

Devaladevi, the *de Facto* Ruler of Nepal

Prof. Dr.T.R. Vaidya *

Devaladevi is the queen of Harasimhadeva, the last Karnata King of Simroangarh, who took asylum in the Kathmandu valley, after Simroangarh was completely devastated by Ghiyasuddin Tughlak, the Sultan of Delhi in 1326 A. D. She has played very active role in Nepalese politics from 1336 to 1366 A.D. in the most adverse situation.¹

The achievements of any ruler should be assessed on three basic grounds such as evaluation of the then situation, real achievement of the ruler and its impact in the society. On these grounds, an attempt is made in this paper to assess achievement of queen Devaladevi as the regent of Nepal Mandala.

At that time, Nepal witnessed various problems which had worsened the situation from the 11th to the 14th century. Nepal was divided into three states- Khasa Malla Kingdom in the west, Simroangarh (Tirhut Kingdom) under the Karnatas in the Southeast and Nepal Mandala in the central part.

Within Nepal Mandala, there were many political and socio-economic problems as well. The conflicts among the royal families further worsened the situation. There were several royal families, which were in conflict to grab power. The conflicts were not only among various royal families but also within the family members. Some of the conflicting members of the royal families also invited outsiders to invade the capital in their favour. In fact, a prince invited the Khasa Mallas for invasion. The latter returned only after they were given handsome amount as ransom, which was collected from every household in the capital. On the other hand, another prince seems to have invited the Karnata rulers to help him. Such activities from the royal family members caused much economic hardships. The main interests of the royalty had no doubt deteriorated political and economic condition of the country.

Such a situation prompted local feudatories to seek autonomy from the center. They also took side of the conflicting royal families in order to fulfil their

* Dr. T.R. Vaidya was formerly Professor and Head in the Central Department of History, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal.

¹. T.R. Vaidya, "Devaladevi-the Wife of Harasimhadeva", in T.R. Vaidya, *Nepal: A Study of Socio-Economic and Political Changes*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1992, pp.19-23.

interests. As a matter of fact, they had control over some villages and became powerful.

In the town of Bhaktapur, there were two palaces viz. *Tripura Rajdurbar* and *Yuthunimam Rajdurbar*. The former was the residential building of the *de jure* royal family and *Yuthunimam Rajdurbar* was that of the *de facto* ruler. There is also a reference of clash between the families of *Tripura* and *Yuthunimam* palace. The contemporary document mentions about the event in this way:

*"Thereafter, the invading party came, they tried to enter Yuthunimam palace. They were, then, driven out by killing them one by one. At Tripura, on the cross roads of Kvachen, there was an exchange of arms. The invaders were driven out of the palace compound. About twelve persons were killed between both the parties".*²

The same document mentions about another invasion –

*"In N.S. 448 (1328A.F.) on Falgun Sukla Saptami the Khasiya Malla King Aditya Malla came to invade Kathmandu. Having occupied Nuwakot, the western gate of the valley, his troops entered Kathmandu. Then he set fire on all the three towns".*³

Kathmandu was repeatedly invaded by both the Khasa Malla and Karnata rules. Besides, the country faced different types of natural calamities as well.

*"In N.S. 448 (1328 A.D.) on Bhadra Sukla Nawami the epidemic was spread consequently. A Pathi (4kg.) of rice cost a dramma. "*⁴
*In N.S.449 (1329 A.D.) a great epidemic spread since Phalguna Sukla. Till Bhadra some hundred persons died per day. The name of this epidemic is Kani-maraka.*⁵

*In N.S.461 (1341A.D.) on the day of Asadha Sukla Dvadasi, there was a heavy rainfall, submerging the whole country.*⁶

*In N.S. 464(1344 A.D.) on Aswina Sukla Saptami, in the early hours of the day, there was a violent earthquake. The next day Sri Jay Arimalladeva passed away in Gvalam.*⁷

^{2.} Dhanavajra Vajracharya and Kamal P. Malla (eds.), *The Gopalaraj Vamsavali*, Kathmandu: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1985, p.152.

^{3.} *Ibid.*, p.149.

^{4.} *Ibid.*, p. 148.

^{5.} *Ibid.*, p. 149.

^{6.} *Ibid.*, p. 153.

*In N.S.468 (1348 A.D.) on the Sankranti, Phalguna Krishna Dasami, there was a heavy snowfall reaching up to the town level.*⁸

*In N.S.483 (1363 A.D.) on Pausa Krishna Pancami night, there was a heavy snowfall. It did not stop for eight days.*⁹

Devaladevi's regency was most eventful. As already mentioned there were inter and intra royal family conflicts, revolts of unruly feudatories and natural calamities. She appeared in the scenario of Nepal Mandala to face problems and play very active role in the adverse situation. She had to face the most crucial challenges of her own period as well as the legacy of the past.

After being vanquished by Ghiyasuddin Tughlak, the Sultan of Delhi, in 1326, King Harasimhadeva, fled to the northern hill areas accompanied by his family members and followers. But he died on the way.¹⁰ Queen Devaladevi was given asylum in the *Yuthunimam Rajdurbar* in Bhaktapur by her brother Rudra Malla, the *de facto* ruler of Nepal.¹¹ After some months Rudra Malla died and his wives became *Sati*. Rudra Malla's daughter Nayakadevi was considered as the successor of the *de facto* ruler. But she was too young, and was grown up under the care of Padumaladevi (her grandmother) and Devaladevi (her aunt). These elderly women took responsibility of the royal family from 1326 to 1332.

Nayakadevi was married to Harischandra, a prince of Varanasi origin. As there was no Thakura (prince) in *Yuthunimam*, two *Kumars* (princes) were brought from the south to stay in the palace in N.S. 450 (1330 A.D.). Later, Nayakadevi was married to Harischandra and Kamaladevi, her sister to Gopalachandra. Harischandra under the protection of Padumaladevi seems to have interfered in the politics since 1332. His active role in the administration aroused jealousy among the old nobility of both the *Yuthunimam* and *Tripura* palaces. In 1333, he seems to have entered *Yuthunimam* and *Tripura* palaces with the help of force to control them. He killed some of his opponents. But another very powerful noble raised arms against him. Thus, he was compelled to flee to Kathmandu. The nobles there also started conspiring against Harischandra. Finally, Harischandra was poisoned to death. But his younger brother Gopalchandra vowed to take revenge against these nobles. Gopalachandra revolted from Tokha fort situated in the north of Kathmandu. For sometime, he remained active. He also tried to enter Lalitpur, a town in the Kathmandu valley, but in vain.

7. *Ibid.*,

8. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

9. *Ibid.*, p.156.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Active role of Devaladevi

Devaladevi had to cope with many problems particularly political, social and economic. Her role in the politics is of immense significance.

Born in 1300 A.D. Devaladevi (also known as Devalaxmi) was married to Harasimhadeva. It seems that Rudra Malla had the motive to arrange marriage to protect Nepal from repeated invasions. The marriage had positive impact that Harasimhadeva did not invade the Kathmandu valley since then.¹² When Ghiyasuddin, Tughlak devastated Simroangarh, the Karnata royal family fled to the mountain. On the way to the mountain, King Harasimhadeva died. Devaladevi, prince Jagatsimha and their followers were given asylum by Rudra Malla. They started to live in *Yuthunimam* palace.

A few months later, Rudra Malla died in 1326. At that time, Padumaladevi and Devaladevi (mother and sister of the deceased king) had to participate in politics. Devaladevi seems to be not so active in the initial phase. However, her mother Padumaladevi guided Harischandra to control administration. Unfortunately, Harischandra was poisoned to death in 1335 A.D. and his brother Gopalchandra was also murdered in 1340 A.D.

Due to paucity of contemporary evidence we are not in position to assess the role of Devaladevi at that time. Probably, she was keenly observing the politics. What it seems, on the basis of the available sources, is that after the death of Padumaladevi, the two princes (Harischandra and Gopalchandra) became very weak. Whether Devaladevi was not powerful enough to intervene in the politics or she wished to have the fall of the princes cannot be ascertained due to the lack of sources. Both of these reasons are likely to be possible. She herself was a refugee in the *Yuthunimam* palace. She might have waited for an appropriate time observing the situation as well as winning over the courtiers on her side.

There is probability that Jagatsimha gradually made Nayakadevi his concubine. After knowing this Gopalachandra revolted with the support of a powerful feudal lord named Jogaram Mulami. But the latter deserted and left him alone in the Tokha fort. The followers of Jagatsimha beheaded Gopalachandra. Then, Jagatsimha became powerful with no rivals. For some years, he ruled over the country without opposition. The days after giving birth to a daughter, Rajalladevi, Nayakadevi died in 1347 A.D. Devaladevi brought up Rajalladevi. Later, Jagatsimha was also thrown into prison. No details is available on him since

11. Vaidya, f. n. no.1.

12. T.R. Vaidya, "History of Simroangarh," *Voice of History*, Vol. XIV, No.1, Central Department of History, T.U., Kirtipur, June 1999, pp.1-18.

then. Most probably, either he was killed or died in prison. He had a mysterious death. It is very surprising to note what Devaladevi was doing when her son Jagatsimha was imprisoned. Most probably it might be the outcome of the conflict between the mother and the son. Devaladevi had her son set aside by throwing him in the prison and ruled unchallenged.

Devaladevi, having set aside Gopalachandra and her own son, became quite assertive in suppressing the unruly courtiers and feudatories. Abhayaram Mulami, one of the most active feudatories and nobles, entered *Yuthunimam* to serve Devaladevi in 1336 A.D. Thus, he joined the party of Devaladevi. After a week, other courtiers like Anekaram Mahatha (Chief minister) and Thayita Bha (a noble) administered their allegiance to Devaladevi. With their help, some of the unruly opponents who had come to attack *Yuthunimam* palace, were killed. Later on, a negotiation was made in which the Brahmins played impartial role. To celebrate the negotiation, the common mass also gathered at the palace. Thus Devaladevi captured power in 1336.

For some years Devaladevi was supported by Abhayaram Mulami and Thayita Bha. Followed by those courtiers, she went to *Kuthi* to collect revenue (?). They occupied unruly fort called *Pyako*. Four days afterwards, those followers were killed, which was a shock to the common people. Devaladevi, with the help of *Mahatha* (Chief minister) Anekaram had the courtiers killed to serve her purpose. Devaladevi, with the help of *Mahatha* Anekaram, captured Manigala (Patan), Murhikho (?), Kitpuri (Kirtipur), Balambu, Yetakhwata and Khoyampu. In 1345, the *Bahar* fort revolted against her, which was suppressed after some days. On the other hand, Devaladevi was successful to unite chiefs of different forts such as Kvachhen, Chochhen and Vamvigochhen in Bhaktapur.

In spite of suppression of many forts, Devaladevi was not yet powerful enough to rule without challenge. In 1348 A.D. when King Rajadeva (*de jure* ruler) had the bell of Pashupati rung to inform the courtiers, the followers of Devaladevi did not assemble there. The reason why the followers of Devaladevi did not respond to the ringing of the bell is not yet known. It had been the tradition to ring bell in the odd times for emergency calling of the courtiers. Most probably, there had been a conflict between the *de jure* and *de facto* rulers of Nepal.

Although Devaladevi ruled for 30 years as a *de facto* ruler from 1336 to 1366 A.D., she did not have the smooth sailing. She had to face internal problems such as revolts of the nobles and feudatories. The worst problem she ever faced was the invasion of Nepal Mandala by Samasuddin Iliyas, the Sultan of Bengal on November 19, 1349. It is described in the contemporary record that in N.S.470 on *Marga Sukla Navami* (November 19, 1349 A.D.) Sultan Samasuddin entered (the valley) and set everything on fire for seven consecutive days.

Another account mentions about the invasion in this way:

*"Then Sultan Samasuddin came from the east and reduced Sri Pashupatinath to three pieces. The whole Nepal (the valley) was reduced to ashes. The people ran in panic. (The writer) had to undergo untold hardship in Bhaktapur."*¹³

Sultan Samasuddin not only set the three towns of the valley to fire, he also broke the Pashupati phallus into three pieces and completely destroyed the Swayambhu Chaitya and other temples and *Viharas* in the valley.

During the period of invasion for seven days, both the rulers and common people seemed to have taken shelter in the *Vanadurga* (forest forts) around the valley and assaulted the invaders in the night. Guerrilla war tactics was adopted by the local people. It was the only instance in the history of Nepal when a foreign invader could enter the capital. After seven days, they left Kathmandu. The invasion of Samasuddin caused devastation but it did not leave any imprint in the history of Nepal having enduring consequences. However, restoration of the whole system took a long time. The temple of Lord Pashupatinath was restored in 1360 A.D. and Swayambhu in 1372 A.D. The whole capital town had to be rehabilitated and restored, which was done with much patience and sincerity.

Devaladevi had constructed *mandap* and water tank in the Pashupati area. In 1349 A.D. she also offered a treasure to Lord Pashupatinath. She had also enthroned Rajadeva as the King having consulted with the concerned two royal families (*de jure* and *de facto* rulers). In those days, there were four or five royal families, the members of the royalties used to ascend the throne on mutual understanding.

On *Aswin Sukla Panchami* in 1354 A.D., Jayasthiti Malla was brought from the south (?) and five months later he was married to Rajalladevi. Devaladevi got one more staunch supporter. The contemporary writers had much to write in favour of Jayasthiti Malla. He is described as the incarnation of the Buddha and the eight *Lokapalas* (the eight protectors) in contemporary documents.¹⁴

Gopalrajvamsavali mentions about the death of Devaladevi. According to it - *In N.S. 486 (1366 A.D.) on Vaishkha Sukla Saptami Sri Devaladevi, the great lady, passed away at the age of 66 years and 8 months.*¹⁵

^{13.} Vajracharya and Malla, f. n. no. 2, p. 131.

^{14.} *Ibid.*

^{15.} *Ibid.*, p.156.

As already mentioned, she had to rule the country in the most adverse situation. She did utmost efforts to maintain law and order and control the unruly courtiers and feudatories. She also contributed to rehabilitate the devastated capital. Had she got a favourable situation she would have done many things for the development of the nation. Her inviting of Jayasthiti Malla as a bridegroom for Rajalladevi became most favourable blessing in disguise to Nepal. Devaladevi is remembered as the active, brave and dedicated regent of Nepal. She had saved the nation from the invaders and also protected the country from political and economic devastation.

* * *