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Regmi Research (Private) Ltd,  
Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Matwali Chhetris<sup>1</sup>

By

Dor Bahadur Bisht.

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Originally, I held the view that Chhetris comprised the second place after Brahmans, in the caste system as it is generally understood, irrespective of its mythological and historical background. Although it is not accepted that all communities except Muslims can be divided into "four Varnas". I was one of those who believed that Brahmans and Chhetris are distinct categories in the caste hierarchy. However, the results of recent research should help us to eschew such prejudices. Chhetris are divided into different sub-groups such as Thakuri, Khas and Khatrri, just as Brahmans are divided into Purviya, Kumai and Jaishi. This is known to all. But it is only recently that people have come to know that Matwali Chhetris too form a sub-group of Chhetris.

The Muluki Ain (Legal Code) which was in force during the Rana regime described Matwalis as those who customarily consumed liquor. It placed Chhetris above Matwalis in the caste hierarchy. The very term Matwali Chhetri therefore sounded incongruous. But in the light of what I have personally seen and heard in the course of my tour of Jumla, Tibrikot and Mugu districts, which form parts of the Karnali zone, I deem it necessary to present the following facts.

In the course of my visit to Tibrikot district, I visited the Tibrikot District Panchayat Office. One of the District Panchayat members gave his name as "Saune Bisht". After telling him that my surname too was "Bisht" he casually remarked that "we are brothers". But he pointed out that he was a Matwali Chhetri. There were other Matwali Chhetris too on that occasion. They told me that Matwali Chhetris had several surnames such as Bohra, Kathayat, Thapa, Rokaya, Bisht, Budha, Budhathoki and Bhandari. The Matwali Chhetri population comprises 1,000 families in 24 villages in Tibrikot district. The breakdown is as follows:-

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1. Dor Bahadur Bisht, "Matwali Chhetris" (Liquor-Drinking Chhetris), Pragna (Nepali, Quarterly, published by the Royal Nepal Academy), Year I, No. 1, 2027 (April 1970), 85-90 pp.

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Village			No. of Families			Village			No. of Families		
1.	Dhorezen	-	38			13.	Chauda	-	60		
2.	Rini	-	61			14.	Choom	-	45		
3.	Patmara	-	67			15.	Huri	-	25		
4.	Bata	-	50			16.	Mhari	-	16		
5.	Lhorpa	-	50			17.	Urgu	-	30		
6.	Japan	-	16			18.	Muduli	-	15		
7.	Lamri	-	22			19.	Guthi	-	52		
8.	Tirkhu	-	36			20.	Kundi	-	37		
9.	Lhomo	-	72			21.	Mani	-	32		
10.	Nalphi	-	60	-		22.	Pahadigaun	-	65		
11.	Pirya	-	100			23.	Mandara	-	11		
12.	Garigaun	-	38			24.	Dillikot	-	20		

These families comprise nearly 50% of the total population of the district. Matwali Chhetris far outnumber sacred thread-wearing Chhetris. Matwali Chhetris are simply called Matwalis. They do not wear the sacred thread, and they consume liquor, beer and chicken, but not pork. Saune Bisht told me that several of his close relatives wear the sacred thread, but that he and many others do not do so because the district is too cold to permit the observance of the religious rituals which this act obligates. Moreover, they are prohibited from consuming liquor once they start wearing the sacred thread. They also stated that the Kalyal Kings of Jumla used to permit any one who pleased them or killed tigers or captured wild horses to wear the sacred thread.

All the people that I came across when I reached Patmara and Bumra on my way to Mugu Gam-Gadhi were Matwali Chhotris. I also met sacred thread-wearing Chhetris at Lumsa village, while I was going to Mugu village, which lies on the border. Here too most of the local Matwali Chhetris maintained that they were not interested to wear the sacred-thread because of the limitations of the climate as well as of commensal taboos. It was very difficult

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to find Brahman priests who could solemnize sacred thread investiture ceremonies. Some people who frankly said that they did not want to wear the sacred thread because their forefathers did not do so. One or two persons even remarked, "Why should we bother about this, when even people wearing the sacred-thread are now casting it off?"

The Matwalis' surnames correspond to those of other Chhetris. Matwalis resemble other Chhetris in physical features. They wear similar clothes, speak the same language and follow the same religion. There is therefore no doubt that Matwalis and Chhetris belong to the same caste. The question may then arise: "Why have Chhetris been divided into the sacred-thread wearing and Matwali sub-groups?" We shall discuss this question later in this article.

I noticed during my tour that different castes or communities worship different family deities. I thought that this fact would help me to determine the origin of the division of Chhetris into the above-mentioned two categories. Accordingly, I made inquiries of Matwalis about their family deities. I learned that Mashta and Durga Bhawani are the family deities of all people in this area. People customarily refer to Mashta as "Barhamashta" (representing twelve brothers) and Bhawani as Navadurga Bhawani.

Varaha and Mashta are among the family deities of many Brahman living in areas west of the Karnali and Bheri zones. It is therefore possible that the term Barhamashta (Barha-Twelve) was subsequently identified by the Sanskrit words Varaha and Mashta. This view may not appear to be incorrect for those who believe that Mashta, the ancient deity of the Vedic period, had migrated to areas east of Nepal from the west and the original form of the Nepali language can be found in the western hill region of Nepal. Asked to identify who were the twelve brothers represented by Mashta, the Matwalis gave their names as Babiro, Hyangre, Sunargaun, Tharpa, Kalashilto, Dhandar, Kshtrapala, Kawa, Bijulidanda (Ukhadi), Budhu, Gura and Mahakal. This might create the impression that these twelve brothers (Mashta) were named after particular places. But according to many persons the truth was just the opposite. There are no doubt 12 villages of these names in Jumla district. But those were actually named after the twelve brothers represented by Mashta.

The deity known as Mashta did not seem to have definite physical features. Inside there were heaps of imperfect wooden images of ordinary type, having eyes, noses and mouths carved on them, together with some bells, tridents, small festoons made of cloth and a few altars situated haphazardly. These remind one of the stone image, or a simple stone not containing any image, covered with vermilion, flowers, etc, which one sees inside temples at several places including Kathmandu Valley and Jumla itself. However, these temples of Mashta and their altars leave a totally different impression. The rituals observed in these areas are clearly different from those followed elsewhere.

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It was difficult to identify the images not only of Mashta but also of those deities which are widely worshipped by Hindus. I saw a blacksmith on the main route leading to Tibrikot near the confluence of the Tila and Jauwa rivers who was engaged in polishing a metal image about 6 inches long, with a Crown as well as a Khadga (sword) in one hand and flowers in the other. The image was seated on a chair. Asked to identify the deity represented by the image, the blacksmith referred to Gamsh. He said he usually made such idols and sold them at the Khalanga market of Jumla for Rs 15.00 to Rs 20.00 each.

During my overnight halt at Patmara, I asked people about the names of deities. They mentioned the names of Mahadev, Maruddha (Maharudra?), Lama, Mashta, Bhawani, Kuladeo, Banjapal and Mahabai. The most important deities as stated by the Thakuris of Pinagaun in Mugu district were Rum, Bihin, Lama, Mhabai, Khapar and Betal.

At Patmara, I casually heard the word Khasan for the first time. I was told that it was a common practice to call this area, which is inhabited by Khasas, as Khasan, just as the northern border area, inhabited by Bhotas, is called Bhot, the Magar-inhabited area of the Rapti zones as Magarat, and the Tharu-inhabited southern area as Tharuwan. Like Bhot, Magarat, and Tharuwan, Khasan did not have clear-cut boundaries. In actual practice, areas where those communities are in the majority are known by these names. But it is not possible to find people who can indicate the boundaries of Khasan and identify the descendants of the Khasa community. The reason is that Khasas have migrated many times and both the definition and the origin of the term Khasa, have been distorted.

At present, Khasa or Khasiya is used in different areas of the Karnali, Bheri, Soti and Mahakali zones in derogatory terms while referring to Chhetris and Matwali Chhetris. In the Nepali language, Khasa means "fall". Some have therefore speculated that people belonging to the Khasa community must have "fallen" from some place, that they must have been "fallen" from Brahmins. To prove this, some have even quoted the point made by some well-known historians that Parashuram had exterminated all Chhetris. This confused for a long time. One really wonders why and how the term Khasa finds mention only in history and mythology, and why it has now become difficult to find any person who would like to be identified as a Khasa. The very word Khasa has become despicable, although several important national personalities are descendants of the Khasas, and the Khasa dialect was the original form of the present national language of Nepal.

But the term Khasa does not have a derogatory connotation. The descendants of Khasas, who had spread from West Asia to western Nepal travelling

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along the Himalayan areas, and eventually succeeded in establishing a powerful empire, have not totally disappeared.<sup>2</sup>

The powerful Khasas who had established an empire of their own stretching through Dailekh and Kaskikot in western Nepal and the areas to the north and west of Mustang, and up to Purang and Guge in Tibet from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, were till then uncultured.

They were ignorant of the Hindu culture and believed only in Shamanism. This can be surmised from the present condition of the Karnali zone. We have never found any example in which culture and civilization have developed in the absence of political accomplishments and economic prosperity. The Khasas cannot be an exception to this rule. It does not appear that the Khasas had adopted the Hindu culture in its refined form before the eleventh century. They might have worshipped only Mashta, the vedic deity, for several centuries. During the medieval period, when their empire extended to Tibet, which adhered to Lamaism, the Khasas had adopted Buddhism at the dawn of their civilization. This is confirmed by the stone inscription of the Sinja King Prithvi Malla discovered by Yogi Narahari Nath.<sup>3</sup>

The Khasa kings had embraced both Lamaism and Hinduism. This is proved not only by stone inscriptions but also by the fact that one of the deities still worshipped by people in the Karnali zone is a Lama. Moreover, Priests (Dhamis) of the temples of Mashta recite some prayers in the Tibetan language. The gradual Sanskritization of the Khasa language must have started during this period. The Khasa Kings must have started calling themselves Thakur or Thakuri at the inspiration of their Brahman advisors and, possibly, some Rajput Chhetris.

After the Khasa kings and other members of the ruling family started calling themselves Thakuris, the other Khasas too began to wear sacred thread and call themselves a Chhetris. Those who continued to be known as Khasa began to be despised, and looked upon uncultured people. In these circumstances, it was natural that people should want to wear the sacred thread and succeed in doing so either by killing tigers, boar, or wild

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2. Giuseppe Tucci, Preliminary Report On Two Scientific Expeditions In Nepal, pp. 43-130, Baburam Acharya - Nepal Ko Sanskritik Parampara" (Nepal's Cultural Tradition), Gorkhapatra, Bhadra 5, 2020 (September 1963)....

3. Yogi Narahari Nath, Itihas Prakash, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 58-59.

horses or participating in war; thereby pleasing the King or other influential persons. No wonder then the term Khasa should have been looked upon with contempt. This is probably why those Khasas who have not been able to wear sacred thread have started calling themselves Matwali Chhetris, regarding the word Khasa as humiliating. It may be noted that different people in Nepal had, in different stages of history, attempted to conceal the real name of the communities to which they belonged. It is therefore natural that the Khasas too should have sought to discard the name of their community. The Koches of Morang and Jhapa districts had started calling themselves Rajbanshis after embracing Brahmanism in the 18th century. Those Koches who were unable to enjoy the status of Chhetris embraced Islam,<sup>4</sup> while at the same time calling themselves Rajbanshis. A more recent example is of the Thakalis living at Thak-Satsaya along the banks of the Kaligandaki river.<sup>5</sup> Several new communities are actually in the process of emergence and several existing ones are on the point of being disappearing. There are many examples of such developments within the Newar community as well.<sup>6</sup>

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4. (1) Swayambhu Lal Shrestha, "Rajbanshi Tayagu Chhun Khana" in Jhiji.

(2) Brian Hodgson: "On the Koch, Bodo And Dhimal Tribes", in Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects, Vol. 1, Section 1, Part 3.

5. (1) Dor Bahadur Bisht, "The Innovators of Upper Kali Gandaki", Ramjhar, Vol. 5, No. 3.

(2) Christoph Von Fuhrer Haimendorf: "Caste Concepts And Status Distinction in Buddhist Communities of Western Nepal," in Caste And Kirs In Nepal, India and Ceylon.

6. Colin Rossor: "Social Mobility In The Newar Caste System."

The Nirkhi Levy1. Ijara Grant To Chhote Singh Newar

From King Rana Bahadur Shah,

To Chhote Singh Newar.

We hereby grant you authority to collect the Nirkhi levy on the sale and purchase of goods brought by traders throughout our territories, after appointing your agents at the check points mentioned below. Permit the sale and purchase of goods imported by traders from abroad, or exported by them, as well as on copper, iron, lead, wax, bikhma, chiraita, kutki, jatamashi, cardamon, cotton, tejpat, taj and paper at seasonal rates. At all places covered by your agents, collect the Nirkhi levy at 1% each from both the seller and the purchaser, thus making a total payment of Rs 2%. Transmit the proceeds to the Toshakhana.

Do not harass traders on the ground that they conduct commercial transactions at places where your agents have not extended their jurisdiction. Grant reasonable remissions in the event of natural calamities. At the end of the year, submit accounts and obtain clearance. Do not collect the Nirkhi levy on goods not mentioned here, including goods meant for the royal palaces, goats and gelding goats, ghee, oil, pulses and foodgrains of all varieties. Once the Nirkhi levy is collected and seals affixed on the goods, permit traders to sell such goods wherever they like.

The Taksari and the Bhansari shall open consignments in the presence of agents of the Nirkhi collector.

In case any discrepancy is noticed in the imposition of the Nirkhi levy, we shall give the matter due consideration and issue another order to remove it. We shall also grant reasonable expenses in the light of the revenue collected from this levy, with due consideration to the work of the staff required for such collection.

List Of Check-Points Where Agents Are  
To Be Appointed

Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaun towns.

Kalyari, Bhainse, Dolalghat, Kalinjore, Jhinkhu-Dobhan, Kanpur, Charange, and Sindhuli in the east.

Mahesh Dobhan, Kallarighat, Budhasing, Devighat, and Pangu in the west.

Contd...

Syaphru, Timure, Listi, Mani and Chhslankhu in the north.

Shravan Badi 3, 1855,

Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 24, pp. 654-656.

2. Extract From Regulations Promulgated In 1799 A.D. In The Name Of R. chandra Pudasaini and Doman Chauchari For Collection Of Revenues Not Included In Ijaras In The Eastern Tarai Districts

Section 7. Collect the Nirkhi levy at the rate of 1% each from both the seller and the purchaser on transactions in goods conducted in the Tarai, except on goods being supplied to or procured from Kathmandu Valley.

Falgun Badi 5, 1855,

Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 24, pp. 705.

3. Imposition Of Nirkhi Levy, 1800 A.D.

From Girban,

To the Amalidars, Dwares and Jethabudhas throughout our territories north of Tokha.

We hereby impose the Nirkhi levy on transactions conducted by traders and merchants throughout our territories at the rate of 1% from the purchaser and 1% from the seller, thus making a total payment of 2%. We hereby grant a contract to Mahindra Singh for the collection of this levy with effect from the year 1855.

Let him collect this levy on goods sold by traders and merchants on commercial basis at the following rates in the areas under your jurisdiction. Also let him appoint his agents at different places. You shall be held to have committed an offense and awarded punishment in case anybody creates any obstruction.

Schedule of Rates

Particulars

Rate of Levy

Jewelry, textiles, pashmina fabrics,  
general merchandise, dewang, kochin,  
signif, mercury, falcons (bas, jurra),  
elephants, horses

Rs 2.00 per Rs 100.00

Contd...

Goods brought by traders, tea, dhumar, dry foods of all categories, homespun cloth (chadi, chaga, paga), blankets, yellow orpiment (harital), borax, wax	...	08 annas per load
Male buffaloes	...	8 annas per pair
Iron, tobacco (surti, tamakhu), herbs and drugs, paper	...	4 annas per load
Raw cotton, salt	...	2 annas per load
Copper	...	Rs 1.00 per load
Charas (Narcotic), yaks tails	...	Rs 1½ per load
Musk	...	10 annas per sheer
Sheep, <u>chyangra</u> goats	...	1 animal on a flock of 50

Falgun Badi 30, 18650

Similar orders were issued separately in the names of Amalidars, Dwares, Jethabuddhas and Birta owners also in areas east of Bhadgaun, west of the Bishnumati river and south of Patan town.

Ragmi Research Collections, Vol. 24, pp. 134-135.

#### 4. Ijara Grant To Mahindra Singh Newar

From King Girban,

To Mahindra Singh Newar.

We hereby grant you a contract (Ijara) for the collection of the Nirkhi levy on the sale and purchase of goods brought by traders as mentioned below, by appointing your agents at different check-points.

The Nirkhi levy shall not be collected on foodgrains, ghee, oil, goats and gelding goats, goods meant for the royal palace and all goods produced in Nepal on which the Jagat duty is not collected. It shall be collected only on commercial goods imported from other countries or exported there by traders, as well as on goods produced in our territories on which the Jagat duty is collected.

Contd..o

Transactions in respect to such goods shall be permitted at seasonal rates. In all places where you have appointed your agents, collect the Nirkhi levy at 1% each from both the seller and the purchaser, thus making a total payment of Rs 2%. Transmit the proceeds to the Toshakhana.

Do not harass traders on the ground that they conduct commercial transaction in places where your agents have not extended their jurisdiction. Grant reasonable remissions in the event of natural calamities. At the end of the year, submit accounts of the contract and obtain clearance.

Once the levy is collected and seals affixed on the goods, permit traders to sell them wherever they like.

The Taksari and the Bhansari shall open consignments in the presence of the agents of the Ijaradar.

In case any discrepancy is noticed in the imposition of this levy, we shall give the matter due consideration and issue another order to remove it.

#### Schedule of Rates

(Same as in No. 3).

Elgun Badi 30, 1856,  
Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 24, pp. 132-134.

#### 5. Reimposition Of Nirkhi Levy, 1805 A.D.

From King Girban,

To the Amalidars, Dwares, Jothabudhas and Birta owners of different areas throughout the hill region north of Tokha and south of Tibet.

The Nirkhi levy had been abolished at one time, but we now hereby revive it and impose it at the following rates per cent on goods sold on commercial basis by traders, merchants and pedlars all over our kingdom. We also hereby grant a contract for the collection of this levy to Mahindra Singh for the period from Shrawan Sudi 13, 1862 to Shrawan Sudi 12, 1863. Let him collect this levy on goods sold on commercial basis by traders, merchants and pedlars at the following rates in the areas under your jurisdiction.

Contd...

Schedule of RatesParticularsRate of Levy

Jewelry, textiles, pasmina fabrics,  
Dewang, Kochin, Sigrif, mercury,  
falcons (Baj, Jurra), elephants,  
horses

... Rs  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per Rs 100.00

Goods brought by traders, tea,  
Dhumar, dry fruits of all  
categories, homespun cloth  
(Khadi, Chaga, Paga), blankets,  
yellow orpiment (Harital), borax,  
wax, needles, thread

... 6 annas per load

Male buffaloes

... 6 annas per pair

Iron, tobacco (Surti, Tamakhu),  
herbs and drugs, paper

... 4 annas per load

Raw cotton, salt

...  $1\frac{1}{2}$  annas per load

Copper

... 12 annas per load

Charas (narcotic), yaks tails

... Rs  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per load

Musk

... 10 annas per seer

Sheep, Chyangra goats

... 1 animal on a flock of

Bhadra Badi 9, 1862.

Similar orders were issued separately for the hill regions between Bhadgaun and the Kanaka river in the east, with the exception of the Tarai north of Sikharmadi and Sindhuli, and between the Bishnumati and Bhoiri rivers in the west, with the exception of Palpa, Gulmi, Argha, Khanchi and the Tarai.

Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 19, pp. 227-228.

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6. Ijara Grant To Mahindra Singh Newar, 1805

From King Girban,

To Mahindra Singh Newar.

We hereby grant you a one-year contract (Ijara) of Rs 15,001 for the collection of the Nirkhi levy (dastur) from Shrawan Sudi 13, 1973 to Shrawan Sudi 12<sup>n</sup> 1974 in the regions situated within the following boundaries, with the exception of Palpa, Gulmi, Argha, Khanchi and Salyan:-

East of the Bheri river,

West of the Kana (Ka) river,

North of Sikharmadi, Sindhuli and Hitaura, and,

South of the Tibetan frontier.

Appoint your agents at different check-points and collect levies at the following rates on the sale of goods brought by merchants:-

(The Nirkhi levy) shall not be collected on foodgrains, ghee, oil, sesame, mustard, goats and gelding goats, goods meant for the royal palace and all goods produced in Nepal on which the Jagat duty is not collected. It shall be collected only on commercial goods imported from other countries, or exported there, by traders, as well as on goods produced in our territories on which the Jagat duty is collected.

On such goods, the Nirkhi levy shall be collected at the following ad valorem rates at the time of their sale at seasonal rates in areas covered by your agents. Do not harass traders on the ground that they sell these goods at places where your agents have not extended their jurisdiction. Once the levy is collected, and seals affixed on the goods do not collect it again on the same goods. Permit trader to sell goods wherever they like.

The Taksari and the Bhansari shall open consignments in the presence of the Ijaradar's agents.

Reasonable remissions shall be granted after ascertaining where you have not been actually able to extend your jurisdiction. Make payment of installments as these fall due. Submit accounts at the end of the year and obtain clearance. Pay interest at commercial rates if installments are not paid when due.

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Contd...

Schedule of Rates

(Same as in No. 5).

Schedule of Installments

Total payment due for the one-year period  
from Shrawan Sudi 13, 1862 to Shrawan 12,  
1863 ... Rs 15,0010

Advance payment to ... Rs 2,001

Balance ... Rs 13,000

Installmentse

Bhadra ... Rs 1,300

Aswin ... Rs 1,300

Kartik ... Rs 1,000

Marga ... Rs 1,200

Pousho ... Rs 1,000

Magh ... Rs 1,000

Falgun ... Rs 1,300

Chaitra ... Rs 1,200

Baisakh ... Rs 1,000

Jestha ... Rs 1,000

Ashadh ... Rs 1,000

Shrawano. ... Rs 1,000

Bhadra Badi 9, 1862g

Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 19, pp. 229-231.

Contd...

7. Ijara Grant To Hanumant Singh Newar, 1816 A.D.

From King Girban,

To Hanumant Singh Newar.

We hereby grant you a one-year contract (Ijara) for the collection of the Nirkhi levy from Shrawan Sudi 13, 1973 to Shrawan Sudi 12, 1974 in the regions situated within the following boundaries, with the exception of Palpa, Gulmi, Argha, Kharchi and Salyan:-

East of the Bheri river,

West of the Kanaka river,

North of Sikharmadi, Sindhuli and Hitaura, and,

South of the Tibetan frontier.

Irrespective of whether or not routes on all the four sides are used complete payment of the usual amount of Rs 17,001 and the present addition of Rs 500, thus making a total payment of Rs 17,501 for one year, to the Toshakhana in separate installments.

Appointment your agents at different check-points and collect levies at the following rates on the sale of goods brought by merchants.

The Nirkhi levy shall not be collected on foodgrains, ghee, oil, sesame, mustard, goats and gelding goats, goods meant for the royal palace and all goods produced in Nepal on which the Jagat duty is not collected. It shall be collected only on commercial goods imported from other countries, or exported there, by traders, as well as on goods produced in our territories on which the Jagat duty is collected.

On such goods, the Nirkhi levy shall be collected at the following ad valorem rates at the time of their sale at seasonal rates in areas covered by your agents. Do not harass traders on the ground that they sell these goods at places where your agents have not extended their jurisdiction. Once the levy is collected, and seals affixed on the goods, do not collect it again on the same goods. Permit traders to sell goods wherever they like.

The Taksari and the Bhansari shall open consignments in the presence of the Ijaradar's agents.

Contd...

Reasonable remissions shall be granted after ascertaining where (you) have not been actually able to extend your jurisdiction. Make payment of installments as these fall due. Submit accounts at the end of the year and obtain clearance.

Make collections in the customary manner, and as done by Kulanand Jha. Do not treat traders and merchants unjustly or harass them.

Schedule of Rates

(Same as in No. 5)

Schedule of Installments

Advance (Muhuda) Installment	...	Rs 3,001
Shrawan, Bhadra and Aswin	...	Rs 3,700
Kartik, Marga and Poush	...	Rs 3,700
Magh, Falgun and Chaitra	...	Rs 3,700
Baisakh, Jestha and Ashadh	...	Rs 3,400

Bhadra Badi 5, 1873,  
Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 36, pp. 302-305.

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Appointment of Mokaddam In Chitaun, 1827 A.D.

From King Rajendra,

To Harran Mahto.

From Baisakh Badi 1, 1884 (April 1827), We hereby appoint you as Mokaddam for reclaiming waste lands (Kalabanjar) in the area situated south of the Parganna of Gahirawa adjoining the Kachhar in Marjyadpur district. Bring ryots for settlement in this area from Jaulpur in the Moglan, as well as from Birta and Jagir lands. Enjoy tax exemption for 3 years. From the fourth year, pay revenue as follows every year to the Amil at the Potakhanna, exclusive of Raja-Anka levies, treasure-troves and fines collected from persons convicted of Panchakhat offenses. At the end of every year, submit accounts and obtain clearance.

Pota tax at Rs 1 per Hal of 2 bullocks	...	8 annas
Salami for Pagari of Mokaddam	...	2 rupees
For each household requiring a priest	...	8 annas
Tikabhet levy for Dashain festival	...	1 rupee
Farakhtana levy	...	1 rupee and 8 annas

Promote reclamation and settlement of this mouja faithfully and appropriate the levies and perquisites due to you as Mokaddam.

Jestha Badi 2, 1884

(May 1827),

Ragmi Research Collections, Vol 43, pp. 218-219.

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## The Nepal Era<sup>1</sup>

By  
Surya Bikram Gnyawali

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The Nepal Era commenced on October 20, 879 A.D., or on the Kartik Sukla Pratipada day in the Vikrama Year 936. Before the introduction of this era, other systems were used in Nepal. Scholars are not unanimous in this regard and available information too is very meager.

Two eras were used in the ancient stone inscriptions of Nepal. One was the Amshuvarma era, which was used by the Kings of Nepal during the seventh and eighth centuries. According to many scholars, this era is the same as the Harsha era, which commenced in 606 A.D. A few scholars also hold the view that the Amshuvarma era was introduced by Amshuvarma in 595 A.D., when he was born or was crowned as King. There is a greater controversy with regard to the era used in the stone inscriptions of Manadeva and other Lichchhavi Kings. It has been variously interpreted as the Vikrama era, the Shaka era and the Gupta-Ballabhi era which commenced in 319-20 A.D.

Recently, a scholar has pointed out that a King of Nepal named Manadeva had introduced a new era in 576 A.D.<sup>2</sup> However, no inscription using this era has so far been discovered. Nepali scholars have expressed the view that this is none but Amshuvarma's era.

In the same way, we do not know much about the Nepal Era. In fact, we do not even know in what circumstances it was introduced. The Vamshavalis give a fanciful story of its origin, which is as follows:

At the time when the Nepal Era was introduced, Ananda Malla was King of Bhadgaun, while his elder brother, Jayadeva Malla, was King of Kathmandu and Patan. An astrologer of Bhadgaun informed King Ananda Malla that in case sand was taken out at Lakhu Tirtha on the confluence of the Bhatikhu and Vishnumati rivers at an auspicious moment, it would turn into gold. The King sent men to procure sand from the place indicated by the astrologer at the auspicious moment. A Shudra merchant of Kathmandu, named Sakhawal, saw porters taking the sand to the King's palace. He persuaded them to leave the sand at his house by paying them money. The porters then procured sand

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1. Nepal Upatyakako Madhya kalin Itihas (Medieval History of Nepal), Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 2019 (1962), Chapter I, pp. 1-10.

2. K.P. Jayaswal, Chronology and History of Nepal, pp. 34-40.

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again from Lakhu Tirtha and took it to the royal palace. But since it had not been taken out at the auspicious moment indicated by the astrologer, it did not turn into gold. This made Ananda Malla furious, and he started reproaching the astrologer, who he thought had deceived him. The astrologer too became distressed when he saw his knowledge of astrology unsuccessful. He therefore decided to throw his books on astrology into the fire. Meanwhile, when examining the sand which the porters had taken to the royal palace, King Ananda Malla saw small nuggets of gold at the bottom of the baskets. He then immediately went to the astrologer, and saw him throwing his books into the fire. This caused great distress to the King and he prevented the astrologer from burning his books. He took the astrologer to his palace and showed him the gold nuggets. This proved that his knowledge of astrology was correct. On the advice of the astrologer, the King instituted inquiries to find out how the porters had brought the sand. It was then discovered that the sand which had been taken out at an auspicious moment had been appropriated by Sakhawal, the merchant, and that the sand which had been taken to the royal palace had been procured at a later moment.

Sakhawal thus became owner of an immense quantity of gold. With the permission of King Jayadeva Malla of Kathmandu, he paid off the debts of the entire inhabitants of Kathmandu and introduced a new era known as the Nepal Era. Shakhawal then installed his stone status near the southern gates of the Pashupatinath temple. After this, he died.

In due course of time, the name Shakhawal was Sanskritized into Shankhadhara. The era introduced by him became known as the Nepal Era introduced by Shankhadhara.<sup>3</sup>

Ananda Malla was King in 275 Nepal Era, or 1144-46 A.D. There is therefore no need to point out that the Vamshavali version regarding the origin of the Nepal Era is not reliable. It has post-dated the origin of this era by 275 years.

According to Indian tradition, only a Chakravarti King has the authority to introduce a new era. It is commonly believed that Vikramaditya, who vanquished the Shakas, introduced the Vikrama era. In Nepal, it is traditionally believed that anybody who introduces a new era must pay off the entire debts of the people. It is clear that the story of Sakhawal and the transformation of sand into gold was concocted on the basis of this popular tradition.

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3. The name Sakhawal is very doubtful. In the Hindi languages, Sakh means trust or confidence. The term of Sakhawal thus refers to a trusted or reliable merchant.

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It has not yet been ascertained which King was ruling in Nepal when the Nepal Era was introduced. According to some scholars, Raghava Deva was ruling at that time. But most Vamshavalis, with the exception of those found by Kirkpatrick and Bendall, do not mention Raghava Deva. According to Kirkpatrick, Raghava Deva introduced the Tambula (?) era. The Vamshavali found by Bendall only mentions the name of Raghava Deva without giving any detail. Had Raghava Deva introduced a new era, this Vamshavali would have mentioned the fact. The Bendall Vamshavali mentions Raghava Deva as well as 6 of his successors. They are said to have ruled for a total period of 135 years. This fits in with the authoritative date of the reign of the seventh King, Laxmikama Deva. On the basis of this evidence, Bendall has come to the conclusion that the Nepal Era was introduced by Raghava Deva. But this evidence appears to be weak.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now make a comparative study of the Nepal Era and the Vikrama era. In North India, the Vikrama era starts from the month of Chaitra, and its months end on the Purnima (full moon) day. In other words, they start from the new moon day. But according to scholars, the Vikrama era was calculated from the month of Kartik in ancient times. In Bombay, Gujarat, Kathiawar and elsewhere, the Vikrama era still commences from the month of Kartik, and its months end on the new moon day. In other words, its months start from the full moon day. The Nepal Era too commences from the month of Kartik, and its months end on the new moon day.

4. The Vamshavali found by Bendall is written on palm-leaf in the ancient Newari script. It was compiled during the reign of Sthiti Malla (Circa 1383-96 A.D.). A detailed description of this Vamshavali is contained in the historical article by Bendall which was published in 1905 along with a catalog of books in the Bir Library compiled by Mahamahopadhyaya Hara Prasad Shastri. Yogi Naraharinath has published this Vamshavali under the name of Gopal Vamshavali in the Himabat Sanskriti, Year 1, No. 1.
5. According to the Gopal Vamshavali published by Yogi Naraharinath, the period of the reign of Raghava Deva and his successors is as follows:

Raghadeva	...	43 years and 6 months
Jayadeva	...	10 ,,
Bikramadeva	...	8 ,, and 9 ,,
Narendradeva	...	1 ,, and 6 ,,
Gunakamadeva	...	85 ,, and 6 ,,
Udayadeva	...	5 ,, and 2 ,,
Total	...	154 years and 5 months

According to Bendall, Laxmikamadeva succeeded Udayadeva. But it is difficult to say anything precisely in this regard.

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This has led some scholars to follow Kirkpatrick in expressing the view that the Nepal Era was connected with the invasion of King Nanyadeva of Karnatak.<sup>6</sup> This invasion took place in the Nepal year 217, corresponding to 1019 A.D. However, the Vamshavali's state that it took place in the Nepal year 9 or the Saka year 811. The above-mentioned view of Kirkpatrick and others seems to be based on this mistake. The Vamshavali thus ante-date Nanyadeva's invasion by 202 years. Since the truth is that Nanyadeva invaded Nepal 202 years after the introduction of the Nepal Era, it is clear that he is in no way concerned with the Nepal Era.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Nepal Era has a southern origin. We shall now discuss how this southern influence entered into Nepal. The Vamshavalis state that before the commencement of the Nepal Era, a King named Varadeva was ruling in Nepal, and that during his reign, a Brahman, who looked like an incarnation of Shankaracharya, visited Nepal to ascertain how the regulations enforced by Shankaracharya were being followed.<sup>7</sup> It appears that this visit created considerable impression on Varadeva, because according to the Vamshavali, he named his son Shankaradeva after this Brahman.<sup>8</sup> It seems possible, even though the Vamshavalis have not said so, that this Brahman came from southern India. In other words, southern influence was pronounced in Nepal at the time when the Nepal Era was introduced. It will not be surprising, therefore, if this had some influence on the Nepal Era. It is not possible to say anything in this regard at this stage.

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6. Mahamahopadhyaya Gaurishanker Hirachand Ojha, Bhartiya Prachin Lipimala (Ancient Indian Scripts); Kirkpatrick.
  7. The exact date of Shankaracharya has not been determined. According to some scholars, he was born in 788 A.D. and died in 820 A.D. It is popularly believed that Shankaracharya visited Nepal and appointed a Namoodri Brahman as Priest of the Pashupatinath temple. In the absence of adequate data, it is not possible to determine to what extent this tradition is correct. It is possible that after the death of Shankaracharya, one of his disciples visited Nepal and had some influence over the King.
  8. The Mahabodhi Bihar of Patan has a copy of the Pragnya Paramita written on palm-leaf. It contains the date 7, when "Parambhattacharak Maharajadhiraj Parmeshwar Shri" Shankaradeva was reigning. It is possible that this number refers to the date according to the Nepal Era. This also indicates that it was Shankaradeva who introduced the Nepal Era. However, further research is necessary in this regard.

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The Nepal Era commenced on October 20, 879 A.D., or during the end of the eighth century of the Shaka era. The era which commenced in 576 A.D. as mentioned above appears to have been introduced during the latter half of the fifth century of the Shaka era. The discrepancy of 1 or 2 years which is noticed here may be due to mistakes in calculation. As such, both of these eras seem to have commenced during the end of a century of the Shaka era. In ancient time, there is evidence that the Shaka era was in use throughout the Himalayan region. This is the reason why the year mentioned in the inscriptions of Mana Deva and other Kings in Kathmandu Valley is regarded by several scholars as the Shaka year. The Nepal Era was introduced in Kathmandu Valley only subsequently. It started during the end of eighth century of the Shaka era, and it was given the form of the Vikrama era as current in the south. Later, after Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered Kathmandu Valley, he abolished the use of the Nepal Era for official purposes and introduced the Shaka era in the form in which it was used in the hill areas of northern India. During the Prime Ministership of Chandra Shamsher, the use of the Shaka era for official purposes was abolished, and replaced by the Vikrama era as it was used in northern India.

It is possible that the Nepal Era was introduced by taking the year 801 of the Shaka era as year 1, ignoring the first 800 years. It is also possible that in due course of time this calculation assumed the form of a new era. But this statement lacks clear evidence. Even then, since such a practice was common in India, it is possible that it was adopted in Nepal also.<sup>9</sup>

Kielhorn<sup>10</sup> has proved that the first day of the Nepal Era was October 20, 879 A.D., or the Shukla Pratipada day in the month of Kartik in the Vikrama year 936 commencing in the month of Chaitra. He has also proved that in case the figure 937 is added to the months from Kartik to Falgun in the Nepal Era, and the figure 938 to the months from Chaitra to Aswin, the modern Vikrama era results. Nepali astronomers have not made as deep study of the Shaka and Nepal eras as Kielhorn. Accordingly, some confusion appears to be existing in this regard in Nepal. This is proved by a book on astrology entitled Khanda Khadya Tikal written in the Newari script, which is available at the Bir Library in Nepal. According to this work, the Nepali Era can be converted into the Shaka era if the figure 802 is added to it. In other words, the author of this work ignored the fact that

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9. Such a system of calculation was popularly followed in Kashmir.

10. Indian antiquary, Part 17, September 188.

11. Bir Library catalog, Part 1, p. 26.

the twelve months of the two eras are not uniform, because the Nepal Era starts in the month of Kartik. The Bir Library also contains a work called Navaratnam by Damodar Bhatta, which gives the Shaka date of Marga Vadi Ashtami, 1607, as corresponding to the Nepal year 806. According to the Khanda Khadya Tika, the equivalent date should have been 1608 Shaka, by adding 802 to the Nepal year 806. But since both the Vikrama and the Shaka eras commence in the month of Chaitra, only 801 should be added to the Nepal year 806 to get the equivalent Shaka date of 1607.

Many such mistakes have been committed while calculating equivalent dates for the two eras. For example, a work called Pitri Bhakti Tarangini<sup>12</sup> gives the Nepal year 784 as the equivalent of the Shaka year 1587, thus showing a difference of 803 years between the two.

In the opinion of some historians, the Nepal Era was introduced to commemorate the end of the domination of Nepal by the Tibetan King Srong Tsan Gampo, who died in 650 A.D. But the domination which Tibet established over Nepal during the early seventh century was nominal and short-lived. After the death of Srong Tsan Gampo, there commenced a long war between Tibet and China. This tied up the hands of Tibet, so that it had neither the capacity nor the time to see what was happening in distant Nepal. Moreover, as a result of the cultural relations which were established between Nepal and Tibet during this period, their relations had become very affectionate and mutually respectful and had no place for domination of any type.

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12. Ibid, p. 195.

Birta Confiscation Regulations, 1805 A.D.

From King Girban,

To Dittha Sandhya Vaidya.

You have requested for regulations to determine valid and invalid grants among records collected by Bhutya Thapa, Ramanand and Jasiwant Thapa. You did well. We hereby enact the following regulations. Act accordingly:

1. All lands which lack signatures (i.e. documentary evidence of title), and in respect to which people occupying adjoining lands state that they do not know the name of the King who granted the land, or of the person who obtained it, shall be confiscated.
2. Even if signatures are lacking, but people occupying adjoining lands take oath on the Harivamsha, the lands shall be confirmed.
3. In cases where documents are available, but boundaries are not mentioned, the area mentioned in the documents shall be confirmed; and the surplus shall be confiscated.
4. In case documents are available, and the boundaries too are mentioned, (the lands) shall be confirmed according to such boundaries.
5. In case people occupying adjoining lands take oath that documents existed previously, but were later destroyed by natural calamities, and that they had seen and perused such documents, (the lands) shall be confirmed.
6. All lands purchased from Newars shall be confiscated, whether or not documents are available.
7. Only reliable people who have lived in the adjoining area for a long time shall be made to take oath on the Harivamsha with due care, making them sign a statement that their life, as well as that of the members of their family (will be forfeited) if they succumb to favor of take bribes.
8. All lands ritually gifted as Birta, Bandha or Guthi by persons other than Kings whose authority has been confirmed shall be confiscated.
9. In case the King who had ritually gifted any land as Birta had not fixed the boundaries and the area, and Kings other than his descendants had fixed the boundaries, such Birta lands shall be confiscated.

Birtas granted by the Crown Prince and the Chief Queen shall be confirmed. In case paddy lands subject to Pota tax have been utilized without paying this tax, the amount due so far shall be calculated and collected.

Baisakh Badi 6, 1862,  
Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 6, p. 501.

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Use Of Palanquin In Jumla, 1844 A.D.

From King Rajendra,

To the ryots of Tripurakot (Tibrikot) division (dara).

You have submitted the following petition to us through Anant Padhya, Ramsaran Padhya, Shyamdhar Padhya and Syamdhar Kathayet:

"Our relatives and Kinsmen petitioned to Subba Rudravir Shahi that they should be allowed to carry the bride in a Palanquin (doli) during weddings. Subba Rudravir Shahi accordingly issued an order granting them permission to do so. Accordingly, (our relatives and Kinsmen) carry the bride in a Palanquin during weddings. We too should be permitted to use the Palanquin similarly."

The petition has been referred to us. We hereby promulgate this order under the royal seal to the effect that in the future (members of) all castes other than Dum may carry the bride in a Palanquin during weddings.

Jestha Badi 10, 1901,  
Regmi Research Collections, Vol. 34, pp. 629-630.

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(S.B.M.)