A Leaf From the Bendall

"Vaṃśāvalī"¹

Thakural Manandhar

The language of the mss. in question is difficult. One part is written in debased Sanskrit and the other part in old Newari. Bendall borrowed the mss. and it was taken to London for research. One consequence of this was Bendall's article 'The History of Nepal and Surrounding Kingdoms' ². The same article was also inserted in the first volume of Mahamahopadhyaya Hara Prasad Shastri's catalogue of mss. in the Durbar Library ³.

There occurs on one of the leaves of the mss. the sentence - tatpascād bhotarajenamāyati rājyaṃ karoti nepālamanḍale - which is omitted by Professor Bendall in his article. But later, Professor Petech, in his book, "The Mediaeval History of Nepal (c. 750-1480), made an attempt to make sense of the sentence.

Professor Petech read: "tatpascād Bhotarāja-Namoyatih Nepālamanḍale rājyaṃ karoti": which he translated: After (the reign of Vasantadeva) the Tibetan king Namoyati (?) ruled over Nepal".

He construed the sentence to mean that a Tibetan king came and ruled the country because the word Bhot is used nowadays in Nepali to mean Tibet. However he also misread the text as 'Bhotarāja-Namoyatih' instead of 'bhotarajenamāyati' and this created another difficulty for him. After searching in the literature of Tibet to find out whether a king of this name appears anywhere he concluded: 'but there is nothing in the Tibetan texts about conquests in Nepal' at that time. He was forced to indulge in conjectures which seem quite irrelevant in this context.

Although I myself had the unexpected privilege of reading out the mss. to Professor Petech sometime during the summer of 1956 in the Bir Library itself, this sentence escaped my notice simply because I was not asked to translate it. What Professor Petech wanted to find out from my reading seemed to be only verification of the dates which he had jotted down in his notebook beforehand. And so it was that I did not pay attention to the sentence at that time. Later, when his book was published, I noticed his wrong interpretation, but it was too late. So afterwards in 1966 when I was in Rome for a short trip from Kiel, West Germany, I met Professor Petech and made some suggestions to correct this and a few other mistakes for a future edition of his book.

The correct reading of the sentence is "tatpascād bhotarajenamāyati rājyaṃ karoti Nepālamanḍale". nam is Newari ablative case-ending signifying 'from' and rāja is just a Newari variant of Sanskrit rājya since 'ya' is pronounced ye by Newari speakers. So it transpires that the sentence is a mixture of poor Sanskrit and Newari. 'Mo' is a misreading for 'ma' in Professor Petech's transcription. This is easily made, for, in Newari script, the
headline over mā, if it looks straight, is to be read mā; but, if it is curved, should be read 'mo'. Thus the correct reading of the sentence means literally that somebody (a king) comes from the Kingdom of Bhota and rules over Nepal.

However, the difficulty for a historian is not yet solved. The question arises as to what the word 'Bhota' implies in this context. If one reads through other Newari portions of the same ms., the answer becomes clear. The word 'Bhota is met with frequently in many other contexts, such as 'Bhota or Bhonta (a variant spelling) dāmanā va ke teochhi kāye mado' meaning that the cost of rice shot up so much that one dāma of Bhota or Bhonta currency could not fetch even four mānas (measure) of it. This is written when describing the intensity of suffering of the people in the year 466 Nepal era (1346 A.D.) in the region of Banepa, Panauti and the neighbouring villages which had fallen victims to famine or siege. So 'Bhonta dāma' implies a currency of Bhonta and indicates the existence of a state called Bhonta or Bhota.

Students of Nepalese history are aware of the fact that Nepal sometime after Amshuwarman was split into two half-kingsdoms in the days of the Lichchavis and the Thakuris; one half being 'yem' ⁵ (the Northern Kingdom) and the other being 'yela' (the Southern Kingdom). So we find two kingdoms in the Lichchavi period of Nepalese history, one major and the other minor as indicated by such expressions as vijayarājya and ardharañjya respectively. Historians like K.P. Jayaswal have described this kind of joint-rule as the Dvārājya system. Coming down to the early mediaeval period, we again find two kingdoms sometimes joint and at other times disjoint as indicated by such terms as 'Bhonta' and 'Gwanla', the one major and the other minor. In this case 'Bhonta' designated the eastern kingdom and 'Gwanla' the western kingdom.

Expressions like 'Bhonta rājyanamayati rājya kareti nepālamandale' (rājya here is Śanskrit spelling for rāja), 'bhonta yā gwanlam āya māthyākatom' ⁷ and 'bhonta yā gwanlan āya thīyākatom' ⁸ (these are pure Newari expressions) are met with in the same manuscript. Gwanla indicates the kingdom of Nepal (expressed in Sanskrit as Nepālamandala): the capital of this part, i.e. the western kingdom happened to be the town of Deo Patan which is still called in modern Newari 'Gwanla'; and Bhonta indicates the eastern kingdom with its capital in the city of Banepa, which is still called in modern Newari 'Bhonta'.

Another case in point is the appellation of 'Bhonta' to chiefs who came from or had their origin in the eastern kingdom of 'Bhonta'. The name of king Jaya Bhīmadeva (1258–1271) was preceded by this appellation (previous to his accession): Bhonta Shri Jaya Bhīmadeva. Many other chiefs from that kingdom had the same epithet prefixed to their names, for instance, Bhonta Jaya Shaktideva (the grandson of king Jaya Bhimadeva), Bhonta Shri Jaya Rājadeva (before he was
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crowned king), Bhonta Shri Shri Jayarjundeva (after his dethronement), Bhonta Jaya Simha Rama (previously a Prime minister of Banepa royal family, later, a feudatory of king Jayasthiti Malla).

eit.

This kingdom of Bhonta lost its identity as a separate state by itself only on Friday, Nov. 23rd 1380 A.D., when king Jayarjundeva, the last of the Banepa royal line was made to enter into his own kingdom (mahajatra yanga thawa raja Binapya kwatha dubhijvaca-kalom, as the Newari portion of the Vamsavali puts it) with honour and dignity, though deprived of power as a major king. Twenty-two days after that when he came to the fort or castle at Gokarna with an evil design to get back to power, his plan was nipped in the bud and he had to remain virtually a prisoner, in a house called Tripurakwachhen (in Bhatgao), where he died a year after on Feb. 3rd, 1382 A.D. The sympathetic tone with which the chronicler ends his narrative in the Sanskrit portion of the Vamsavali deserves notice. In a document written ten years after, in the year 511 N.E. (1391 A.D.), Jaya Simha Rama was referred to with the appellation as Shri Shri Bhonta (Bhuvanta) rajakula mahamatiya, meaning prime minister of the Bhonta Royal House while the Kingdom of Bhonta remained under his protection as a dependent state, acknowledging the formal suzerainty of king Jayasthitimalla. It was still considered to be an honour and prestige to make mention of his having had such connection with the defunct royal house in the past, with double Shri Shri as a mark of respect for the royal house though Jaya Simha Rama was ruling that part of the country at the time as a feudatory of king Jayasthitimalla. An end-leaf of the manuscript 'kriya samuccaya' in the Kaiser Library reads as follows:

(Nota in the document, the specific use of 'ubhaya raja kula ekatva' as an adjectival phrase for the King's Sword to indicate the merger of the two kingdoms lit. the two Royal Houses. This
tradition of installing this Royal Symbol on such big ceremonial occasions to signify the august presence of His Majesty is still observed nowadays in this country).

It seems quite probable that the Sanskrit form of Bhonta is Bhunkti. The same mss. states: samasta nepāla shri jaya rudra malla eua navakota bhunkti paryanta rāja kritam meaning that when Jaya Rudra Malla became all powerful he ruled the whole of Nepal which extended even up to Navakota and Bhunkti, after he had his own kinsman Jayarimalla deva crowned king (1320-1344). Even the expression 'raja Bhukti matram dadau' can mean that the newly enthroned king (Jayari Malla) was given only Bhunkti as his domain since there is every possibility that Bhukti and Bhunkti are just variants in spelling. It may be interesting for a historian to note that another neighbouring state founded originally by Nānya-deva was named 'tri bhukti' which afterwards got corrupted into modern 'Tirhut'.

Footnotes

1. The Bendall Vamsavali, afterwards named as Gopalaraja Vamsavali in the list prepared by the Bir Library. This article is based on my reading of the copy printed in 'Himavat Sanskriti, year l, no. 1.


4. See Luciano Petech, Mediaeval History of Nepal (c.750-1480), Roma, ISMEO, 1958, p. 29.

5,6. In old Newari yem means north, ye means south.

7. During the reign of King Ananta Malla in the year 427 N.E. (1307 A.D.) the king left 'Gwanla' for 'Bhonta' and after a year he died. His funeral rites were not performed until 4 days later. After that the 'Gwanla' kingdom remained separate or disjoint (excluding the 'Bhonta' kingdom).

8. Again in the year 468 N.E. (1348 A.D.) Jaya Rajadeva was crowned king in Gwanla and from that time onwards 'Bhonta' was admitted into the kingdom of 'Gwanla' or linked to it, 'ubhaya rajakula ekatva', as the Kaisher Vamsavali puts it. See p. 14 in the Kaisher fragment of the Vamsavali (in Kaisher Library), no. 171.