

NEPAL

(continued)

-Sylvain Levi

Wednesday 9th - Andy my cortege was still swelling. The Nepalese government has estimate that I was not yet sufficiently guarded and it has or rather the "seat" of Bhatgaon has addressed me a 'pulis', police constable. If this continues I shall end in supporting the whole population of Nepal, because it is needless to mention that all these people are expecting their reward. In the afternoon the number of 'pulis' has doubted but this evening I am reduced once more to unity. And I have thus paraded through the streets of Bhatgaon an imperial cortege. This imposing procession has done a considerable injustice to the corteges of Kaci Jagannatha which they were escorting with due puja forms, today accompanied by great beating of drums and blowing of flutes; I attracted as many people as my divine rival. The Nepalese being very prolific, the roads are crowded with idle urchins too glad to follow behind the procession. There was a good crowd of about fifty of them behind me when I returned. On the faith of my reputation the "whole of Bhatgaon" had come out in the street to see me. The sun alone did not have the curiosity to see me; he stubbornly veiled his face with a thick icy mist and to make my bungalow habitable, I was obliged to attend to my windows with sheets of paper.

My first day has been lucky, I found an inscription of Civadeva in a good state of preservation in an old ruined "hiti" (washing place) of the Tulacchi Tol. More so even than at Kathmandu, more so even than at Patan, epigraphy spreads out at Bhatgaon; magnificent stelas carefully engraved give the chronology of the Mallas. The town is full of temples majority of which are in ruins and decay; the bazar is still important, but one has the sensation of a life that is shrinking as has happened at Patan. Centralization carries on its work even in Nepal; Kathmandu absorbs the valley. The principal temples are those of Bhairava of Kali and Dattatrya. Very few caityas and not one that is monumental; I have not yet seen the viharas. Here like elsewhere in Nepal the religion of Devi triumphs under all its forms; Kali, Bhagavati, Guhyecvari, Maha-Laksmi has also a fairly good temple. The Darbar smaller than that at Patan is nevertheless picturesque in its grouping of pillars, of graduated roofs and of colours; it has like Kathmandu its "gate of gold".

Bhatgaon 13th February—The icy blast has kept me in my house muffled up in vain to protect myself against the stings of the wind that sweeps my room. What a downpour the clouds clung to the trees loosened themselves gathered

in compact masses and melted in torrents. The whole of my escort crammed in shelter in the hall, warmed itself as best it could whilst the bulls were fighting in the neighbouring meadow. Bhatgaon is the town of bulls there are as many as inhabitants. Yesterday one of them has charged our cortege and it was a very rejoicing *saue-qui-peut* (make best your escape). And in spite of the dreadful rain, processions followed one another and the rattles did not cease from tinkling. Morning and evening since the full Moon a cortege preceded by fifes hantbous and cymbals proceed to the temple of Jaganath sings choruses makes puja and returns to town. A Nevar carries on a tray a vase containing the water that has washed the god; and the good people on their way deposit on the tray the modest offering of one pice to receive in the hollow of their hand a little of the holy water; they swallow a portion of it and with the rest they touch the sacred points of their body.

Yesterday morning a pious procession of children, lads and lasses went past by also on the road; two small ones at the head also carried on a brass tray flowers and the childish procession proceeded along singing a hymn to Savasti if you please would believe before the beginning of the class. On the bank of the Hanumati was another cortege but less gay. Ahead four men carrying on their shoulders two poles supporting the body of a woman covered with a cloth; behind a man assisted by two friends yells madly; a group of parents follow him maoning together. They reach the bank of the river the wood is ready whilst the family accomplishes the lustral ablutions the wood burns and the unfortunate corpse grills.

At 1st yesterday morning I was able to continue the course of my expeditions; I visited the borough of Timi that stretches on a plateau

between the Manohara and the Bagmati half-way between Kathmandu and Bhatgaon. The borough is densely populated and contrasts by its cleanliness relative to the towns of Nepal. I searched all the temples, caityas and viharas. It is again Kali under all her forms who triumphs here; the principal temple is Bala Kumari. With and Laksmi Ganeca especially is popular; its chapels infected by clotted blood and adorned by bulls horns speak enough of the sanguinary sacrifices with which the people honour the gods in Nepal. Here also abound the small stelas generally of no importance but decorated by an embossment of grinning mask at the summit, with a long snake unwinding its links on either side. The Nevars give them the name of Brhaspati and make them a daily puja; the Gurkhas do not keep an account of them.

I was coming out disappointed at my failure when I notice a depressed paht. It is the old road, tells me the pulis-ji; the old road is just my concern. And at a hundred metres on the right I find a hithi in ruins with a half-worn stela; the top has disappeared but the base is very legible. The form of the letters, the wordings the exterior disposal clearly indicate a stela of Civadava II. I discover another hithi to the left of the road; I run to it through the human rejections that always adorn the environ of an Indian village. Stretched on the ground a fragment of stela admirably traced with characters of the days of Mana deva and that shows the mark of quite a recent break. The hithi in question has just been repaired and in the course of the work, the stone was broken; and in the crowd that surrounds me, nobody knows where the fragment has gone, a Timian assures me, however, that he had been employed in the repairs of the hithi. My pulis-ji (because the pulis of Timi did not wish to lose the opportunity and my cortege made a somersault) the pulis-ji attempt to extract the said stone from

its fitting, but the only result was that one of the pulis fall backwards in a kind of mire which would envy the cleanliness of our manure ditches.

I also visited the neighbouring village of Nagdes to the North of Timi but to no avail. This morning, always trailing behind me the encumbering multitude of my fellow-labourers, I climbed under a burning sun that evidently desired to make good its three days of eclipse the steep slopes that lead to the thereabouts of 2000 metres of altitude among the terraces where spread cultivation as far as the temple of Manjuceri-Caravasti. On coming from Mahacina, say the Buddhists of Nepal Manjuceri erected this temple; there remains nothing of it; the actual construction is quite modern of the beginning of this century. Ordinary brick-built chapel hugging the rock sheltered by an enormous stone that overhangs and that carries a small caitya on its summit; the rock penetrates the roofing and serves as a ceiling. The Buddhists venerate the sanctuary in honour of Manjuceri the Hindus worship thither with equal devotion, Saravasti, whom the Buddhists give as a wife to Manjuceri. My mukhyas two Gurkhas and also the pulis-ji prostrate themselves before the image and touch the ground with their foreheads; they also ring the visitors bell. My Pundit and my coolie devout Buddhist accomplish the same rites with the same ardour.

In the afternoon I await a visit; the mahant of the Math of Valacchi-Tol had sent word that he would call over and had sent me to examine a manuscript that nobody in the monastery is able to decipher he thought the work to be Buddhistic because at the beginning was written: "namo buddhaya" The writing is correct but the Buddhism of the text stopped there. It is a very long and troublesome commentary on the Malati-Madhava of a certain Dacaratha. Now the mahant sends me word that he is ailing and cannot call over. But since

he has half opened his door, I shall perhaps succeed in wrenching it off and I reply that since he is ill, I shall pay him the visit. And I proceed to the convent. It is a Math of Jaingamas that rigorously closes its doors to one and all. Long discussions take place. At last the mahant informs me that he will come and meet me on the causeway, outside the monastery. While waiting for him a distraction offers itself. On a neighbouring platform in front of the temple of Kali and facing the temple of Bhairava, on one of those rectangular brick platforms that encumber the roads and crossways a compact crowd assists to the representation of a nataka or so-called one Men, women and children are there covered with brass rings flowered with marigolds and wearing necklace of large oranges. Their heads are hidden under a fantastic mask with large round eyes and flat noses. On the top of their ears protrude two oblique stems supporting large gilded lozenges. Their head-gear consist of metres with very large crowns from which falls a tufted and greasy head of hair in Tibetan styls. The personages are Kali, Bhairava, etc. . . The masked actors begin presenting grotesque greetings to the circle of spectators, then express by dancing the various sentiments possessing them. At last the mahant arrives, a tall old man with a long white beard, draped in the yellow robe of the sanniyasis. I address him in Sanscrit he admits to me that he does not know it. The kind of novice he escorts does not know any the more. Here am I reduced to Hindustani and dame, my Hindustani is not worth my Sanscrit I ask to see the "pustaks". The kind mahant replies with calm that he has none. And he sent me one for examination. The sin of lying does not worry them, at least as regard the Mlecchas. In short he consents to tell me that the Pundit of the monastery, absent at present is returning tomorrow and then matters would be seen into. The perpetual tomorrow.

(To be continued)