

NEPAL

(Continued)

— Sylvain Levi

This letter dated in the last days of Prithi Narayan exposes well to the light an essential aspect of his character; the hatred and distrust of the European; he carried his suspicion even to the very goods from Europe which he refused to pass through his territory. He feared to see the merchant following the merchandise from close. Prithi Narayan died at Mohan Tirtha, on the Gandaki, in the first day of 1775; three of his wives and two of his concubines ascended the pyre.¹

His successor was his son, Simha Pratap Sah who reigned three years² (1775-1778). Simha Pratap showed himself more generous towards the gods as his father, who during the whole of his life made only one gift to Pashupati. He engaged himself to offer in sacrifice to Guhyecvari, patroness of Nepal, 1,25,000 animals. He also honoured the goddess Tulaja; lastly he had conveyed to the darbar; the linga of Nayakot. He loved to dwell in the Tarai in the winter season and preoccupied himself to ameliorate this very neglected portion of his domains.³ At his death he left as heir a child in the cradle, Rana

Bahadur Sah. The disastrous administration of long minorities and regencies fought for at the dagger's point began with the grand-son of Prithi Narayan to continue henceforth uninterruptedly. Father Ginseppe, who wrote his memorandum on Nepal at the moment when the first rivalries of the court broke out after the death of Pratap Simha and who would not forgive the Gurkhas for the expulsion of the Franciscan missionaries, saw with a badly contained joy peep already the divine vengeance. 'Perhaps, the vow Prithi Narayan did not fear to violate (the vow made to the nobles of Patan and that punished, in case of perjury, the king and five generations behind him, to the fires of hell) will have its effect with time.' If his life had been prolonged by a miracle, Father Ginseppe could have congratulated providence on its punctuality in the retribution of faults.

The younger brother of Pratap Simha Sah, Bahadur Sah, who was then living at Bettia, on the British territory, on the boundary of Nepal with his uncle Dala Mardana Sah, the ancient king of Patan, hastened to reach Kathmandu to take

possession of his regency. He was an active and enterprising prince, but he found in opposition to him an adversary of his calibre, queen Rajendra Laxmi, mother of the young king, who claimed to exercise the power in the name of her son. From this moment until the death of the queen in 1795 the two rivals fought stubbornly interrupted with short reconciliations and marked in each fresh outburst by a series of massacres. The victor struck pitilessly on the partisans of the vanquished. A secret marriage, concluded so they say, between the queen and the regent and the inspired on both sides by the same ambition, did not bring any respite to the hostilities.

However, the impetus given to the Gurkhas by Prithi Narayan had not yet slowed down. The new administration did not lack in forces or men; the conquest was pursued with successes beyond expectations in the West, Palpa retained its independence, defended by a belt of tributary principalities. Bahadur Sah asked and obtained in marriage a daughter of Maha datta, king of Palpa; under covert of this matrimonial alliance, the regent proposed to his father-in-law a political alliance, directed against the last chiefs who remained independent. The booty would have to be equally divided. Maha datta fell in the trap, the Nepalese troops arrived led by a Khas officer as brave as he was cunning, Damodar Panre (Damodara Pande). Betrayed by the king of Palpa the only chief who was powerful enough to protect them the princes of the twenty four kingdoms, in the domain of the Seven-Gandakis and the princes of the Twenty-Two kingdoms in the basin of the Kali were in greater portion despoiled. The Gurkhas reserved themselves the lions share; Maha datta received three small states, taken away from his ancient allies and which he was not

destined to retain long. Pursuing his victorious march Damodar went beyond the traditional limits of the Nepalese Empire and penetrated in the Kumaon which he subjugated.

In the East the expansion of the Gurkhas also progressed beyond the old frontiers. Already the Kiratas were subjugated; in September 1788, a force of 6000 men penetrated into Sikkim. A month later, the capital was occupied. Bhutan was threatened; Tibet saw her frontiers violated; the Tibetan province of Kuti was invaded. A skilful movement of the Tibetans recalled the Gurkhas in the rear but the movement stopped too soon. The Gurkhas certain about their communications, retook their offensive march on Sikkim, occupied her a second time and declared her annexed (1789).

Tibet with her enriched monasteries due to the piety of Asia, seemed to offer an easy prey. Under insignificant pretexts, the Gurkhas scrambled to the assault of the lamaseries, crossed the defiles pillaged Shikar Jong (Digarchi) (1790); but they allowed themselves to be duped by the superb promises of the Chinese and Tibetans. Soon after being exasperated by the duplicity of the lamas and the mandarins, they appeared again in Tibet, impatient of vengeance and plunder (1791). The emperor of China K'ien long vainly addressed them a message of threats; the Chinese envoy was insulted, Tibet was in peril. K'ien long without delay assembled important forces which he placed under general Fou K'ang, In face of such number the Gurkhas were obliged to fall back; the victorious Chinese followed them on their traces and reached the very heart of Nepal, at one day journey from Kathmandu (1792). The terror stricken daibar sued for peace, recognized the suzerainty of China and bound himself to pay a regular tribute.

At the height of his terrors, the darbar, unfaithful to the lessons of Prithi Narayan had solicited the help of the English. Lord Cornwallis decided too late. The Gurkhas had thought better of it; they had wisely preferred a distant sovereign to close a protector. However, Lord Cornwallis insisted sending to Nepal a mission entrusted to settle there and then the usual difficulties and especially to reclaim the (enforcement of) a commercial agreement signed in March 1792, at Benares, between Nepal and the Company. This agreement stipulated fixed duties on imports and exports (2.5% ad valorem) on goods carried from one territory to another but Nepal had always known to evade it by substituting to the frontier customs, partial collectings portioned out at successive stages of penetration. Colonel Kirkpatrick penetrated Nepal (in March-April 1793), if he did not bring away political advantage from this very short sojourn he at least gathered the materials of an excellent work (I, 133 sq.).

The Chinese war had interrupted only for a short while the operations in the West. Jagaj Jit Pande continued the conquests began by his brother Damodar. After Kumaon, Gharwal in her turn became a Nepalese province (1794). Nepal stretched at present from Bhutan to Kasmere.

Suddenly a (drama) tragedy of the palace abruptly terminates the regency. Rana Bahadur had grown as a minor king under the protectorship of ambitious regents, cloistered in his palace, given up to precocious debauchery which sapped all his vitality. In 1795, he suddenly wishes to reign, by caprice. He arrests his uncle Bahadur Sah, whom he retains in prison for two years until his death. From now there begins an

era of violences, furies and disorders such as Nepal had never known. Rana Bahadur is impulsive of nature a Nero of small stature; he loves music; he arranges the tune to be played in the large temples, at Guhyecvari, at Changu Narayan, at Vajra Yogini, at Daksina Kali, at Tulaja. When well disposed he gives unthinkingly, on days of great events he distributes one thousand cows in alms, he feeds the Brahman and faqueer troops, but on the first annoyance, he blasphemes the gods, and despoils the Brahmans. The Nepalese recognise in him the king of Kathmandu, Jaya Prakasa who was to return to the world in the posterity of Prithi Narayan.

His first act, is to confiscate the principality of Yumila, free so far by the prestige of her ancient precedence. Rana Bahadur espoused the daughter of the rajah of Gulmi, Lalita Tripura Sundary, intelligent and devoted princess of her husband but she gave him no son. He at first abandoned her and took to an ordinary slave from whom was born an illegitimate son. He then took the daughter of a Brahman who became the mother of king Girvana Yuddha Vikramah Sah. This prince was therefore of illegitimate birth because the king prohibited the marriage between a Ksatriya and a woman of Brahmanic blood. The Brahmans were shocked by this union which appeared to them as incestuous. In order to put a quick stop to the abomination, the Brahmans published a deep prophecy on astrology and that announced in the near future the sickness of the favourite and the death of the king. Indeed, the favourite soon fell seriously ill. The king anxious through love and worried by the prophecy that concerned him, consulted the Brahmans on precautions to take. They indicated costly ceremonies, that would

in spite of the rites; the young woman died in a few days. Furious to have been wounded in his heart and to have lost his money, the king summoned the Brahmans to return the money under threats of terrible persecutions; he orders to be handed over to him the idol of Tulaja which they have worshipped, breaks it to pieces and the fragments conveyed to the cemetery of Karavira, with the funeral cortege of Acaryas in tears, to the sound of trumpets; the remains are burnt on the pyre and the ashes thrown into the river.

This was too much the terror-stricken people dazes at the sacrilege committed benefit them by a lakh of rupees. Rana Bahadur was induced into the affair; but feared to pay the consequences. Rana Bahadur understood that an opportune sacrifice could save the dynasty and personally contrives to offer him chances of return. He gave out as an excuse that his mourning had severed him from the world, entered into the orders took

the name of Nirgunananda Svami and announced his intention of going to die a holy death at Benares. He nominated for his son Girvana Yuddha Vikram, in spite of his irregular birth; and in order to dissipate all preventions he requested of the king of Palpa, Prithivi Pala to come in the name of the most authentic of Nepalese Rajputs and place on the child's forehead the royal mark. The army and people took the oath of allegiance to their new king. At the time of departing the Svami felt his vocation already shaken, he went and settled in Patan, fortified himself thither, recruited partisans. But the opposition of the Brahmans condemned him to fail; he became aware of it and decided on a scheme. Queen Tripura Sundary had refused the regency in order to follow her husband; he nominated for regent the slave he had loved. Damodar Panre, the victor of the West was elected to exercise the functions of prime minister (1800).

FOOT NOTES

1. Bogle; ib., 159.- The date of 1775 is also given by the Vamcavali yet the date of 1771 is currently given. M. Markham the editor of Bogle repeats himself, this error, p. 107 of his work. On page 159 in which Bogle mentions the arrival in Lhasa in March 1775 of a message announcing the death of Prithi Narayan and the accession of his successor of Simha Pratap (Sing Perterb); he died in 1775.- The date of 1775 for the death of Prithi Narayan is also confirmed by two other passages of the same book, p. 197 and p. 205.
2. Father Ginseppe says : two 'years at most'.
3. Hamilton, p. 196.