

A Comparative Study About the Religion of Ancient Nepal and India (4th Century A.D. To 8th Century A.D.) as Gleaned from the Inscriptional Evidences

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt has been made to do a comparative study about the religion of ancient Nepal and India on the basis of inscriptional evidences. The time period is from 4th century A.D. to 8th century A.D., which is called Licchavi period in Nepal and Gupta age in India. This age is called 'Golden Age'. At that time Vaiṣṇavism was the most popular religion in India and Śaivism was the stronger faith in Nepal. The expression *Paramabhāgavata* is absent in the inscriptions from Nepal but present in the inscriptions from India. In Nepal the different names of Viṣṇu images are attached with the term *svāmī*; such as Nārāyaṇasvāmī, Vāmanasvāmī, Dolāśikharasvāmī etc. Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription of the time of Budhagupta says about the two deities named Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin. The first one probably the name of Śiva and the later was in all probability the image of the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu's dwarf incarnation was popular in Nepal and in India. Vedavyāsa was probably regularly worshipped in Nepal but he was present in Gupta inscriptions as the composer of the traditional verses not as a deity. The different names of Śiva are known from the inscriptions of Nepal. Bhadreśvara, Bhṛṅgāreśvara, Bhuvaneśvara are some of them. Such practice was prevailed in India also. Nirmand Copper Plate Inscription of Samudragupta refers his name as Mihireśvara. There were different sects of *Pāśupata*-s in Nepal. It is revealed from the inscriptional evidences that there was no conflict between Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism in Nepal and in India also.

In Nepal and in India Buddhism was served by the rulers who were the devotees of other religions. The Nepal inscriptions informs about lot of *vihāra*-s: Mānavihāra, Śivadevavihāra, Śrīmanvihāra etc. Gupta inscriptions and Nepal inscriptions both talk about *Ārya-vikṣu saṅgha* and *Ārya-vikṣuṇī saṅgha*. There is no instance of Jainism in Nepal inscriptions whereas plenty of instances available from Gupta inscriptions. Worship of Sun God, Śakti, and Mātrkā-s were popular in Nepal and in India.

Although the Gupta kings were the staunch followers of the Vaiṣṇavism and Śaiva –faith was the personal faith of the Nepal rulers, they gave equal respect to other gods and goddesses. Aṃśuvarmā was a Śaiva king but he did not ignore the Vaiṣṇavite gods. In his Harigaon Inscription dated 608 A.D. he gives due donations to Dolāśikharasvāmin, Narasiṃhadeva, Bhumbhukkikā, Jalaśāyanasvāmin. The Udayagiri Cave Inscription⁶¹ is a Śaiva inscription and it records that Śāvā Vīrasena, Chandragupta's minister of peace and war excavated a cave to serve it as a sanctuary of the god Śambhu.

Keywords: Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, *Pāśupata*-s, 4th century, Nepal, India, Religions.

Hindu Rulers of Nepal and India

Like the rulers of Nepal during 4th-8th century A.D., Gupta rulers are mostly Hindus and worshippers of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Hinduism restored in this period both in Nepal and in India.

1. Vaiṣṇavism: Most popular religion in India in Gupta age & Śaivism: Most popular religion in Nepal in Licchavi period

Vaiṣṇavism was the pre-dominant aspect of Brahmanical religion during Gupta period. In Nepal Śaivism was the most popular religion and Vaiṣṇavism was perhaps practiced along with Śaivism. Samudragupta was a worshipper of Viṣṇu and he introduced the emblem of Lakṣmī, consort of Viṣṇu on his coins.¹ Mānadeva I was a devotee of Viṣṇu and his *Mānānka* coins, contain image of a lion which may be compared to the Mināstambha, a symbol of Vaiṣṇavism.²



Gold coin of Samudragupta with Lakṣmī c. 335-375 CE

2. The Expression *Paramabhāgavata*

The expression *Paramabhāgavata* on his coins and inscriptions proves that Candragupta II was a devoted Vaiṣṇava. The expression *Paramabhāgavata* is absent in the inscriptions from Nepal.³ King Aṃśuvarṃ added the title to his name *Bhagavatpaśupatiṇṇānugrḥita*. Maybe he inspired by the examples of the Gupta kings who called themselves *Paramabhāgavata*.

The Meherauli Iron Pillar Inscription⁴ states that king Candra out of his devotion for Viṣṇu erected a pillar on a hill called Viṣṇupada. Mānadeva I perhaps built a magnificent temple of Viṣṇu on the top of Dolādri hill which is known as Chāṅgu.⁵

3. The Popularity of Vaiṣṇavism in Gupta Age and in Licchavi Period

The Udayagiri Inscription dated 401-402 A.D. states that the grandson of *Mahārājā* Chagalaga of the Sanakānika tribe took up a Sanskritic Viṣṇavite name Viṣṇudāsa.⁶ The Gadhwa Stone Pillar Inscription dated 467 A.D.,⁷ the Junagadh Rock Inscription of Skandagupta⁸ prove the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism at Gupta age. The later Gupta emperors were also Vaiṣṇavas. The Eran Stone Pillar Inscription of Budhagupta dated 485 A.D.⁹ is the proof where *Mahārājā* Mātrviṣṇu and his younger brother Dhanyaviṣṇu erected a *dhvaja-stambha* of Viṣṇu under the name of Janārdana. The Paśupati Stele of Jayadeva II (CXLII) dated 733 A.D. informs that king Viṣadeva was a great follower of Sugata's doctrine-*sugata-sāsana-pakṣapātī*. In the beginning part of the Chāṅgu Pillar Inscription there is the invocation of Hari. It is said in the inscription, the *Śrīvasta*, the sign of Sri Viṣṇu is imprinted on the vast chest of god Hari-*śrīvatsāṅkitadīptacāru vipula prodhṛtavakṣasthalaḥ* (I-line no.4). The inscription of Bhīmārjunadeva and Viṣṇugupta at Yangahiti (CVIII) dated 642 A.D. refers to the carving of an image of Viṣṇu lying in the sea. The Anantalingeśvara Inscription of Narendradeva (CXXII) dated 656A.D. mentions permanent donations to the temple of Lokapālasvāmin. On the basis

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of Lele Inscription (LXV) dated 604 A.D. it can be said that Śivadeva I believed in Vāsudeva. Although Aṃśuvarṃā was a Śaiva king but he did not ignore the Vaiṣṇavite gods. In his Harigaon Inscription (LXXIV) dated 608 A.D. he gives due donations to Dolāśikharasvāmin, Narasiṃhadeva, Bhumbhukkikā, Jalaśāyanasvāmin. The Bhairavdhokā Inscription of Dhruvadeva and Jiṣṇugupta (XCIX) containing the prayers of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī indicates that there was a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa-mūrti. At that time Viṣṇu was specially worshipped in his Jalaśayana form in Nepal but the Vyāsa, Narasiṃha, Balarāma, Trivikrama, Vāmana and Śūkara forms were no less worshipped.

4. Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin: Connection between Nepal and India

In Nepal the different names of Viṣṇu images are attached with the term *svāmī*; such as Nārāyaṇasvāmī (CI), Vāmanasvāmī (XXXII), Dolāśikharasvāmī (LXXIV), Lokapālasvāmī (CXXII) etc. It is known from the Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription of the time of Budhagupta¹⁰ about the two deities named Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin. According to R.K. Mukherjee, “At the time of Budhagupta pilgrims from North Bengal used to visit the Varāha-(Kokāmukha)-kṣetra of Nepal. One such pilgrim was Rbhupāla who carried home his devotion to God Kokāmukha-Varāha by constructing at his native place, near Dāmodarpur, the temples where were installed the images of Gods Śvetavarāha and Kokāmukhasvāmin in imitation of their original (*ādyā*) shrines in distant Nepal.”¹¹ The first one probably the name of Śiva and the later was in all probability the image of the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. The inscriptional records prove that Vaiṣṇavism was popular among the masses of Bengal till the middle of the 5th century A.D. and temples of Viṣṇu under different names were constructed at various places of this province.

5. Viṣṇu’s Dwarf Incarnation in Nepal and in India

From the Junāgadh Inscription of Skandagupta¹² it is known that Viṣṇu’s dwarf incarnation was popular during the Gupta period. Bhagavān Vāmanasvāmī in the Sankhu (Kathmandu district) Inscription (XXXII) dated 538 A.D. is the proof of Viṣṇu’s dwarf incarnation which was popular at that time in Nepal also.

The Eran Stone Inscription of Toramāṇa¹³ mentions about the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. The Anantaliṅgeśvara Inscription (CXXII) of Nepal dated 656A.D. refers *Varāhayātrā*.



In Nepal Viṣṇu was specially worshipped in his Jalaśayana form but the Vyāsa, Narasiṃha, Balarāma, Trivikrama, Vāmana and Śūkara forms were also worshipped.

Vedavyāsa was regularly worshipped in Nepal and there was a temple of Vedavyāsa in which his image was worshipped as a deity.¹⁴ The Kapinche (Patan) Inscription (XXVI) dated 527 A.D., records the grant of a land in favour of Mahārṣi Vaiśampāyana. Vedavyāsa was present in Gupta inscriptions as the composer of the traditional verses but nowhere he is said to be worshipped as a deity.

Narasiṃha deity in Bhaktapur Darbar, Nepal

6. Śaivism: Most Popular Faith in Nepal & South India

Śaivism was the stronger and most popular faith in Nepal in 4th-8th century A.D. Among the coins issued during Licchavi period, Paśupati coins are found in the largest number. The Budhhanilakantha Inscription of Mānadeva I dated 473 A.D. (VI) proves that with Viṣṇu Mānadeva I was a worshipper of Śiva also. There was no conflict between Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. Although Mānadeva I was personally a Vaiṣṇavite, but his two queens and daughter constructed Śaiva images (V & XIII) and Śiva *liṅgas* (XVIII). Aṃsuvarmā adopted the title of *bhagavatpaśupati bhāṭṭāraka pādānuḡṛhita* and Jayadeva II mentions in his inscriptions that all his ancestors were devotees of Śiva.¹⁵

Though Śaiva –faith was their personal faith the Nepal kings gave equal respect to other gods and goddesses.

The same picture reflected in the Gupta inscriptions. The Vākāṭakas of the south India were originally the devotees of god Śiva. The Tālagunda Pillar Inscription of Śāntivarman¹⁶ is a *śaiva* inscription and proves that Śaivism was very much prevalent in South India during the 5th century A.D. But Prabhāvatīguptā is delineated as the devotee of Viṣṇu as evidenced by her Poona Copper Plate Inscription¹⁷ (*atyantabhagavadbhaktā*). In the Chammak Copper Plate Inscription of Mahārājā Pravarasena II,¹⁸ Rudrasena II, Prabhāvatīguptā's husband, is said to be a worshipper of god Cakrapāṇi or Viṣṇu. Rudrasena I was an ardent devotee of the lord Mahābhairava. The Mandasore Stone Inscription of Yaśodharman and Viṣṇuvardhan dated 532 A.D.,¹⁹ was truly a *śaiva* inscription.

The cult of Śiva was the second expansive religion in India but in Nepal it was the first. Śiva was worshipped during the days of the Guptas, as evidenced by Kālidāsa's works and the *Meghadūta* refers to him as Mahākāla (*Purva Megha*-35). The Bilsad Stone Pillar Inscription of Kumāragupta dated 415-416 A.D.²⁰ informs that Dhruvaśarman, constructed a gateway, established an almshouse and erected a lofty pillar at a temple of god Kārtikeya. Kumāragupta also issued peacock type coins in honour of Kārtikeya. All these evidences speak of a Śaivaite character.



Kāl Bhairab, Kathmandu, Nepal

The Khoh Copper Plate grant of Mahārājā Hastin, dated 475-476 A.D.²¹ and the Majhgawam Copper Plate Inscription²² begins with the invocation of Mahādeva. But through the Khoh Copper Plate grant of Saṃkṣobha dated 528 A.D.²³ it is proved that Saṃkṣobha, son of Mahārājā Hastin did not follow his father's religious faith Śaivism and accepted Vaiṣṇavism.

7. The Cult of Lakuleśa in India and in Nepal

In the Mathura Pillar Inscription of Candragupta II dated 380 A.D.²⁴ refers Uditācārya as being tenth descent from Bhagavat Kuśika. Dr. Banerjee says,²⁵ "Bhandarkar identifies this Kuśika with one of the four disciples of the great Śaiva saint Lakuliśa or Lakulī who is believed to be the last incarnation

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of Mahādeva.”. The cult of Lakuleśa, the only incarnatory form of Śiva, was worshipped during the Licchavi period in Nepal as evidenced by the Chhatrachandresvara Inscription of the time of Jisṇugupta (CIV) dated 640 A.D.²⁶

Different Names of Śiva

Śaiva worship again is referred to in the Karamdāṇḍā Stone Inscription dated 436 A.D.²⁷ The Mahādeva known here as Prthivīśvara and in Nirmand Copper Plate Inscription of Samudragupta²⁸ refers his name as Mihireśvara. The Guṇaighar Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta²⁹ refers the name of the Pradyumneśvara Śiva. The name of Pradyumneśvara Śiva is known from the Deopārā *praśasti* of Vijayasena.³⁰ In Nepal Śiva was worshipped under different names-Bhadreśvara, Bhṛṅgāreśvara, Bhuvaneśvara, Candreśvara, Laḍitamahēśvara, Nātheśvara, Prabhukeśvara, Parvateśvara, Rāmeśvara, Viśveśvara, Vajreśvara.³¹ A practice is seen in Nepal which was practiced in south-India was that when an image was installed the name of the god was coined after the name of the person who constructed the temple and installed the image such as Anupameśvara by Ābhīri Gominī, wife of Anuparama and mother of Bhaumagupta (XXXIII); Vijayeśvara by Mānadeva I's daughter Vijayavatī (XVIII); Ratneśvara by Ratnasaṅgha (VIII); Jayeśvara by Jayalambha (XI) and Prabhukeśvara by Prabhusaṅgha (X).

Teacher of Pāśupata Sect

It has been observed through the study of the Nepal inscriptions (CIV dated 640 A.D.) that there were different sects of *Pāśupatas* and the teachers of those *Pāśupata* sects existed at that time. Such teacher was Ācārya Bhagavat Pranarddana-Prāṇa- Kauśika. The Mathura Pillar Inscription of Candragupta II dated 380 A.D.³² shows that under the teacher Ārya Uditācārya, Śaivism was flourishing in Mathura at that time. The two immediate religious teachers preceding Uditācārya were Bhagavat Upamita-vimala and Bhagavat Kapila-vimala.

8. Buddhism

In Nepal the earliest purely Buddhist information is found in the undated inscription from Lagantol (XXXV). Vṛsadeva was the first king whose partiality for Buddhism was on record. According to chronicles king Vṛsadeva favoured Buddhism and constructed *Danḍocaitya*. This inscription is on it which refers to the endowment of lands for feeding the *saṅgha*. The Mankuwar Stone Image Inscription of Kumāragupta I dated 448 A.D.³³ records that Bikṣu Budhhamitra installed the image of Budhha. Sāñcī continued to be a great centre of Buddhism. The Sāñcī Stone Inscription of Candragupta II speaks of a *mahāvihāra* at Kākanādaboṭa (Sāñcī).³⁴ The Nepal inscriptions inform about the *vihāras* named Mānavihāra, Śivadevavihāra, Śrīmanvihāra, Kharjurikavihāra, Madhyamvihāra, Ajikāvihāra, Abhayarucivihāra, Caturbhāḷaṭasanavihāra, Guṃvihāra, Jīvavarmāvihāra, Madhyamavihāra, Puṣpavāṭikāvihāra etc.³⁵

Sāranātha like Sāñcī was another reputed centre of Buddhism. Sāranātha had the two Budhha images containing inscriptions respectively of the time of Kumāragupta II, dated 473 A.D. In the first the Budhha is called *Śāstā* (teacher).³⁶

Ārya- vikṣu Saṅgha

The Sāñcī Stone Inscription, dated 412 A.D.³⁷ says that Āmarakārdḍava, a faithful attendant of Candragupta made a grant of 25 *Dīnāras* and a village called Īśvaravāsaka to the *Ārya-saṅgha*, i. e. the community of Buddhist monks. In the Licchavi inscriptions there are *Ārya- vikṣu saṅgha* (CXI, CXXVIII) and *Ārya- vikṣuṇī saṅgha* (CXXXVIII) also. It is true that Buddhism occupied an exalted position under the guidance of the Guptas though their patronage towards this religion was not direct.

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Āmarakārdhava who himself did not most probably belonged to the Buddhist order, showed his deep reverence for the Buddhist religion.

Buddhism was served by the rulers who were the devotees of other religions.

The Mandasor Stone Inscription of the time of Prabhākara dated 467 A.D.³⁸ records the construction of *stūpa*, *kūpa*, *prapā* (shed for supplying free drinking water) and *ārāma* (garden) in a Buddhist monastery by Dattabhaṭa, the commander-in-chief of the forces of king Prabhākara. The inscription is a unique blending of Brahmanism and Buddhism. Dattabhaṭa respected Hindu Gods and went forward to construct a Buddhist *stūpa*. The construction of a Buddhist *stūpa* by a *Brāhmaṇa* general was common in the Gupta Empire.

The same practice was popular in Nepal. Aṃśuvarṃā was a great devotee of Śiva but he treated Buddhism equally. Though Naredradeva was a great devotee of Paśupati-nātha who fed and devoted to Pāśupata *Brāhmaṇas* and assumed the title of *Paramamaheśvara*, he had also same reverence to Budhhha who depicted *dharmacakra* (Buddhist-wheel) in some of his inscriptions.³⁹ The Guṇaighar Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta⁴⁰ is the earliest record speaking of a Hindu king who made a gift to a Buddhist *vihāra*. Like the earlier Gupta monarch Vainyagupta was not a follower of Viṣṇu. He was a great devotee of Mahādeva.

Avalokiteśvara

Guṇaighar Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta⁴¹ also mentions Avalokiteśvara. The worship of Āryavalokiteśvara and Avalokiteśvara became very popular at that time in Nepal. The installation of an image of Bhagavat-Āryāvalokiteśvara is recorded in the Lagantol (Kathmandu) Inscription of the reign of Rāmadeva (XXXV). The Buddhist deities including Avalokiteśvara invoked in the inscription on a *caitya* (XCI) in Nepal.

Budhha in Different Names

The Kurā Stone Inscription of Toramāṇa⁴² throws light on the state of the Buddhism prevalent in the Punjab area during the first part of the 6th century A.D. the Budhha has been described here as the god of the gods (*Devātideva*). In the Chabahil Inscription (XII) the Buddha is mentioned as *Mahāmuni*, but in the Simbhu stupa fragmentary inscription he is described as *Sambuddha Jagadekaguru*.⁴³

Daily worship

The Guṇaighar Copper Plate Inscription of Vainyagupta dated 507 A.D. ⁴⁴states that from the income of the *agrahāra* land the worship of the lord Budhha with perfumes, flowers, lights, incense were directed to be held thrice a day-*gandha-puṣpa-dhūpa-dīpādi-pravarttanāya* (lines 5-6). The inscription at Pharping dating back to Aṃśuvarṃā has mentioned the construction of a shrine of the Buddhist god Kumaravijaya (LXXXIII) is of interest mentioning umbrella, garment, flower, vermilion, lamp, and musical instruments in connection with the worship of the god. The *saṅgha-prāsāda* mentioned in the Naxal Inscription⁴⁵ was most likely a Buddhist *saṅghārāma*. The devoted followers recited stanzas of Navagrantha (nine sacred scriptures) in the *vihāras* and in front of images of the Buddhist divinities in the morning and evening.

Baigram Copper Plate Inscription dated 447 A.D.⁴⁶ is a deed of sale and registers the purchase by private persons of *khila* (fallow) and *vāstu* (homestead) lands belonging to the state for the purpose of donation to a temple. The purpose of the purchasing land was to meet the expenses, out of the income from the lands, for repairing the temple of lord Govindasvāmin, when damaged or dilapidated, and for the performance of daily worship with perfumery, incense, lamp or flowers.

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Jainism

Jaina devotees also used to get support from the Gupta kings. The Udaygiri Inscription dated 425 A.D.⁴⁷ informs that Śaṅkara, a disciple of Ācārya Gosvāmin, erected an image of Jaina Tirthaṅkara Pārśva or Pārśvanātha. An excellent liberal outlook of Skandagupta's time is furnished by Kahum Stone Pillar Inscription dated 460-461 A.D.⁴⁸ which states that Madra who had great respect for *Brāhmaṇas* set up five images made of stone of the Jaina Tirthaṅkaras.

The religious practices of the Buddhists and the Jainas usually took the form of installations of the statues of the Buddha and the Tirthaṅkaras respectively. The Gunaigharh Inscription of Vainyagupta confirms that monks, residing in the *saṅgha* were provided with clothing (*cīvara*), food (*piṇḍapata*), and bedding (*śayana*), seating (*āsana*) and medicines.

The conclusion can be drawn like this: the Gupta kings valued the religious toleration much and it is a pointer to amity and peace that prevailed among heterogeneous religious sects. The Paharpur Copper Plate Inscription dated 478 A.D.⁴⁹ records that a Brāhmaṇa couple intended to purchase some fallow lands for the purpose of making donation in favour of a Jaina *vihāra*.

It is said that "During the rule of the 15th Kirāta King Jinghri, another religious doctrine, Jainism, was being preached by Mahavir in modern-day country called India. Bhadrabahu, a disciple of Mahavira Jaina, is said to have come to Nepal. But Jainism did not gain as much popularity as Buddhism in Nepal."⁵⁰ Regarding Jainism unfortunately there is no information available from select dated inscriptions.

Other Minor Religious Cults

Sun god

Worship of Sun god was popular in ancient Nepal. The Tebahal Sun Image Inscription (X) dated 480 A.D., records the installation of an image of the Sun god and a land grant to him. The deity here is called Bhagavān Indra Divākara. It is not known how the name of Indra came to be associated with Sun. In the Lele inscription (LXV) dated 604 A.D. there is reference of Indragoṣṭhikā which proves that worship of Sun god was popular at that time.

Worship of Sun was similarly popular in the time of the Guptas. The Mandasore Stone Inscription of Kumāragupta I and Bandhuvarman dated 436 and 437 A.D.⁵¹ state that a temple of Sun was built by the silk-weavers. Skandagupta was also a worshipper of the Sun-god as evidenced by some of his silver coins.⁵² The Indore Copper Plate Inscription dated 465 A.D.⁵³ speaks of a temple of Sun established by two merchants of Indrapura. The Gwalior Stone Inscription of Mihirakula⁵⁴ informs that Hūṇa Mihirakula was a devotee of Śiva. This inscription is an interesting evidence of the Sun cult in the Gupta era. It is said in the inscription that Mātṛceṭa, caused to be made a stone temple of the Sun. From the inscriptional evidences it is revealed that during the Gupta age the Sun cult extended over the vast portion of the Madhya Pradesh. From the Banshkhera and Madhuvan inscriptions of Harṣavardhana it is known that Harṣa's ancestral deity was the Sun and his ancestors were called *paramādityabhakta*.

Śaktism and Tantricism

The Bihar Stone Pillar Inscription, dated 455-467 A.D.⁵⁵ refers to the worship of Skanda or Kārtikeya along with the divine mothers which connect with the Śaktism or Tantricism. Tantricism was very much cultivated during the time of Skandagupta. This Gangdhar Stone Inscription of Viśvavarman dated 423 A.D.⁵⁶ also says, Mayūrākṣaka, a minister of Viśvavarman who was a great devotee of Viṣṇu constructed the temple of divine mothers. The association of Dākinī-s or female ghosts with the mother goddess and with the magic rites is a clear evidence of the introduction of Tantricism in Brahmanical faith. There is Tantricism in Buddhist faith in Nepal. During the first half of the 7th century, Vajrayāna deities became popular among Nepalese Buddhist. Deities such as Svayambhū Vajrayogini and Śākyamuni Budhha are repeatedly referred to in ancient inscriptions. Numerous famous teachers and adepts from India such as Vasubandhu, the tantric Nagārjuna, Padmasambhava, Śāntirakṣita and Kamalāśīla are said to have come to Kathmandu valley in the service of Buddhism but none of these seems to have stayed for very long. The activities of Nagārjuna, Padmasambhava and Vasubandhu are identified with miraculous events, which tend to support the notion that tantric forms of Buddhism were present in the valley at a very early stage.⁵⁷ Some tantric Buddhist deities of this period are known from the inscriptions (XCI), chronicles and Tibetan sources-



Saptamātrikā

Akṣyobhya, Amitābha, Vajrayoginī, Vajravairabha, Uṣṇīṣavijaya and Samantabhadra. There was a strong influence of mother Goddess cults which resulted in Buddhist deities. The Inscription of Sikubahi (XLVIII) talks of Mātrikās. In south India, Saptamātrikā worship is prevalent, the Aṣṭamātrikā are venerated in Nepal.⁵⁸

Contemporary inscriptions record that Śakti was worshipped in Gupta period under the names of Bhagavatī, Bhavānī, Kātyāyanī, Devī, Pārvatī etc.⁵⁹

Though the Gupta kings were *Paramabhāgavatas*, “...yet they worshipped Śakti or Durgā, invoked her in their strenuous campaigns of conquest and defence against the invading Hūṇas and depicted her in their coins, Siṃhavāhanā or Lakṣmī appropriately figured on many Gupta coins”⁶⁰

At that time Śakti worship was popular in Nepal also.

Vijayasvāmini, wife of Mānadeva I was a devotee of Bhagavati Vijayaśrī, and installed an image of Palanchowk Bhagavati (XIV) on 503 A.D. The Harigaon inscription of Aṃśuvarmā (LXIX) dated 606 A.D. records a grant of 3 *Purāṇas* and 1 *Paṇa* which is donated to Śrīdevī. May be Śrīdevī enjoys the Śākta connection. Devī and Śrī support the Śākta association of Devī Bhagavatī Vijayaśrī.

Religious Tolerance

It is known from the inscriptional evidences that Gupta kings had a liberal outlook upon religion and they donated to all religious sects.

Although the Gupta kings were the staunch followers of the Vaiṣṇavism, their subjects could belong to any sect and follow any religion like Nepal rulers.

The Udayagiri Cave Inscription⁶¹ is a Śaiva inscription and it records that Śāvā Vīrasena, Chandragupta’s minister of peace and war excavated a cave to serve it as a sanctuary of the god Śambhu. Chandragupta II a Vaiṣṇava king was tolerant enough to appoint a minister having a leaning towards Śaivism.

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The Khoh Copper-Plate Inscription of Sarvanātha dated 512 A.D.⁶² records the repairing of the shrine of Viṣṇu and Āditya and Sarvanātha declared that some amount of the income should be spent for the purpose of the maintenance of *bali, caru, satra* etc in both these shrines.

The Bhamodra-Mohotā Copper Plate Inscription of Droṇasiṃha dated 502 A.D.⁶³ contains the various religious beliefs of the Vallabhī kings. Dhārāsena I and his younger brother Droṇasiṃha were devotees of Maheśvara. Droṇasiṃha's younger brother Dhruvasena I was a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. Dhruvasena's younger brother was a great devotee of Āditya.

It is said that "In spite of the Guptas' predilection towards Vaiṣṇavism this period was the spectrum essentially of religious harmony and toleration, in the Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism existed side by side."⁶⁴ In the Paharpur Copper Plate Inscription⁶⁵ refers *Brāhmaṇa* as donors. This grant records that a *Brāhmaṇa* and his wife intended to purchase some fellow lands to donate in favour of a Jaina *vihāra*.

Though Śaiva –faith was their personal faith the kings of Nepal gave equal respect to other gods and goddesses. Although Māndeava I was personally a Vaiṣṇavite he was catholic about other sects and put no hindrance to his spouses and daughter. General people were also free to adopt any sect which indicated his religious toleration. Though Naredradeva assumed the title of *Paramamaheśvara*, he had also same reverence to Budhhha who depicted *dharmacakra* (Budhhist-wheel) in some of his inscriptions.⁶⁶

Although Aṃśuvarṃā was a Śaiva king but he did not ignore the Vaiṣṇavite gods. In his Harigaon Inscription (LXXIV) dated 608 A.D. he gives due donations to Dolāsīkharasvāmin, Narasiṃhadeva, Bhumbhukkikā, Jalaśāyanasvāmin. Aṃśuvarṃā was a great devotee of Śiva but he treated Budhhism equally. The Harigaon inscription of Aṃśuvarṃā (LXXIV) dated 608 A.D., shows the rulers played a very significant role in the development of Buddhism in Nepal. The Harigaon inscription of Aṃśuvarṃā (LXIX) dated 606 A.D. records a grant to Devī Bhagavatī Vijayaśrī. From the term *Ṣaṣṭhīdevakula* appear in the Harigaon inscription of Aṃśuvarṃā dated 606 A.D., (LXIX) which clearly indicates that the temple belongs to the folk goddess Ṣaṣṭhī.

The example of one Śaiva ruler (Aṃśuvarṃā) who simultaneously donated to Vaiṣṇavite gods, *vihāras* and *saṅghas*, to Devī Bhagavatī Vijayaśrī and to the folk goddess Ṣaṣṭhī indicate to take the idea that at that time in Nepal the rulers were no less liberal and tolerant than the Gupta rulers of India.

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4. *C.I.I.*, III, No. 32, p. 139.
5. According to Regmi, "although the inscription belongs to Mānadeva, it should not be considered that the temple was his creation or he had set up the image of Nārāyaṇa in it. They existed before his reign"- D.R. Regmi, *Inscriptions of Ancient Nepal*, III, p. 09.
6. *ibid*, No. 3, p. 25, line, 2.
7. *ibid*, No. 66, p. 268.
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