

HIRANYAVARNA MAHAVIHARA: ITS ROLE AND RELATION WITH NAGABAHA

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INTRODUCTION TO THE HIRANYAVARNA MAHAVIHARA

Hiranyavarna mahavihara of Patan is one of the most magnificent, outstanding and richest Buddhist monasteries of Nepal. A Baha is a Buddhist monastery where the members of the Bhikshu-Sangha perform different type of rites and rituals including Barechhuyegu, a male initiation rite. Among the eighteen main Bahas of Patan, Hiranyavarna Mahavihara is distinctive with retaining the old ritual traditions. The people of that locality call this Baha as Kwabaha which is situated at Kwalakhu tol of Patan about two blocks from the historic complex at Mangal Bazar. This monastic complex is based on an ancient traditional Buddhist model: a principal deity, a chaitya in the middle and a tantric deity within a courtyard enclosed by a two storied quadrangular structure. The lower storey contains the images of Vajrasattva, Namasangiti, Aryatara at different sanctums whereas the upper storey contains the image of Amoghapasa Lokesvara, Amitabha, tantric deity and living quarter of Chakresvara, most senior Aju of the Bhikshu Sangha. Beside that, the Baha is full of nicely carved stone, bronze, arts and sculptures such as the image of Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, twelve Lokesvaras around the Swayambhu Chaitya and other art objects like ghanta, vajra, monkeys with jackfruits etc.

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The following section of this paper is dedicated to introduce Nagabaha, an old Buddhist habitationl complex of Patan. The aim of this writer is to explain the nature of relationship between the Hiranyavrna Mahabihara or Kwabaha as a religious cultural centre and Nagabaha as a complex of Newar settlement. The role of the Hiranyavarna Mahavihara in socio-cultural and ritual life of the people of Nagabaha will then be highlighted.

INTRODUCTION TO NAGABAHA

Among the numerous Bahas or nani of Patan Nagabaha is one of the most popular and better kept large courtyard. The classical and ancient name of this Baha is Yitilhane and Illhane. Its Sanskrit names are Vasuvardhan Vihara and Pasuvarna Mahavihara. At present this is not really a Baha in the true sense, but a large residential courtyard with several Buddhist Chaityas, a large old stone water tap and park. Now-a-days this Baha is popularly known as Nagabaha. People think that this Baha is called Nagabaha because two big nagas are painted in an old sattal here. In the centre of this Baha, there is an ancient shrine containing an image of Aksobhya facing east. There are two large Chaityas and other votive Chaityas (Buddhist Cult objects) which show the importance and add to the attraction of this Baha. Besides that, on the northern side, there is a bronze image of a bull, which is called Neel Thusa in Newari, means the bluehorned bull.

Nagabaha in not very far from Hiranyavarna Mahavihara as it is one of a series of courtyard adjacent to Hiranyavarna Mahavihara. Nagabaha is inhabited almost exclusively by Shakya and Dhakhwas and a few Bajracharya members of the Kwabaha's Sangha. Therefore, the people of Nagabaha belonging to different groups are very closely associated or related with Kwabaha. Here Nagabaha people arrange feasts and festivals, rites and rituals.

CAST COMPOSITION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

As indicated earlier, the square shaped residential complex of Nagabaha consists of several Newar caste group such as Bajracharya, Dhakhwas, Shakyas,

Jyapoos, Joshi, Nau etc. They all live in close proximity with each other. These various cast groups live around the Nagabaha. They all are Newars who speak Newari language and follow basic tenets of Newari Culture. Bajracharyas, Dhakhwas, Shakyas are Buddhist Newars where as Joshi, Nau are Hindu Newars. Although all these caste groups are Newars but only Buddhist Newars such as Bajracharya, Dhakhwas, Shakyas of this Baha have direct Cultural links with the Hiranyavarna Mahavihara. This paper may not deal with Hindu Newar groups as far as ritual life is concerned. There many residential nanis or Bahas associated with the Kwabaha Sangha as members. They are Nyakha-Chowk, saraswotini Athabaha etc. The scope of this paper is to throw light on the relationship between Nagabaha and the Kwabaha. So other nanis or residential complexes will not be discussed.

OCCUPATION OF BUDDHIST NEWARS OF NAGABAHA

As regards the occupation of the Newars of this Baha, they mostly follow the hereditary occupations. The Dhakhwas and the Shakyas depend mostly on trade and business. Now they also manufacture and export curio goods such as wooden and bronze statue of Buddhist deities and many other items. Only a few Bajracharya follows the traditional priesthood. Some have shops and other trades and some Bajracharyas are employed in the government services. Agriculture is the hereditary occupation of the Jyapoos of this Baha. Bajracharya, Shakya and Dhakhwas are of high castes of this Baha. Bajracharya are regarded as priest and they are equal to the Brahmans of Hindu Caste.

FEASTS AND FESTIVALS IN NAGABAHA

The people of this nani celebrate several Buddhist festivals with great interest and mass participation. Their festivals are colourful and mysterious. Actually most of the festivals celebrated are said to have originated centuries ago and people of Nagabaha have carried some legends regarding them.

As said, Nagabaha is the place where several important Buddhist festivals or ceremonies take place. Illhane Samyak or Nagabaha Samyak is one of the most

important and unique five yearly Buddhist Ceremony which is always grandly celebrated by the Buddhist Newars as well as the Hindus of that complex. This ceremony is performed on a very large scale and its expenses are born by the guthi of Kwabaha. This function is celebrated with great zeal. In this ceremony all the Dipankara Buddhist from various Bahas of Patan are invited here. In fact, Samyak-Dan means the right Charity in true sense. On the third day of the Bright half of falguna, all the invited Dipankara Buddhas gods and goddesses are assembled at Nagabaha in the evening. Then they are worshipped with offerings of lamp, which is called 'Dipadana'. On the next day, they are given Samyak-Dan and Samyak Bhojan. According to the local legend this Buddhists function was started by some Thakuri person named Bhali Bharoo or Bharibharad.²

Another great Buddhist ceremony celebrated at Nagabaha is the grand procession called Dipankha. This ceremony is closely related to the story of the Neel Thusa of the Baha. This Neel Thusa is supposed to be lord Buddha himself in one of his former lives according to one Jataka.³ According to the Local legend' Dipankara Buddha once visited this shrine and at that time a bull who was grazing here heralded his arrival. Generally this procession occurs every 12 years under the supervision of Dipankha Guthi. But the exact timing can in no way be fixed for it. The chief seat of the gathering of the people for this Dipankha procession is inside the Nagabaha. In this procession the people of the Nagabaha as well as the outside people also take part with great devotion. The procession starts from Nagabaha following the definite route and cover all important Stupas and Chaityas of Kathmandu valley. It takes more than 24 hrs to cover the complete route.

Other important Buddhist ceremonies and pujas are also held in this Baha: they are Baha puja (worship of Vihara), Ganesh puja (worship to Ganesh), Panchadana (Alms giving), (Matya, Wonla (festival of lights) etc.

THE SANGHA OF THE KWABAHA AND ITS FUNCTION

A Sangha is an association of the Buddhist male members connected with the particular Vihara, who have been through only Barechhuyegu rites formally. The

collective name for this association is the Sangha, which is responsible for the care and maintenance of the Baha.

The Sangha of the Kwabaha is very powerful and the Buddhist Newars of the Nagabaha have close connections with the Sangha of Kwabaha. This is the most unique feature of Newar Society. Although the Newars of this Nagabaha are not from same caste group yet the Sangha of Kwabaha regulates all the rituals equally. Every Buddhist male child must be initiated in the Baha where his forefathers belonged. Otherwise they cannot be the member of the Sangha. Barechhuyegu initiation of the Buddhist Newars of the Nagabaha is performed in Kwabaha. As the Baha is the centre of these religious life and social relation, they have closely attached to the Baha. This rite is very important initiation for the Buddhist Newars. Every Buddhist Newars of the Nagabaha must be initiated there and he is entitled to share in the life and rites of that Baha only. After the Barechhuyegu initiation the boy is included into that Sangha and his name is written in their Dhala Pau or roster (List). Then only he becomes the member of the Sangha of that vihara. In patan the Sangha of Kwabaha has largest Sangha of all the Bahas. According to the Chakresvara (Senior most) the membership now consists of 2,800 Shakyas (Including Dhakhwas) and 950 Bajracharyas.

Every initiated member of the Sangha, have right and duty to serve as Dyapalas of the main shrine and other shrine of Kwabaha. Services of duties pass from the eldest to the youngest for one month or two months. The daily rites, rituals, rules must be followed by Dya-palas. The Dya-palas of the main shrine must live at the temple for the entire month.

ORGANISATION OF ANNUAL FEAST AT SANGHA

Organisation of annual feasts, Kwabaha divides the member into three main localities: Nagbahal, Nakabahil and Hakha tol. The three Bahas are given special tasks such as preparation of certain food items. The Dhakhwas of Nagabaha, for example, are entrusted with collection of curd for the feast. Five to ten volunteers usually young men taken from one of these localities act as food servers, especially beaten rice and curd. The annual feast organised by the Sangha is called Sombhwe or Serva Sangha Bhojan. All males registered as members after completing the

Barechhuyegu rite are expected to attend this feast. For each feast, there are 12 palas (attendants) are called Guthipala. All the food for the feast is prepared in a spacific place called Digi. During the ceremany people worship the main duty in agam or Digi. Which is the second agam of the Hiranya-Varna Mahavihara. The senior most bajracharya ajus is called Chakresvara, who ranks as head of the Sangha among all members. In both agams only the Chakresvara can enter in the presence of God and worship him. On the occasion of this feast the 30 ajus assemble in an outer room of the Digi. After finishng the puja they sit in order for the feast, accordingthe positon they are given in the Barechhuyegu list presented to Kwabaha.

RITUALS RELATED TO THE KWABAHA

Each year the main-turn-holder of Dhakhwas family of Nagabaha has to organise the following rite.⁴

- two tantric rites (Sinhah puja) for the anniversaries of te Grand father Cakra Singh and his brother. Cakra Singh died childless and he donated land to Kwabaha for the annual performance of a tantric rite to Yogambara in Kwabaha. This type of rite is call Dau-puja.
- displaying the two Dipankara Buddhas in Kwabaha during Bahidyabwayegu and at five year Samyak Nagabaha.
- the distribution of beaten rice and yoghurt to all the members of Kwabaha at the annual Kwabaha feast called Sangha-Bhojan.
- lineage deity worship. On this occasion evry member of the Dhakhwa clan male and female is invited to the lineage deity feast at Kwabaha. The mainturn holder of the Dhakhwas' Guthi organise the feast and on this day they worship Swayambhu Chaitya as Digu-dya and Yogambara as a classical tantric diety of Wotala.

Like the Dhakhwa clan, the Bajracharya and the Shakya of the Nagabaha, have to display the Dipankara Buddhas in Kwabaha during Bahidyabwayegu and at regular Samyak. They also organise worship of lineage-deity in Kwabaha.

There are some fasting such as Vasundhara Dhalan, Sinka-Dhalan, Astamivrata which one observed by the Newars of the Nagabaha with great zeal. They believe that any one observe this Vrata or fasting gets his/her desires fulfilled and attains perfect happiness in the life. On the occasions such as Janko (child's rice feeding ceremony) Baratayegu (female initiation rite) the candidates are taken to the baha for blessing. The tradition of the recitation of Prajnaparamita in Kwabaha is very popular among the Buddhist Newars of Nagabaha. They regard it as a source of protection from evils and help people to generate and increase the religious feeling and sense of devotion. Because of that this text is recited about eighty or ninety times every year on private request.⁵

Among the pindapatras (ceremonial begging bowls) preserved in kwabaha, fourteen of them were donated by the people of Yililhane or Nagabaha. Some of them are dated Samvat 654, 670, 684, 705, 706, 748. Most of these pindapatras were donated because the previous pindapatras were destroyed because of over use.⁶ In V.S. 2032, a Buddhist Newar named Asha Ratna Dhakhwa (member of Kwabaha's Sangha) of Nagabaha, has donated a silver ceremonial begging bowl to the Shakyamuni Buddha of Kwabaha. For the benefit and peace of the world, Shrasahuti Yajna was performed by him in V.S. 2033 on the Basantapanchami at his own expenses.⁷ Such ritual have become deep rooted and consolidated in the Newar Buddhist society.

In conclusion, the above account shows that the life of a person or family or group of Nagabaha is very much affected by Kwabaha and its Sangha. Without performing Barechhuyegu rite no membership to the Sangha is possible. Membership in the Sangha is important factor for social-cultural life of a Buddhist Newar. There is no change no modification in the pattern of relation between the residential complex of Nagabaha and the holy place Kwabaha. We can't see any change in ritual life style of the Buddhist Newar of Nagabaha despite the fact that we are observing some changes in the social-cultural life of the people in Nepal. The Buddhist Newar of Nagabaha follow the traditional life style regulated by the basic principles of Vajrayana. In their society religion is still a very powerful force to control and regulate the life. The Sangha of Kwabaha is still powerful to rally the individuals, families and groups around it. It affects the daily life of the Buddhist Newar of Nagabaha. Its influence on the follower can be easily discerned in all the rites and rituals performed there throughout year.

FOOTNOTES

1. Nani, A Residential complex with a big courtyard and a shrine in the middle.
2. HemRaj Shakya, B.S. 2036 Samyak Mahadana Guthi (Kathmandu: Jagatdhar Tuladhar), P. 142.
3. Karunakar Vaidya, 1986, Buddhist Traditions and Culture of the Kathmandu valley (Kathmandu: Shajha Prakashan,) p. 156
4. David N. Gellner, 1993 Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest, (New Delhi: Foundation Books) p. 244
5. - Private communication from Asha Ratna Dhakhwa of Nagabaha.
6. Hem Raj Shakya, N.S.100 Sri Hiranyavarna Mahavihara Sthit pindapatra - Ambhilekha, (Patan: Mukta Bahadur Dhakhwa,) p.p.14-36
7. - Private communication from AshaRatna Dhakhwa of Nagabaha.