

ROLE OF BHRIKUTI (BHELSA TRITSUN) IN SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

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Abstract

The discovery of Mauryan Emperor Ashokan pillar in Lumbini by General Khadaga Shumsher Rana and Dr. Alois Fuhrer in 1896 A.D. opened the door of archaeological study in Nepal. Since then the archaeological excavations have been carried regularly. This article focuses around Lumbini the Birth Place of Buddha and highlights the contributions of Bhrikuti in spreading Buddhism in Tibet.

Historical Background

B. C. Law's, "Geography of Early Buddhism" views that, "The Koliyas, were one of the Republican Clans belonging to the time of Buddha, they had two settlements, one at Ramagrama and the other at Devadaha."

The Koliyas Dynasty to which Mayadevi, the mother of Gautam Buddha was born is mentioned by different names - Koliyanagara, Byaghrapur, Devadaha or Ramagrama. The Koliyas of Devadaha are known as the maternal clan of Gautam Buddha; whereas the Koliyas of Ramagrama are known as the famous claimants for the relics of the Gautam Buddha in Kusinarapava.

Mayadevi was married to King Suddhodhana of Shakya Dynasty of Kapilvastu. One night she dreams of a white Elephant entering her womb, she is then soon expected to give birth. As the custom was those days, the child was to be born at his maternal uncle's residence. Mayadevi, whilst going to Devadaha, which lay thirty-five kilometres

north-east of Lumbini, had to pass through Lumbini, a beautiful pleasure garden (Pradimoksha Bana), collectively maintained by the Sakyas of Kapilvastu and the Koliyas of Devadaha or Ramagrama during the seventh and the sixth centuries (B.C.) located in the Terai region, in the southern part of Nepal. As Mayadevi was passing through the garden she experienced labour pain and gave birth to Buddha (then known as Siddhartha), however she passed way soon after and Buddha was raised by his mother's sister Mahaprajapati. It was then that astrologers predicted that he would either be a great king or a great saint.



Lumbini, Nepal



An image of Hiuen-Tsiang

Later as he grew into a man he was married to Koliya Princess Yashodhara, daughter of Suppra Buddha of Koliya Dynasty of Devadaha. After a year Prince Rahul was born to him and soon after Buddha rejected his princely life in pursuit of knowledge.

It is said that he acquired knowledge at Bodh Gaya under a Bodhi tree. He then went on to give his first

preaching at Saranath in India and continued to voice his knowledge of peace as, "The Eight Fold-Path" until he acquired Mahapariniravana at Kushinarapawa.

After his Mahaprinirvana his relics were claimed by eight Kings. The holy text or the Mahaparinirvana Sutta of Dighanikaya mentions that Buddha's relics were claimed by the Bulis of Allakapa, the Brahmins of Vethpida, the Lichhavis of Vaisali, the Koliyas of Ramagrama, the Sakyas of Kapilvastu, the Mallas of Pava, the Mallas of Kusinara, and the King Ajatsatru of Magadh. They also built stupas over the relics of Buddha.

It is said that the Maurya emperor Ashoka erected 84,000 stupas, even opening seven original stupas. But he could not open the Stupa of Ramagrama, because it was protected by Naga. Chinese travellers Fa-Huien visited the Ramagrama Stupa after walking five yojana east of Lumbini, where Gautam Buddha was born. Hiuen-Tsiang (Xuanzang) came to Ramagrama after walking more than 200 li towards east from Lumbini during the seventh century (A.D).

The discovery of the Ashokan pillar in Lumbini by General Khadaga Samsheer Rana and Dr. Alois Fuhrer in 1896 A.D. opened the doors of archaeological study in Nepal. Since then archaeological excavations have been carried regularly.

Role of Bhrikuti (Bhelsa Tritsun) in spread of Buddhism in the Himalayan Region

Buddha was born in the South of Nepal; due to this first Pitakas and



An image of Bhrikuti

Suttas were all in Sanskrit and the making of Viharas or Monasteries began in the south, yet today it flourishes in the northern region or the Himalayas of Nepal.

As time passes, civilization changes, what was yesterday becomes a 'bygone tales' and people tend to forget the contributions. In a modern day term Bhrikuti would be the 'Brand Ambassador' in introducing Buddhism to Tibet.

Before the spread of Buddhism Northern region of Nepal and Tibet was the home place of Bon dharma or religion. Bon has been classified into "Original Bon" which is animistic with belief that nature is pervaded

by good and bad spirits and ' the 'Modern Bon' began after 14th century and exist to this day. Bon today is completely influenced by Mahayan Buddhism.

Bhrikuti

The Nepali princess Bhrikuti Devi, known to Tibetans as Bal-mo-bza Khri-btsun, Bhelsa Tritsun (Nepali consort) or, simply, Khri bTsun (royal lady), is traditionally considered to have been the first wife of the earliest emperor of Tibet, Songtsan Gampo (605? - 650 CE), was considered as an incarnation of Tara. She was also known as "Besa", and was a princess of the Licchavi kingdom of Nepal.

Even though the historicity of Bhrikuti Devi is not certain, and no reference to her has been found among the documents discovered at Dunhuang, "there are increasing indications supporting this hypothesis." There were certainly very close relationships between Tibet and Nepal at this period and, "Such a mythological interpretation discredits in no way the historical likelihood of such a marriage."

Many Tibetan accounts make Bhrikuti the daughter of Amshuverma (605-621 CE), co-ruler and successor of Śivadeva I. If this is correct, the marriage to Songtsän Gampo must have taken place sometime before 624 C.E. Acharya Kirti Tulku Lobsang Tenzin, however, states that Songsten Gampo married Bhrikuti Devi, the daughter of king "Angsu Varma" or Amshuverma (Tib: Waser Gocha) of Nepal in 632.

According to some Tibetan legends,



The Wedding of Bhrikuti as per the Chinese manuscript

however, a Nepali king named Go Cha (identified by Sylvain Lévi as "Udayavarman", from the literal meaning of the Tibetan name) who was said to have a daughter called Bri-btumn or Bhrikuti.

"Udayavarman" was, most likely the same king we know as Udayadeva (the son of Śivadeva I and, later, adopted son and heir to Amshuvarmā, and the father of Narendradeva (Tib: Miwang-Lha). If this is accepted, it means that Narendradeva and Bhrikuti Devi were brother and sister. What so ever the controversy, if the marriage did take place, it must have been sometime in the early 620s.

We do have some fairly detailed historical accounts of Narendradeva, who not only spent some time as an exile in Tibet, but was placed, on the

Nepalese throne with the help of the Tibetans.

The (Jiu) Tangshu, or Book of Tang, records that when the king of Nipoluo Nepal, the father of Licchavi king Naling Deva (or Narendradeva), died, an uncle (Yu.sna kug.ti or Vishnagupta) usurped the throne, "The Tibetans gave him refuge and re-established him on his throne in 641; that is how he became subject to Tibet."

It is not known exactly when Bhrikuti married Songtsan Gampo, but it was presumably about the time that Narendradeva fled to Tibet after his father, Udayadeva, was replaced by Dhruvadeva c. 621 CE, who, according to an inscription dated in 623, was ruling jointly with Jishnu Gupta.

Bhrikuti, the daughter of Lichhavi King Amshuverma (Achu-Fama in Chinese) was married to King Songtsen Gampo (Tibetan: Srong btsan sgam po). He was born in an Ox year of the Tibetan calendar, 569-649?/605-649. He was the founder of the Tibetan empire. He is traditionally credited with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, influenced by his Nepali wife Bhrikuti. He later married Wencheng, Chinese Princess and niece of Tang Taizong Emperor (Tang Dynasty)

Bhrikuti's marriage in Ka Khol Ma Tibetan Manuscript

Many Chinese and Tibetan manuscripts, one of it known as Ka khol ma mentions as follows:

Atisha says in the Ka khol ma, that one morning King Songtsen Gampo said to his ministers Thonmi Sambhota and Gartong Tsen, as they were walking into his room, "Give me some chang," and then added, "Last night, I dreamed of the Western land of Nepal, of a beautiful princess named Bhrikuti, and the city of Yabu Yagal (Tenzin, Lobsang, The Tibet Journal, 1982, p.84)." The next day the two ministers met near O Thang Lake with the chieftains of the Seven Cities.

They had asked the chiefs to bring some food, and they each brought different parts which, together, constituted a complete animal. This was considered a very auspicious sign, and they decided to ask for the hand of the princess.

It was then the ministers Thonmi Sambhota and Gartong Tsen then left for Nepal, together with a hundred

horsemen carrying numerous gifts as well as gold. Songtsen Gampo also gave them three letters in case the Nepali King Amshuvarman refused to accede to his request.

When they arrived in Nepal they met with the king. Gartong Tsen offered the gifts and asked for the princess for the king of Tibet, while Thonmi Sambhota acted as translator. The King of Nepal flew into a terrible rage and told them, "You are insulting me greatly! I will only give my daughter to someone of my own rank and I am superior to the king of Tibet: I have the holy Dharma and support of the Buddha's body, speech and mind from the time of Buddha Kashyapa. The Dharma has been well established here since King Kri Kri, who reigned at the time of the Buddha Shakyamuni. My riches are like the smoke of the eternal fire, plates are never empty of food, the sound of flour mills never ceases. In Tibet, the king of the hungry ghosts, doesn't have all this, and since there is no law, thieves reign and battles rage. I won't give him my daughter!"

Each time he refused the minister presented him with another letter, written in Nepali in gold on blue paper. At length, the king gave the princess, together with the statues of Jowo Mikyo Dorje (a representation of Buddha Akshobhya and Maitreya, the texts Tog, Gra Inga (China Buddhism encyclopaedia), and the Sutra of the White lotus, as well as several artists and seven elephants loaded with precious diamonds. The princess herself rode on an elephant, holding a sandalwood statue of Tara, and surrounded by her many servants.



An image of Amshuverma, National Museum, Chhauni.

The king went in person to see her off, he went as far as Mangyul, (Mustang) the border of Nepal and Tibet.

It was Princess Bhrikuti who took with her as dowry numerous Buddhist images, Granthas, Pitakas, Suttas with her.

King Songsten Gampo who gave her the title of Green Tara because she was little dark and as Princess Wencheng White Tara

It was Lachen Thechun/ Bhrikuti Chinese manuscript mentions her as Princess of Nepal; who invited various Scholars from different countries such as Acharayas Shantarakshit from Nepal (who knew dual language both Bhote vasa or language known today as (Tibeto-Burman) and Sanskrit., Chinese Scholars from China, Scholars from Kashmir named Pandit Bimal Mitra Chinese call him Lochawa meaning

'Translator', and Acharaya Guru Padmasambhav a famous Tantrist and well-versed scholar from Udiyan known earlier as Odintapur. Beside them there were others who were 'Do Bhasi' such as Pago, Birochan, Kava Palchen and others who translated the 'Tripitakas' comprising of Binayapitaka, Sutrapitaka, Abhidhrmapitaka including the four Tantras such as : Kriya Tantra, Charya Tantra, Yoga Tantra, Atiyoga Tantra. These Lochawas or the learned translators translated the Buddhist Pitakas, Granthas and Suttas into Bhote vasa or Tibetan so that people would understand them. The Chinese translated it into Mandarin and thus began the spread of Buddhism.

It is said that during those days Bon religion was everywhere and it was Guru Padmasambhav who, being a Tantrik was able to control the good and aggressive spirits of Bon religion. To this day it is believed that there are many 'semi-controlled' spirits who will give trouble if humans step into their domain. To this day they do lot of worship offer rituals to please them.

Conclusion

Why in the Himalayas did the Buddhism find a peaceful heaven?

When the Muslims attacked the Indian territory they began to destroy the great centres of learning for both the Hindus and the Buddhist like, Vikrmsila, Nalanda, Taxshila. It became unsafe for the monks to reside there. They fled with their Holy Buddhist Text and came to Nepal. Slowly with Princess Bhrikuti's

promotion many migrated towards Tibet and Buddhism found a safe and peaceful haven in the Himalayas. As a Researcher I bow to Bhrikuti and remind the world of her good deeds.

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