

THE LAND SYSTEM OF THE LICCHAVIS IN NEPAL¹

Prayag Raj Sharma

Kathmandu

INTRODUCTION

The present article is an attempt to understand and appreciate the workings of the land system prevalent under the Licchavi rulers of Nepal and the implications of this system for the period immediately preceding as well as following it. Based on strictly documentary evidence, the period of Licchavi rule opens in the reign of Mānadeva with his Cāngu Pillar inscription dated 464 A.D. and closes with the reign of Jayadeva II, the last celebrated ruler of the dynasty, in the second quarter of the 8th century. The source on which I have based the present study is the corpus of inscriptions from this period. These have been compiled and edited in an excellent manner by Dhanavajra Vajracarya in his, *Licchavi Kālakā Abhilekha* (abbreviated as *LA* from here on), Institute of Nepal and Asian

1. The paper has benefitted much from the valuable comments made on its earlier draft by Dr Chaitanya Mishra of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies and Prof. K.P. Malla of the Institute of Humanities of T.U. Similarly, Dr John K. Locke has helped in editing the English, and Dr Krishna Chandra Mishra of the Institute of Humanities, in reading the Sanskrit text of the inscriptions. As I am grateful to each and every one of them for their help, I should, however, mention here that as to the opinions expressed in the paper I alone am responsible.

Studies, Vikram Samvat 2030, i.e. 1973 A.D.¹ All my citations from and references to inscriptions in this paper depend on this book. In the arrangement and interpretation of the material in the inscriptions, however, I have made my own reasonings and drawn my own conclusions, which may be at variance with Dhanavajra's. Dhanavajra's commentaries on the Licchavi inscriptions are the first, and so far the only, exhaustive explanations available to historians; and hence their importance to us cannot be overemphasized. Still, the meaning given in many places leads us to the conclusion that the inscriptions have been treated in a piecemeal manner and hence the treatment is only suited to explain single inscriptions. My attempt here has, therefore, been to present a more holistic, although by no means exhaustive, picture focussing mainly on the land system of the Licchavis of Nepal.

The Licchavi records enable us to elicit some interesting points concerning contemporary land administration and form some ideas on the social and economic interrelations of land prevalent in an ancient, historical Hindu society in Nepal. The long time span covered by these inscriptions is not a

1. Dhanavajra's book includes all the Licchavi inscriptions found up to the time of its publication. It incorporates those inscriptions which were first reported by Bhagavanlal Indrajit, Bendall, Lévi, Gnoli and the Itihasa Samsodhana Mandala, giving their latest and improved readings. Altogether, it has 189 inscriptions written in the Sanskrit language and the Licchavi (Gupta) script of the North-Indian variety. These inscriptions fall into five main types according to their contents and purpose: (a) royal edicts 85, (b) panegyrics 2, (c) verses made in praise of sects by their votaries 8, (d) short inscriptions consecrating images, *lingams* (stone phallic symbols), water-spouts, etc. 60, and (e) short inscriptions giving just the dates or names of persons issuing them 34. Information relating to land is found in (a) and (d) types of inscriptions.

static period, as one might be led to believe, but is marked by several stages of change in respect to the policy followed regarding landownership. An interesting historical circumstance attending this period is the steady flow of an indic population migrating from the plains of India to take up permanent residence in the Nepal Valley, where an indigenous population of a different ethnic and cultural origin had been living for a long time.

It is my intention to postulate in this paper that a pre-Licchavi system of landownership managed to survive in some form right down to the time when the Licchavi records first appear in the 5th century A.D. It seems quite possible that vestiges of such landownership, which allowed authorities to interfere in village administration and to levy taxes on the villages, lingered on in at least some parts of the Valley, if not everywhere. This practice is certainly not a proof of a parallel and confronting authority existing alongside the Licchavi rulers. It is merely indicative of a short transitional period before the Licchavi rulers succeeded in consolidating their position. Very soon, the Licchavis brought about a change in this situation, as a result of which they assumed a more direct authority and control over these lands. As the Licchavi system was based on the ancient Hindu system of landownership,¹ its adoption was perhaps inevitable because of the

1. Ideally, the King is the owner of all land in his kingdom (*bhūpati*) under this system. The Hindu Science of Polity clearly suggests this. See Kautilya's *Arthasāstra*, Book VII, Chap. 11. If reaping and exploiting the fruits of the land and keeping up maximum productivity by not letting the land lie fallow are among the King's main economic concerns, his other duties also include protecting the *dharma* and protecting the people in his country from marauders and external invaders. The notion of *dharma* (goodness or righteousness) is the notion of ultimate moral order in the world as the Hindus visualised this. The king remains committed to guarding this moral order. This idea is

gradual change that was coming about in the ethnic and cultural make-up of the population of the Valley. Great numbers of indic migrants and their local indicized converts were now settling in

well brought out in the story of Kings Ben, Pr̥thu and the Earth in the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, which I will narrate briefly below. For performing the role of protector, the king maintains the right to extract a share of the produce from all lands in his kingdom. His commitment to the ways of *dharma* would, however, require him to make gifts of land from time to time to Brāhmaṇas learned in Vedic knowledge and the performance of sacrifices, so that they might carry on with their prescribed duties without having to worry about their livelihood. Such an act was considered highly meritorious. There may be similarities in the economic practices relating to land between the ancient Hindus and other feudal systems prevailing elsewhere in the world; but gifting away lands to Brāhmaṇas in acknowledgement of their superior ritual status, which in its train created a class of landowners based exclusively on caste, is its most unique and distinguishing feature.

The story of Ben, Pr̥thu and the Earth runs thus: King Ben was an oppressive ruler bent on defying *dharma* and deviating from its path. The story implies that such behaviour by the king is equal to breaking the trust the people have in him, which may be the same as breaching the contract in a Social Contract Theory of Kingship. The ascetics (Brāhmaṇas) first try to dissuade Ben from following this delinquent path; but when he pays no heed to their advice, they kill him with the power of their anger. However, being without a king is considered an even greater insecurity than having one who does not follow the *dharma*. Hence the same ascetics try to get a new king in place of Ben. This they do by shaking the arms of the corpse of the dead king and producing out of the corpse an extremely likeable person called Pr̥thu, whom they then anoint king. By then, however, Earth has become an unyielding and barren place. Pr̥thu decides, therefore, to punish Earth. Earth, who has now assumed the form of a cow, runs away from him for protection, but finally surrenders. She also tells him why she had gone barren. She had been overly and improperly exploited by those who had little regard for *dharma*. She then advises Pr̥thu to tend her and exploit her properly in the future, to level the land and prepare it for agriculture, so that she might again be bounteous. Accordingly the king sets up villages for cultivators and cattle herders, establishes townships and big cities; and thus, good times are restored. *Bhāgavata Purāna*, translated into Nepali by Pt. Vasudeva Bhattarai (Kathmandu: Nepali Bhasa Prakasini Samiti, Vikram Samvat 2017) Vol. I, *Skandha* 4, Chapters 14-18, pp. 328-41.

non-Aryan, pre-Licchavi Nepal. The Licchavis seem to have made appropriate changes in the land tenure policy in order to accommodate these new groups on the land under relatively liberal terms. Later again, when village settlements became even more densely settled by a Hinduized population, there seems to have been a further change in the land ownership policy of the Licchavis. By assigning people common plots of land on easy terms, this policy encouraged them to form and live in communities of diverse names bound together by ties of kinship, common religious sects, and co-operative work relating to institutionalised religious or social obligations.

THE KIRĀTĪ LEGACY

The early Licchavi inscriptions, from Vasantadeva down to the period of the joint rule of Śivadeva and Amśuvarmā, make wide reference to certain offices in connection with the tax-collecting activities and other related privileges enjoyed by these officials in the villages. The offices are *kuthera*, *liṅgvala*, *śullya* or *solla*, and *māpcoka*. The meaning of these terms and the exact functions carried out by these officials in contradistinction to each other is not clear to us from the inscriptions.¹ References to these offices thin out considerably

1. Although much speculation is forwarded in *LA* on the probable separate functions carried out by each of these four offices in the Licchavi administration, there is not a single conclusive proof supporting the conclusions. Only the *māpcoka* seems to have been changed into a regular government office with its distinctive functions in the later, post -- Amśuvarmā period. Some details of the functions of the *māpcoka* contained in *LA* 116 are very revealing, where mention is made of some social and property laws. The inscription says that a woman retained a claim to her husband's property even after he died, disappeared, became an ascetic or lost his caste. Up to this point, it conforms well to the practices of Hindu Law. But the inscription then goes on to say that the woman's claim to the property would continue even if she were to take a new husband or become

in the later inscriptions; and after the Kevalpur inscription of Jiṣṇugupta (LA 109), three of the offices are no longer mentioned. Only the office of the *māpeoka* continues to be mentioned until the inscriptions of Narendradeva (LA 123) and Jayadeva II (LA 149). However, the role of the *māpeoka* at this time was probably not the same as it had been when this office was part of a set of four offices in the earlier inscriptions. The idea that these offices were a set of four is conveyed by the use of such expressions as *caturṣvadhikaraṇeṣu*,¹ which was, no doubt, a collective term of reference to the above four offices (LA 25, 44-49).

The occasion for addressing these officials in the royal edicts was invariably a prohibitory order forbidding them to transgress the village boundaries, even for reason of *pañcāparādha* (literally, the 'five crimes') affairs and *abhilekhyam* (literally, 'documents committed to writing') in the village. This is stated, for example, in LA 31 and 32. It is further stated in a series of six inscriptions, all from the Balambu area, issued

a woman of easy virtue, so long as she begot an offspring out of such union. This is in contravention to any known Hindu Law (unless it was not referring to the personal property of women under *strīdhana*, which specifies the kinds of personal property which women may hold as their own), because fidelity to the dead husband is a must in order to enable a woman to enjoy his property. Only if she fails to produce an offspring, says the inscription, does the property go to the *māpeoka* office. Would not this law be somewhat reminiscent of the *kipaṭ* land-retaining rules prevalent among the Limbus of eastern Nepal, under which Limbu chiefs (*subbas*) gave land to Limbu members to cultivate, but which reverted to the chief if such a member died without an heir? Licchavi property law in general seems to have given greater rights to women, but this law clearly shows deference to non-Hindu tribal customs.

1. The word *adhikaraṇa* would no doubt mean an office of authority such as the meaning conveyed by the terms *kuthera*, *liṅgvala*, *śullya* and *māpeoka*. It looks likely that the authority in question was derived from the residual powers of the Kirāta landowners with the endorsement of the Licchavis.

in uniform language and on the same date by Gaṇadeva in these words: 'You the villagers addressed in the edict were blessed with a favour according to which *kuthera* and *śullya* officials were forbidden to enter your village; having been apprised of this situation by *sarvadaṇḍanāyaka mahāpratihāra* Bhaumagupta, I decree that all four officials, including the *lingvala* and *māpeoka*, shall not henceforth enter your village even on the pretext of [investigating] a *pañcāparādha* offence,' (LA 44-49).¹ There are in all, ten such edicts issued by Vasantadeva and his successors up to the time of the rise of the joint-rule of Śivadeva and Aṁśuvarṁā. Each of these edicts seeks to restrict the authority of the above offices by forbidding the officials to exercise their customary authority in those villages. This also seems to make these edicts the largest single group on any one subject-matter.

During Śivadeva and Aṁśuvarṁā's time, some of these offices are again made the subject of royal address in the edicts. Although the general purport of the inscriptions is the same, there is a slight variation in the nature of the message. The royal order is now directed mainly to the *kuthera* officials, who alone are given the right of entry into the village, or the *draṅga*, if such be the case. (The meaning of *draṅga* will be explained at length later.) However, they were given the right of entry only to raise the 'three just and proper taxes' (*samucitastrikara*). I will discuss the form of these three taxes later, but it is certain that 'just and proper' means that they were considered so and hence allowed by the Hindu tradition. The edicts then hasten to add that these officials are strictly denied entry into the villages for affairs concerning *pañcāparādha*

1. 'Pūrva rājabhir yuṣmākaṁ kutheraśullyadhikaraṇābhyāṁ na praveṣṭavya-mityanugrahaḥ kṛtodhunā mayā sarvadaṇḍanāyaka mahāpratihāra Śri Bhaumaguptā-nugñāpitena lingvalmāpeokādhikaraṇābhyāṁ pañcāparādhadvāreṇa catur-bhirapyadhikaraṇair na praveṣṭavyamiti.'

and *lekhyadāna*. (*Lekhyadāna* should relate to the drawing up in writing of the deed of a gift of land, and hence may give us some more precise indication of the meaning of *abhilekhyam* mentioned above). In one edict (LA 60), it is clearly stated that the *lingvala* and *śulli* officials are on no account to enter the specified *draṅga*, not even on the pretext of *pañcāparādha* offences. The last prohibitory edict with regard to these offices, debarring them from entering Nupunnadraṅga (LA 109), was issued by Jisnugupta. The residents of this *draṅga* are exempted from paying tax obligations relating to *daṅkhuṭṭārtha* (meaning not clear), perhaps with their free labour.

Now, what kind of offices did these four names stand for? What might have been their place and function in the Licchavi administration? From the time we hear about them in the inscriptions, their authority in the villages was on the decline, slowly but certainly. The authority they had exercised in the villages of at least certain areas of the Nepal Valley, related to tax-collecting, *pañcāparādha* and *lekhyadāna* works in the village. They are at first deprived of acting as authorities in one sphere and later in the other spheres. These inscriptions do not explain the nature of *pañcāparādha* or what these five offences consisted in. The names of some of the more serious public crimes in those days are mentioned, however, in much later inscriptions (LA 117, 118, 133). They included theft, murder, treason, and adultery with another man's wife. The punishment for these crimes was twofold. First was confiscation of the property of the individual committing the crime and of the members of his family, though the family was spared later by royal decree in favoured villages. Second was the king's claim to the body of the offender, whether for execution or enslavement is not clear (LA 133). In the time of Visnugupta and the kings that followed him, the king himself took an interest in awarding punishment for these crimes.

The responsibility for investigating and punishing these offences had at one time been clearly within the domain of the four offices, *kuthera*, *śullya*, *lingvala* and *māpcoka*, before they were deprived of this right. This suggests their important position and power.

In the new arrangement, why were the *kuthera et al* officials deprived of the functions which they had been exercising, most probably as a customary tradition? Were they mere officials appointed by the king and therefore functioning at his beck and call, and according to his orders? Or do these names signify some seats of traditional land authority, whose position, even though subsidiary to the sovereign king, was far superior to that of other offices? Were the villages in question made completely tax free by the royal edicts which mention and restrict the authority of the *kuthera et al*? This seems unlikely, for one could then just as well argue that the villages to which the *kuthera et al* were denied access for the investigation of *pañcāparādha* crimes were thereby granted licence with respect to these crimes.

There was a special category of land-grant signifying a gift of land made on a completely tax-free basis. It is indicated by the expression *koṭṭa* which such an exempted village was called by, and the expression *acātabhaṭapraveśyam*, which signified that no government official would dishonour the royal order by transgressing its well-defined boundaries. Thus it seems that favouring villages with the restricted activity of the *kuthera et al* merely signified their status in terms of a reduced tax rate and/or replacement of one authority system by another. The privileges of the *kuthera et al* officials continued to be exercised in another sphere, i.e. *lekhyadāna* or *abhilekhyam*. This probably meant that a prior approval of these officials was essential before villagers could set aside land they owned for various kinds of social and religious endowments. All this

speaks of a great authority exercised by these officials in village social and land administration matters. The edicts of the Licchavi kings in the early years seem to be trying to bring about an alteration in the situation by gradually replacing them.

In the inscriptions of Śivadeva and Aṁśuvarma (LA 60-64), the *kuthera* were allowed to enter the village to whom royal favour is being made only on certain conditions: they could go into such villages only for the purpose of realising the three just and proper taxes. The expression *samucitastrikara mātra sādhanāyavaiva* puts an unmistakable emphasis on the idea of realising taxes at a just and proper rate. Hence it is obvious that before the promulgation of such decrees in these villages, a different rate of land tax was prevalent and that such a tax was, if anything, heavier. What made a tax just in the eyes of the Licchavi rulers? Most probably their perception of a just tax lay in its conformity to the Hindu traditions as defined in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* and other classical law books of the Hindus, such as the *Manusmṛiti*. If this presumption is correct, it would mean that some of the villages still had a different rate of tax and a different system of land administration, both of which were probably a continuation, in some form, of the earlier Kirāta land system. This would further mean that the village authorities such as the *kuthera*, *liṅgvala*, *śullya* and *māpcoka* mentioned in the Licchavi inscriptions were a relic from the pre-Licchavi regime. The non-Sanskritic origin of the names themselves suggests the same.

The continuation of these officials for some time in the early period of the Licchavi rule marked a transition period, during which the new rulers needed some time to make adjustments of their own in a largely non-Aryan setting. These village authorities probably exercised their rights by virtue of being some kind of hereditary chiefs and by holding title to large

tracts of land in the villages where these decrees were made. In the second stage, the Licchavis are clearly trying to diminish the role of these four offices or authorities, and in some villages, to eliminate it altogether. As this is happening we also see an upsurge in the use of Sanskrit names for officials in the later years of Licchavi rule. This, I believe, is quite a natural outcome to expect in the Indianization process of early Nepali history. To cite only a few names related just to revenue and village administration, we find the following Sanskrit names introduced: *bhaṭṭādhikaraṇa*, *svatalasvāmi* (LA 68) *dauvārika* (LA 149), *śaulkika*, *gaulmika* (LA 73, 74), and the *pūrva-*, *paścima-*, *uttara-*, and *dakṣiṇa-adhikaraṇas* (LA 149).

It is difficult to speculate much on the land system of Nepal before Licchavi rule. The very historicity of the Kirātas of this period remains an uncertainty in the minds of some historians. However, the native chronicles of Nepal are unanimous in calling this a period marked by a long rule of Kirāta kings.¹ It is not the aim of this paper to go into detail on the question of who these Kirātas might have been in terms of their ethnic and linguistic origin, but there is now almost a consensus of opinion which regards them as a people of Tibeto-Burman stock living in the Himalayas. A recent study points out the profusion of non-Sanskrit nominals in the Sanskrit inscriptions of the Licchavis of Nepal, which have a distinct affinity to the Tibeto-Burman stems of the large Sino-Tibetan family of languages.² Many languages of Nepal, including Newari, which are still spoken today belong to this stock. Names such as *kuthera et al* fall in the same class of words as the other non-Sanskrit nominals. This makes

1. S. Lévi, *Le Népal* II, p. 77-83.

2. K.P. Malla, 'Linguistic Archaeology of the Nepal Valley: A Preliminary Report, *Kailash* (Vol. VIII, no. 1-2), pp. 5-23.

it possible to regard the pre-Licchavi period of Nepali history as being non-Sanskrit in culture and origin; and all of this is part of what the Licchavis came to inherit when they came to power.

There is another aspect of the Kirāta-Licchavi transition which must be kept in mind. The change of regime does not seem to have happened as a result of a sudden act of military conquest from outside. The seizing of power by the Licchavis was probably more in the nature of a coup, organised by the indic immigrants from the south, whereby they dislodged the Kirāta rulers from their palace.¹ The early history of the Nepal Valley is characterised by a continuous inflow of people from the plains of India into the Valley where they settled permanently. The Licchavis themselves had come to the Valley to settle from Vaisālī (now in the Muzaffarpur District of North Bihar), an event which has been preserved in local traditions for a long time.² The history of Nepal as it is today hinges

1. There is no tradition whatsoever of a large-scale military conquest of the Kirātas by the Licchavis preserved in Nepali chronicle-writings. On the other hand, there is a suggestion in the *Paśupati Purāṇa* that the Licchavi King actually came to power by outmanouvering the Kirātas with his superior skill with words and his power of inducing trust of himself in the people. This expression of the *Paśupati Purāṇa* amounts to the Licchavis having turned the tables on the Kirātas when the right moment came. The lines read:

*jitvā kairāta rājānām vākyena pratyayena ca
kariṣyati tadā rājyaṁ vaiśālyādhipatirbalī*

Paśupati Purāṇa, Ch. XVII, verse 12.

Lévi puts the date of this work about the same time as the *Nepāla Māhātmya*. Lévi, *Le Népal* I, p. 207. The oldest extant Ms. of *Paśupati Purāṇa* is *Nepāla Saṁvat* 624, i.e., A.D. 1504, and that of the *Nepāla Māhātmya*, N.S. 774, i.e., A.D. 1654. I was given information about these mss. dates by K.P. Malla.

2. See note 9 above. In a further line the *Paśupati Purāṇa* says:

*licchavinām narendrānām rājyabhūmimimām śubhām
prajāścāpyāśrayiṣyanti bahirdeśāgatās tadā*

Paśupati Purāṇa, Ch. XVIII, verse 15.

('In this good and sacred land of the Licchavi kings, people who have come to settle from outside will get a good shelter.')

mainly on the waves of this migration of indic people from the south, for this went on incessantly for centuries. The continuing waves of this migration finally succeeded in reducing the native people to a secondary place, culturally and politically.

There is some evidence of this movement of people to be had, although in a general way, from the Licchavi inscriptions. First, this may be gathered from the frequent use of the expression *grāme nirvāsopagatān* in the edicts, which may be construed as a reference to new arrivals going to settle in the village. A line of similar import is found in another inscription (LA 22) which addresses those people who are already settled and those who might come to settle in the future: *ye praviṣṭāḥ pravivikṣavaśca*. This movement would surely indicate a situation in which there is a constant flow of migrating people into the Valley. Among such people were not only Brahmans, Buddhist monks, traders and artisans, but even princes. This is indicated in an inscription of Patan in these words 'there was a prince called Vajraratha, come from outside the country in the south...' (LA 53). On the other hand, a line occurring in an inscription from Bhaktapur (LA 62) makes reference to a people who had lived there in the village of Khr̥puṅ as long as the sun and moon had been there. This might be a reference to an indigenous, older population of Nepal.

The above discussion may enable us to understand some of the circumstances surrounding the land system of Nepal in that early period. But, as to the meaning and nature of the four offices, *kuthera*, *liṅgvala*, *śullya* and *māpēoka*, we are as far as ever from knowing anything specific. These offices are sometimes called *adhikarāṇa* (LA 44-49) and at other times *vṛttibhuḥ* (*māpēoka vṛttibhuḥ* in LA 116), which suggests that they, too, like other officials, were entitled to be paid in emoluments for their services. However, if they were mere officials, why was

it felt necessary to have all of them replaced at all, and by using such strong sanctions? There is yet another curious thing in regard to these offices. In a couple of inscriptions (LA 31 and 32), the royal edict asks the villagers to give some land in the village to these officials in return for the arrangement whereby these officials will not enter the villages any more for the exercise of their customary authority.¹ If these were only officials, why would not the king himself make an arrangement for paying them instead of asking the villagers to do it? Would the king do it on a specious plea that the royal treasury should not incur any loss in paying them? All of this makes the villagers' act of giving this land appear to be a compensatory act. If true, it appears that they were something more than just the usual run of the mill of government officials, in fact, authorities in their own right. Most probably this authority, which was traditional, had come to them in the time of the previous regime. In the early days of their rule, the Licchavi kings probably found it expedient to acknowledge and continue this authority, at least for some time. The basis of this traditional authority was, no doubt, rooted in the land, and hence gave them such wide powers in regard to the *pañcāparādha*, *lekhyadāna* and other tribute raising activities in their villages.² Thus, the powers they held in respect to their land may have been similar to the powers which

1. 'Tato gramīṇairapi mā bhūd rājakośasyāpahānirīti tatpratimocanāya sve sve grāme adhikaranayorubhayoḥ kṣetraṁ dattaṁ paścimoddeśe bhūmi.6 piṇḍakaṁ śollādhikaraṇasya mā 2 kūtherādhikaraṇasya mā 1.' (LA 31)

2. The basis for obtaining or wielding judicial or other kinds of authority seems to have been land even before the emergence of the king's authority. Even the rise of a strong kingship at the centre was unable to replace this completely; and landowners of various names and levels continued to be given judicial powers, albeit limited, up until the time of the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 A.D. See Andràs Höfer, *The Caste Hierarchy and the State of Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*, p. 201-2.

the hereditary Limbu chiefs have held over their *kipaṭ* land in eastern Nepal up to modern times.¹ Perhaps the migrants from India who settled on the land of these *kuthera et al* chiefs had many dues and obligations to pay them, about which we have no data available at present; but these obligations were clearly burdensome. The Licchavi kings were conscious of this burden and endeavoured to remove it. An added reason for acting at this time may have been the constantly increasing number of indic settlers in the villages. This was the first step in bringing about a change in the land system of Nepal. For a brief period of time, immediately after these authorities were deprived of exercising their customary rights, they seem to have been engaged as tax agents of the kings. This can be seen from the instance of the *kuthera* in the inscriptions of Śivadeva and Aṁśuvarṁā. However, as we will see in the following lines, this too was changed after some time.

THE LICCHAVI LAND SYSTEM

The Licchavis of Nepal represent a people who were different from their Kirāta predecessors in both their political genius and cultural background. Ethnically too, all the members of their aristocracy, their ideologues and intellectuals, and others of the influential section of their society were of a different stock from the local people,² and had come from

1. For a detailed description of the *kipaṭ* system of land tenure, see Mahesh Regmi's *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, pp. 534-87. See also Lionel Caplan's *Land and Social Change in Eastern Nepal*, pp. 56 ff. for an understanding of the process of alienation of *kipaṭ* land belonging to the Limbus by Hindu immigrants in that region in recent times.

2. The *Paśupati Purāna* called the Kirātas *mlecchas*. This is the term used by the early Hindus to describe aliens or non-Aryans. This underlines the awareness of an ethnic difference between the Kirātas and the Licchavis from an early time. See *Paśupati Purāna*, Ch. XVII, verse 11.

India at different times as migrating hordes. The Licchavi rulers themselves were one such migrating group which has already been mentioned. As this is the period when the documented history of Nepal begins, it becomes obvious from its records that extensive indic influences were laid at the base of Nepali culture during this most formative stage.¹ It is, however, quite outside the scope of the present paper to discuss all its aspects here.

References to Brahmans can be found in the Licchavi inscriptions in the time of Mānadeva I, in connection with making gifts of land to them. Later we see that the Brahmans themselves had become large landowners and made their own land endowments in support of diverse charitable causes (LA 28). The values which guided the Licchavi kings in the performance of their political and other acts derived wholly from either Brahmanism or Buddhism, both of Indian origin. There is a significant line in an inscription (LA 17) which describes the king's position at that time in regard to his adopted values. It describes King Mānadeva I as someone who bases the performance of his (kingly) duties on the precepts of the *śrutis* (*vedas*) and *dharmaśāstras* (Hindu Classical Law Books).

Let us return now to see what these kings were actually doing in terms of bringing about a change in the land administration system. In attempting change, the king seems to be assuming direct responsibility in the sphere of village fiscal

1. The Licchavi stone edicts emulate contemporary styles of India not only in regard to the script and the language they use, but also in the matter of their diction and style. For example, if the impressive epithets of the Licchavi kings and rulers are modelled on those used in the stone inscriptions of the Imperial Guptas, their more technical expressions used for making the grants are drawn from the Karitalai and Khoh plates of Mahārāja Jayanātha and Sarvanātha in the Gupta Era 174-214, i.e., A.D. 493-533. See J.F. Fleet, *CII*, Vol. 3, pp. 31 ff. and 117-39.

administration and in the maintenance of law and order there. His responsibility was exercised mainly through the person of the *brahmuñ*, which appears to have been a title of some consequence in the village. In the edicts where the above four officials have their authority checked, the inscription closes each time with a mention of the village *brahmuñ*, whom the king appointed in the same manner as he appointed the *dūtakas* (LA 25, 26, 31, 32, 44-49). It is true that the term *brahmuñ* itself is non-Sanskrit in etymology, but it had apparently been adapted to the new Hinduized administration. Save in the first two edicts, the *brahmuñ* are always persons whose names end in *gupta*. The *guptas* at this time were an important group within the Licchavi aristocracy. Elsewhere in these inscriptions, many members of their group are seen enjoying high titles of state such as *vārta* and *pratihāra*. Thus the *brahmuñ*'s title and appointment was of no mean significance, although his jurisdiction and authority was probably limited to the village.

The role of the village agent named *brahmuñ* does not seem to have lasted for long, however, as it soon disappeared. It was replaced by a Sanskrit term, *svatalasvāmi* (LA 68), and later again by a more common term, *dauvārika* (LA 149), a post which endured permanently in Nepali village administration.¹ There was one important effect of all this change, and that was to bring all the land under the direct control of the king. The kings made land their chief resource and the base on which they built their political and social hierarchy. The rulers had expansive palace grounds, such as Mānagrha and Kailāsakūṭabhavana,

1. This authority (nowadays called *dwāre*) as a village agent of the administration continued to be prevalent in the Kathmandu Valley until the turn of the century. Hodgson mentions that *dwāriā* was an active village authority, along with a few others, until the first half of the last century. See Hodgson's 'Some Accounts of the System of Law and Police... ..', pp. 247-75.

which, besides containing living apartments for their families, also housed important high offices of state. We learn this from LA 72 and 149. Offices such as the *pūrva-*, *paścima-*, *uttara-*, and *dakṣiṇa-adhikaraṇas* probably took their names from the respective gates in the king's palace where they were evidently located. This speaks too of the manner in which the king exercised direct control in conducting the affairs of the village. The work of the above offices in the king's palace probably consisted in coordinating the administration in four sectors of the kingdom corresponding to the cardinal directions. In line with this trend for using Sanskrit names for administrative posts, we get references to a *viṣayapati* in two identical inscriptions from the Tistung area outside of the Valley (LA 73 and 74). We are told about several tax officials working under the lord of this *viṣaya*, or region, such as *śaulkika* and *gaulmika*, both Sanskrit terms, who, it is said, remained attached to the western door. This western door, we presume, must have referred to the king's palace gate.

Some of the other administrative positions and titles of the higher echelons constituting the Licchavi aristocracy were represented by such names as *dūtaka*, *mahāsāmanta*, *sāmanta*, *sarvadaṇḍanāyaka mahāpratihāra*, *pratihāra* and *vārta*. These positions were, in all likelihood, the preserve of a few families: the Licchavis, Varmans, Guptas and other relations of the rulers by marriage. Adding to them the Brahmans, whose social and ritual status was everywhere acknowledged, we get as clear a picture of the land-owning class as it is possible to have from the Licchavi period. The political strength of these people must have been consolidated by extending their control over a great deal of land, which could have only been achieved by alienating the land titles of the Kirātī people.

It is not possible from the inscriptions to make any estimate of the size of the land-holdings of any of the

privileged classes of this time. Lands belonging to the king and his close relations were referred to by the term *rājakula* (LA 68). Such crown lands were secured by well-defined boundaries and were made inviolate from any kind of encroachment by government tax officials (*sarvakoṭṭamaryādopanna acātabhaṭapraveśyo*). From the above inscription (LA 58), we also find out that the owners of these lands could make an unlimited use of its products (including forest resources), even though such owners might not be living on the land, a privilege which was not enjoyed by the tillers and tenants who actually lived on the land.

The most revealing edict in this connection is the one issued by Vasantadeva, to which we have already made a brief reference above (LA 22). The subject of this edict is a grant of an entire village on the basis of *sarvakoṭṭamaryādopannah acātabhaṭapraveśyo* by the king to his sister, Jayasundarī. The village thus conferred appears to have been a large one since its residents included eighteen kinds of *prakṛti* (castes of subjects?). Further, it was given to her with the stipulation that she and her descendants might enjoy the grant in perpetuity, which was the usual stipulation in such grants. The government tax-officials are warned in the edict not to bother for tax-collecting purposes the residents presently living in the village, nor those who might come to settle in the future. Similarly, all the villagers living in the village thus donated (meaning thereby its tenant-cultivators) are asked to live in a spirit of peace and mutual cooperation, to pay all their tributes such as *bhāgabhogakarapiṇḍakadānādi* (which so far were due to the king) henceforth to the king's sister, and to be protected and looked after well by her. The most prevalent form of and commonly paid taxes in the Licchavi inscriptions were the *trikara*, and these no doubt consisted of the above *bhāga*, *bhoga* and *kara*. What these taxes referred to will be discussed a

little later on. Most likely, these three taxes were paid by every cultivator-tenant of the time. The term *pindakadānādi* perhaps referred to the tribute a tenant on a land-endowment had to pay to the group to which the endowment had been made. Even though this seems to be the general meaning of the term, this inscription seems to indicate that even in the case of a land-endowment, some share was due to the king from the recipients of the endowment. All of these various forms of tribute and taxes, which earlier went to the king, are now transferred by him to his sister. Such land-grants formed one category of tribute-free lands. Recipients of such grants would have included members of the ruling class, *sāmantas* (feudals or members of the aristocracy), and high ranking officials of the state, with only a few details on the rights of their enjoyment probably varying here and there. The size of the land held by the individual families is known in one or two instances to have been substantial; although a family in those days could imply a large extended family comprising a wide set of kin groups. LA 34 mentions a *vārta* Dhruvasaṅgha who made an endowment of 400 *bhūmi* (the size of the land-measure is not clear) to his own private and family-managed *goṣṭhī*. In LA 11 we hear of a single *sārthavāha* (head of long distance caravan traders) endowing 450 *bhūmi* on a Śiva temple he himself had ordered to be set up, and in yet another instance (LA 10) 2,750 *bhūmi* on another Śiva temple.

Let us return to the subject of village administration, from which I have digressed a little, to see the nature of the change brought about in it by the Licchavi kings. As we have already seen, the kings were eager to appoint village agents or local functionaries. At the same time their efforts ran in another direction towards the creation and setting up of groups called *pāñcālīs* within the villages. These newly-formed groups of people were closely living and cooperating communities within the village, bound together by common economic, social and ritual ties. Two edicts (LA 71 and 85) state that problems

that might arise in the villages concerning the *pāñcālīs* were to be brought for examination before the personal court of the king (*paramāsana* or *antarāsana*). This arrangement seems to have been gradually extended later to as many villages as possible, thus completing the process of a centralised control of the villages, directly assumed by the king at his palace. Thus it would seem that the course of development of village fiscal administration went through three stages in the following sequence: *brahmuñ*, *svatalasvāmi*, *dauvārika*, all of whom were obliged to refer matters to the Licchavi *antarāsana*.

Towards the reign of Aṁśuvarṁā, we thus see a significant change occurring in the use of land and its administration by the ushering in of the *pāñcālīs*. Their introduction had a far-reaching impact on the evolution of the social and cultural life of the Nepal Valley. Although these *pāñcālīs* have the appearance of being kindred to indic traditions, there is no exact parallel of these practices to be found anywhere in India. The word *pāñcālī*, in the context of the Licchavi inscriptions, means a body of people in the village, basically comprising land-owners and cultivators, to whom the king assigned specific religious and/or secular duties, and in return for the fulfilment of which he gave them land to cultivate on easy and liberal terms. There were differences in the privileges granted or the terms under which land was given to these various *pāñcālī* groups to cultivate. Such land was assigned to them, as a group, on a commonly shared basis. Members sharing in the obligations and privileges accruing from such assignments were called *pāñcālīkas*.

The first reference to *pāñcālī* occurs in an inscription of Aṁśuvarṁā (LA 64). In several inscriptions, including this one, the term *pāñcālī* is used in the sense of a settlement or village cluster. Elsewhere, it is used to indicate a distinct group of people within a village (LA 146). One inscription makes use of the expression *sarvapāñcālī kuṭumbinah* (LA 111),

suggesting the existence of more than one *pāñcālī* in a village.

It may be permissible to speculate a little on the circumstances under which the Licchavi kings invented such a system in their land use. Could this have been done in response to the greater indicization of the population and a desire on the part of the rulers to accord greater facilities to the new Hinduized settlers in the cultivation of the land? Several such *pāñcālī* groups were created for the works relating to the maintenance of and worship in a Sivite or a Vaisnavite shrine, and the management of lands donated to these shrines in endowments (LA 70, 79, 85, 110, 140). One of the inscriptions (LA 85), which is an edict of Amśuvarma, sheds important light on the process of creating a *pāñcālī*. According to this inscription, Amśuvarma's sister and her affinal relations had set up several temples of deities providing them with supportative lands. The task of management was entrusted to the office of the *paścimādhikaraṇa*. The edict now orders an alteration in this arrangement and transfers this responsibility henceforth to the *adhaśālā pāñcālīkas*. The land endowed to these shrines by the sister of Amśuvarma must have ultimately come from the king's land or state land, which shows how the state was favourably disposed to responding to the needs of the new communities by eschewing its own rights over these lands. In another edict (LA 79), we are told about land south of Māṭiṅgrāma, which had been assumed into the state land (*rājabhogyatāmāpannam*) in the past, but was now given over to the *pāñcālīkas* there for its care-taking. One believes that the above terms describing land as *rājabhūmi* (LA 26) and *rājabhogyatāmāpannam* are equivalent to the modern Nepali term *raikar*.¹

1. In fact, *raikar* appears to be a short and derived form of *rājabhūmikara*. The use of *rājabhūmi* in the Licchavi period appears to be the same as that of the modern *raikar*. Although *rājabhūmi* did denote all state lands, it did not thereby denote that all *rājabhūmi* were crown lands. For a description of the modern *raikar* system, see Mahesh Regmi's *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, pp. 17-21.

References to the *pāñcālikas* become more numerous in the later Licchavi inscriptions. We also learn the fact that the role of the *pāñcālis* was not limited to performing their obligations in the religious sphere, but also included work in the secular sphere. Several of them were asked to look after the maintenance of irrigation canals (LA 107, 140, 146), for doing which they were given extra land to tend. We also learn in one instance of the *pāñcālī* created among two groups of artisan-craftsmen who earned their livelihood by practising their respective trades (LA 110). These were the *digvāra* and *ginuṅgvr̥ttibhuj*. The nature of these two trades is not immediately clear to us, but later on in the same inscription, the *pāñcālikas* in the village are waived tax on textiles (*cailakaraṃ pratimucya*), levied perhaps on their production. This perhaps means that the professions of *digvāra* and *ginuṅg* were related to the work of weaving and making of coarse cloth.

Everywhere the *pāñcālis* are made the objects of big and small favours granted by the rulers. In some cases (LA 64, 106), they are exempted from paying taxes in any form whatsoever (by ordering the tax officials to keep away from their areas). In others (LA 83), they are given benefit of a tax-reduction, the waiving of specific taxes (LA 110), or are favoured with the discontinuation of the extraction of forced labour from their settlements (LA 118). Still later, the *pāñcālikas* are offered an entire village as an *agrahāra* grant, i.e. a grant on a fully tax-exempt basis, which in status, is comparable to the lands of *koṭṭa* and *acāṭabhaṭapraveśyam* granted to the king's close relations (LA 136). The *pāñcālikas* are free to make use of these *agrahāras* as it might please them (LA 149). The most significant reference to the wide-ranging powers of the *pāñcālikas* is found in an inscription at Naxal (LA 149). It describes how these *pāñcālikas* exercised (perhaps limited) powers by investigating cases, awarding justice, and

retaining for their own use a portion (one sixth) of the fines accumulated in the village (*pāñcālikanāmeva nyāyāvalokana . . . vyavahārapariniṣṭhitajātaṃ dravyasya ṣadbhāgaṃ pāñcālikānāṃ dātavyaṃ*). This development underlines yet another important fact, namely, that in the matter of a few decades the power to investigate offences committed within the village had come to pass from the *kuthera*, *liṅgvala*, *śullya* and *māpcoka* (collectively designated as the 'four-offices') to the *pāñcālikas*, in other words, from the indigenous land-owning chiefs to the indicized communities in the village. But, throughout all the changes which came about, the king made his presence in these villages felt through the *dauvārikas* who were invariably posted there. A further line in the Naxal inscription (LA 149) says that the *dauvārika* was to report the matter to the king within a month's time if an offence investigated by the *pāñcālīs* was of a serious nature.

The *pāñcālīs* were not, however, the only groups to be given land and sundry other benefits by the kings. The edicts also quite often give directives for the benefit of sectarian religious groups and artisans' groups. I have already described an instance of the latter group. Among other such groups to be given land were the workers of the *śālās*, i.e. production workshops (LA 70). The *śālās* thus referred to include the oil press (*tailaśālā*, LA 78), copper smithies (*tāmrakuṭṭaśālā*, LA 149), pharmaceutical laboratories (*ārogyaśālā*, LA 70) and indigo processing workshops (*nīlīśālā*, LA 84). Instances of land grants to benefit sectarian religious groups were common during the time of Narendradeva and Śivadeva II. Recipients of such grants were a Vajreśvara *maṇḍala* (LA 128), the *vaśapāsūpatācāryas* of the Sivaite sects (LA 139), and the Buddhist monastic community (*āryasaṅgha*) of Śivadeva *vihāra* (LA 133 and 134). The manner in which such grants were given to these groups not only made the lands fully tax-exempt, but also bestowed the attendant powers of a local authority, reinforced with expressions like *sarvakoṭṭamaryādopannaḥ* or *śarīrakoṭṭamaryādopannaḥ*.

The Licchavi land practice also helped the evolution of an enduring cultural institution in the Nepal Valley, the *guthī* system. References to the word *goṣṭhī* or *gauṣṭhika* are quite common in the Licchavi inscriptions, the first referring to the body and the second to a member belonging to this body. Such cultural bodies were instituted by giving them land, or income from land at a stipulated rate, for which they were to look after specific works enjoined upon them. The work usually concerned ritual or worship. It is difficult to ascertain the difference in Licchavi society between a *goṣṭhī* and a *pāñcālī* as their power and functions go, where they are charged with a similar religious responsibility. However, it is possible to surmise that a *goṣṭhī* was a smaller group than a *pāñcālī*, limited in the amount or work it did and the authority it exercised. The nature of these *goṣṭhīs* becomes a little more evident when one looks at the names of some of the *gauṣṭhikas* listed in LA 70. These names are: *bhagavad vāsudeva brāhmaṇa gauṣṭhika*, *indra gauṣṭhika*, *arccā gauṣṭhika*, *dhvaja gauṣṭhika*, *pradīpa gauṣṭhika*, *dhūpa gauṣṭhika*, etc. Occasionally *goṣṭhīs* could also be partly social in nature as is inferred from the *pāñīya prañālī gauṣṭhika* (drinking water) who, one guesses, was charged with providing water at appointed places. Most of these *goṣṭhīs* were publicly instituted groups set up by order of the king. In a single instance, however, there is mention of a private *goṣṭhī*, in which the management of affairs seems to have been confined to the members of the family itself (*svajana goṣṭhikādhīnam kṛtya*, LA 34). Such private *guthīs* have always been in vogue in Nepal, even up to modern times.¹

1. Private *goṣṭhīs*, or *guthīs* as they are now called, have been known to exist right down to the modern times. In the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, land under such a *guthī* was called *guthī birtā*. See *Śrī Pāñc Surendra Bīr Bikram Śāha Deva ko pālāmā baneko Muluki Ain* (Simhadarbar: Kanun Vyavasthapak Samiti, Ministry of Law, Vikram Samvat, 2022) I, pp. 8-18. Mahesh Regmi says that such *guthī* lands were also called *duniyā guthī*. See his *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, p. 650.

One or two interesting aspects of the Licchavi land system emerge from our study. It brings to light preferred groups to whom land-grants were made, thereby bringing them within the acceptable framework of a *pāñcālī*, *goṣṭhi*, or other group, such as the *ārya bhikṣu saṅgha*, or the *pāsūpatācāryas* of the Buddhist or Sivaite sects. It may be assumed that this was part of a consciously adopted policy to forge stronger communal links among these people by settling them around commonly assigned lands and/or enabling them to share in its income. This arrangement must have been a significant contribution to the shaping of the basic structure of Licchavi society, as we will see below.

LAND-HOLDING, LABOUR AND CROPPING PATTERNS

We have come to know about three classes of land-holders in the Licchavi period. The biggest land-holders were from among the royalty, the feudals, and other groups of the aristocracy. The next category comprised the privileged *pāñcālīs*, *goṣṭhīs* and religious sects which were granted land in perpetuity on easy terms as *agrahāra* and *śarīrakoṭṭamaryādopannaḥ*. It is difficult to determine what kind of small, independent farmer-cultivators there were at this time and to what extent their economic conditions differed from the families of tenants of the various categories of land-owners mentioned above. It is certain that large land-holders needed to settle families of tenant-cultivators on their land to work. Whether there were several levels, forms or tiers of this tenancy is a question which our present material is unable to answer. The different categories of tax-exempted land ownership arose through alienation of state lands through the king's formal renunciation of his rights to levy tax on them (*rājabhūmi*, LA 25 and *rājabhogyatām-āpannam bhūmi*, LA 78, 109). Furthermore, the kings were quite keen that their land grants should endure for all time and that future kings should honour them and abide by them. At the same

time, cases of resumption of land once granted are not unknown and are indicated in the inscriptions (LA 79,109). One hardly needs to mention that this assigning of land (and also its resumption) followed the socio-economic and cultural norms prevalent at the time. It seems fairly obvious that one norm being followed here is that found in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*: all land belongs to the state.¹

Next I want to draw the attention of the readers to the economic significance and implications of some expressions in the inscriptions and point out their possible meaning in the context. One such expression is the insertion of the prefix *śarīra* (literally, 'body') in front of the word *koṭṭamaryādā* in the class of *agrahāra* grants of the time of Narendradeva and Śivadeva II (beginning with LA 129). In the same category of grants the expression used earlier was either *susthitakoṭṭamaryādā* (LA 22) or *sarvakoṭṭamaryādā* (LA 58, 67). In either case, land-grants made under these provisions had always signified a transfer of rights of revenue from the king to the new owners of these lands. But, in the early years of the inscriptions, cultivators and tenants on such land were probably not rendered thereby wholly free from the obligation of offering corvée in some form to the rulers and the land owners. However, in later years this arrangement seems to have needed some revision. It is possible that such a practice proved to be a disincentive to the farmers. Therefore, when the kings willingly eschewed their rights to levy taxes on certain land and gave it in endowment for meritorious reasons, they started to make a different type of decree. For example we get the following line in an inscription of Narendradeva (LA 133): *śarīrakoṭṭamaryādopannaḥ śarīrasarva-karaṇīya pratimuktaḥ kuṭumbi bahirdeśagamanādi sarvaviṣṭirahito,* i.e. a

1. Kauṭilya discusses the idea of the king's sovereignty over all land in his kingdom in *Arthaśāstra*, Book VII, Ch. XI, 296-98.

land grant endowed with the rights of *śarīrakotta* and village cultivators discharged from rendering the obligatory service of physical work and portorage at the time of a journey to outside countries by the landowners.' The same inscription elsewhere explicitly states on what counts involuntary labour is to be extracted from the villagers; it is not to be extracted on any other count.

The practice of slavery as also the extraction of forced labour is known to have existed in every ancient, developed society, be it in China, India or elsewhere. Our inscriptions which make references to these thus affirm their prevalence in the Licchavi society as well. Two kinds of forced labour are mentioned: *bhotta viṣṭi* and *phalanju visti* (LA 139, 143). The exact use of such labour is not clear, but in the case of the former, at least, portorage obligation is clearly indicated. Lévi considered *bhotta viṣṭi* to be forced labour connected with Tibet, and used this evidence to try to prove his theory of the subjugation of Nepal by that country.¹ However, this theory now appears quite untenable; and the connection with Tibet, even if true, would have to be taken to refer to journeys by traders and other people going to Tibet. For in LA 139, the use of portorage by the traders is clearly stated; and that it was not perhaps limited to Tibet alone but extended to any distant country outside is indicated by the expression *bahirdeśagamanādi sarvaviṣṭi rahito* in LA 133. It is possible that free portorage was also extracted from the villagers for transporting loads of grain and other goods to the land-owners living away from their land. Like corvée, slavery too was part and parcel of the Licchavi land-based society, although we are unable to discover all its forms. In a single inscription (LA 129) mention is made of *devabhṛtya* and *dāsī* in connection with a shrine of Viṣṇu. From this we gather that

1. S. Lévi, *Le Népal* II, p. 174.

the offering of slaves by kings and wealthy people for service connected with temples was a prevalent practice here as it was in parts of ancient India.

The system of giving relief to some villages from the obligations of paying corvée, even if done on a discriminatory basis, might well imply a concern for raising the productivity of the land by giving farmers enough time to devote themselves to agriculture. Such a concern is further affirmed by instances in which kings are seen to be willing to offer due benefits to the people in the villages for undertaking agriculturally productive work. Work on the construction and maintenance of water-spouts (*praṇālī*) and irrigation channels (*tilamaka*) was thus an important concern of the rulers. An increasing number of settlements in the valley had to be provided with drinking water. Nepal came up with a solution of this problem by devising a hydraulic engineering system of its own. Such *praṇālīs* also had an unmistakable touch of local aesthetics and artistry. Irrigation channels are mentioned in four places (LA 66, 105, 107 and 146), where the concern of the rulers for their proper functioning is clearly manifested.

We find three types of land mentioned in the inscriptions. The general term for land is *bhūmi* (*bū* in Newari), but where the word used is *kṣetra*, it indicated land for growing wet paddy. Such fertile paddy-fields by the side of the Valley's numerous streams can be seen even now; and in one place in the inscriptions such land has even been called *nadīkṣetra* (river-land), LA 38. Land not growing paddy, but devoted to the cultivation of fruits, vegetables and flowers were called *vāṭikā* (*bārī* in Nepali; *ke bwa* in Newari). In two places, up-lands on the hill slopes are suggested by the term *parvatabhūmi* LA 80, 115).

There is still little information available on the size of land measures prevalent at that time. The word *bhūmi*, apart from

meaning land in general, was probably used as a measure of land as well,¹ for gifts of land to people are counted as so many *bhūmis*. The word *mānikā* was properly a unit for measuring grains and was used as such; but it was also used sometimes as a measure of land (LA 70, 105). In a single inscription mention is made of the revenue which was payable on each oxen-plough of land (*gohale gohale yaddeyamāsīt*, LA 115) in an upland area. This suggests that even the plough served as a unit of measure, a custom which continues to be prevalent in the hills of Nepal up to the present time.

From these inscriptions we can gather some idea of the types of crops grown on these lands. One commonly mentioned grain, of course, is paddy. It was probably the most important single crop in those days, as it still is now-a-days. Occasionally, non-cereal crops are mentioned. LA 78 refers to *hāmhuṃ vastu* and *kūmhuṃ vastu* in clear association with vegetable oil. These terms, therefore, must indicate oil seeds of some kind; and, considering the closeness of the word *hāmhuṃ* with the modern Newari *hāmu*, meaning sesame, it probably meant that. In one inscription (LA 143), there is a reference to *vastuṃkṣetrāṇi*, suggesting the existence of agricultural lands separately set aside for the growing of non-cereal crops. From one inscription (LA 115) it is possible to surmise that the up-lands on the hill

1. The unit of measurement for land used in the Kathmandu Valley these days is called a *ropanī* which has an area of 5,476 square feet. This measurement has been prevalent in this place since the days of Malla rule. According to the chronicles, the measurement of a *ropanī* varied according to the quality of the land which was graded into four categories at the time of Jayasthitimalla (AD 1382-95). The difference in the size of a *ropanī* between the lowest and highest graded land could be more than twenty-five percent. See Devi Prasad Lamsal (ed.), *Bhāṣā Vāṃśāvalī* (Nepal Rastriya Pustakalaya, Department of Archaeology, Vikram Samvat, 2023) Pt. 2, p. 238. The other measurement popular in the hills is *māto murī* which is one-fourth of a *ropanī*.

surrounding Thenco village were used for growing certain fibrous plants yielding flax, out of which a kind of cloth called *cokhparā* was made. There is also reference to many water holes and tanks in the vicinity of the village, which is significant here, because the water was probably needed to process the flax. A little below in the same inscription, the villagers were waived the tax on 'the production of *caila*,' i.e. tax on textiles.

TAXATION

The next important subject to deal with is the system of taxation prevalent in the time of the Licchavis. The oft-repeated phrase *samucitastrikara*, already discussed, perhaps captures the most common forms of tax paid by the agricultural communities in the villages. These three taxes were probably the same as *bhāgabhogakara* mentioned in LA 22 and 139; but it is not immediately clear from the inscriptions what economic activity of production or what kind of individual wealth is being taxed. The state's right to impose comprehensive taxes on its people in the Hindu polity has been known to exist from the days of the *Arthaśāstra* and these taxes covered almost all economic spheres. Although the picture of taxation presented by our inscriptions is not as exhaustive as that presented by the *Arthaśāstra*,¹ it is detailed enough to make an interesting account.

Let us first try to understand the nature of the taxes conveyed by the expression *bhāgabhogakara*. There is perhaps no ambiguity in our understanding of the word *bhāga*. This was, no doubt, the tax levied on land produce, out of which the king took a certain part (*bhāga*) as his due share. The *Arthaśāstra*

1. *Arthaśāstra*, Book II, Ch. VI, pp. 60-65.

and the *Manusmṛti* both use the word *bhāga* in this sense.¹ The meaning of *bhoga*, however, is not immediately clear. For this, we have to turn to an analysis of the significance of this word as it is used in about half a dozen other places in the Licchavi inscriptions. Generally it is used in the sense of consumptive enjoyment of property, whether it be a piece of land, or gold accumulated by a person. Let us actually cite some of the lines which seem to give us this meaning. In one instance (LA 95), it is stated: 'the endowment of the land is made for the use and enjoyment thereof by the *āryabhikṣuṇīsaṅgha* (*āryabhikṣuṇīsaṅgha paribhogāya akṣayanivipratipādītā*)'; in another (LA 124) we read, 'for properly tending, protecting and enjoying the wealth consisting of land, land-produce, usufruct, etc. as outlined above in the edict (*yathāpūrvakalpita kṣetrapinḍakādi pratyāyāmpālanopabhogāya*)'; in yet another instance (LA 139) we read '... by making due payments in all kinds of wealth such as gold, etc. (*hiraṇyādisarvapratyāyāneṣāmupayacchad*)'. In the context of the above lines, the word *bhoga* would thus appear to indicate a tax levied on individual property and wealth. As for the word *kara*, it probably signified taxes realised in cash. Such also seems to be the purport of the word as used in the *Arthaśāstra*.²

It is difficult to say anything conclusive about the rates at which people paid revenue to the state or to the land-owners of various descriptions on agricultural produce. But it seems quite certain that these rates were fixed in general conformity to the injunctions laid down in the *Arthaśāstra*, *Manusmṛti* and similar classical Hindu works. This assumption does not, however, help us much to know the precise rate at which land revenue was collected in Licchavi Nepal, because the statements of the above works on Hindu law about these rates are

1. *Arthaśāstra*, Book II, Ch. VI, 60; *Manusmṛti*, Ch. 7, verse 130-32.

2. *Arthaśāstra*, Book II, Ch. VI, pp. 60-61.

not one and unanimous. They enumerate various rates of payment, the choice of which would be left to each state to make, taking into account different variables such as crop types, quality of the land, customary practices of the region, etc.¹

The *Arthaśāstra* lays down a rate of revenue up to fifty percent on land, but it also implies that, on such land, all agricultural inputs such as oxen, seed and irrigation costs would have to be provided by the state.² Generally, however, this does not seem to have been done in the case of all state land, barring perhaps the crown lands. Ideally, a fifty percent rate of revenue on private-ownership tenancies would have also required these conditions to be met, if such a rate were

1. The reason to presume this is quite obvious. As staunch Hindus, the Licchavis were certain to follow the prescriptions of the *Arthaśāstra*, the various *Smṛtis* and other works in the same class, as these were the Hindus' universally accepted authorities everywhere with respect to economy, law and polity. It is true that these various works are far from laying down a single or uniform rate of payment on land produce, if only because they were written at different times and regions. But it must also have been to allow flexibility since the Hindus had to be governed by a number of variables obtaining in a particular area. So the *Arthaśāstra* quotes rates of one-third, one fourth, one fifth, and even a rate of whatever a farmer may be able to pay easily. On lands with irrigation facilities the rates of payment could be different again. Rulers must have consulted these injunctions of the *śāstras* before determining a rate in their own area. See *Arthaśāstra*, Book II, Ch. XXIV, 116-117. The *Manusmṛti* similarly lays down different rates for different types of produce, as well as for paddy which perhaps was regarded as the main crop. For the last, the rates given are one-sixth, one-eighth, or one-twelfth of the produce. *Manusmṛti*, Ch. 7, Verse 130-32.

2. The *Arthaśāstra* makes a clear distinction between two types of tenant cultivators—those who surrender half the share of their produce and those who pay the fixed one-fourth or one-fifth of the produce. The former are called *Ardhasītikā*, and the latter *Svaviryopajīvinah*. See *Arthaśāstra* Book II, CH. XXIV, 116. The word *sīta* elsewhere in the work has been translated by R. Shamasastri as 'crown lands'. See. R. Shamasastri (trans), *Arthaśāstra*, Book II, Ch. VI, 60, p. 58.

prevalent on private holdings. In a number of inscriptions we do find the rates of payment on specific amounts of land mentioned, where such land has been given in endowment (LA 12, 14, 21, 24, 28, 30, 32, 34, 37, 95, 97). In ten instances the rate of payment of produce from the specified amount of land differs with figures ranging from 40 to 60 percent while in five instances the rate is 60 or 75 percent.¹ But, since we do not know the size of the plot, the size of the measures used for land or grain, nor anything about the productivity rate per unit of land, the data is too incomplete to enable us to resolve the question of the payment of produce. Theoretically, the rate of payment on land endowments or on lands given to government officials for their support should not be different from the rate at which payments were made to the state, because, theoretically, it was this very portion of the revenue that the state was supposed to transfer to the new owner, when the king gave somebody land to enjoy. However, in practice, this was a process by which state land (*rājabhūmi*) passed into private ownership thereby enabling its new owners to fix their own rates on the tenants. This rate always tended to be higher than what the king or the state realised from the land. Similarly, lands acquired by reclamation, too, passed into private ownership status.

Apart from land revenue, the inscriptions mention other kinds of taxes prevalent in the Licchavi period. These were levied both in kind and in cash on, for example, jars of oil (LA 78), earthen pots (LA 83), firewood (LA 115), textiles (LA 110, 115), onions and garlic (LA 60), fish (LA 55), and

1. In a single instance, where the endowment has been made in such a way as to keep the land within the donor's own family, the figures for the land endowed and the payment of produce demanded tally, adding up to a hundred percent. This might have come about because the cultivators of the land and the beneficiaries of the endowment were one and the same people.

animals such as pigs and sheep (LA 83, 111). Tax was also realised from a person's right to use authorised weights and measures in commerce (LA 134). Interesting in this connection is the use of the expression *kara karaṇīyam* in several inscriptions (LA 54, 82, 109). In the first two inscriptions, it is clearly used in connection with sheep and buffaloes. It may thus relate to a tax realised in the form of labour or an obligation of the villagers to assist in rearing animals.¹ Rates of payment of these taxes are known in only one or two cases, such as fish and sheep (*mallakara*),² but in the case of others one knows nothing at all. The rate of payment for *mallakara* at one time was one *kārṣāpaṇa* (a denomination of money consisting of sixteen copper *paṇas*), but this was subsequently lowered to four *paṇas* (LA 54, 115). The nature of the taxes in some of these inscriptions implies that it was levied on the sale of certain categories of merchandise (LA 55, 73, 74) or on its production (LA 110). The order freeing the *pūñcālikas* of Jolpriṅgrāma from paying tax on textiles and *digvāra vastu* (most probably a fibrous plant whose flax was used in the production of textiles) is comprehensible only when this is understood to have been a production tax.

The custom of levying taxes on households was also prevalent from this time on, for we come across terms like *vasataye kṛṣīkarmaṇe ca* (LA 58) or *grhakṣetrādi śrāvaṇīkāḍāna* (LA 77)

1. In one case (LA 68), the villagers were obliged to bring 50 measures of white clay (measurement used not clear) each time they came to visit Amśuvarma's royal seat at Kailāskūta Bhavana. The purpose of the order must have been to keep a supply of this material ready and handy. The palace seems to have been painted in this colour and the material was perhaps available in the area of the said village.

2. The meaning of the word *malla* in *mallakara* in the present inscriptions has been convincingly explained to refer to sheep. See Gyanmani Nepal, 'Malla karako paribhāṣā' *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* (Vol. VII, No. 1 and 2), pp. 193-221.

in the inscriptions. As to their rates, however, nothing is clear except the tax in cash specified in LA 77. But, even here, the amount given was probably a total sum of three different taxes, i.e., *gṛha* (house), *kṣetra* (land) and *śrāvāṇikā*, a specific levy discussed below.

This brings us to consider the next two important obligations of payment which Aṁśuvarṁā himself ordered to be drawn up and promulgated from his palace. These relate to two annual levies paid in money. One was called the *maryādāpaṇa*, i.e. money paid in accordance with the order of precedence and status of persons (which included some of the famous divinities of the Nepal Valley, LA 72) and the other was called the *śrāvāṇikādāna*, i.e. a customary gift payment made in the month of *śrāvāṇa* (LA 77).¹ Meticulous care seems to have been taken in drawing up the rates of these taxes in order to satisfy everybody; but what is not explicitly stated is just who the people are who had to pay this tax. It is quite improbable that each and every household would be paying the money at the rates given and to all the people and divinities named. For the total amount of tax then would be too great for any single household to bear. In one inscription (LA 72), receivers of these payments include various deities and the bearers of the ritual paraphernalia of the king or the palace, the sovereign king himself, his sons and some of his important officials. In the other (LA 77) the receivers consist of some of the publicly celebrated shrines and Buddhist monasteries of the time, other divinities, the king, two kinds of *pāñcālī* (one *sapelā* and

1. There is no exact parallel to *maryādāpaṇa* to be found in later times in Nepal; although the idea behind the various forms of levies due to the royalty might be traced to it. Similarly, the *śrāvāṇikādāna* was different from the *saunṣyā* of modern times, which was a homestead tax.

another *sāmānya* [ordinary]),¹ officials of the palace, *gauṣṭhikas*, recipients of royal favour, Brahmans, and lastly, ordinary men. The list of gift givers in the second case is of an unspecified nature. Therefore, this might mean that the aim of the inscription was merely to prescribe rates, and that people would invoke its authority where it applied or concerned them. If this assumption is correct, it would then make the payments prescribed in the inscriptions obligatory only on the respective tenants of the specified categories of land-owners and would not imply that every household would have to make payments to each and every type of *pāñcālī*, *goṣṭhī*, the Brahmans and even ordinary men of Nepal. These two levies appear to have been made in recognition of some sort of status distinction between the land-owners and their tenants resulting in an obligation to pay a kind of annual retaining fee for keeping their tenancy.

SETTLEMENTS

The subject of land is connected naturally enough with the subject of settlement cluster, where its holders would come to reside. Although our data here is not extensive, it has nevertheless one or two important things to tell us.

1. This inscription implies the existence of two levels of *pāñcālīs*, *sapelā pāñcālī*, whose meaning is not clear, and *sāmānya pāñcālī* which should be the term referring to any 'ordinary' *pāñcālī*. I think the meaning of the latter should give us some clue to the meaning of the former: a *sapelā pāñcālī* is above an 'ordinary' *pāñcālī*. The rate of payment to the *sapelā pāñcālī* is also double that due to the *sāmānya pāñcālī*. Two levels are implied in the inscription in regard to other things as well, such as the monasteries. Brahmans and ordinary men are similarly distinguished, and different rates laid down for them. It is likely that *sapelā pāñcālī* represented a more privileged status corresponding to its composition and function.

First, it is easy enough to notice a hierarchy characterising the various settlements, not only from the viewpoint of their size or the number of houses, but also from the viewpoint of the power exercised by these settlements and the land controlled by them. Lying at the bottom of this hierarchy were the agricultural village units called *grāma*. A collection of these *grāmas* made up a *tala*, as we know from the case of Śītāṭikātala in the west of the Valley near Thankot. There were at least half a dozen villages within this *tala*, if not more, in the time of Gaṇadeva (LA 44-49). One is amazed at the way this place is seen to grow constantly from the time of Vasantadeva on. At that time Śītāṭī was mentioned merely as a *gulma* or outpost for check and inspection (LA 2). Later in the reign of Śivadeva II, Śītāṭī had grown to be a *draṅga*, which means an even bigger settlement than a *tala*. In fact, a *draṅga* would have several *talas* within it, a fact which is indicated in several inscriptions (LA 61, 123, 124, 143) by expressions such as *yūpagrāma draṅgasya sarvatala sahitasya* or *dakṣiṇakolīgrāma draṅgasya sarvatalagrāmāiḥ*. This area of Śītāṭī around modern Thankot and Balambu has yielded a very large number of Licchavi inscriptions; and edicts of the early kings were also directed to the people living in that part of the Valley. All this suggests that this was among the earliest and most densely settled areas of the Nepal Valley in the Licchavi period.

We get names of nine different *draṅgas* in different parts of the Nepal Valley from the Licchavi inscriptions, and reference to a tenth one in the Naxal Narayanchaur inscription (LA 149) whose name, unfortunately, has not been preserved. According to Monier-Williams' definition, the word *draṅga* is generally used in the sense of a town.¹ Although this may

1. Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary. See under '*draṅga*'.

be so, not all the *draṅgas* mentioned seem to have enjoyed the same urban prestige from the viewpoint of their economic status. Lembaṭīdraṅga (LA 70), for example, appears to have been used very much as a tributary village. Most of its land, if not all of it, was set aside for the support of various charitable endowments. According to the edict this use of the land in this *draṅga* was a custom dating back to the acts of earlier kings, and the continuation of the custom is hereby ratified. The urban character of some of these *draṅgas* is indicated by the case of Stharudraṅga. An inscription describes the selling of fish within its boundaries and calls this a taxable act (LA 55). Perhaps some of these *draṅgas* had already developed into bounded (walled) settlements, much in the manner of the Valley's towns in the mediaeval period. From the fact of their later development one can say that three *draṅgas* in particular — Mākhopṛmsadraṅga (LA 61), Yūpagrāmadraṅga (LA 123) and Dakṣiṇakolīgrāmadraṅga (LA 117, 124) — carried within themselves a nucleus capable of growing into bustling towns of political and artistic significance in the future. The treatment given by some Licchavi kings to Dakṣiṇakolīgrāmadraṅga and Yūpagrāmadraṅga also seems to have been of a special nature. Their economic privileges seem to have been assured by attaching to them some tributary villages (LA 115, 124). The whole of Thencogrāma, for example, was given over to Dakṣiṇakolīgrāma in one such arrangement. Narendradeva singled out Yūpagrāma and Dakṣiṇakolīgrāma *draṅgas* by showering on them special tax benefits, an act which may have been done in return for the political support he received from them. It is these two *draṅgas* of Yūpagrāma and Dakṣiṇakolīgrāma which ultimately managed to grow into the towns of Patan and Kathmandu respectively. The concentration of economic prosperity centering on them indicates the rise not only of a privileged class of social elites in such places, but also the presence of an increasing number of people of different

trades, as the social and economic life in them became more complex and stratified. Such a differentiated population within a *draṅga* is suggested in an inscription in which the object of the royal address is a specific fourth quarter of a *draṅga* to whose residents alone all the blessings are awarded (LA 117). It is significant to note here that the name of the different quarters of the mediaeval town, *ṭollaka* (Newari *twā* or *twāla*) is probably derived from the *talas* constituting these *draṅgas*.¹

CURRENT NEWAR SOCIAL FORMS AND LICCHAVI LAND POLICY

Some features of present-day Newar society, which is ultimately descended from the Licchavi society, may be explained by the land policy of the Licchavis. One of the spatial principles characterising settlements of Newar clans and their *phuki* groups today is that members of the group live in close clusters in specific localities of a hamlet or an urban centre in the Kathmandu Valley. Sesyos (Hindu, high-caste Newars) of different clans have their own respective areas of concentration; the Vajracaryas and the Sakyas have their own residential *bahās* (corruption of Sanskrit *vihāra*, i.e. a Buddhist monastery); and the Jyapu farmer caste similarly has its own *nanis* (large quadrangles) to live around.² According to Haimendorf, the 'phuki group' in Newari denotes members of an agnatic lineage, all descended from a common ancestor not less than five

1. The word *ṭollaka* is not listed in Monier-Williams' *Sanskrit English Dictionary*. Turner regards the Nepali word *ṭol* (*tollaka* < *ṭola* < *ṭol*) to have been derived from the Sanskrit *pratolī*, meaning 'principal street'. See Turner, *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language*. But I feel the word could equally well have been derived from the Sanskrit *tala*, which the Licchavis used as a division of their *draṅga*.

2. C. von Furer-Haimendorf, 'Elements of Newar Social Structure', *Journal of the Royal Anthropol. Inst.* (Vol. 86, 2), pp. 24-26.

generations back.¹ Their ritual of *degu pūjā*, too, has a significance connected with specifically appointed places. The group performing this *pūjā* or worship is composed only of *phuki* members, although it may not always have all the living descendants of the five or seven generations represented in reality. The worship is performed annually to the ancestral deity, which differs from group to group but is located in a specific place, supposed to be connected with the family ancestors of the lineage. Similarly, the *āgāñ*, or its equivalent the *wanjala* among the Sayamis (also called Manandhars),² serves the various clans of the Sesyos as a ritual centre around which they gather, but has also come to signify a social unit comprising agnatic members beyond seven generations. The house where the *āgāñ* deity is kept (newari: *āgāñ chě*) also has a locational significance in as much as it helps to tie together all the members of the group, many of whom have now moved away from the place to some other locality. The *sāh* of the Sayamis has come to have the same significance. The word means an oil press (and is probably a corruption of Sanskrit *śālā = tailaśālā*); but to the Sayamis of Kathmandu it has come to denote the 'constituent segments' into which the community is now divided. Sayamis in Kathmandu today claim that there were originally altogether seven *sāhs* there, out of which only four exist today (Haimendorf, p. 26), and that all the Sayamis today are members of one or the other of these *sāhs*. The *sāh* is further divisible into a number of lineage groups descended from a common ancestor and residing in the same *nani*.³ These concepts of a spatial integration of the

1. Haimendorf, op. cit., p. 24. Theoretically, *phuki* can be extended to include members up to seven generations.

2. Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

3. Haimendorf, op. cit., p. 27

elements of Newar social structure, may owe their origin to the Licchavi policy of creating communities around commonly assigned land during that early period of indic migration.

A remarkable continuity of tradition, from the Licchavi period right down to the present time, is also to be seen in the practice relating to the *goṣṭhīs*, or their modern equivalent, the *guthīs*. At present the concept of *guthi* signifies an institution of wide social prevalence among the Newars, the levels, composition and purpose of which may be different in every case. However, in every case land held in trust, or pooled income, is invariably behind the notion of *guthi*. There are various ways in which one can become a member (Newari: *guthiyār*) of a *guthi*. If a *guthi* is *phuki*-based, one gets membership in it automatically. Membership in other *guthīs*, such as a *sii guthi*, is obtained through a subjectively made choice. Besides these, there are some other large, communal or caste-based *guthīs*, such as the *ācārya guthi* of the eighteen *bahās* of Kathmandu.¹ Membership in a *guthi* is usually given to one person from each household; and members are generally represented by the males. Whether a *guthi* is big or small, there is always a formal committee to run it, consisting of several members selected by virtue of seniority of age. The oldest member of the committee is also its head and is called the *thakālī*. He exercises a lot of power in the affairs of the *guthi*. One of the most distinguishing features of a *guthi* is communal feasting by all of the members at the conclusion of their work each year. This is probably important for reinforcing the idea of social solidarity among the members. Such an occasion of feasting is witnessed also in an edict of Jīṣṇugupta (LA 107) where a *pāñcālī* is enjoined to organise it.

1. John Locke, *Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in Nepal*, p. 26 ff.

One more example of an unbroken tradition continuing from the Licchavi period down to the present may come from an inscription (LA 129) relating to the worship and the festival at the shrine of Lokapālasvāmi (Viṣṇu) at Haṃsagrhadraṅga, if we compare this with some striking parallels in the organisation of the modern festival of Viṣṇudevī at Satungal village studied by Ishii.¹ Narendradeva's inscription prescribes an elaborate arrangement for the worship of Lokapālasvāmi. All the authority for organising this festival is given to one holding the office of *kulapati*, which seems to be comparable to the position of the *thakālī* of a *guthī*. The *kulapati* appears to have been the person responsible for the entire management of affairs relating to it. It was through him that all payments were authorised to persons connected with the performance of the ceremony. Says the inscription: 'for repairing the roads on the bright half of the eleventh day of the month of *kārttika* [i.e. the day before the festival], the *kulapati* is to pay four *mānikā* [a measure] of husked rice [to the workers]. On the twelfth day, i.e. the day of the consecration of the deity Lokapālasvāmi, Brahmans are to be paid 25 *paṇapurāṇa* [money] for their services of ritual. All the people, from Brahman to Cāṇḍāla [the lowest of the lowly castes], living within the boundary of the *draṅga*, are to be fed; 54 *mānikās* of husked rice are to be given [to pay the cost] of raising poles, one pole each by one person, this act seems to have been part of the ceremony itself; 25 *paṇapurāṇa* are to go for making *goyuddhapatākā* [a banner of a particular type]; 40 *mānikās* of paddy are to be spent] for performing the rites and rendering sacred the place of the deity. ... ten *devabhṛtyas* [male servants dedicated to the service of the temple] and 20 *dāsī* [female slaves as above] are to be paid 140 and 360 *mānikās* of paddy respectively.' Unfortunately, the inscription is only partly preserved and

1. Hiroshi Ishii, 'Structure and Change of a Newari Festival Organization,' in J.F. Fisher (ed.), *Himalayan Anthropology*, pp. 505-27.

hence, is unable to give us more details of this interesting event.

Now the above account may be compared with Ishii's account of the festival of Viṣṇudevī at Satungal some details of which are given as follows. Ishii writes that this festival is the biggest event in the village, and that the goddess is accepted as the patron deity of Satepa. The week-long festival is observed with many acts of celebration in several stages, in which the entire village participates. Special rites and functions during the festival are performed by designated groups and personnel, meaning thereby various *guthīs* assigned to perform these functions. In all, there are five *guthīs* connected with this festival, of which four are controlled by the Sesyo community and one by the Jyapus. Except for this last one, all the *guthīs* are land-based. The *guthī* land is cultivated by people within the village itself, and the income coming from the land in revenue is collected by members of the festival *guthī*. An account-book for the festival is kept in the house of the Sesyo *thakālī* and the income and expenditures incurred for the festival are registered by other members of the *guthī*. The Sesyo *thakālī* is the most important person and the one responsible for managing the process of the festival at all its stages. He is said to be a more important person for the festival than the Brahman invited to perform the rites at this time. The help of the Jyapus, Duins and Nayas (various small and inferior castes) is indispensable for the festival; and it is the duty of the *thakālī* to coordinate all of this.

CONCLUSION

The above is a much too brief and incomplete picture of the Licchavi land system of Nepal. Our source for the present study has been the inscriptions of the period in which information on the land system is by no means lacking, but details

are limited, because it is not the primary aim of the inscriptions to deal with the land system. Furthermore, in many cases these inscriptions are peeled off and eroded, which makes their reading difficult, variable and subject to correction. Despite these uncertainties, some of the ideas stimulated by reading these inscriptions, and discussed above, seem quite reasonable. In treating the material I chose to situate it in the context of a recurrent wave of migration of indic people into a marginal Hindu zone of the sub-Himalayas. I have tried to focus attention on those aspects of the study which might suggest a process of change from a non-Hindu to a Hindu system of landholding and management. It has also been my aim to show, even though sketchily, how the Licchavi land system might have been responsible for setting some of the patterns of the socio-economic and cultural life of the people of the Nepal Valley. These tentative conclusions have been reached by studying present day Newar society and indicating some of its characteristic features, since the Newar society of today is ultimately a descendant of the historical Licchavi society.

The burden of supporting the cultural and religious traditions rested on the land through endowments. The custom of making such endowments went on not only unabated, but perhaps increased, after the Licchavis ceased to rule in Nepal. It would not be surprising therefore, if, at certain periods, a great part of the land in Nepal had become concentrated in the *guthi* sector, although there is no immediate proof to cite here in support of this view.¹ Even private individuals felt themselves under social and cultural pressure

1. Mahesh Regmi, *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, p.636. In 1806, in the time of Girvana Bikram Saha, a large amount of private *guthi* land was confiscated. Ibid., pp. 696-701.

to show an equal concern for endowing lands to charitable and religious causes. The *guthi* tenancy, as well as other tenancies prevalent in Nepal in those days of a pre-capitalistic and pre-colonial economy, probably operated more leniently, that is, it was milder in terms of the economic burden it laid on the tenants, than forms of land tenancy practised in recent centuries within Nepal itself or in South Asia as a whole. In this system of tenancy, the margin of income left to the tenants after paying the revenues on each piece of their land was relatively higher and therefore less exploitative. It still left them with a comfortable amount of farm produce for their maintenance. Furthermore, the norms of a fairer income distribution characteristic of a pre-capitalistic economy were generally upheld here. In the same way, rules allowing the eviction of tenants were non-existent. The relatively well-off Jyapu farmers of the Valley, who have traditionally been the main tenants on these lands, lead us to suggest such a view. Another economic consequence of this land system was probably also the fact that it did not produce a large number of really large land-owners, and thus prevented large scale concentrations of land in the hands of single individuals. It did not rule out the possibility of a few *guthis*, and the occasional individual, owning a large amount of land, but the size and form of this concentration was nothing like that common under the *ryot* and *zamindari* system of India and Nepal in recent centuries.

In the Kirāta period the king's connection to the state land was probably maintained through a tribal hierarchy of local chiefs, at whose head sat the king. In the time of the Licchavi rulers this arrangement was transformed by the pursuit of an aggressive policy of land centralisation under the king's direct care (*paramāsana*). In the periods subsequent to this, though they do not fall within the purview of this paper, we see how the very cultural and social factors, to promote which

the centralised land policy of the Licchavis had been first devised, worked to undermine it later. By the time of the Malla period the process which initiated the creation of land outside the king's revenue authority had reached such a point that the king's base of income had shrunk and his income was a small trickle. This loss was partly compensated for by devising numerous customary levies raised from all households in the kingdom, such as the levies raised at the time of the initiation, *dekhā*, etc. of the kings and princes.¹ Although this may have helped to a certain extent to pay the expenses of maintaining the splendour of the royal household, it hardly did much to help restore the image of the king as a seat of authority and power, something he had lost by the fact of loosing control over most of the state land. The king was now looked upon more as a ceremonial head,² a person presiding over the myriad festivities and rituals with which the Valley was steeped at that time, rather than as a powerful potentate whose might inspired awe. The rule of the king, in fact, had become a 'ritual hegemony'. It was too hard for Jayaprakāśa-malla to assume this role later on, when the need for it arose in preparing to fight with the forces of Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha. Nepal's traditional, feudal system of landownership, rooted in the historical cultural legacies of more than a thousand years, had finally come to cease at this point.

1. Gautamvajra Vajracarya, 'Ṭhyāsaphu ko Aitihāsika Vyākhyā, *Pūṛṇimā*, no. 13, pp. 15-25.

2. 'The economy was not organised by the ruler, but was based upon a corpus of tradition, which prescribed individual function. The king himself was a part of that traditional structure, with prescribed functions, and appropriate rights to go with these function'. See John Hicks, *A Theory of Economic History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 14 paraphrased in Mahesh Regmi, *Readings in Nepali Economic History* (Varanasi: Kishor Vidyaniketan, 1979), p. 20

Appendix

*Dates of the Licchavi Rulers
As Seen in Their Inscriptions*

Note on the eras used in the inscriptions: The Licchavis of Nepal dated their inscriptions in two different eras, one succeeding the other. The era of the early inscriptions is first used in the Cāṅgu Pillar Inscription and continues until the reign of Śivadeva I and the beginning years of the rule of Amśuvarmā. This is widely believed to be the Śaka Era beginning in 78 A.D. The second era appears in the later part of Amśuvarmā's reign and continues through the end of the Licchavi period. This is known to have begun in 576 A.D.

Mānadeva I (of Cāṅgu Pillar Inscription)

386 – 427

Vasantadeva

428 – 454

Manudeva

(?)

Vāmanadeva

460 – ?

Rāmadeva

467 – ?

Gaṇadeva / Bhaumagupta

479 – ? / 482 – ?

Gaṅgādeva

489 – ?

Śivadeva I / Amśuvarmā

512–526 / 516 – 45

Udayadeva

45

Dhruvadeva / Jiṣṇugupta

48 - ? / 48 - 57

Bhīmārjunadeva / Viṣṇugupta

55 - 65 / 57 - 56

Narendradeva

67 - 129

Śivadeva II

118 - 129

Jayadeva II (of Paśupati Inscription)

137 - 157

Note: [/] This oblique line indicates a joint rule.

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