

Virupaksha

— Hari Ram Joshi

The Nagas were one of the different tribes of the primitive age. The Nagas were of the matriarchal society. So, in their society the woman folks had unlimited sway in comparison with those men folk. So, the women were the rightful claimants of power and property. Men had no right on the property. That's why in the society of those days the sexual freedom was given priority to all even among the brothers and the sisters, so to say between mother and the son. The wealth always remains intact within a family only owing to this sexual freedom being allowed within a particular family. The popular legend that Virupaksha had sexual relation with his own mother finds support in this sexual freedom, prevailing in those days. Later on the Aryans, too, adopted the above mentioned tradition of marriage system practised by the Nagas. Innumerable instances are found in a careful perusal of Vedic, Itihas-Purana, Buddhist and Jain scriptures. In the Vedic literature we come across the legend of incestuous sexual relations of Prajapati Brahma with his own daughter¹. The Buddhist scriptures indicate that the Sakyan clan itself was the result of the sexual relations among the brothers and the sisters.² The commentary of the Suttanipata, a well known

Buddhist scripture, states that the Sakyas were reproached by the Koliyans for cohabiting like dogs with their own sisters.³ It is mentioned in Avashyakachurni, a Jain scripture, that King Ushava married his own daughter and King Pupphaketu allowed his son to marry his own sister.⁴

Thus, from the very primitive times the tradition of sexual cohabitation even among blood relatives was widely prevalent among the ancient tribes of Nepal and India as it was spread in other ancient civilisations of this world, too. Lord Rudra-Siva, known as the revered god so to say the popular deity of the primitive man from before the advent of the Vedic Aryans, had married his own sister 'Ambika'.⁵ This myth as well as the popular legend that Virupaksha, the chief of the Naga tribes, had sexual intercourse with his own mother can be taken here in this very context. This sort of sexual freedom among the primitive tribes of Nepal is, in fact, the logical sequence of the matriarchal system as well as the establishment of the rule of various non-Aryan tribes like the Nagas and so on in accordance with other contemporary civilisations of the world.⁶ The popular legend of Virupaksha can be accounted for on this very

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basis. Lord Rudra-Siva, the non-Aryan god, was the revered deity of these Nagas in accordance with the tradition, prevalent among the other ancient tribes. Virupaksha, installed at Aryaghat in Pasupati region, is shown with a Siva-Linga in the left hand and a rosary in his right hand.⁷ This icon, clearly, supports the above facts. Besides, according to the Pauranic myths the Nagas were the gate-keepers of Pasupati-Siva. The Varahapurana states that the worship of Pasupati-Siva cannot be fruitful until and unless one first pays homage to the Naga.⁸ These facts, too, support the afore-stated statement.

It has already been discussed above that Virupaksha was the chief of the Nagas. It seems that this fact is supported with the Pauranic legends, too. According to Varahapurana, one of the eighteen prominent puranas, there was a Naga named Shleshmantaka at Pasupati region. After having atoned for sins by his severe penance, he obtained the favour of Pasupati-Siva. He, too, had an Ashram near about the Lord.⁹ That purana states, clearly, these facts. These descriptions of Varahapurana coincide mostly with the popular legend of Virupaksha. These facts lend support to the possibility that Shleshmantaka was also a name of Virupaksha. Most probably the Naga 'Shleshmantaka' came to be known as 'Virupaksha' after his absorption in Siva (शिव सायुज्य).¹⁰ Again, as the region was the dwelling place of the Naga 'Shleshmantaka', it became well known as Shleshmantaka forest. Hence, the fact that there was the huge habitation of the Nagas in that region, comes to be true. This view, too, has helped us to prove that Virupaksha was the chief of the Nagas.

Again, the Naga deities are especially shown emerging out of water in the artefacts. The images of this kind are available

in the 'Bharhut art'.¹¹ According to Valmiki Ramayana and Divyavadana, the Buddhist scripture, they were the 'Udaka nihsrita Devah' i.e. the gods who had come forth out of water.¹² During the Kushana period their images began to be installed on the banks of river or the big lakes. Because they were considered to be the patron deities of the water currents underneath.¹³ Virupaksha, having three eyes, installed at Pasupati Aryaghat can be taken here in this very context. This image is installed on the bank of the sacred river Bagmati and is shown as if it was emerging from under the waters. The people offer libation of water daily to him, too, as it was done to other Naga deities. From all these facts it comes to be known that Virupaksha was, first of all, the Naga chief and afterwards came to be worshipped as Rudra-Siva, having three eyes. According to Sivasatanamastotra Virupaksha is also one of 108 names of Siva.¹⁴ It, too, points out towards the aforestated facts.

Soma, Agni, Indra and Varuna were the Dikpalas of North, East, South and West respectively in our religious view-point. But, in the popular version Dhritarashtra, the chief of the Gandharvas, Virupaksha, the chief of the Nagas, Vaishravana Kubera, the chief of the Yakshas as well as Virudhaka, the chief of the Kumbhanda tribes were the Lokpalas of East, West, North and South respectively. They were revered as Chatumaharajika or the four great gods. A thorough study of the Buddhist literatures as well as the Sanchi and the Bharhut Stupas renders (affords) a clear-cut picture of this fact.¹⁵ The names and homages of these deities are found to be mentioned even in Atharvaveda 11/9/17 and 8/6/15. In that veda they are stated as Gandharvapsara, Kumbhamushka (Kumbhanda), Naga and Itarajana (Punyajana).¹⁶

Even though Virupaksha was a Naga chief, he, having been very popular among the masses, came to be adored as a god. According to Roopamandan (the scripture) he was one of the twelve Rudras.¹⁷ It is essential to give libations of water (तपण) to Virupaksha also along with other various gods and goddesses as recorded in the Grihya rituals.¹⁸ These are the very reasons why the tradition of worshipping Virupaksha after installing his images, is still being practised here even though he was a Naga, a non-Aryan tribe. The installation of this Virupaksha image in the Pasupati region can be taken here in this very context. A mediaeval image of Virupaksha is installed at Gopuchchha i. e. Svayambhu hill, too, in Kathmandu. The Kanchipuram copper-plate inscription, dated Saka era 1450 (1528 A. C.) states that an image and temple of Virupaksha was installed there in South India.¹⁹ Again, the Ramayana has stated that Virupaksha was an elephant of Lord Indra, the Lokpala of Eastern direction.²⁰ Thus, although the non-Aryan Naga tribes were conquered by the Aryans, the Aryans were unable to counter-act the popular version of the masses; the result was that they, accepting the popular approvals of other ancient tribes including the Naga one as an unaltered part of their religion and culture, had to adopt the culture of the conquered tribes as the foundation of their very existence. They recognized the matriarchal system of the non-Aryans in a doctrinal manner. The influence of matriarchy will, clearly, be visible in the fact that Siva becomes just like a corpse in absence of female energy (मातृशक्ति).²¹ This fact seems to be correct that none hates others, saying that they are destitute of Vishnu or Siva. But everyone abuses (condemns) the weak or incapables, saying that they are deprived of energy.²²

It seems that the image of Virupaksha, the Naga deity, was, first of all, installed at Pasupati Aryaghat in Nepal at about 5th century A.C. Lain S. Bangdel and Pratapaditya Pal differ in their dating of this image. According to Bangdel it was the product of the 4th century A. C.²³, whereas Pal accepts it as of the 6th century A. C.²⁴ But, in fact, this image seems to be the product of 5th century A. C. as shown with the study of history. The study of art and history has brought forth the aforesaid conclusion. It is essential to make thorough study of both sides viz. art and history of the image while fixing the conjectural date of its making. It does not seem to be proper at all to leave out history even though the art side is stronger enough. This image was, possibly, installed by Shree Bhogini, the Naga wife of the Lichchhavi King Shree Manadeva of 5th century A.C. in the memory of the tutelary or the guardian deity of her mother's side (माइत). It has already been mentioned in an editorial of *Rolamba*, Vol. 5, No. 3, the quarterly journal of the Joshi Research Institute, that Shree Bhogini was a Naga woman. The finding of this image of Virupaksha, the Naga chief, too, has lent support to prove the fact that Shree Bhogini was a Naga woman.

The first reference about Shree Bhogini is found out on the reverse of the coins, bearing the word 'Shree Mananka' which was circulated by the Lichchhavi King Shree Manadeva. The name 'Shree Bhogini' is, clearly, inscribed on that coin.²⁵ With the finding of this coin it is known that Shree Bhogini was the principal queen of Shree Manadeva. The line 'श्रीभोगिनीति कथितास्य वसूवदेवी' of the inscription of Vijayavati, the princess, is taken here as an ample evidence for proving it.²⁶ After the numismatic evidence the first mention of Shree Bhogini is to be found on the very aforesaid inscription, dated Samvat

427. That inscription was installed by Vijayavati, the daughter of Shree Manadeva by his consort Shree Bhogini, the Naga woman. She had erected an inscription along with the installation of a Siva Linga near about the image, installed by her mother. That was no other than the aforesaid Suryaghat inscription.

From the study of the aforesaid different facts it is known that Virupaksha was the chief of the Nagas and he was revered as a Naga deity. The finding of this image illuminates the fact that the tradition of the Naga tribes remained here in Nepal uninterruptedly from the very primitive times. This fact cannot be set aside.

Notes and References

1. Aitareya Brahmana, 3, 13, 9; Jaiminiya Brahmana 3, 261, 63.
cf. डा० यदुवंशी: शैवमत, विहार राष्ट्रभाषा परिषद्, पटना, ई. सन् १९५५, पृ. २०६, २०९
2. Digha Nikaya 3. 14; Mahvastu.
cf. N. N. Bhattacharya: History of the Tantric Religion, Manohar, 1982, p. 130
3. Suttanipata 1.357
cf. N. N. Bhattacharya: op. cit., p. 130.
- 4 cf. ibid, p. 130.
5. Vajasaneyi Samhita 2. 59;
cf. N. N. Bhattacharya: op. cit., p. 130;
'आरवुस्ते रुद्र पशुस्तं जुषस्वैष ते रुद्र भागः सह स्वस्त्रा अम्बिकया तं जुषस्व ।'
-तैत्तिरीय संहिता १. ८. ६
cf. डा० यदुवंशी: पूर्वोक्त, पृ. २००;
A. B. Keith: The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads, Motilal Banarásidass, 1976, p. 144
6. cf. Editorial of *Rolamba*, Journal of Joshi Research Institute, Vol. 2, No. 4;
Hari Ram Joshi: The Naga Tribes (Rolamba, Journal of Joshi Research Institute, Vol. 4. No. 1)
7. Some thieves had dug the ground beneath the image of Virupaksha at Aryaghat in view of taking away that image about 2022 V. E. But, they were unsuccessful in their attempts. The fact came into light on that very occasion.
8. cf. कल्याण-संक्षिप्त ब्रह्म पुराणाङ्क, वर्ष ५१ संख्या १, जनवरी १९७७, पूर्णसंख्या ६०२, गीता प्रेस, गोरखपुर, पृ. ३८५
9. cf. कल्याण-पूर्वोक्त, पृ. ३७९
10. One of the four states of Mukti: The others beings Samipya, Sarupya and Salokya.
cf. Sir Monier Monier-Williams: Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Originally published in 1899, second reprint 1981, p. 1207, 1210
11. cf. वासुदेवशरण अग्रवाल: भारतीय कला, पृथिवी प्रकाशन, वाराणसी, १९७७ ई., पृ. ३४५
12. cf. वासुदेवशरण अग्रवाल: पूर्वोक्त, पृ. ३४५
13. cf. वासुदेवशरण अग्रवाल: पूर्वोक्त, पृ. ३४५
14. cf. कल्याण-संक्षिप्त ब्रह्म पुराणाङ्क, वर्ष ६०, संख्या १, ई. सन् १९८६, गीता प्रेस, गोरखपुर, पृ. ४४५
15. cf. वासुदेवशरण अग्रवाल: पूर्वोक्त, पृ. ३४५
16. 'खडूरेधिचङ्कमां खर्विकां खर्ववासिनीम् ।
य उदारा अन्तहिना गन्धर्वीप्सरसश्च ये ।
सर्पा इतरजना रक्षांसि ॥१६॥
चतुर्दंष्ट्रांश्चावदतः कुम्भमुक्तां असृङ्मुखान् ।
स्वभ्यसा ये चोद्भ्यसाः ॥१७॥'
-अथर्ववेद ११।१।१६-१७
cf. अथर्ववेद संहिता, अजमेरीय वैदिक यन्त्रालये मुद्रिता, वि. सं. १९८१, पृ. १७२

- 'येषां पश्चात् प्रपदानि पुर पाष्णीः पुरो मुखा ।
खलजाः शकधूमजा उरुण्डा मे च मटमटाः
कुम्भमुष्का अयाशवः ।
तानस्या ब्रम्हणस्पते प्रतीबोधेन नाशय ॥१५॥'
-अथर्ववेद ८।६.१५
- cf. पूर्वोक्त, पृ. १२२
17. cf. Gopi Nath Rao : Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol. 2 Part 2, Motilal Banarsidass, 1968, PP. 387-388
18. cf. A. B. Keith : op. cit., PP. 213, 242
19. cf. D.C. Sircar: Select Inscriptions, Vol. 2 Motilal Banarsidass; 1983, PP. 592-600
20. cf. John Dowson : A Classical Dictionary, Rupa & Co. 1982, P- 180;
Margaret and James Stutley : A Dictionary of Hinduism; 1977, P. 165
21. cf. Margaret and James Stutley : ibid, P. 259
22. "रुद्र हीनं विष्णुहीनं न वदन्ति जनाः किल ।
शक्तिहीनं यथा सर्वे प्रवदन्ति नराधमम् ॥११॥"
-देवी भागवत ३।६।१९
- cf. दाउ दयाल गुप्त : दुर्गा महिमा, पुस्तक महल, दिल्ली, १९८१, पृ. ४२
23. cf. Lain S. Bangdel : The Early Sculpture of Nepal. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1982, P. 78, Plate 93
24. cf. Pratapaditya Pal : The Arts of Nepal, Part One, Leiden / Kolu, 1974, P. 58, Plate 75
25. cf. हरिराम जोशी : उत्तर प्राचीनकालीन मुद्रा, साज्ञा प्रकाशन, वि. सं. २०३३, प्लेट 'श्रीमानाङ्क',
26. cf. हरिराम जोशी : नेपालको प्राचीन अभिलेख, ने. रा. प्र. प्र. वि. सं., २०३०, अभिलेख, नं. २०, पृ. ६०