

Annals of Prithvinarayan Shah in Contemporary Sanskrit Literature

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Throughout the history, poets and monarchs have lived by reciprocal performances. In past, poets were always in search of a contemporary great king what is reflected in the quest and query of Balmiki, the first poet, in the very beginning of his Adikavya as "कोऽन्वस्मिन् साम्प्रतं लोके". On the otherhand, survival of the body of fame (यशःकाय) of however a great monarch fully depended on the poet. And so even a true chronocler like Kalhana, took pride in recording the relative superiority of poet over that of his real human hero.

स्मृतिमपि न ते यान्ति दमापा विना यदनुग्रहम्
प्रकृतिमहते कुर्मस्तस्मै नमः कविकर्मणे १।

Great epics of world invariably started in praise of great heroes and in Sanskrit, the hero of an epic, by rule, must be a royal one. Thus originated the historical literature in Sanskrit which is composed in Vams'a and Vijaya forms of epic poetry^{2A}. Here history is fused with imagination to suit the taste of old audience. In this way to quote Dandi "the famous figure of ancient kings, reflected in the mirror of literature, continue to maintain the image even after those kings are no more alive."^{2B}

In Sanskrit the tradition of Vams'a and Vijaya form of historical epic is very old. The first epic, the Ramayana is the chronicle of the kings of Solar Dynasty (Surya Vams'a) and the great Epic Mahabharata describes the story of feud between two families of the Lunar Dynasty (Chandra Vams'a), in the name of 'Jaya'. The first classical epic of Sanskrit, attributed to the great grammarian Panini, is known as 'Patala Vijaya'. Kalidasa's masterpiece epic is named as Raghuvams'a. Later, in the evolution of captions of Sanskrit, epic, some we find surnamed as 'Udaya' (Nelodaya) and 'Charita' (Naisadha Charita) also. In Nepal these patterns of historical poetry have remained wide in vogue up to this day, as is evident from the names Bhaktaviyaja, Prithvindravarnodaya, Mahendrodaya etc.

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Nepal is reputed as the land of gods and kings, throughout the world. Eulogies of great kings and devotional poems form the bulk of Sanskrit poetry found here in the shape of inscriptions as well as belles letters. In this context, heroic exploits of the great King Prithvinarayan Shah, known as Bismark of Nepal, has had a unique popularity among the poets and audience. He is extolled for munificence and gallantry in warfare in a dozen or more inscriptions as well as poems dramas, stories etc. Poets wrote fervently and frequently about him in Sanskrit and Vernacular too.

Though King Prithvinarayan Shah, as the leader of masses, encouraged the vernacular, Sanskrit retained the superior position at his court. This is evidenced from inscriptions and contemporary literature and scripture. The venerable Kings of Gorkha had recognised in Sanskrit the veins of Hindu socio-cultural organism and therefore they patronised it with utmost care. Their priests, bards and ministers were versed in Sanskrit language and literature. Rama Shah, the famous jurist King of Gorkha, was a lover of Sanskrit and got scribed the classics of Sanskrit, like Meghaduta for his personal collection.³ Chakrapani, an envoy, of King Prithvinarayan Shah, wrote his diaries in Sanskrit⁴ and poets like Lalitaballabha adorned his court.

Annals of this great King of Nepal is recorded in literature in many forms. They are described in inscriptions, eulogies, short historical epics and other mixed forms of poetic art (viz. campu, gatha etc.) They are composed in Sanskrit by both Brahman and Buddhist poets.

Sanskrit inscriptions of Prithvinarayan Shah retain the elegance of style of earlier period. In these we get the vividness of description and poets' alertness for preserving the sanctity of facts. A highly impressive and yet realistic sketch of the unmatched great figure of Prithvinarayan Shah among his contemporaries is presented in the following verse of an unknown poet in his Basantpur South Block inscription:

राजानः सन्ति नो किं दिशि दिशि धरणीपाल वंशाब्धिजाता
द्यूतस्वापावलासु प्रणिहितमनसो दानयुद्ध प्रहीणाः ।
पृथ्वीनारायणेशो रिपुदवदहनप्रौठ दावानलोऽसौ
दाने मेघोपमानो जयति निजधरा वारितद्यूतदोषः५।

The poet condemns here those contemporary kings of North India, who, then, in the face of great enemies were drowned in the luxuries of life, while cheers are bestowed on Prithvinarayan Shah, for he alone was constantly alert against the foreign foes and banned many such bad practices as gambling, in his kingdom.

In another inscription of the same place (innercourt yard) some poet applauds his gallantry in foiling the demoniac diplomacy of the foreign foe (Mir Kasim and the British):

काश्मली खा प्रयातो वरुणदिशि जितोयस्यमल्लप्रहारा -

दातोमन्तः दाणेन दाणामपि न रणे स्थातुमीशःफिरद्वी^६ ।

Prithvinarayan remained the venerable figure to be remembered with awe and respect in many inscriptions of later dates. The initiative verses of Bagmati pillar inscription (A.D. 1811), composed by First Pandit Bani Bilaj Pande, glorify him as the marvellous King of Nepal.⁷ A copper-plate inscription found at Palpa (Western Nepal) describes him as versed in seven parts of state craft.⁸

Apart from these inscriptions, at least three short epics describe the annals of this great King of Nepal in detail. Among these, two poems by Lalitaballabha are very famous. Even a cursory perusal of these poems will indicate that this poet was a courtier of King Prithvinarayan and must have accompanied him in his major conquests of Bhaktapur and other cities. His two works are named as Bhaktavijaya and Prithvindravarnodaya. Of these Bhaktavijaya is already published with a present day commentary.⁹ Prithvindravarnodaya is only partly printed in an anthology of historical materials related with the great King.¹⁰

Bhaktavijaya narrates the episode of the conquest of Bhatgaon, which gave the final seal on the unification of this agelong valley kingdom by the Gorkha King. It is written in the traditional 'Vijaya' form of epical poetry and displays a realistic approach in relating the incidents of war.

Prithvindravarnodaya, on the other hand, is composed in the Vams' form of historical epics, relating the biography and major conquests by the great king. It is divided in three chapters entitled as "सकलरिपु-ध्वंसन, नारायणावतारस्तवन". Only the first chapter bearing evidences on political history has been printed in full. The number of verses in different chapters are disproportionately arranged as in ch. I-12 and ch. III-18. The colophone indicates that the poem was hastily composed by the minstrel only nine months after the completion of Bhaktavijaya, probably to mark the festive occasion of the unification of Nepal valley or his annointment as the king emperor of this expanded empire. A post-script in the end of the one of the manuscripts of 'Bhaktavijaya' expresses the lament for the fact that the poet was unsuccessful in full recitation of these two poems before the royal audience, and the king did not spare time to peruse these verses carefully. This is natural, as Prithvinarayan Shah a life long warrior and conquerer, could scarcely have time to be absorbed in somewhat luxurious chattering of the minstrels. Lalitaballabha, perhaps, knowing this temperament of his patron cut short the numbers of verses in the last two chapters which only flattered and eulogised his qualities.

Prithvinarayan Shah as the unifier or founder of the present kingdom of Nepal acquired the fame of a mythological hero in his life time. Nepalese folk literature is full of descriptions of his wonderful adventures¹² and allude to his divine qualities, such as easing the labour pain of women by showing his name-seal.¹³ But Lalitaballabha has restrained himself from

tritulating the facts of history and he impartially narrates the heroic qualities of his patron's opponent too. Jayaprakasha Malla is depicted as a gallant king who braved in the face of a mighty enemy and suffered a fatal injury,¹⁴ in his last bid to save his centuries old dynastic rule. These two poems of Lalitaballabha, barring some grammatical flaws and sporadic portions of prosaic chronicling, consist many pieces of fervent imageries and poetic eloquence. One of the verse in Bhaktavijaya has the popular series of imagery depicting the conquest of many tiny kingdom of the Nepal as the grand luncheon of the Emperor:

१४ सुवर्णपीठायित कान्त्यधिष्ठः समक्तमोगेनचनाति हृष्टः

समीहतेऽतः परमारसालाः सुपिष्टलोटी जमला विशालाः ।

It is said that the great king as a mighty devourer was not content having sat on the golden dining chair of Kanti (Kathmandu) and even after the delicious dish of 'Bhakta' (rice, here the conquest of Bhaktapura) wanted to relish more and more dishes of Palpa, Doti and Jumla etc. The idea is adopted and elaborated in a vernacular poem of Subanand Das,¹⁵ probably the oldest poet of Nepali language. We don't know much whereabouts of these two poets, but they must have been contemporaries or Subanand might have lived a little later, who as a little learned verse maker got ideas from his senior to narrate the marvellous deeds of the king in flattering style of the bards.

Another chronical poem entitled 'Prithvi-digvijaya' is composed by Sundaranand Bajracharya.¹⁶ He was a devout Buddhist priest as is evident from the first auspicious verse of this poem.¹⁷ This poem narrates the war annals of Prithvinarayan Shah and has a remarkable brevity and clarity of style. It has altogether 39 verses. Though the literary merits of this poem cannot match with the works of Lalitaballabha, it has greater historical value as it relates the date of each conquest by Prithvinarayan Shah.

Gorkhavijayatilaka, by Agnidhara, found in fragments only,¹⁸ is another heroic poem which narrates the conquest of western Nepal by the descendants of Prithvinarayan Shah. Initial portion of this poem which must be a description of the life of the great king is not available. Nevertheless he is often remembered and praised eloquently in the narration of subsequent battles.

Kavitanikasopala,¹⁹ is some what a different type of composition in which Prithvinarayan Shah is depicted as a fine loving personality who wished very much the poets and other niceties of life like any mediaeval king. This work, ascribed to Lakshmana Kavi appears to be a fine creation of poetic fancy, very much in the fashion of famous mediaeval composition of Bhojaprandhana. It reports about a conference of poets organised by Pratapa Sinha Shah, the then crown prince, in the famous Balaju Park of Kathmandu. Here the description of Kathmandu city by the king to his youthful son has a touch of eroticism and hyperbolism.

Gorakhadhis'a campu,²⁰ a mixed composition in prose and verse describes the glorious deeds of the kings of Gorakha (Shah dynasty) up to King Surendra Bikrama Shah. Name of its author is not known. Composed at some later date it has elevated the personality of the great king to near divinity. By now, many popular beliefs about the supernatural power of the king had found root in the hearts of the Nepalese people.²¹

Yet another poem by Pandit Sundarananda, entitled Triratna Saundarya Gatha (fine story of three jewels) contains a poetic description of the life and qualities of King Prithvinarayan Shah in one chapter. This book has been critically edited and published by Shri Dhanabajra Bajracharya.²² Every indication is that the author of this book, Sundarananda, is the same as the writer of Prithvi Digvijaya, mentioned above. This book narrates the story of 'trio' rule in Nepal by King Rajendra, Queen Mother Lalita Tripura Sundari and Prime Minister Bhimasena Thapa. Sundarananda's Sanskrit language shows some grammatical flaws. He was skilled in writing poetry in many vernaculars as is evident from the poems collected in this book in Nepali (Parvata), Newari and Bhasa (Hindi).

Jayaratnakar Nataka,²³ by the priest poet, Shaktiballabha Aryal is, so far, only dramatic work which attempts to bring on stage, the glorious character of the great king. This drama written completely in Sanskrit is somewhat different in form. Here character of the great king is narrated (not played) by the actors in the beginning and concluding scenes. This drama avoiding any care for unity relates a heap of imported incidents extending to three generations. Shaktiballabha was the son of Lakshminarayana, the preceptor of King Prithvinarayan himself. Lalitaballabha must be a senior contemporary of this poet, though we are ignorant of relation between them due to Lalita's silence about his family identity. Poetic merits of Shaktiballabha's work, his scholarship and command over Sanskrit language is definitely superior to any of his senior or junior contemporaries.

Above we have tried to give a summary account of works in Sanskrit which describe the glory of the great king of Nepal. Many more works of this type may still be unnoticed and need further investigation and collection. Literary and historical values of these works need more studies by scholars which may throw ample light on the history as well as the cultivation of Sanskrit poetry in the last centuries, in Nepal.

NOTES

1. Rajatarangini 1.46

2A. Vide: Ancient Historians of India by V.S. Pathaka, p. 17ff.

2B. आदिराज यशोविम्बमादर्शप्राप्तवाङ्मयम्

तेषामसन्निधानेऽपि न, स्वयं पश्य नश्यति ।

- 56 CNAS Journal, Vol. 10, No. 1 & 2 (Dec. 82/June 83)
3. Vide: 'Itihasa Prakasha', Sandhipatra Sangraha, Vol. 1, p. 236.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Sanskrit Sandes'a, 1.5.
 6. Sanskrit Sandes'a, II. 22.
 7. Printed in 'Triratna Saundary Gatha' ed. by Dhanabajra Bajracharya, p. 291ff.
 8. Itihasa Prakasha: Sandhi patra, I, p. 551.
 9. Vide: 'Prithvinarayan Ko Dibya Upades'a, ed. by Nayaraj Pant and cchers, Jagadamba Prakasana, Kathmandu.
 10. Op. cit., p. 437 ff.
 11. This is informed by Mr. R. Swaminathan ex-curator, National Archive of Nepal, in his article on these two poems in 'Ancient Nepal', No. 4, p. 44.
 12. Vide: Itihasa Prakasha: Sandhi Patra Sangraha.
 13. cf. 'यन्नामादारमुद्रिकां दितितले दृष्ट्वाधुनापि स्त्रियः ।
शीघ्रं गर्भं विमोचनं विदधते (शान्तप्रसूतिव्यथाः) ।
- Gorakshadhis' campu, verse 42.
 14. Bhaktavijaya, verse 103.
 15. cf. 'नेपालको सिन्धु लुटि, मरातको धीलेमुटी, पाल्पाको ल्याउ हींग,
जिरो रिसिंगको, ल्याउ पिरौ तनहूको, भाग सित भीकोटको दाल सित
..... महाराजको जिउनार वनाउ है ।
'Prithvinarayan' by Subanand, published in "Buigal" (an anthology of old Nepali poems) IIIrd edition.
 16. Printed in Itihasa Prakasha: Sandhipatra, p. 75 ff.
 17. This verse is taken from the famous Sanskrit play. 'Nagananda' of Shriharsa. This drama glorifies Buddha and Buddhism.
 18. Printed in Itihasa Prakasha: Sandhipatra, pp. 528-35.
 19. Edited and published by Yogi Narahari Nath from Yogapracharini, Gorakhtilla, Varanasi.
 20. Itihasa Prakasha, II, pp. 598-611.
 21. Vide Supra (f.n. 13).
 22. Nepal Sanskrit Parishad, Kathmandu.
 23. Published by Nepal Sanskrit Parishad, Kathmandu.