, Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 36, sp. 505. Also: Vol. 36, n. 478 (Bara district: s Bhadra Sudi 1, 1834)s
 8. H.H. Wilson, op. cit. p. 372.

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Disbursement. Of Revenues From Morang District

1. A sum of Rs 6000 against revenues from Morang district, with its headquarters at Vijayapur, for the (Vikraman) year 1854 is hereby received through Garbhu and credited to the Toshakhana (Treasury) as follows. It shall be debited during audit of accounts.

Rs 5000 against installment due on Baisakh Badi 13, 1854.

Rs 1000 (advanced to) Sarvanjit Pande on Jestha Badi 1, 1854 to meet royal palace and commercial expenses during his visit to Lhasan

... 1854 Vikraman

Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 25, p. 378.

2. A sum of Rs 4986 and 14 annas against Ijara revenues from Morang district, with its headquarters at Vijayapur, for the (Vikrama year) 1853 is hereby received through Subba Dhaukal Singh and credited to the Toshakhana (Treasury) as follows:

Chaitra Badi, 1853	...	Rs 500
Chaitra Badi 4, 1853	...	Rs 250
Chaitra Sudi 2, 1853	...	Rs 80
Chaitra Sudi 3, 1853	...	Rs 300
Chaitra Sudi 11, 1853	...	Rs 250
Total	...	Rs 1,380

Gifts And Donations Made By His Majesty

To Gagalyani Bhandari	...	Rs 60
To Biseshwar Lohani	...	Rs 60
To Jotikar Jaisi	...	Rs 60
To Khagapati Labha	...	Rs 100
To Panda	...	Rs 10

Contd...

To Dhya	...	Rs 15
To Ramachandra	...	Rs 5
To Darhi Khatal	...	Rs 20
To Mangal Labha, record- keeper of fodder supplied for bulls	...	Rs 50
To Rajaram Kadyal	...	Rs 30
To son of Adai Sahadeo Padhya	...	Rs 100
Total		Rs 500

Gifts And Donations Made By Her Majesty

To Jamuna	...	Rs 20
To Krishna Simha	...	Rs 7
To Dhani Ketu	...	Rs 7½
To Nainradha	...	Rs 5
Total		Rs 59½

Gift From Senior Nani Saheb
to Narayan Singh Chitrakari

... Rs 6½

Gifts And Donations Made By Junior Nani Saheb

To Madmuketi	...	Rs 15
To Brahman offering Bel leaves	...	Rs 12
To Guhyeshwari Datta	...	Rs 16
To Naul Sing	...	Rs 15

Contd...

230.

To Brahman while gifting book	...	Rs 5
To Alaka Mai	...	Rs 3
To Jawani Ketī	...	Rs 4
To Meghya	...	Rs 10
To Sunaketi	...	Rs 10 $\frac{1}{2}$
To Thagchheketi	...	Rs 7
To Laxmiketi	...	Rs 4
Total	...	Rs 101 $\frac{1}{2}$

Wages of Rupanarayan Chhipi employed to dye cloths by Toshakhana ... Rs 78 $\frac{1}{4}$

Wages of four persons employed to powder medicines at Bhandarkhal, from Marga Sudi 1 to Falgun Sudi 15 ... Rs 42n

Price of lac bangles paid to Pashupati Lahakhya ... Rs 71 $\frac{1}{2}$ r

To Mahindra Guru, in lieu of revenue from 3 khets among a total of 5 khets ... Rs 75

Maternity expenses to Gujya Ketī ... Rs 2

Feed of government falcons and Pristharaj (?) (birds?) ... Rs 15

To Nurse Bidhwa, in lieu of revenues from 3 khets ... Rs 75

Contd...

To Nurse Jogmaya, doo	...	Rs 75
To Bhanu Padhya Brahmani, in lieu of revenues from 2 <u>khets</u>	...	Rs 50
Wedding expenses of grand- daughter of Melama Vaidya	...	Rs 40
To Balabhadra Pandit, in lieu of revenue from <u>khuwa</u> lands	...	Rs 50
To Jasya Khawas, in lieu of revenue from <u>1 khet</u> assigned as Jagir	...	Rs 95
To Brinda Bhandari, do. <u>1 khet</u> and <u>60 muris</u>	...	Rs 40
Balance due to Nehal Bahu- rupi from reward granted during Falgun festival	...	Rs 24
For purchase of goats during Bhairavi festival through Laxman Chaudhari	...	Rs 212
To wet-nurse of Dhan Sabeab, in lieu of revenue from 3 <u>khets</u>	...	Rs 75
To nurse do. ? <u>khets</u>	...	Rs 50
Emoluments of artisans em- ployed for stone-work at Jagannath temple:		
To Harikrishna Khawas, in lieu of revenue from 2 <u>khets</u>	...	Rs 50
To Hridayanarayan, do.	...	Rs 50
To Lalu Rangrej as wages for dyeing cloth during Fagu festival	...	Rs 20

Contd...

Expenses for Chudakarma
and Annaprashan ceremonies
of four children of Rana
Simha Shahi

... Rs 150

Farewell expenses for clerk
(Navisinda) of Bhawani Das
and for Krishnaram Das

... Rs 75

Wedding expenses for Kasaun-
bagalya (?) Brahman

... Rs 40

To Bhole Masalchi
(spice-vendor)

... Rs 25

Cost of five guns of Hiralal

... Rs 60

Emoluments of Laxminarayan
Nau (barber)

... Rs 10

Emoluments of Narahari Vaidya
(Physician), in lieu of
revenue from 3 khets

... Rs 75

Cost of 90 tolas of attar,
4 swords and one pair of
cocks presented to His Majesty
by Dhur Patari

... Rs 277½

Cost of medical treatment
of the Junior Princess
(Kanchha Nani Saheb), through
Subedar Ram Singh

... Rs 47

Ritual offering (Dakshina)
made during religious cere-
monies performed by the
Senior Princess (Jetha Nani
Saheb), through Purohit
(Priest) Devidas

... Rs 519½

Emoluments of Kuhlmi Gurung,
in lieu of revenue from
3 khets

... Rs 55

Contd...

Emoluments of Banshu Khawas in lieu of revenue from 1 khet to meet the short fall in 10 khets assigned in Chisapani	...	Rs 25
Final installment of salary due to Sangamlal Chitrakari (painter) belonging to the Madhesh (i.e. India)	...	Rs 239
For religious functions and dances at various places, through Dittah Laxmi Narayan:-		
Expenses incurred in 12-year functions at Sikhali-Dauta (temple)	...	Rs 94
Cost of cane required for chariot of Itkhwal Machhindra- nath	...	Rs 10
Ritual donation (Dan) made during Chandrayan (fast) by (the prince of) Salyan, nephew (of His Majesty)	...	Rs 5
do. by Sir Bahadur Shah	...	Rs 13
Emoluments in lieu of revenue from 4 khets to Gairda Bhaju and Kisi Bhaju, attendants at the place where Parthi- Puja was performed	...	Rs 100
Total	...	Rs 4,866 and 14 annas.

Jestha Sadi 13, 1854 Vikrama,
Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 25, pp. 382-385.

The Indraajatra Festival^x

By

Baburam Acharya

Indraajatra is probably the oldest festival of Nepal. Surprisingly, there exists one remarkable similarity between the May Pole festival, which is observed on the first day of May every year in England as well as in other parts of Europe, and the Indraajatra festival. In both festivals, people erect a tall pole around which they dance and sing. However, in Europe the top of the pole is decorated with ribbons, while buntings are used in Nepal. This difference does not mean much, however. The striking similarity between the May Pole festival and Indraajatra festival indicates that the European race of the ancient age and the nomadic Indo-European race, the ancestors of the Aryans of India and Iran, used to observe an identical festival at one stage, but that it began to be celebrated in the course of time in varying forms under the influence of different climates and ideas when it moved to Europe and thence to India. People used to celebrate the festival even when they lived the life of nomads. Dancing and singing were the main features of that festival. Since the festival could be enjoyed only if it was celebrated in moon light, people in several countries, including Nepal, used to celebrate it accordingly. In common with an Indian practice, the Indraajatra festival commences in Nepal also from the twelfth day of the bright half of the month and terminates on the full moon day. In Europe, the practice of observing the lunar calendar has long been given up and all festivals are observed there on the basis of solar months. So no lunar night has to be selected for observing any festival in Europe. The first day of the month of May is prescribed as the date for the observance of the May Pole festival, because it is the oldest festival in Europe.

The Rigveda, the oldest scripture of the Hindu Aryans who had settled down in the Indus and Gangetic plains, and who were one of the three branches of the Aryan race, and the Avesta of the Iranian Aryans, must be consulted if we are to trace the origin of the Indraajatra festival. In both scriptures, Varuna, Indra Agni, and other gods are mentioned. This is so because the Hindu Aryans and the Iranian Aryans were two branches of the same family. However, these two branches were hostile to each other. While the Rigveda describes Indra as the greatest of all gods, the Avesta presents him as a demon. One-fourth of the Rigveda is devoted to the praise of Indra. Likewise, the Hindus regarded as god everybody presented as demon in the Avesta.

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The Hindu Aryans had just taken to cultivation in the Bindhu-Sutlej plains. Peasants needed rains, but frequent drought hampered their agricultural operations. They therefore conjectured the existence of a demon named Vritra, who was responsible for drought. The Hindu Aryans then thought that they needed a god who was powerful enough to kill that demon. They accordingly imagined of the existence of a god named Indra. The Rigveda depicts Indra as a god armed with a thunderbolt and fond of liquor called Somarasa. In that age, people did not think in terms of heaven, earth and hell. The Rigveda therefore mentioned the existence of three words, namely the earth (prithvi) space (Antariksha) and the abode of gods (Diva). According to legend, Diva was the abode of Indra, who was said to have vowed to kill Vritra for the benefit of the Aryans. People used to throw Somarasa into the fire in large quantities as an offering to Indra, as they believed that any food thrown into the fire in the name of any god would reach him.

According to the story related in the Vedas, Indra, accompanied by other gods including Vayu, and carrying a thunderbolt, would swiftly attack Vritra and extend assistance to the Aryans in their fight against the non-Aryans. Hence Indra was regarded not only as the god of rains but also as the god of war. Among the Hindu Aryans, Vaishyas were in the majority, and the number of Kshatriyas or warriors, was very small. Both needed the support of Indra. Vaishyas sowed seeds after the commencement of the rainy season. When the seeds started sprouting, it was natural that peasants should be filled with joy. They thus could not help expressing gratitude to Indra, the god of rains. It therefore became essential for them to start a festival. A few Brahmins, who performed religious rituals, took interest in this festival, but Kshatriyas took part in it because Indra was after all the god of war. Although the Vedas and the Brahmin scriptures do not contain any reference to this Indrajatra festival, the fact that the literature belonging to the Puranic age describes it as having attained a perfect stage constitutes evidence that the festival dates back to the Vedic age.

During the Puranic age that followed the Vedic period, the existence of heaven, earth and hell was imagined, and importance was given to Brahma, Bishnu and Maheshwaras. Images of Bishnu and Maheshwaras were made and worshipped. Less importance was given to Indra. He was depicted as an obedient servant of Brahma, Bishnu and Maheshwaras. However, no mythologist had the courage to divest Indra of his position as the King of the gods (Devaraja). In fact, Kalidas, a popular poet of the Puranic age, has enlogized Indra. In his Meghaduta, Kalidas has said that King Dasharath would bow down only before Indra when he was engaged in religious performances with the motive of attaining the position of a god.

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Indradhwaja was regarded as the symbol of Indra. Indra dwelt in a region higher than space (Antariksha). This explains why people considered it necessary to install a very tall pole while observing the Indra-jatra festival. Sculpture had already progressed during the Puranic age. Golden idols of Indra and his wife (Indrani) were therefore made and placed on the foot of the pole for purposes of worship.

The Vishnudharmottar Purana not only describes the procedure of installing the Indradhwaja, but also contains an interesting story. The story runs as follows: When defeated by the demons (Asuras), the gods, led by Indra, approached Vishnu, who was then dwelling on the Ocean of Milk (Ksheera-Samudra) with a plea for succor, Vishnu then gave them a flag and said, "If you go to the battlefield with this flag, the Asuras are sure to get defeated." The gods acted accordingly and defeated the Asuras. Indra, pleased over this victory, worshipped the flag with much fanfare. He then offered the flag to King Vasu of Chedi and said, "Famine will never break out, the threat of the enemy will disappear and there will be many other benefits to the State if its King observes the festival of worshipping Indradhwaja." Vasu was able to attain prosperity and vanquish his enemy because he followed the instructions of Indra. This story indicates that this festival used to be observed enthusiastically all over India when it was ruled by Hindus.

With the advent of Islam, the Hindu Kings gradually lost their consciousness, with the result that the importance of this festival declined. Although Muslims failed to dominate Nepal during the medieval period, yet the country was split into numerous tiny states. This festival was observed in each of these small states, albeit on a small scale. In Kathmandu, it attained an advanced stage during the rule of King Pratap Malla (1698-1731 Vikram). He renamed the Indradhwaja festival as Indrajatra, and celebrated it on a big scale. This is proved by inscriptional evidence. In India, it was the practice to install the pole on the eighth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadra and worship it for 7 or 8 days.

In 1809 (1742 A.D.), Jaya Prakash, the last Malla ruler of Kathmandu, observed the Kumari festival simultaneously with the Indrajatra festival. The practice of worshipping a virgin girl to be chosen from among the daughters of a Buddhist as the symbol of Goddess Kumari had been started during the reign of Pratap Malla. Jaya Prakash Malla introduced two Kumara (virgin boys) to be worshipped as the symbols of God Bhairava. They were taken round the town on separate chariots at the time of the Indrajatra festival. Indrajatra thus became a more merry festival.

While the Indradhwaja festival, being observed by the Hindu Aryans for the past 5000 years has already vanished from India, it continues to be celebrated on a national level in our country. This is a matter of pride for us.

King Prithvi Narayan Shah's Letters To Pandit
Rajivalochan and Parashuram Thapa

1. From King Prithvi Narayan Shah to Pandit Rajivalochan,

Greetings. All is well here and we want the same there. News of your well-being will make us feel happy. We have received your letter and noted its contents. The news here is good.

You have written that military action be commenced during the coming Jivapaksha.² You have advised well. But since we are about to commence action in Changu and Sankhu, we will not be able to commence action effectively there. We shall not remain silent if action is started from there. We shall act according to circumstances. If action is started on two fronts, it may not be effective from this side.

You have written: "I have represented here before my lord that Kaski has nowhere to go besides Gorkha." You have thus made a correct representation before our brother. This is good. Where can Gorkha go besides Kaski? Even if Kaski does not commence action today, it will do so tomorrow, thereby benefitting Gorkha. Even if Gorkha does not commence action today, it will do so tomorrow, thereby benefitting Kaski. But (it is an objective of State policy) to serve the interests of both Gorkha and Kaski. Even if action is not commenced today, it may be commenced tomorrow. Circumstances may create difficulties, but it is our desire to reduce Lamjung and fulfill the ambition of our brother.

You have made a request to the effect that the family of the Kaji be given shelter. But had we done so, the family of the Kaji would have turned against him. We therefore could not do so. The Kaji has behaved improperly with us and escaped. We let his family depart because we did not want to create a rift between the Kaji and his family.

1. Nayaraj Pant (et.al), Shri 5 Prithvinarayan Shah Ko Upadesh (Teachings of King Prithvi Narayan Shah), Lalitpur: Jagadamba Prakashan, n.d., Part 3, pp. 932-941.

2. An auspicious moment calculated on the basis of the position of the imaginary planet Rahu vis-a-vis other planets.

You are living at the feet of our brother. You too are there, and we shall send respectable persons from here. Persuade the Kaji to return here. What more to wise people ?

Saturday, Magh Badi 9,
Camp: Madi, Nuwakot.

Notes

This letter was sent by Prithvi Narayan Shah to Pandit Rajivalochan in Kaski. It does not mention the year: Most of the documents issued during the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah and earlier mention only the month, the date and the day of the week. It is therefore necessary to ascertain the year in which this letter was written on the basis of the events mentioned in it.

The letter refers to plans for the conquest of Sankhu and Changu. Prithvi Narayan Shah wrested Nuwakot of King Jaya Prakash Malla of Kantipur in 1801 Vikrama. He then started making preparations for the conquest of Kathmandu Valley. There were mutual hostilities among Gorkha, Kathmandu and Patan because of their contiguous boundaries. Prithvi Narayan Shah's enmity towards Kathmandu and Patan intensified when he annexed part of their territories. Prithvi Narayan Shah wanted to maintain amicable relations with Bhaktapur as this would enable him to exert pressure on Kathmandu and Patan. This is the reason why he used to help Bhaktapur to fight against Kathmandu, and also gave to Bhaktapur a part of the conquered territories. Taking advantage of the internal conflicts of Jaya Prakash Malla, Prithvi Narayan Shah occupied Sankhu and Changu in 1803 Vikrama with the help of King Ranajit Malla of Bhaktapur. But he could not retain possession of these villages for long. Soon the Gorkhalis were driven out of Sankhu and Changu.

King Siddhi Narayan Shah of Kaski was a contemporary of Prithvi Narayan Shah.

In the beginning, the Gorkhalis strengthened their friendship with Lamjung in order to fight against Kaski. But as soon as Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered Nuwakot, Lamjung became hostile. The result was that Prithvi Narayan Shah was forced to fight on the western front too from time to time and was unable to march with assurance towards the east. In this letter, Prithvi Narayan Shah has tried his best to win over Kaski, promising to help it in annexing the territories of Lamjung. Rajivalochan made a request to the effect that Gorkha should commence action jointly with Kaski against Lamjung during the coming Jivapaksha. Prithvi Narayan Shah, however, refused to do so on the ground of his projected attack on Sankhu and Changu. He also tried to persuade Kaski to keep on waiting, saying: "Even if Gorkha does not commence action today, it will do so tomorrow, thereby benefitting Kaski."

It has not been possible to identify the Kaji who is mentioned in the letter. It appears that the Kaji committed some crime and fled to Kaski, while his family remained in Gorkha. Rajivalochan requested that the Kaji's family be detained in Gorkha. But Prithvi Narayan Shah considered it inadvisable to do so, and suggested that the Kaji be persuaded to return to Gorkha.

The letter thus appears to have been written on Magh 6 (or Magh Badi 9) 1802 Vikrama.

1. From King Prithvi Narayan Shah To Parashuram Thapa,

Greetings. All is well here and we want the same there. News of your well-being will make us feel happy. The news here is good.

Yesterday, I sent an order through Vidyapati Ujha directing that the Jyami be played alive. I hereby solemnly pledge that I shall protect your life and property and provide you with means of livelihood. Come to us. I shall also restore your Birta lands. If I do not fulfill this pledge, may the evil eyes of Shri Gorakhnath fall on me. If I fulfill this pledge, may the gracious eyes of Shri Gorakhnath fall on me. If you do not come here when summoned, you will see what happens. What more to wise people.

Monday, Bhadra Badi 2,
Camp: Nuwakot.

Notes

This letter was sent by Prithvi Narayan Shah to Parashuram Thapa from Nuwakot.

Prithvi Narayan Shah ascended the throne of Gorkha in 1799 Vikrama. He was 20 years of age at that time. From the very year of his accession to the throne, he started making efforts to expand his Kingdom. Since Lamjung and other principalities in the west were quite strong, he considered it more advisable to move towards the east. He therefore decided to occupy Nuwakot.

At that time, Jayanta Rana, a general of King Jaya Prakash Malla of Kathmandu, was in command of Nuwakot. The Gorkhalis were defeated by the troops led by Jayanta Rana. Prithvi Narayan Shah repeated his attempt to occupy Nuwakot in 1801 Vikrama. He tried to win over Jayanta Rana to his side. Jayanta Rana was previously a military commander of Gorkha. However, Jayanta Rana replied that he would remain faithful to Jaya Prakash Malla. Prithvi Narayan Shah therefore decided to occupy Nuwakot by force of arms. On Aswin 15, 1801 Vikrama, he suddenly attacked Nuwakot. The Gorkhalis came out victorious in this battle. Shankhamani Rana, a son of Jayanta Rana,

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fell fighting in the battle Jayanta Rana was at that time staying at Balkot, east of Nuwakot. A few days later, Prithvi Narayan Shah occupied Balkot also. Jayanta Rana was captured and was later flayed alive.

Gyami is a Magar clan. The letter informs Parashuram Thapa that Jayanta Rana had been flayed alive.

Parashuram Thapa was a brother of Kashiram Thapa. He was previously a military commander of King Ranajit Malla of Bhaktapur. After the Gorkhalis occupied Nuwakot, King Jaya Prakash Malla of Kathmandu made efforts to drive them out. He began to look for a capable military commander to undertake the task. He selected Kashiram Thapa for this purpose and sent him to reoccupy Nuwakot with a large force under his command. This report created alarm among the Gorkhalis. But the Gorkhali troops, whose courage had been bolstered by the firm assurances of Prithvi Narayan Shah, fought bravely and therefore emerged victorious. Kashiram Thapa escaped to his home in Palanchok. Jaya Prakash Malla therefore became furious with him. Later, Kashiram Thapa and his followers were assassinated at the instance of Jaya Prakash Malla while they were performing religious ceremonies at Deopatan.

When he heard that his brother, Kashiram Thapa, had been assassinated in this manner, Parashuram Thapa decided to take revenge upon Jaya Prakash Malla. He tried to invite the Gorkhalis and bring about the end of Jaya Prakash Malla. It was against this background that a plan was formulated jointly by Gorkha and Bhaktapur to wrest Sankhu and Changu from Kantipur.

The letter gives many assurances to Parashuram Thapa in an attempt to persuade him to come over to Gorkha. But no agreement could be effected, and Prithvi Narayan Shah later wrote in his Dibya Upadesh that he was betrayed by Parashuram Thapa.

Since this letter informs Parashuram Thapa that Jayanta Rana had been flayed alive, it must have been written after 1801 Vikram. There is evidence that it was actually written on Bhadra 9 (Bhadra Badi 30), 1804 Vikram.

(S.B.M.)