Virupaksha

— Hari Ram Joshi

The Nagas were one of the different tribes of the primitive age. The Nagas were of the matriarchal society. So, in their society the woman folks had unlimited sway in comparison with those men folk. So, the women were the rightful claimants of power and property. Men had no right on the property. That's why in the society of those days the sexual freedom was given priority to all even among the brothers and the sisters, so to say between mother and the son. The wealth always remains intact within a family only owing to this sexual freedom being allowed within a particular family. The popular legend that Virupaksha had sexual relation with his own mother finds support in this sexual freedom, prevailing in those days. Later on the Aryans, too, adopted the above mentioned tradition of marriage system practised by the Nagas. Innumerable instances are found in a careful perusal of Vedic, Itihas-Purana, Buddhist and Jain scriptures. In the Vedic literature we come across the legend of incestuous sexual relations of Prajapati Brahma with his own daughter. The Buddhist scriptures indicate that the Sakyan clan itself was the result of the sexual relations among the brothers and the sisters. The commentary of the Sutanipata, a well known Buddhist scripture, states that the Sakyas were reproached by the Koliyans for cohabiting like dogs with their own sisters. It is mentioned in Avashyakachurni, a Jain scripture, that King Ushava married his own daughter and King Pupphakctu allowed his son to marry his own sister.

Thus, from the very primitive times the tradition of sexual cohabitation even among blood relatives was widely prevalent among the ancient tribes of Nepal and India as it was spread in other ancient civilisations of this world, too. Lord Rudra-Siva, known as the revered god so to say the popular deity of the primitive man from before the advent of the Vedic Aryans, had married his own sister ‘Ambika’. This myth as well as the popular legend that Virupaksha, the chief of the Naga tribes, had sexual intercourse with his own mother can be taken here in this very context. This sort of sexual freedom among the primitive tribes of Nepal is, in fact, the logical sequence of the matriarchal system as well as the establishment of the rule of various non-Aryan tribes like the Nagas and so on in accordance with other contemporary civilisations of the world. The popular legend of Virupaksha can be accounted for on this very
basis. Lord Rudra-Siva, the non-Aryan god, was the revered deity of these Nagas in accordance with the tradition, prevalent among the other ancient tribes. Virupaksha, installed at Aryaghat in Pasupati region, is shown with a Siva-Linga in the left hand and a rosary in his right hand. This icon, clearly, supports the above facts. Besides, according to the Pauranic myths the Nagas were the gate-keepers of Pasupati-Siva. The Varahapurana states that the worship of Pasupati-Siva cannot be fruitful until and unless one first pays homage to the Naga. These facts, too, support the aforesaid statement.

It has already been discussed above that Virupaksha was the chief of the Nagas. It seems that this fact is supported with the Pauranic legends, too. According to Varahapurana, one of the eighteen prominent puranas, there was a Naga named Shleshamantaka at Pasupati region. After having atoned for sins by his severe penance, he obtained the favour of Pasupati-Siva. He, too, had an Ashram near about the Lord. That purana states, clearly, these facts. These descriptions of Varahapurana coincide mostly with the popular legend of Virupaksha. These facts lend support to the possibility that Shleshamantaka was also a name of Virupaksha. Most probably the Naga ‘Shleshamantaka’ came to be known as ‘Virupaksha’ after his absorption in Siva (चित्रं सादुप्त्र). Again, as the region was the dwelling place of the Naga ‘Shleshamantaka’, it became well known as Shleshamantaka forest. Hence, the fact that there was the huge habitation of the Nagas in that region, comes to be true. This view, too, has helped us to prove that Virupaksha was the chief of the Nagas.

Again, the Naga deities are especially shown emerging out of water in the artefacts. The images of this kind are available in the ‘Bharhut art’. According to Valmiki Ramayana and Divyavadana, the Buddhist scripture, they were the ‘Udaka nihirsita Devah’ i.e. the gods who had come forth out of water. During the Kushana period their images began to be installed on the banks of river or the big lakes. Because they were considered to be the patron deities of the water currents underneath. Virupaksha, having three eyes, installed at Pasupati Aryaghat can be taken here in this very context. This image is installed on the bank of the sacred river Bagmati and is shown as if it was emerging from under the waters. The people offer libation of water daily to him, too, as it was done to other Naga deities. From all these facts it comes to be known that Virupaksha was, first of all, the Naga chief and afterwards came to be worshipped as Rudra-Siva, having three eyes. According to Sivasatanamastotra Virupaksha is also one of 108 names of Siva. It, too, points out towards the aforesaid facts.

Soma, Agni, Indra and Varuna were the Dikpalas of North, East, South and West respectively in our religious viewpoint. But, in the popular version Dhritarashtra, the chief of the Gandharvas, Virupaksha, the chief of the Nagas, Vaishravana Kubera, the chief of the Yakshas as well as Virudhaka, the chief of the Kumbhanda tribes were the Lokpalas of East, West, North and South respectively. They were revered as Chatumaharajika or the four great gods. A thorough study of the Buddhist literatures as well as the Sanchi and the Bharhut Stupas renders (affords) a clear-cut picture of this fact. The names and homages of these deities are found to be mentioned even in Atharvaveda 11/9/17 and 8/6/15. In that veda they are stated as Gandharvapara, Kumbhamushka (Kumbhanda), Naga and Itarajana (Punyajana).
Virupaksha

Even though Virupaksha was a Naga chief, he had been very popular among the masses, coming to be adored as a god. According to Roopamandar (the scripture) he was one of the twelve Rudras. It is essential to give libations of water (तरंग) to Virupaksha also along with other various gods and goddesses as recorded in the Grihya rituals. These are the very reasons why the tradition of worshipping Virupaksha after installing his images, is still being practised here even though he was a Naga, a non-Aryan tribe. The installation of this Virupaksha image in the Pasupati region can be taken here in this very context. A mediaeval image of Virupaksha is installed at Gopuchchha i.e. Svyamabhu hill, too, in Kathmandu. The Kanchipuram copper-plate inscription, dated Saka era 1450 (1528 A.C.) states that an image and temple of Virupaksha was installed there in South India. Again, the Ramayana has stated that Virupaksha was an elephant of Lord Indra, the Lokpala of Eastern direction. Thus, although the non-Aryan Naga tribes were conquered by the Aryans, the Aryans were unable to counteract the popular version of the masses; the result was that they, accepting the popular approvals of other ancient tribes including the Naga one as an unaltered part of their religion and culture, had to adopt the culture of the conquered tribes as the foundation of their very existence. They recognized the matriarchal system of the non-Aryans in a doctrinal manner. The influence of matriarchy would, clearly, be visible in the fact that Siva becomes just like a corpse in absence of female energy (मातृत्वक्ष). This fact seems to be correct that none hates others, saying that they are destitute of Vishnu or Siva. But everyone abuses (condemns) the weak or incapables, saying that they are deprived of energy.

It seems that the image of Virupaksha, the Naga deity, was, first of all, installed at Pasupati Aryaghat in Nepal at about 5th century A.C. Lain S. Bangdel and Pratapaditya Pal differ in their dating of this image. According to Bangdel it was the product of the 4th century A.C. whereas Pal accepts it as of the 6th century A.C. But, in fact, this image seems to be the product of 5th century A.C. as shown with the study of history. The study of art and history has brought forth the aforesaid conclusion. It is essential to make thorough study of both sides viz. art and history of the image while fixing the conjectural date of its making. It does not seem to be proper at all to leave out history even though the art side is stronger enough. This image was, possibly, installed by Shree Bhogini, the Naga wife of the Lichchhavi King Shree Manadeva of 5th century A.C. in the memory of the tutelary or the guardian deity of her mother’s side (मात्र). It has already been mentioned in an editorial of Ralamba, Vol. 5, No. 3, the quarterly journal of the Joshi Research Institute, that Shree Bhogini was a Naga woman. The finding of this image of Virupaksha, the Naga chief, too, has lent support to prove the fact that Shree Bhogini was a Naga woman.

The first reference about Shree Bhogini is found out on the reverse of the coins, bearing the word ‘Shree Mananka’ which was circulated by the Lichchhavi King Shree Manadeva. The name ‘Shree Bhogini’ is; clearly, inscribed on that coin. With the finding of this coin it is known that Shree Bhogini was the principal queen of Shree Manadeva. The line ‘त्रिपशोषोत्ति कामिताय कष्टमृदुश्च वासनदेवी’ of the inscription of Vijayavati, the princess, is taken here as an ample evidence for proving it. After the numismatic evidence the first mention of Shree Bhogini is to be found on the very aforesaid inscription, dated Samvat.
427. That inscription was installed by Vijayavati, the daughter of Shree Manadeva by his consort Shree Bhogini, the Naga woman. She had erected an inscription along with the installation of a Siva Linga near about the image, installed by her mother. That was no other than the aforesaid Suryaghat inscription.

From the study of the aforesaid different facts it is known that Virupaksha was the chief of the Nagas and he was revered as a Naga deity. The finding of this image illuminates the fact that the tradition of the Naga tribes remained here in Nepal uninterruptedly from the very primitive times. This fact cannot be set aside.

**Notes and References**

1. Aitareya Brahmana, 3, 13, 9; Jaiminiya Brahmana 3, 261, 63.
   Cf. दो ग्रहविक: श्रेयस, ब्रह्मार राज्याय विभिन्त, पद्म, ५. सन् १८४५, पृ. २०९, २११.

2. Digha Nikaya 3. 14; Mahavastu.

3. Suttanipata 1.357
   Cf. N. N. Bhattacharya: op. cit., p. 130.

4. Cf. ibid, p. 130.

5. Vajasaneyi Samhita 2. 59;
   Cf. N. N. Bhattacharya: op. cit., p. 130;
   ‘ध्यायते 5 संघ पुनःगुरु गुर्जरेन ते राज्य माय: सहस्राम द्विवेदी में ज्ञान सहस्राम द्विवेदी में ज्ञान’

   तत्त्वज्ञानी संहिता १. ४. ६

   Cf. शास्त्रविद्या: पुराण, पृ. २०२;


   Hari Ram Joshi: The Naga Tribes (Rolamba, Journal of Joshi Research Institute, Vol. 4, No. 1)

7. Some thieves had dug the ground beneath the image of Virupaksha at Aryaghat in view of taking away that image about 2022 V. E. But, they were unsuccessful in their attempts. The fact came into light on that very occasion.

8. Cf. कल्याण-सहित्य: वराह पुराणांक, वर ५१ संवर ९, जनवरी १९२४, पृष्ठ ६०२, नीता प्रेम, गोरखपुर, पृ. ३८५.

9. Cf. कल्याण-पुराण, पृ. ३७९.

10. One of the four states of Mukti: The others being Samipya, Sarupya and Salokya.

11. Cf. वा पुणेशब्रह्मण एकबाल: भारतीय कला, पृविवी प्रकाशन, पुणे, १९२७ हि, पृ. २४५.


14. Cf. कल्याण-सहित्यांक: वर ६०, संवर १, इ. सन् १९२६, नीता प्रेम, गोरखपुर, पृ. ३४४.

15. Cf. वा पुणेशब्रह्मण एकबाल: पुराण, पृ. ३४४.

16. “वांडे भगवानं विष्णुं पुरातनम्। ते उत्तराय जनसहितं मन्त्रवाचारसहबद्धम्।
   सप्तं तत्त्वं रक्षितम्। १८५१।
   पुराणी महापञ्चालिकं: कुर्मसुपुरव्रह्मण ।
   रक्षितं ते चोंद्रभस्मम्। २0२२॥”
   अब्ज़ मावर ११५२ आदि.
“पूर्वों वश्चात प्रवद्धिन पुर्व पार्ष्वं: पुरों मुखा। खलमा: शक्तिमका उप्रणा मे च मातुराका: न स्वरेव प्रवद्धिन।”

—बर्षर्वेद १६.१६

Cf. पूर्वोक्त, प. १२२

Margaret and James Stutley: A Dictionary of Hinduism; 1977, P. 165
21. Cf. Margaret and James Stutley: ibid, P. 259
22. “हर देहीं विष्णुहीं न वर्णित जनान। वर्णितहीं वर्ण लघु प्रवद्धिन नराशमयै।”

—वेदो भागवत ३१.६१९

Cf. वाज दयाल गुप्त: बुद्ध महिमा, पुस्तक महत, दिल्ली, १९५१, प. ४२
25. Cf. हृदिराम प्रसाद: उत्तर प्राचीनकालीन मुद्रा, सांस्कृतिक प्रकाशन, वि. सं. २०४१, ख्पृ. ‘श्रीमानाद्रु’, २०४१, प्रति २२
26. Cf. हृदिराम प्रसाद: नेपालको प्राचीन क्षेत्रकित, ने. रा. वि. प्र. वि. सं. २०३०, प्रति २२, येत्वै २०, प. ६०