

A Leaf From the Bendall

"Vamśāvalī"¹

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The language of the mss. in question is difficult. One part is written in debased Sanskrit and the other part in old Newari. Bendall borrowed the mss. and it was taken to London for research. One consequence of this was Bendall's article 'The History of Nepal and Surrounding Kingdoms' ². The same article was also inserted in the first volume of Mahamahopādhyāya Hara Prasad Shastri's catalogue of mss. in the Durbar Library ³.

There occurs on one of the leaves of the mss. the sentence - tatpāścād bhotarājenamayāti rājyam karoti nepālamandale - which is omitted by Professor Bendall in his article. But later, Professor Petech, in his book, "The Mediaeval History of Nepal (c. 750-1480)", ⁴made an attempt to make sense of the sentence.

Professor Petech read: "tatpāścād Bhotarāja-Namoyāti Nepālamandale rājyam karoti": which he translated: After (the reign of Vasantadeva) the Tibetan king Namoyāti (?) ruled over Nepal".

He construed the sentence to mean that a Tibetan king came and ruled the country because the word Bhot is used nowadays in Nepali to mean Tibet. However he also misread the text as 'Bhotarāja-Namoyāti' instead of 'bhotarājenamayāti' and this created another difficulty for him. After searching in the literature of Tibet to find out whether a king of this name appears anywhere he concluded: 'but there is nothing in the Tibetan texts about conquests in Nepal' at that time. He was forced to indulge in conjectures which seem quite irrelevant in this context.

Although I myself had the unexpected privilege of reading out the mss. to Professor Petech sometime during the summer of 1956 in the Bir Library itself, this sentence escaped my notice simply because I was not asked to translate it. What Professor Petech wanted to find out from my reading seemed to be only verification of the dates which he had jotted down in his notebook beforehand. And so it was that I did not pay attention to the sentence at that time. Later, when his book was published, I noticed his wrong interpretation, but it was too late. So afterwards in 1966 when I was in Rome for a short trip from Kiel, West Germany, I met Professor Petech and made some suggestions to correct this and a few other mistakes for a future edition of his book.

The correct reading of the sentence is "tatpāścād bhotarājenamayāti rājyam karoti Nepālamandale". nam is Newari ablative case-ending signifying 'from' and rāje is just a Newari variant of Sanskrit rājya since 'ya' is pronounced ye by Newari speakers. So it transpires that the sentence is a mixture of poor Sanskrit and Newari. 'Mo' is a misreading for 'ma' in Professor Petech's transcription. This is easily made, for, in Newari script, the

headline over mā, if it looks straight, is to be read mā; but, if it is curved, should be read 'mo'. Thus the correct reading of the sentence means literally that somebody (a king) comes from the Kingdom of Bhota and rules over Nepal.

However, the difficulty for a historian is not yet solved. The question arises as to what the word 'Bhota' implies in this context. If one reads through other Newari portions of the same mss., the answer becomes clear. The word 'Bhota' is met with frequently in many other contexts, such as "Bhota or Bhonta (a variant spelling) dāmana wā ke teochhi kāye mado" meaning that the cost of rice shot up so much that one dāma of Bhota or Bhonta currency could not fetch even four manās (measure) of it. This is written when describing the intensity of suffering of the people in the year 466 Nepal era (1346 A.D.) in the region of Banepa, Panauti and the neighbouring villages which had fallen victims to famine or siege. So 'Bhonta dāma' implies a currency of Bhonta and indicates the existence of a state called Bhonta or Bhota.

Students of Nepalese history are aware of the fact that Nepal sometime after Amshuvarman was split into two half-kingdoms in the days of the Lichchavis and the Thakuris; one half being 'yem'⁵ (the Northern Kingdom) and the other being 'yela' (the Southern Kingdom). So we find two kingdoms in the Lichchavi period of Nepalese history, one major and the other minor as indicated by such expressions as vijayarājya and ardharājya respectively. Historians like K.P. Jayaswal have described this kind of joint-rule as the Dvairājya system. Coming down to the early mediaeval period, we again find two kingdoms sometimes joint and at other times disjoint as indicated by such terms as 'Bhonta' and 'Gwanla', the one major and the other minor. In this case 'Bhonta' designated the eastern kingdom and 'Gwanla' the western kingdom.

Expressions like 'Bhonta rājyenamāyati rājyam karoti nepālamandale' (rājye here is Sanskrit spelling for raje), 'bhonta yā gwanlam āya mathyākatom'⁷ and 'bhonta yā gwanlan āya thyākatom'⁸ (these are pure Newari expressions) are met with in the same manuscript. Gwanla indicates the kingdom of Nepal (expressed in Sanskrit as Nepālamandala): the capital of this part, i.e. the western kingdom happened to be the town of Deo Patan which is still called in modern Newari 'Gwanla'; and Bhonta indicates the eastern kingdom with its capital in the city of Banepa, which is still called in modern Newari 'Bhonta'.

Another case in point is the appellation of 'Bhonta' to chiefs who came from or had their origin in the eastern kingdom of 'Bhonta'. The name of king Jaya Bhimadeva (1258-1271) was preceded by this appellation (previous to his accession): Bhonta Shri Jaya Bhimadeva. Many other chiefs from that kingdom had the same epithet prefixed to their names, for instance, Bhonta Jaya Shaktideva (the grandson of king Jaya Bhimadeva), Bhonta Shri Jaya Rajadeva (before he was

crowned king), Bhonta Shri Shri Jayārjundeva (after his dethronement), Bhonta Jaya Simha Rama (previously a Prime minister of Banepa royal family, later, a feudatory of king Jayasthiti Malla). etc.

This kingdom of Bhonta lost its identity as a separate state by itself only on Friday, Nov. 23rd 1380 A.D., when king Jayārjuna deva, the last of the Banepa royal line was made to enter into his own kingdom (mahājātra yāga thawa rāja Bināpyā kwatha dumbijyācākatom, as the Newari portion of the Vamsavali puts it) with honour and dignity, though deprived of power as a major king. Twenty-two days after that when he came to the fort or castle at Gokarna with an evil design to get back to power, his plan was nipped in the bud and he had to remain virtually a prisoner, in a house called Tripurakwachhen (in Bhatgaon), where he died a year after on Feb. 3rd, 1382 A.D. The sympathetic tone with which the chronicler ends his narrative in the Sanskrit portion of the Vamsavali deserves notice. In a document written ten years after, in the year 511 N.E. (1391 A.D.) Jaya Simha Rama was referred to with the appellation as Shri Shri Bhonta (Bhuwanta) rājakula mahāmātya, meaning prime minister of the Bhonta Royal House while the Kingdom of Bhonta remained under his protection as a dependent state, acknowledging the formal suzerainty of king Jayasthitimalla. It was still considered to be an honour and prestige to make mention of his having had such connection with the defunct royal house in the past, with double Shri Shri as a mark of respect for the royal house though Jaya Simha Rama was ruling that part of the country at the time as a feudatory of king Jayasthitimalla. An end-leaf of the manuscript 'kriyā samuccaya' in the Kaiser Library reads as follows:

सम्बत् ५११ कार्तिक शुक्ल अमावास्यापर प्रतिपदा सूर्यं ग्रास स्वाति नदात्र आदित्यवार
श्रीश्री भुवन्त राजकुल श्रीपिलाखवास महामात्य श्रीमदनराम वर्धनस्य भार्या जेत्र लक्ष्मी परीसन
डंडा श्रीजेत्रबर महाविहारया दन ध्वजा पर्यन्त श्रीश्रीश्री बजासन भट्टारक प्रतिष्ठा कनक
कलश ध्वजारोहन जिमनेन्हू लदाहुति याडो श्रीश्री उमे राजकुल एकत्व खड्ग सहितन मूल
आचार्य राजगुरु पण्डित श्री महावोधय भद्रस कर्म आचार्य भ्रातृ बजाचार्य श्री भोजजुस श्रीमत्
श्रीश्री सप्त दीपाङ्कुर तथागत आदि न परिक्रम जात्रा जुव ध्व ख्यनस राजाधिराज परमेश्वर
परम भटारक श्रीश्री जयस्थिति राजमल्ल देवस्य विजयराज्ये श्रीश्री भुवन्त राजकुल महामात्य
श्रीजयसिंह रामस्य प्रतिपालित राज्ये शुभम् ।

(Note in the document, the specific use of 'ubhaya rāja kula ekatva' as an adjectival phrase for the King's Sword to indicate the merger of the two kingdoms lit. the two Royal Houses. This

tradition of installing this Royal Symbol on such big ceremonial occasions to signify the august presence of His Majesty is still observed nowadays in this country).

It seems quite probable that the Sanskrit form of Bhonta is Bhunkti. The same mss. states: samasta nepāla shri jaya rudra malla eva navakota bhunkti paryanta rāja kritam meaning that when Jaya Rudra Malla became all powerful he ruled the whole of Nepal which extended even up to Navakota and Bhunkti, after he had his own kinsman Jayarimalla deva crowned king (1320-1344). Even the expression 'rāja Bhukti mātram dadau' can mean that the newly enthroned king (Jayāri Malla) was given only Bhunkti as his domain since there is every possibility that Bhukti and Bhunkti are just variants in spelling. It may be interesting for a historian to note that another neighbouring state founded originally by Nānya-deva was named 'tri bhukti' which afterwards got corrupted into modern 'Tirhut'.

Footnotes

1. The Bendall Vamsāvalī, afterwards named as Gopālarāja Vamsāvalī in the list prepared by the Bir Library. This article is based on my reading of the copy printed in 'Himavat Sanskriti, year 1, no. 1.
2. C. Bendall- The History of Nepal and Surrounding Kingdoms (1000-1600), compiled chiefly from mss. lately discovered. Written as an historical introduction to Pandit Haraprasād Sāstri's catalogue of the Nepal Durbar Library. With chronological tables and a plate facsimiles of mss. JASB Vol. LXXII, Pt. I (History, Antiquities, etc.), 1903 pp. 1-32.
3. H.P. Shastri - Catalogue of palm-leaf and selected paper manuscripts belonging to the Durbar Library, Nepal, with historical introduction by Prof. Cecil Bendall. Calcutta (The Baptist Mission Press), 1905. Vol. 1.
4. See Luciano Petech, Mediaeval History of Nepal (c.750-1480), Roma, ISMEO, 1958, p. 29.
- 5,6. In old Newari yem means north, ye means south.
7. During the reign of King Ananta Malla in the year 427 N.E. (1307 A.D.) the king left 'Gwanla' for 'Bhonta' and after a year he died. His funeral rites were not performed until 4 days later. After that the 'Gwanla' kingdom remained separate or disjoint (excluding the 'Bhonta' kingdom).
8. Again in the year 468 N.E. (1348 A.D.) Jaya Rājadeva was crowned king in Gwanla and from that time onwards 'Bhonta' was admitted into the kingdom of 'Gwanla' or linked to it, 'ubhaya rajakula ekatva', as the Kaisher Vamsāvalī puts it. See p. 14 in the Kaisher fragment of the Vamsāvalī (in Kaiser Library), no. 171.