The Question of Gopala's Accession: A Fresh Study

by Syed Amirul Islam

HE question of accession of Gopala (c. 750 A D), the founder of great Pala dynasty of Bengal, to the throne, is a very interesting episode that leads the historians to contradicting views with regard to the circumstances of his accession. The crux of the problem lies in a word Prakriti written on Khalimpur copper plate of Dharmapala (c. '770-810 A D). his son and immediate successor. Analysing the word scholars like Ramaprasad Chanda, Aksykumar Maitrya, Rakhaldas Benarjee, D C Sircar and others hold that he was elected by the people, while R C Majumdar suggests that he was at first elected by the feudal lords and then supported by the people. But M M Ali, A M Choudhury and others think that the idea of election by the people at that time is simply anachronism. A M Choudhury's view is that 'a few Prakritis' i.e. 'ruling chiefs or officials' 'succeeded in mastering powers'. Now, the present article is an attempt to throw of fresh light on the subject.

In Haribhadrs's Astasahasrika Prajaparamita Dharmapala is called rajabhatadi-vamsa-patita which means that he was born in the line of Raibhata but fallen or outcast. A king named Rajaraja or Rajaraja-Bhata is known in ancient history of Bengal. It is thought that he was a Khadga King or prince. It might be the case that Dharamapala's forefathers i.e. Gopala and his forerunners were closely related with the Khadgas but somehow incurred their displeasure and was discredited, hence the above epithet.

The above quote has not been taken much into account by the historians who have made only a cursory glance over it. We think that these words must seriously he taken into account. Had there been no inner meaning of the words it would not have been mentioned in an important illustrated manuscript like

Astasahasrika at a time when it was not at all easy to do so and, moreover, which was done at the time of Dharmapala. At least the author would not have dared to use the word patita to the ruling royal family had there been no tacit consent of the rulers. It may, therefore, be presumed that Gopala was

really related with the Khadgas or that he was a scion of that family. Scholar like Muhammad Shahidullah thinks that the Palas were related with the Khadgas from maternal side!! Again, the influence and power of Vapyata and/or Gopala was so much, countable that another old royal family of the time, the Bhadras gave their daughter in marriage with Gopala. His wife

Deddadevi is known as Bhadratmaja which has been interpreted by scholar like Akshaykumar Maitreya merely as gentle or noble born. But this view is not tenable on the ground that had it been the case, the mention of such an ordinary word (gentle or noble) would have been redundant, because every man of destiny try to marry generally a noble or gentle woman. Kielhorn rather very rightly points out that Deddadevi came of royal Bhadra family. That there was a Bhadra dynasty ruling in Vanga-Samatata during 7th century A. D. is now unmistakably proved by schol-

It is thus remarkably noticed that two important dynasties of the time were related with Gopala. It should also be noted that the Khadgas were Buddhists, while the Bhadras were Brahmins in belief. Gopala and his successors were Buddhists but practiced religious toleration. It is known that Garga, a Brahmin, was mantri or sachib (minister or secretary) of Dharmapala, while Darvapani and Kedarmisra (relatives of Garga) were also ministers of Devapala (c 810-47 A. D.), his son and

immediate successor. In fact, the Brahmin Garga family served the Palas at least upto Narayanapala (861-917 A.D.).

A careful examination of the above facts show that a congenial political atmosphere was already in existence for ascending Gopala to the throne.

Now, it is generally accepted that before the rise of the Palas a hundred years of anarchy prevailed in Bengal after the demise of Sasanka. Though some scholars limit the time to only twenty-five years, yet it cannot be denied that there was no paramount power throughout the whole of Bengal at that time to bring together all conflicting interests within a single fold. The socioreligious condition was also not without contending forces. Hiuen-Tstang recorded in his accounts of numerous religious groups of Brahminism. Buddhism and Jainism or Nirgranthas. They were highly active in society with different trends and ideas. Hence many a man naturally might have began to think to bring these conflicting views in an orderly situation.

Again, it is known that trading activities developed to a certain extent during the Palas. But this peculiarity cannot be a sudden growth. The people must have been practicing in commercial lines for a long time. For greater and good commercial activities, peace as well as tranquillity in the society is a must. The people engaged in merchandise were definitely deeply interested in developing such a peaceful atmosphere. Hence the commercial class was also demanding the emergence of a power that would offer them

Such a socio-religious as well as political condition might have induced the two old but fallen influential dynasties, the Khadgas and the Bhadras, to come to an understanding to support Gopala, a rising sun, to ascend to the

throne and it was his incident of compromise among the members of these dynasties that is metaphorically inscribed in Khalimpur plate that Prakriti put Gopala to the throne. By Prakriti as may mean the people in general, so it may also mean the members of these dynasties who were feudals and officials. It seems more feasible that these members of the dynasties set together and decided the matter rather than a general election of the common people at a time when it was neither at all a normal nor an occasional practice.

Again, the Bhadras, though Brahmins, did not hesitate to give their daughter in marriage with Gopala, a Buddhist, when they perceived his future-fortune. Such inter-religious marriage among the ruling families was a general practice in South Asian history. It was probably through their negotiations that an understanding was also made that Brahmins would become Gopala and his successors' counsellors to mitigate the social tensions. As a result of this understanding, the Brahmin Garga family served the Palas. This mutual bridge between the two important religious (Buddhists and Brahmins) vis-a-vis political groups (Khadgas and Bhadras) really gave peace for a long time. As an intelligent and ambitious man of the age Gopala also accepted the total affair rather than shading blood to rise to power and au-

It should also be borne in mind that a man of plebeian or humble origin or a mere adventurer cannot capture throne until and unless he attains, during his time or at the time of his ancestors, such a position from whence he could seize state-authority. An ordinary soldier or a wood-cutter cannot become a king, the story of which is very much found in myths or fairy tales, not in reality of life. Hence it seems very possible that Gopala's grandfather, Diatanishnu, somehow become a man of repute in learning, while his father, Vapyata, a leader in warfare. These reputations led the two old royal families, the Khadgas and the Bhadras, to extend their hand in raising Gopala to the throne.

HE venerable Egyptian actor Omar Sharif. now in the twilight of his years but still widely known as one of filmdom's outstanding entertainers, believes Arabs should try to improve their image with the international media which almost always portray Muslims in a negative

"We do not have enough representation in this field." he said when asked about Hollywood movies that show Arabs to be hardly more civilized than their Bedouin forebears.

The actor's comments were made during an extended interview recently at his home in suburban Cairo where he also offered a rare glimpse of his personal life.

Mr Sharif, 63, was horn Michael Shalhoub, the son of a wealthy Lebanese timber merchant. The 1949 graduate of Cairo's British Victoria College became a Muslim only in 1953 He married Egyptian actress Faten Hamama the following year, the matriage, which lasted 13 years, produced so Tarek now grownup.

"I never loved again after Faten," Omar said. "If I did I would have married again. One other reason was because of my son. When I got divorced, I took him with me. I was afraid if I got married again there would be a barrier because there would ba a stepmother."

Starting his career by appearing in Egyptian films aimed at Arab-speaking audiences. Omar has made 56 movies in the United States

diary by ARJUNA

Dr. Zhivago Settles Down

and Europe. His best known movies include the 1962 award-winning classic "Lawrence of Arabia" directed by David Lean. It earned him a Golden Globe award and a nomination for the American Oscar Awards the same year.

He also gave a memorable performance in "Funny Girl." which starred award-winning actress-singer-director Barbra Streisand. Portraying the title role of "Doctor Zhivago" in the film adaptation of Boris Pasternak's literary classic, he received his second Golden Globe award

"It was my best movie." Mr Sharif says of the critically acclaimed film.

The actor, who used to be content living in apartments in Paris and Hollywood, appears to have now settled down more or less permanently in the Egyptian capital. "What really pulled me back was I wanted to be close to my family and my old friends, and to settle down in my own country," he said.

"I have been away from my country for 30 years. If a person is famous in his own country it should be considered international fame.

"I believe in destiny," he

continued. "But I never did anything about it. I didn't make it happen. It just did. Not everyone in lucky, but when God gives luck, one has to know how to use the opportunity and take advantage of it. The film story has given me everything and it was my life. It did not

want to do any other work. "I was the only son, and my father was a lumber merchant He wanted me to work with him but because of my love for art, I did not follow in his footsteps."

When asked about the movie roles that really satisfied him, Mr Sharif was philosophical in his reply: "You are really never satisfied. I am satisfied with two or three things, little parts of things, but not with a lot. I made a lot of bad things. But it is impossible in acting not to make mistakes. I have been acting for 41 years."

portray the fight moral values? Through cinema you can reach people very deeply. especially now with television. I think television is a very important factor in education. Unfortunately, I don't think that we convey enough morality through the TV and cinema. I think we can do much more.

Does he think movies today

think cinema is extremely important in the culture of the masses of the people because it is a big thing in their life, especially the poor people. Cheap entertainment is important and, if we can give it ah educational and moral value, it would be good. But you do not make films just to teach lessons, you make films to entertain.

The star who made his fortune in cinema thinks satellite TV will eventually replace movies. "I do not know in how many years. There will be no more people going to the movie theatre. I think there will be some extraordinary

screens in the house someday. "But I think the surely in 200 years' time, they will say. in the 20th century there was a seventh art called cinema'." And is there a crisis in the

Arab film industry? "There is, because people do not go to the cinema. If they have TV sets and videos at home, they will not go to the cinema. The people who go to the moviehouses do not have videos at home because they cannot afford it. They like vio-

lent movies and comedies." On Egyptian cinema, he said. "The quality should be improved. There are only two or three that are of a high standard, which a person can go to relax. We should have young directors and a new generation of young actors. And the most important is the script. We should have good authors"

Depthnews Asia

A Reality Not Far from Imagination

believe in the reality of fantasy. I believe that an imagined world or something remembered and cherished from memory is as real or legitimate as the actual thing. For example, I come back from watching the cinematic version of a favourite book and stubbornly settle back into my own imagined version of it, which I play in the private auditorium of my I once revisited a remem-

bered city of 'sandstorms and fiery winds hot as the breath of Djinns' to see the 'mammoth, palatial' house of my childhood with its 'sky high ceilings' and 'acres and acres' of gardens.

Stereotype No 3 is laziness.

Nearly 40 per cent of

Aborigines are unemployed.

more than four times higher

than the rate for non-indige-

nous Australians. But the sur-

centage of Aborigines are in-

volved in Community Develop-

ment Employment Projects

under which people receive

hourly wages from the

government for working in

community organisations in-

stead of receiving unemploy-

Aborigines want to work rather

than just receiving hand-outs,"

says a spokesman for Tangen-

tyere Council which works

with Aboriginal housing in

Alice Springs. There in ten

Aboriginals are involved in vol-

treatment. The federal gov-

ernment does provide large

sums of money for the com-

munity, but a lot of it never

survey shows that 'the federal

government has been wasting

millions of dollars in the

wrong places. Their policies

have failed. The money is not

getting to the ground. It's get-

Robert Tickner agrees. At the

Aboriginal Affairs Minister

ting lost in the bureaucracy."

Suzy Smith says that "the

Stereotype No 4 is special

"So you can see that many

ment cheques.

untary work.

gets through.

vey found that a higher per-

Arriving in the drab and dusty city of Multan (Pakistan), I was discomfited to see an ordinary sized house set in an average sized garden! But when I came away, the image that persisted was that of a mammoth, palatial house with sky high ceilings, set in acres and acres of gardens, located in a wind lashed magical citadel of my imagination. Yes, I do believe that the idea of a place is just as real as the place itself. Surely, just because most of its Krishnochura trees have been butchered, its roads congested and polluted beyond recognition, the shady and serene Dhaka of the 60's has not ceased to exist in the collective memory of our genera-

filmic impressions, books I had read, visual images of its art and lots of misconceptions.

One of my mistakes was in my giving Rome a Renaissance personality; it took me a while to realize that it is Florence which is the true Renaissance Art capital, and that the facade of Rome as we see it today is rather that of a Baroque city. But of course, the fault was not mine, for those were the days when life was simple and I thought that every fountain, well every second fountain, was made by Bernini and every other statue by Michelangelo! Here again, I was misled of course, for at that time I had not claimed this city as mine

some familiar sites, and that is all Rome is to them. These are people who, in general, have forgotten the art of dreaming. and to whom the pedestrian workaday world is the only one they inhabit. To them History is a chore, a heavy, irrelevant book to be avoided. They have lost the way to the magical city which exists inside and around all of us, and to enter which, the only key required is a willingness to believe in its

I say all this with conviction because for a short while I, too, was one of the people I mentioned. This happened in spite of my love of history, art and literature, in spite of my belief in the reality of our fantasies. I got distracted by my involvement in setting up a home, raising a family, and being an active member of the community. For a while I led a life that could have been anywhere, the anonymous suburbs of America or some comfortable outpost in Asia or Africa. The routine of the present showed me a faceless Rome, where the lovely weather, fantastic food and friendly environment put a veil over the historical and mysterious dimensions of the city. Then slowly, like soft background music, the past began to filter through to my senses again, first at an almost subliminal

level, then more insistently.

Lunching with friends at some

picturesque Trattoria or

Ristorante my attention would

wander from the anti-pasto to the antiquated decorations of a nearby palazzo; around the piazza of the famous flower market, Campo dei Fiori, I suddenly recognized a trellissed balcony that had been the subject of a noted painting; visiting the cobbler's, I found that the humble close-by church nurtured an important piece of sculpture; someone's elegant home was the stable of a castle; the park in the corner had a history; at this particular cafe table Byron had composed such a line.... The seduction was complete: I was nostalgic for Rome. I had forgotten how far I had drifted from the magical city of my fantasy, the Rome of Caesar, of heroic naval battles on the Tiber, of gladiators who all looked like Kirk Douglas, of the holy geese of the Capitol saving the city from the Gauls, of Audrey Hepburn shrieking as Gregory Peck removes his handless sleeve from the Bocca della Verita or Mouth of Truth, of Alberto Moravia, Vassari, Gibbon, and yes, I also missed the Rome of

Bernini and - Michelangelo!

With the elation of someone coming home. I slowly worked my way back into the bosom of MY Rome: a comfortable combination of the everyday and the long ago. This time I was my own guide. I read and browsed and wandered and dreamed. And finally in dreaming about it, I discovered the true location of this city on any of the Seven Hills of one's imagination, from where to watch it grow like Romulus and Remus' first Rome at the foot of the Palatine hills, which grew and grew till it transformed into the mythical city, situated both in the idea of it and the reality. Everyone is right about it, as everyone has a right to it, both the dreamers and the fact finders, the dwellers of the past and the present. After all. "Tutte le vie portano a Roma", or all roads lead to Rome, never mind which Rome!

CULTURE

New Light on 'the World's Most Imprisoned People'

BORIGINES? They are drunk, law-breaking layabouts who get special treatment from the government. That is the view of many white Australians about the country's 265,000 indigenous people. Now a national survey has destroyed

The survey - the first of its kind in Australia - will increase pressure on the federal government to change its polices towards the world's oldest living human culture.

Says Suzy Smith, coordinator of the Cape York Health Council, which lobbies on Aboriginal health issues: "We will use the survey to make the federal government take responsibility for the mess they have made of Aboriginal affairs. We will use the survey as a lobbying tool."

Stereotype No 1 is drunkenness. But the survey showed that almost one-third of Aborigines are non-drinkers compared with 16 per cent of the rest of the 17 million population. Commented a member of an Aboriginal organisation in Alice Springs who wished to remain anonymous: "It's just that Aborigines who drink are. more visible."

Stereotype No 2 is lawlessness. David Byrne, deputy director of the Cape York Land Council in Cairns, admits that one in three Aboriginal men has been arrested in the last five years — nearly 60 per cent of them more than once and

CCORDING to a news re-

port, dacoits robbed the

A passengers of a launch

and injured the four member-

contingent of Ansars guarding

the vessel, and also snatched

away their guns and ammuni-

tion. When the guards could be

disarmed, what is the objective

There is something funda-

of providing security services?

mentally wrong with such a

trained properly to provide pro-

tection as per duty assigned.

snatching of arms from the cus-

tody of the Ansars, and other

auxiliary forces who carry arm

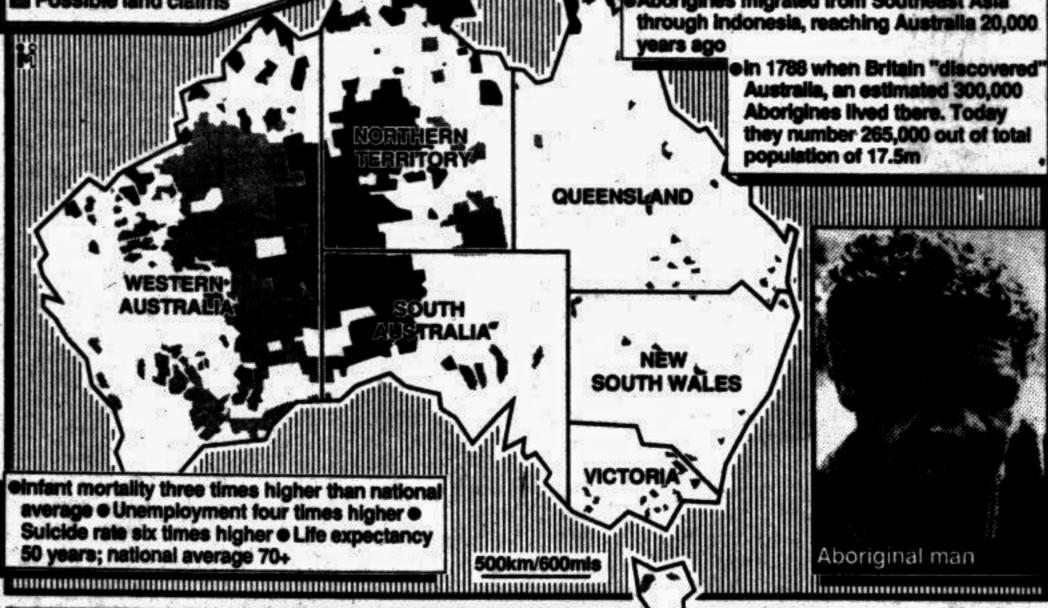
groups, the security personnel

better enemy?

Melinda Ham writes from Queensland, Australia

In the wake of an Australian National University report that the average Aborigine male lifespan is 54 compared with 72.8 for other Australians, the country's first detailed survey of its indigenous people dispels several white Australian myths. Gemini News Service listens to the sound of stereotypes shattering.

World's oldest living human culture Existing Aboriginal tenure eAborigines migrated from Southeast Asia Possible land claims years ago



that "Aborigines are probably the most imprisoned people on the face of the earth." But crime seems to be linked to

unemployment, as nearly 40 per cent of those arrested were unemployed. In addition, Byrne points out that " many

Aborigines are jailed because they are ignorant of the law, or they feel that a particular law is irrelevant to their cultural

by Alif Zabr Managaria de la compania del la compania de la compania del la compania de la compania del la compania de la compania de la compania del la compania de la compania del la compania

Sitting Ducks!

state of affairs - the security in the present changing society, forces are neither equipped nor but our professional security forces are not mentally or physically prepared to contain the What's wrong with the training challenge. Most of the miscreof the Ansars? Why do they act ants are amateurs, but act on like sitting ducks? This is not the group strength, equipped the first time we read about the

with illegal arms. The basic problem is that the law maintenance personnel lack the deterrent image on public duty. How to fight a which would make the culprits pause before going into action. The times have changed. To The Ansars, in this instance, contain the stronger lawless did not even know how to defend themselves! What type of must be better and superior to training exercises or rehearsals the opponents in all respects are carried to anticipate attacks

(avoid the weakest link). by miscreant groups? The train-Lawlessness, violence, holdups, ing department appears to be mugging have become the trend hopelessly outdated. How the officers check up on the field operations — this is not the first attack on public vehicles carrying passengers and security guards.

Not only the training methods have to be reviewed, but the security personnel must be better equipped to combat the modern crooks. An undevel- raid. oped policing force is useless, and a wastage of time, energy, money and human resources.

Emergency communication contact is vital (SOS flash). Mobile wireless communication equipment are now much cheaper, compact, and easier to

maintain. In fact our rural telephone system is using local wireless loops. The bus and launch owners (as also other vehicles) may take advantage of such facility and use wireless telephones for emergency contact of the nearest police post or roving team (our Telecom authority have to examine this aspect). Employment of plaincloth detectives/spies, and fast communication links act as deterrent (ensure that the walkietalkie is not captured first!).

It is not difficult to adopt simple check/control measures to detect disguised robbers in public vehicles. The Ansars in this case were obviously not mentally prepared expecting a

There are many other weak links in the present security arrangements which have to be thoroughly reviewed by the professionals for corrective action. The basic philosophy or approach is simple: be prepared for the worst situation.

more than 10,000 Aborigines. "This survey shows that most Aborigines do not want this. They are proud of their history, their culture, their beliefs and their languages and they want to hold on to it." More than 80 per cent of

launch of the survey, published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), he stated: "These findings very powerfully and surely for all time rebut the all too commonly believed myth that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a privileged position in this country as a result of special treatment." The survey carries another blow for white Australians. "Many white Australians want black Australians to become assimilated into the rest of Australia, says the deputy director of the Cape York Land Council in northern Queensland, home to

respondents emphasised the essential role of tribal elders in continuing their traditions.

Births, deaths, marriages, I came to Rome not with government payments and other information is not recorded on the basis of whether a person is indige-Continued on page 12



Before I came to Italy. Rome to me was a mythical city rising from the mists of such Hollywood phantasmagorias as Spartacus, Ben Hur, Fall of the Roman Empire, Cleopatra and, of course, the sugary Roman Holiday. When finally arrived, I realized with a sense of joyous triumph, that i was not far wrong. Rome is a mythical city! It exists not only on the plane of its everyday reality, but at a more protean lèvel, it conveniently shapes itself to fit the expectations and imagination of its viewers. The idea of Rome cohabits with the actuality of Rome. Whichever aspect of this city is sought, the seeker will generally find it if he knows where to look for it and how to look. Rome, as any city or any place, lies in the eyes of the beholder.

He who comes looking for the city of slaves and Emperors, togas and chariots, will not be disappointed. The devotee of Alta Moda or High fashion to whom Rome is a pantheon of fashion gods like Valentino, Gucci, Fendi, Armani, Trussardi, Ferragamo, Missoni and other mionor deities will see the city as a giant altar to glamour and design. Rome of the Popes and churches, of Fellini and La Dolce Vita, of Pasta and Vino. or of Keats who is buried here, all exist as the single over riding reality within the stubborn optic of its individual beholder.

Then there are those 'realists' in whose imagination Rome is a city of bag snatchers, bottom pinching Romeos. gesticulating, murderous drivers, smooth talking cheats. dangerously gorgeous, sultry eyed women (and men, I may add), and where everyone talks a lotsa mozzarella! They are not far wrong either!

any strong expectations but certainly with some preconceived notions and images. To me it was a mosaic of myths and legends, historical tidbits,

and so I entrusted myself completely into the hands of other people who introduced me to Rome, and professional guides who, presumably, knew it even better. The first few years, my sightseeing circuit was very narrow and in most of the first things I saw, Michelangelo and Bernini figured prominently! In fact, like Mark Twain's innocents abroad identified much of Rome with that hero of the

Renaissance, Michelangelo.

Perhaps, it was for the likes of

me that Twain wrote in gleeful

irreverence about the man who

designed St. Peter's Cathedral. the capitol, many important palaces, painted the Sistine chapel and other sundry ceilings, sculpted various masterpieces, and in other words, "... the eternal bore designed the Eternal City, and unless all men and all books do lie, he painted everything in it!... never felt so fervently thankful, so soothed, so tranquil, so filled with a blessed peace, as ! did yesterday, when I learned that Michael Angelo was dead."

Of course nothing in Rome

dies. It is transformed to a

relic, then a ruin and finally.

into the building blocks of history, much of which can pile up high enough to form quite a wall, making the spirit of the city, its essence, inaccessible to most unless one has the right password, the correct historical credentials or perspective. I know for a fact that a city so weighed down with its heritage can be quite intimidating. So a lot of people just ignore Rome's past and only live in its present. Which is fine too, for one doesn't have to be an expert in History, or take Art appreciation courses to enjoy Rome's special atmosphere, but to shut oneself totally from its ancient, historic core is a great pity. There are people who live in Rome only because their work brings them here. They go to office, they shop and conduct their

everyday business, eat out a few times and take friends to