Three golden kings

Among the many Nepali kings of old, there are remembered to us so much because of how they required or how the people obeyed, so much they were the very personal monuments they held behind—three golden likenesses of themselves. They lived in the Durbar Square of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, any high noble proud with potent logos behind their houses, each inlaid in the flown of court dresses obviously inspired by Moghul fashion turned head, bedeed, beded and armed with swords, daggers and shields. All in advance of devotion. Two are shielded by the hoods of rearing serpents; one by a royal parasol.

Certainly he could have seen all the three kings, and beginning work on the first statue as a very young man have made his ultimate masterpiece in his thirties or early seventies. It was unusual for a master craftsman to be employed in all the three cities. And as when Patan, the Mills of Kathmandu, who reigned from 1661 to 1674 decided to be immortalised in high relief, it is possible the sculptor went on to portray King Vignagara Mills of Kathmandu who occupied the throne of Patan from 1685 to 1705. Finally, he would have been summoned by the famous woodcarvers of Bhaktapur who ruled from 1697 to 1729. By then, he was a master of master excellence who created in him the ultimate masterpiece.

This, of course, is conjecture. Even today there are artistic exchanges between the three cities so often at large based if not embedded in open warfare, it is unlikely that a single sculptor would in fact have created the three statues, since patrician judiciously employed master craftsmen and kings were no exception. There are the inevitable tales that have kings and artists, the work they commissioned had the artist either killed or maimed to avoid their masterpiece being surpassed. As inevitable are the stories that have actors knowing they would lose their voice or hand if their time usually by saying their work wasn’t complete until they had made sure of their escape.

So naturally romantic. A young Newari Rameshwar Celiya comes to the notice of the king of Kathmandu, known as a great poet and lover of art. He commissions a metal likeness of himself and his sons, and as is the done in the king’s orders for the artist’s dessert, and the young man escapes across the river to Patan. There he does a similar life-size portrait of the king by royal command and when the time comes for the latter to recapture him, now he, to the distant city of Bhaktapur.

There, as an old man with all the skills of his youth, he created a some likeness of the king. And there, perhaps his glorious creativity ended.

If I were permitted to choose a single masterpiece from all of Kathmandu’s amazing treasure, visiting historians would ask for the statue of the Bhaktapur king. He sits on a throne, his hands gently reaching in the attitude of mountain, his short dress minutely creased, his forehead marked with vermilion, and his pair of rings still upon his fingers it is a surprise no modern beholder if he rose surprised. There are the inevitable tales that have kings and artists, the work they commissioned had the artist either killed or maimed to avoid their masterpiece being surpassed. As inevitable are the stories that have actors knowing they would lose their voice or hand if their time usually by saying their work wasn’t complete until they had made sure of their escape.

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