

Death of Dharmadev

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Dharmadev was the father of Manadev I. He was one of the Licchavi kings. He is described to have ruled for forty-one years. According to the Changu inscription of Manadev I, Dharmadev was the son of Shankaradev. Religious-minded, well versed in Dandaniti (state craft) and Karmakanda (religious text), endowed with good virtues, king Dharmadev had expanded and protected Nepal. He was loved by his people by virtue of being a Rajarshi. Pure in mind and physique, bright as moon, well versed in Shastras he worshipped the gods by performing Yajnas (religious rites) (2030 B.S.: 9-16). He had trained his son Manadev in the use of weapons. Dharmadev who was bestowed with all these virtues, had a sudden death in C. 464 A.D.

So far all the historians have only mentioned the sudden death of Dharmadev. No question is raised how it happened. Was it a natural sudden death? In this article it is assumed that Dharmadev was killed by his son Manadev.

Let us examine some of the evidences which reveal that Dharmadev was murdered by his son Manadev. These sources mention that Dharmadev was killed by his son unknowingly. He was murdered by own his son by his own order. Gopalaraj Vamsavali, one of the oldest chronicles, writes "Tasyamrityu Swaputrenaratre Panalikasthane Shiraschhitwa Pitagyankritam // Tasya Putra Sri Manadeva Varsa 411 // Tenam Agyantena Pitavadhakrita // Mahaghorapataka ... (20B)". (His death was caused by the chopping off of his head by his own son beside a water conduit at midnight. It was done by his own order to his son. His son was Manadeva who ruled for 41 years. He had killed his father unknowingly. He had committed heinous sin. According to this description, Manadeva I had killed his father not at his own will but by his own father's order. The chronicler has clarified that it was not a political conspiracy of Manadev against his father.

Wright's chronicle (1958:59-60) narrates the event as follows, "... he was much grieved at seeing the memorial of his forefathers. the Narayana fountain become dry, and he therefore went to Budha Nilkantha for advice. The deity told him to consult the astrologers. He did so, and after some deliberation they said that it required a sacrifice of a human being possessed of the thirty-two attributes. The Raja resolved to obey these directions: but, thinking that to sacrifice a subject would be a sin, and

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to kill his own son, who possessed all the requisite attributes, would be cruel, he determined to be the victim himself. He therefore called his son Bhupkesari, and ordered him to kill, without looking at his face, a certain man, whom, on the fourth day after that he should find lying covered over on the fountain. The prince, going there on the appointed day, in accordance with his father's commands, and not knowing who the person was, cut off his head.

"Another version of the story is that it was Raja Vikmanti who was sacrificed, and that his son Manadeva was the patricide. The patricide, not being able to disengage his hand, to which the severed head attached itself, went to Mani Jogini, by whose advice he built the Buddhist temple and then the head became detached; which head (i.e. an image of it) is seen to the present day at Mani Jogini."

We have also a local legend about the incident. According to that, a king Viswadeva found the ancestral water conduit dry. When he consulted the astrologers, they advised the king to sacrifice a human being who possessed the thirty-two attributes. The king, after much thinking, decided to sacrifice himself. So he ordered his son Manadev to chop off the head of a human being without looking at his face who would be lying beside the conduit. The king himself was lying with his face covered. His son Manadev without looking at the face of the lying body chopped off the head. Then the water flow of the conduit (2011 B.S.: 4-8).

All these various informations were furnished many hundred years after the actual event had occurred. Gopalaraj Vamsavali was written in the 14th century A.D., whereas Wright's chronicle belonged to the 19th century A.D. So a very pertinent question before us is to what extent the descriptions written many centuries later can be accepted, until and unless there is contemporary evidence. About the period of which we are discussing, that is, Manadev I (464-505 A.D.) we do not have any other historical evidences except the inscriptions. We have in total 20 inscriptions of Manadev's period. None of these inscriptions whether erected by the king or the people (rich) mention anything about this event. On this ground so far the historians have ignored the descriptions and local traditions as a mere heresay.

A pertinent question is whether any inscription of any place so far has ever mentioned the evil deeds of the contemporary ruler. No contemporary scribe can ever venture to inscribe the evil deeds of a contemporary king in any public place. Similarly, no subjects would ever inscribe such things

in public places. The description of the evil deeds of the rulers will pass on from generation to generation. Only the later chroniclers record such things. Legends too have existed.

About the subject matter that Dharmadev was killed by his son seems to have passed from generation to generation as a legend. In the process of passing on the account, many additional descriptions were put forward in a much distorted form. As such a student of history has to analyse them most carefully. Genealogical order will also be incoherent in such accounts.

Such thing we find in this account also. The chronicler of Gopal Vsmsavali has described Manadev's murder of his father immediately after an account of Brishadeva, thus giving wrong information about the murder of Brishadeva* by Manadev. Another error in the chronicle is that Mahideva is referred to as the son of Dharmadev. Epigraphically Mahideva was the son of Manadev I.

The local legend has also erroneously mentioned Manadev as the son of Viswadeva (Vrishadeva). Wright's chronicle has also mentioned the event almost in the some erroneous way.

If we verify the authenticity of the event with the accounts of the inscriptions, the Changu pillar inscription of Manadev I dated 464 A.D. gives some faint hints to this effect on critical examination only. The inscription mentions that while worshipping the Gods and Goddesses the queen Rajyavati got the information about the death of king Dharmadev. At such information she was very much shocked and fainted. The royal servants were aghast. The queen came back (to the palace). Shedding tears from the eyes and sobbing with utter grief, she said to her son (Manadev), "Oh my dear son. Your father has expired. What is the sense in my living, after your father had passed away ? Oh dear ! I will follow my husband. Rule the country. There is no use of my surviving in this world which is like a labyrinth of hopes and like a mirage. To find the queen-mother so much determined for self immolation, the son (Manadev) bowing down to the feet of his mother, requested his mother, "What is the use of pleasure after your departure ? I will die first and then only you can die." Hard pressed by such pleas, the queen-mother agreed to that and decided not to immolate herself" (2030 B.S: 9-16).

The account of the inscription reveals :-

1. King Dharmadev had a sudden death.
2. Queen Rajyavati got the information while she was worshipping the dieties outside the palace.

*The great-grandfather of Manadev.

3. There was a chaos among the royal servants.
4. The queen wanted to observe sati.
5. Manadev persuaded her not to do that.
6. The queen agreed to her son's request.

Now let us examine to what extent the Changu inscription supports the versions of the legend and Vamsavalis.

The inscription, no doubt, does not openly mention anything like this to support the aforesaid account. But while critically examining the details I feel that the inscription indirectly support the view.

What was the necessity of explaining all the details about the sudden death of Dharmadev, the dialogue between Rajyavati and her son Manadev I, the feeling of the queen Rajyavati, and the confusion among the royal servants in the inscription ?

This account reveals that something unusual had happened. The unusual event was the patricide committed by Manadev I. To know of it queen Rajyavati was so much shocked that she wished to immolate herself with the dead king instead of living with the patricidal son Manadev. The Sati system was not compulsory then. Manadev who had realised the great mistake was much overwhelmed with grief and was much repentant. So he insisted that his mother should not die and said that he would first die himself sacrificing all the wordly pleasure and then only she could die. Had Manadev been a conspirator he would not have said it and checked his mother from being a Sati.

There is an account of the royal servants getting confused and aghast. Death of a king definitely causes confusion and sorrow among them. Further, sudden death of a king causes more confusion and sorrow to them. The importance given to such thing is also a strong point to prove that the courtiers and royal servants were so much confused because the crown prince had killed the king. They got scared of Manadev, the crown prince, because had he murdered his father out of political ambition it would have its effect on them also.

The accounts of Gopal Vamsavali about Manadev tally with the epigraphic evidences in many things. For example, the Vamsavali mentions that Manadev I ruled for forty-one years which is proved by the inscriptions also that Manadev ruled from C. 464 to 505 A.D. That very Vamsavali further mentions the construction of Mana-

bihar and the temple of Maneswar* by the same king. The Licchavi inscriptions also prove them. In this way if the other accounts of the said king are proved as facts by epigraphy, the account of Manadev's murdering his father should also be accepted. The only mistake we find in the Vamsavali as already mentioned was that he was referred as the son of Brishadev. This is a mistake on the part of the chronicler.

The writer assumes that the rebellion on the part of the feudatories of the East and West of Nepal was an outcome of the murder of the king. The news of the murder of the king by the crown prince spread like a wild fire. There must have been much political confusion in the capital. It had its effect in the remote areas also. The feudatories revolted against the new king. But Manadev, a very brave king, led the army personally and suppressed them. Thus the word "Satha" referred to the feudatories of the East can be interpreted to mean that Manadev who had killed his father unknowingly was mistaken and suspected. So he got furious at them and used the word "Satha" which means idiots. The feudal chief of Mallapuri who paid tribute to Dharmadev also now refused to pay the same to the patricidal king. So Manadev is described to have said in the Changu inscription that if the feudal chiefs when called did not turn up, he himself would go to suppress them. So he, with the help of his maternal uncle, suppressed the rebellious feudatory of Mallapuri. Thus the revolt of the feudatories was the direct outcome of the murder of Dharmadev by Manadev.

The conjecture of most historians was that the revolt of the feudatories was due to the accession to the throne of minor king Manadev under the regency of queen-mother Rajyavati does not seem true. Rajyavati does not seem to have worked as a regent on the basis of epigraphy. Manadev had ruled himself right from 464 A.D. Moreover, if Manadev was a minor in 464 A.D., he could not have led the army himself to the East and the West as the Changu inscription mentions. He was not a minor in 464 A.D. He had not reigned under the regency of his mother Rajyavati. He was a man full of vigour, capable and competent by then. So he could cope with all the revolts. He might be in his early twenties by then.

Another important thing is that if nothing had happened, why did all the chronologies mention almost unanimously about the patricidal case of Manadev I. The description of this case is also referred in a very popular local legend, relating to

*Maneswar is referred in the Licchavi inscription. Probably in the later period the female form of Maneswar became Maneswari as the Shaktism gained much popularity.

a water conduit named Narayanahiti. The references of this case in almost all the Vamsavalis and the local legend and the description of sudden death of Dharmadev in the Changu inscription tally to a large extent. Hence Manadev was involved in the patricidal case.

It may be that because of such a case a chronicler mentioned "Avamsaja Pratipalita Putra Raja Manadev" (1977:119) (king Manadev an adopted son, not belonging to the family). This account reveals two things; firstly Avamsaja (not belonging to the family) and secondly Pratipalita Putra (an adopted son). Why did the chronicler mention it? Epigraphically Manadev belonged to the Licchavi dynasty and was not as adopted son at all. The chronicler would seem to have guessed that if Manadev was a son of king Dharmadev, he could not do that sort of heinous crime. So he wrote Manadev as an adopted son not belonging to the family.

What I assume, on the basis of the legend and Vamsavalis, is that Manadev I killed his father Dharmadev at midnight as ordered by his father. At that time human sacrifice was in vogue. Next morning queen Rajyavati ignorant of it went to worship Gods and Goddesses as usual. People found a dead body lying beside a water conduit. To their utter shock they found it the king's dead body. The shocking news spread like wild fire. The courtiers were confused. Queen Rajyavati was informed at her worshipping place a temple outside the palace. At such tragic information queen Rajyavati could not bear it and fainted. After recovering she returned to the palace. Crown Prince Manadev must have been shocked. Later, preparation for funeral rite was made. Rajyavati out of sheer desperation wished to immolate herself. Manadev, realising the whole situation, pleaded his mother not to immolate herself. He also realised that one murder should not be followed by another death of the queen. Moreover Rajyavati had to be kept alive for political reasons also. So he did not allow her to die. There must have been some chaos in the capital, which led to disturbances outside. Thus the feudatories revolted. Manadev was successful in suppressing them. After that Manadev to atone for his sin constructed temples.

The event seems to have shocked Rajyavati too much and she did not live long. The two inscriptions of Manadev mention the construction of Tribikram Vishnumurti temples at Lazimpat and Teel Ganga in the name of Rajyavati in 467 A.D. Rajyavati seemed to have been so much shocked that she did not survive long after Dharmadev's death. But Manadev's dedication and devotion to his mother led him to construct temples in his mother's name,

The patricidal case of Manadev is put forward for further research on the part of historians. Mr. Vajracharya has also

pointed out that Dharmadev's death was a mysterious one (B.S: 2030 22). This article is not aimed at maligning the image of Manadev. The contribution of Manadev in maintaining the national integrity, upgrading the economic life, art, architecture and literature must be highly appreciated. Besides, Manadev was one of the great Licchavi rulers of Nepal.

This event reveals another very important thing i.e. the sacrifice of Dharmadev for the sake of the common welfare of the people. King Dharmadev could have sacrificed any other person. But as a great king he preferred to sacrifice himself. This is an unprecedented and exemplary sacrifice of a king for the noble cause, that is, the welfare of the state, which will remain quite fresh in the memory of the people for ever.

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