

The Cult of Bhimasena

-Jagadish Chandra Regmi

Hinduism in Nepal incorporates numerous cults including that of Bhimasena. Newar traders particularly worship him as their patron deity who is said to help them to get riches through trade. Hence, one can see pictures or images of Bhimasena take place at every shore in the Kathmandu valley. There are also numerous shrines and well built temples within and without the Kathmandu valley where the Newars have settlements.

It is important to note here that this cult of Bhimasena is unknown in India though some say that Bhimasena is worshipped by some aboriginal tribes in parts of central India.

Antiquity of Bhimasena cult may be related apparently to hero worship because he is one of the famous heroes of the Mahabharata epic, where he is also said to be the son of Vayu deity (or wind-god)

and enjoying extraordinary qualities of heroism. But in Nepalese tradition he is not actually worshipped in that capacity.

In the traditional history (Genealogy) of Nepal, Bhimasena finds his first mention as a resident deity of Dolakha where the valley was in the form of a lake¹. This mythology suggests that the Bhimasena cult has its origin from Dolakha.

We find another reference to Bhimasena in the genealogical work during Shivadeva Varma's² rule. The genealogy states³ that the king Shivadeva brought Kameshwara Bhimasena from the west and established him to the west of Pashupati temple. This is to refer a shrine at Deopatan which contains two stone images of Bhimasena.

Bhimasena Temple situated at Kirtipur is important because its name is recorded in an inscription dated A.D. 1587.⁴

1. The reference goes as—"The valley continuing to be a lake, some say that Bhimasena (one of the Pandavas of the Mahabharata) came from Dolakha and used to amuse himself on it in a stone, where a famous temple of his exists. The daughter of Danasur, seeing Bhimsen, ran away."—His-

tory of Nepal, Ed. D. Wright, p. 64.

2. King Shivadeva of inscriptions? whose dates are known to be ca. A.D. 590-604 A.D.

3. History of Nepal, Ed. D. Wright, p. 83.

4. D.R. Regmi—Medieval Nepal, IV. p. 35

There are two famous temples of Bhimasena, one at Patan and another in Kathmandu. The Bhimasena Temple of Kathmandu is said to have been built in A.D. 1140.⁵ An inscription of King Pratapa Malla standing there is dated A.D. 1655 which is important because it addresses Bhimasena as Lord Shiva. But the inscription is inscribed with 14 Sanskrit Verses composed by Pratapa Malla himself in praise of Bhimasena, as a hero of Mahabharata war.

The Patan Temple of Bhimasena is recorded in the genealogy⁷ as having antiquity as that of the Kathmandu. King Shrinivasa Malla had built a temple here in A.D. 1681 which is recorded in an inscription⁸.

The shrine of Bhimasena at Dolakha now presents only late inscriptions to prove its antiquity although traditional saying

claims much antiquity (as we have stated elsewhere) for it. The shrine itself presents us its composite religious character as the devotees worship in the shrine three deities Shiva and Kali including Bhimasena. Inscriptions lying around the temple and dated A.D. 1520 and succeeding years address the shrine as Shiva⁹. One inscription dated A.D. 1524 mentions 'Bhima-ganeshvara'¹⁰ and another inscription dated A.D. 1549 mentions the name as 'Bhimeshvara'¹¹. A critical analysis of other inscriptions and other records found there may exhibit the gradual evolution of the composite character of the said shrine.

Tantrik texts also retain chapters on the Bhimasena cult as exemplified by the famous text of Rudrayamala Tantra¹². An intensive study of religious literature and other appropriate sources may also prove the cult's importance and other allied topics.

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5. Devamala Vamshavali, ed. Yogi Naraharinath, p. 43.
6. Abhilekh Sangraha, pt III. p. 15; In a copper plate dated A.D. 1564 (D.R. Regmi-Medieval Nepal, II p. 43; Medieval Nepal, IV. PP. 20-21) mention is made of Bhimasena Temple. This reference may prove earlier existence of this temple though the reference is not much clear.
7. Devamala Vamshavali, pp, 32-33.
8. D.R. Regmi-Medieval Nepal, pt. IV. pp. 185 ff.
9. D.V. Bajracharya-T.B. Shrestha, Dolakha Aitihāsik Ruparekha, p. 85 ff.
10. Ibid p. 88
11. Ibid p. 94
12. I have in my possession a manuscript of 'Bhimasena Sahashranama' (1000 names of Bhimasena) which is stated to have been contained in the said Tantrik text.