

Lichhivi Kalin

The word "Lichchavi" is obtained from the term in Magadhi Prakrit, which means "bear." It was called "Rikshavi" in Sanskrit and Pali, wherein "Riksha" means a bear, which symbolizes Shakti. The administrative center of the Lichchavis was located in the village of Basad, which in ancient times was called Vaishali, a part of Muzaffarpur district in today's northern Bihar. To know about the history of the ruling of Lichchavi and their arrival in Nepal, we need to go back around 2,568 years.

One of the 16 prominent districts in North India at that period, the district of Magadha was housed in present-day Patna, Gaya, Nalanda and Sehwan districts. It was governed under an absolute monarchy. The first king of this region belonged to the Haryanka dynasty and was known as Emperor Bimbisara. He ruled from 492-455 BC and was a contemporary of Tathagata Buddha, who was also his brother-in-law. The marriage took place when Tathagata married a Licchavi princess from the neighboring Bajji kingdom which had its capital in Vaishali. The son of Bimbisara was Ajatshatru, who later imprisoned his father and took over his reign. This war between Magadha and Bajji is believed to have started the Lichchavi rule in the Nepal Valley and dates back from 484 to 468 BC.

When Ajatshatru came to the throne, Kosala, Kashi, and Bajji were some of the neighboring kingdoms that he attacked. While monarchies were the rule around the world, the Bajji Republic had a federal system, called Bajji Sangha or Briji Sangh, consisting of eight clans with the Lichchavis as the most prominent. It was a federation that did not have a king but an assembly which ruled-strong enough to resist the forces of Magadha for sixteen years during the Magadha-Bajji war.

Ajatshatru finally resorted to spies, sending his minister Vassakara to play the divisions within the ranks of the Bajji kingdom to rout the Licchavis and annex the Bajji kingdom to the Magadha Empire. Thereafter, the Licchavis moved north into the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal and settled there in successive groups. Hadigaon is an administrative center, with Supushpa being named as the first Lichchavi king.

There is scarce concrete evidence concerning the early Lichchavi kings; hence, there exist a number of historical interpretations. The first authenticated Lichchavi king is that of Mandev, as recorded in the Changunarayan inscription dated AD 464 and considered the oldest authentic document of Nepal. Particulars of the different Lichchavi kings can be gauged from the several records and genealogical lists. After Supushpa, 20 kings succeeded him, followed by Jayadeva as the first important ruler. The Pashupati inscriptions of Jayadeva II proclaim that King Jayadeva I was the very first Lichchavi king. In succession, the series lists 11 kings, including Vrishdev, Shankardeva, Dharmadev, and Mandev.

In 2049 BS, a sculpture found at Maligaon had an inscription which showed Maharaja Jayavarman Samvat 107. The Gopalraja vamsavali records 11 Varmana kings from Jayavarman to Supushpa Varman.

After King Mandev, his son Mahideva ascended the throne briefly, succeeded by Vasantadeva, and then by Shivadev I in AD 526. His successor was Anshuvarma, who initiated a dual rule between the Gupta and Lichchavi dynasties in Nepal. After Anshuvarma, Udayadeva became king, but his brother Dhruvadeva seized the throne in a coup, forcing Udayadeva's son, Narendradeva, to flee to Tibet. Then, there was joint rule between Jishnugupta and Dhruvadeva, although the greater powers were retained by the Guptas. After a short, sole reign of Jishnugupta from Samvat 59 to 64, Bhimarjunadeva and Jishnugupta's son, Vishnu, came into power, creating friction with Jishnugupta. Because of this, Sridhar Gupta, son of Vishnu, became the crown prince.

After Vishnu and Bhimarjuna ruled jointly, Narendradeva came back from Tibet in Samvat 69 to take over the throne and put an end to the dual rule. With a view to religious tolerance and harmony between Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Buddhism, the regime of Lichchavi, starting from the first century AD up to the eighth century AD, is considered to be the golden era in the history of Nepal, though there were power struggles and dual governance. However, much about the history of the Lichchavi is not known because most of the historical evidence still remains unexplored and unplumbed.