

History of Buddhism in Nepalese Context

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Abstract

In this paper, I will be writing the history of Buddhism in many aspects. I will dig into Nepalibhupa-vamsavali, a fine work by ManikBajracharya and Axel Micheals which is a mythoi-history. I will also be reviewing Swayambhu Purana writing about the origins of Kathmandu valley. Furthermore, I will also describe the role of Licchavis' and flourish of Buddhism after they got defeated and entered to Nepal Mandala from the mighty Buddhist King Ajatshatru. Moreover, I will also be talking about the visit of Prithvimalla and the war he waged in Kathmandu valley to protect Buddhism. Thus, in this research paper, I will start with the origins of Buddhism in Nepal to the time of Khas Empire which was entirely Buddhist nation with tolerance towards Hinduism and Shamanism which dominated Trans-Himalayan region. With this, I will show affiliation of Buddhism in Nepal in various aspects like mythology and history in Nepal.

Keywords: Nepalibhupa-vamsavali, Guhyesvari, Virupaksha, Licchavi, Manadeva, Khasa

Overview of Mythological Account

Creation Myth

According to Nepal-Bhupa-Vamsavali, In the Satyayuga, a lotus flower appeared from the lotus root stalk sown by Vipasvi Buddha. On the full moon of Asvina, the glorious Svayambhu in the form of light manifested from the Akanistha world and took abode in the center of the lotus (ManikBajracharya&AxelMicheals, 2016). Similarly, we also find information that in Tretayuga, BoddhistvaManjusri came from Mahacina and stayed in Mahamandapa, located in the western slope of Nagarkot for three nights and paid darsana to Swayambhu in a form of light. In story Jayasri states, "There is a mountain called Gopuchha, situated at a place called Nepal, lying along the northern Himalayas. With the passing of age, the name of the mountain also underwent changes. In Satya Yuga, it was called padmagiri. In the Treta Yuga, it was named Vajrakuta. In the Dvapara Yuga it was known as Gosrng. In the present Kali Yuga, it is called Gopuchha. The inhabitants of Nepal have their own term for it. They call it Samehegu (the cow-tail hillock) (Malla, 2021). Even while studying history of ancient town Nala we find Buddhist story. The settlement was known as Kingdom

of Dirgha Rath. King Dirgha Rath was cruel and was severely punished by SristikantaLokeswor goddess (Malla& Von Rospatt).

Guhyesvari in Buddhism

Interestingly what we find is that the Buddhist chronicles even gives us the pre-creation myth of Hinduism. The origin of Guhyesvari Temple for instance is debated among Hindu scholars of India and Nepal. From Hindu chronicle, we find origin of Guhyesvari after demise of goddess Sati but in Buddhist chronicles, we find it predating Shiva during the era of Buddhist cosmic creation age. Once all the water in the valley had passed out, he (Manjusri) paid darsana to the universal form of glorious Guhyesvari to appear and also paid darsana to her universal form on the night of the ninth day of the dark moon of Mangsira. Even in the oral tradition of Nala, we find similar account. We find story of Dirgharath and SristikantaLokeswor in Satya Yuga with no any Hindu chronicles but we find Hindu chronicles only after the Satya Yuga, i.e., Treta Yuga where Maharshi Valmiki is believed to have meditated on the big stone in Aangla (Rajatar) just opposite to Brahmayani Temple, north of Nala.

Variation in Virupaksha and Pashupatinath's story

In Buddhist account we find Virupaksha committing a sin unknowingly by having sexual relationship with his mother when he went to search his father. Some believe it was thus the starting point of Kaliyuga. Filled with guilt he went to visit Pashupatinatha who was less interested to help him as he was preparing some intoxication. Shiva asked him to open the lid of hot utensil which burned the face of Virupaksha and he cursed Shiva who goes to seek Avalokitesvara's protection. With hatred towards Siva and thinking that his advice was meant to kill him, he began to kick every linga. As there are various versions to the story of Virupaksha, we can see the competition in between the compilers or writers of Buddhist and Hindu chronicles. Such competition can also be seen in various Buddhist sites where there are 'PanchaDhyani Buddha' above the Shiva Lingam. This is also related with the story of Virupaksha. On the eight day of the bright moon of Kartikka, while searching for Sivalinga, he (Virupaksha) arrived at Pasupati, where he saw Siva wearing a caitya-shaped crown adorned with the five Buddhas and observing an uposadhavarta by conyemplating on the Buddha.

Objectives of the research

1. To sketch the historical development of Buddhism in Nepal.
2. To highlight the contribution of kings to promote Buddhism in Nepal.

3. To show the religious syncretism among Hindu, Buddhist and Kirant people.

Methodology

The qualitative research paradigm has been followed for the research article. Descriptive and historical research designs are perceived. Likewise, the primary and secondary sources are adopted. The study of unpublished dissertations and published books and articles are done. The in-depth interviews with monks and nuns are taken as a research tool.

Significance of the study

Nepal is agglomeration of many caste/ethnic people from ancient to modern times. They believe in Hinduism, Buddhism and Kirant. The religious syncretism is the greatest tradition of its people. Kings also showed religious beliefs and creeds. Thus, it helped to flourish Buddhism in Nepal.

Discussions

Licchavis and Buddhism

King Ajatshatrumets Buddha

The Buddhist scripture 'Dirghanikaya' has a chapter 'The Fruits of Reculseship' where we find about the mighty king Ajatshatru. He was sitting in the upper terrace with battling various questions in his mind, unable to find answer and tired of wrestling his thoughts. He asked if there were any Brahmins who could bring peace to his mind. Many spiritual leaders like Purana Kassapa, MakkhaliGosala, AjitaKesakambala and more presented their philosophical discourses to Ajatshatru who was still not finding peace from within. Ajatshatru mounted on his elephant and went towards the place of Buddha. After some conversation with Buddha, king Ajatshatru fell on to his knees and asked Buddha to always guide him towards righteousness. The story of king Ajatshatru and Gautama Buddha is important for us to study because here we find the history of Lichhavi's entering to Nepal.

Licchavis and Vajji

The Licchavi are mentioned in a number of discourses, most notably the Licchavi Sutta and in the fourth chapter of Petavatthu which is the Theraveda Buddhist Scriptures. The Mahayana Vimalakirti Sutra translated by Robert Thurman also talks about city of Vaisali where the Licchavi Boddhisattva 'Vimalakirti' was residing. In Buddhist lore we find that there was a diamond mine near a small village next to the holy river Ganges where both powerful nation Magadha and republic of Vajji agreed to have an equal share where Magadha

failed to collect their own share as it was mostly carried away by Licchavis. Licchavis were a clan originated from Vaishali. In case of Nepalese civilization, two of the most important were the Licchavi and Malla dynasties (Kaplan, 2008). Both Malla and Licchavis were among the various 18 states of Mahajanapada of Vajji. Ajatshatru knowing that it is hard to defeat Vajji from strength conspired to defeat them with stealth. He sent his chief minister Vassakara to Buddha to ask him why Vajji is so strong. Gautam Buddha gave 17 reasons why Vajji is powerful. Understanding the strength of Vajji, Ajatshatru conspired against them by working on hitting on their loopholes. The feud between Ajatashatru and Licchavi during 484–468 BCE led to defeat of the latter (Singh, 2008).

Licchavi King Manadeva and Bouddha Chaitya

We find different story in the chronology of Daniel Wright's Devamalavamsali and Nepalikabhupavamsali unlike story of Jhyarung Khhashy which mentions Bhupakeshvari/Manadeva as the first man who built this stupa. According to this tradition, the ancient Narayanhi spout suddenly dried up. Then the astrologer advised the king Vishwadeva/Vikramkeshari if a man having thirty-two virtues would be sacrificed on the spout, then the water would flow again. The king Vikramakeshari decided to sacrifice his own life in his son Bhupakeshvari/Manadeva's hand in disguise. In order to perform the sacrifice, he commanded his son to slay the man who would sit above the spout on the fourth night. Manadeva obeyed his father's order. After slaying the figure with his spout. Then he returned back to his palace. In the following morning, he was devastated after realizing he had committed a patricide. Then his mind slid into contrition. With remorse, he then darted towards his patriarchal deity Maniyogini (Vajrayogini) in Sankhu for repentance. After listening to Manadeva, Maniyogini told him that his sin would be washed-out if he would build a Bouddha temple.

Khas Kingdom

Khasa King Krachalla and Ashokchalla

Krachalla despite being a Buddhist king according to historians started having religious tolerance and accepting the Hindu religion by offering worship to Ekudra Balesvara; a form of Shiva. Hindu worship of Krachalla was continued by his son, Ashokchalla as well which can be seen in the 'Trident' inscription of Garhwal and Tehri Garhwal where he is mentioned as a great conqueror. This usage of the trident is affiliated with the Hindu religion's god Shiva. When we read the inscription of Bodhi Gaya, we can find another king of the Khasa Kingdom named Ashokchalla who is the king of Siwalik hills. Jitarimalla, son of Ashokachalla invaded Nepal Mandala. During the reign of

Ashokachalla, chieftains of Gandaki regions were forced to pay tributes to the Khasa Kingdom. This king would later stretch his kingdom to the trans-Himalayan region like Guge, Purang, Kailasha also known as Gangri in the north, Terai region in the south, Kumaon-Garhwal in the west, and Gandaki region of Nepal in the east. The Tibetan chronicles mention Ashoka Challa (1280–1344) as a Bodhisattva incarnation, so he was known as "HevajraCharanabindaMakarandaMadhukara." Ashoka Challa had donated the 44 villages of Bodh Gaya by buying from the Mugal emperor and offered to the Bodh Gaya as a Buddhist pilgrimage. Ashoka Challa is referred to with various titles as: Garuda Narayana, Abhinav Bodhisattvatar, Pravarmahayanayayin, etc.

Buddhism in Khasa Kingdom

Khas King Punyamalla had led one invasion in Kathmandu. Punyamalla came to visit various shrines like Pashupatinath, Swayambhunath and Matsyandranath. In Gopala Raja Vamsali (GRV), we can find that King Jatatari had entered in Kathmandu alley in Swayambhu area and 800 Khasiyas were killed. In GRV, the Sinjali kings who attacked Kathmandu valley are referred as Khasiya (Pokharel, 2018). He again re-entered in valley and offered worship to Swayambhunatha, Lokesvara and Pashupatinatha. After capturing Nuwakot in 1290 A.D. Jatri presented treasury to the temple of Bungma (Ratomatsyendranath). With this, we can see that, GRV mentions their religious deeds performed as well as Jitari would offer Puja to both Hindu and Buddhist deities of valley. Many scholars speculate that the attack of Khasa kingdom was for the protection of Buddhism and Dharma. On the other hand, the inscription of Taghbaigonpa in Tibet mentions that the king Aditya Malla had appointed some security force to look after the Gonpa. Also, he had provided some regular funds to manage the monastery in a better way. Such type of contributions show that he had a deep faith in Buddhism and preservation of Dharma. Hevajra is one of the major Tantric practices in Vajrayana Buddhism. Some Khasa kings had declared them as Buddhist practitioners like a Tantric of Hevajra. King Ashok Challa would like to call himself "HevajraCharanaravindaMakarandmadhukar". Also, King Aditya Malla liked to name himself "HevajraPadapadamParichayaparan" (servant of Hevajra).

Conclusion

Although Bhaktapur was stronghold of Hinduism, many Buddhist Viharas were developed during the Malla period, which was the best model of religious syncretism in the ancient and medieval period.

Nepal provided safe shelter to all socio-religious groups and communities. They included all kings such as the Lichchhavis, the Mallas, the Khas Mallas and Sah rulers and other tribes from north in different periods. The common people followed Buddhism from ancient time. The rulers who come to Nepal as refugees captured power and consolidated their rule with people support unity among diversity became the main feature of Nepali culture.

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