

Toumadhi Chowk and Nyataponla (Five-Storeyed) Temple of Bhaktapur, Nepal

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Abstract: From historical and cultural point of view, Toumadhi Square, in the middle of the city, is one of the important squares in Bhaktapur. Bhairavnath, the protector and powerful deity of Bhaktapur city resides here. Later when Bhairav began to take the form of aggressive, to calm him down, a magnificent and huge Nyataponla (five-Storeyed) temple of Siddhilaxmi, the powerful goddess of Tantra Shakti, was built on the right side of Bhairavnath temple in early 1700s. Built in original Nepali style, this temple is beautiful, unique and incomparable in terms of architecture. This can be considered as the effect of Tantra in art, because King Bhupatindra Malla who built this temple was considered an art connoisseur, great scholar and Tantric worshiper and at that time Bhaktapur was a Tantric state. Nyataponla has its own special significance & identity in the historical & cultural heritage of the whole world. Every day a large number of domestic & foreign tourists come to see this temple built by Nepal's own original skill, style, materials. In fact this temple is a beautiful and magnificent example of Pagoda style. The Pagoda style of architecture is Nepal's own style, which is known from the ancient temples & palaces built here. Later, it is estimated that this style of architecture spread from Nepal to Tibet, China and possibly all over East Asia. In present article, the heart of Bhaktapur, Toumadhi square and Nyataponla (five-Storeyed) temple located there have been analytically studied.

Keywords: Talamande, Bhairavnatha, Tilmadhabnarayan, Bisket, Bhupatindra Malla, Siddhilaxmi

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Background

Nepal is predominantly a Hindu country. Hinduism consisted of Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktiism. Similarly, Buddhism is also prevalent here since ancient time and is still popular today. The main reason for this could be that the as many of dynasties ruled Nepal, they were all followers of Hinduism however all of those rulers also had the same faith in all religions. Due to religious tolerance &

generosity among people of different religions, there has never been a conflict in the name of religion in Nepal. Until few years ago, this country was the only Hindu nation in the world. But after the Maoist insurgency & Seven Parties political movement in 2006 AD, the monarchy was removed and a republic was established. In the new constitution, made by the constituent assembly, this country was declared as a secular country. However the essence of Hinduism is still strong in Nepal as there are numerous temples of Hindu gods & goddesses including Pashupatinath, Machhindranath and Changu Narayan. Buddhist monasteries, Chaityas, Stupas such as Swayambhunath, Bouddhanath, of ancient time are also present in Nepal. In the medieval period, there were also built many temples of powerful Hindu deities, which related various sects of Hinduism such as Shaivism, Shaakta, Vaishnavism etc. One of them is the Nyatapona temple built in Bhaktapur, which was once the capital of Nepal Mandala. This magnificent pagoda style temple and its art heritage is a huge treasure trove not only of Nepal but of all the Eastern countries. Despite the various humanitarian reasons, external enemy attack, internal conflicts, occasional this heritage stand strong with very less or no any significant damage. While other monastery, temples, palaces along with it has become extinct in the womb of the earth, it is our good fortune to see this Nyatapona temple as alive today as it was before.

Another thing is that in the medieval period, Muslim domination spread all over Asia, Europe and Africa. In the process of spreading their religion and culture, the Muslims even succeeded to capture Jerusalem, the holy place for Christians. This led to a 250-year crusade between Christians & Muslims. At the same time, many Hindu states in neighboring India were falling one after another under the onslaught of the Muslims. God temples & idols were the target of attack. Books on Hindu scriptures & Purans were burnt. World renowned Universities related to Hindu & Buddhist knowledge such as Nalanda & Vikramshila were burnt down. Thus, even though the Muslim civilization was at its peak, the Hindu religion, civilization & culture were flourishing in Nepal. The blind eye of Muslim could not affect Nepal. For example, in 1449 AD, Sultan Samsuddin Ilyas of Bengal invaded the Nepal valley. But, due to the cold weather, they could not stay for more than seven days.¹ Although the attack sporadically damaged the art, heritage, but due to the art, skill & talent of local people, the destroyed art & heritage could be rebuilt quickly. Similarly, the arrival of Capuchin priests to spread Christianity dates back to the early 17th century. Although the Christian missionaries succeeded in converting some of the lower class Nepali, but it did not affect the overall local Hindu religion, art, culture & heritages of Nepal. For this reason, Kathmandu Valley is still called the city of temples.

Introduction

Toumadhi Chowk (square) and the famous Nyatapona (Five-Storeyed) temple of Bhaktapur seems synonymous to each other. On the one hand, the contribution of the world-famous, original and magnificent Five Storeyed Temple built in the original Nepali Pagoda style has a significant impact on the popularity of Toumadhi Chowk around the globe. Similarly, on the other hand, if the Five-Storeyed temple had not been built at Toumadhi Chowk, the temple would not have gained so much fame and importance. That is why the importance of both the places is patronage to each other. However, the reality is, Toumadhi Chowk was there as the backbone of Bhaktapur centuries before Five -Storeyed temple was built. Five-Storeyed temple came into existence only on Malla Period (mid-eighteenth century of Bikram Sambat) while Toumadhi Chowk existed as the center of Bhaktapur city even before it was established as the capital city.² According to the Vansavali (genealogy), when Bhaktapur was established as the capital city of Nepal Mandala in the pre-medieval period, Shri Bhairavnath was instated as the symbol of the city-guardian deity of the place.³ Also, idols and temples of many famous deities including Tilmadhav Narayan have been established here since pre-medieval times. From this

angle, it is understood that Bhaktapur is a religiously and culturally important place since ancient times.

Objective

The main objective of the study is to explore the historical and cultural importance of the Toumadhi square and Nyataponla (Five-Storeyed) temple of Bhaktapur.

Methodology

The study is conducted on the basis of primary and secondary sources of information. Beside these, the materials used are made more trustworthy by using those published in books and journals and comparisons were made between two or more sources and utilized accordingly. In the process of writing article, explanatory and analytical methods have been used. As this is a historical study, such historical methods have also been used. This article adapted MLA method for citation and references and has been directed towards the work of finding archaeological sources. On the whole, as this article is historical study, qualitative methodologies were used more than quantitative methodologies. In this study, both inductive and deductive methods have been used.

Toumadhi Chowk (Square)

Toumadhi Chowk, which is also called Tamari by the local Newars, is mentioned in historical documents as Talmande.⁴⁵ After the Durbar Square area, this is the most important religious, cultural and historical sight of Bhaktapur. Since, it lies in the periphery of Bhaktapur Durbar Square; the tourists who visit Durbar Square also visit this place. Moreover, the world famous pagoda style Five-Storeyed temple also known as Nyataponlalies in Toumadhi Chowk, along with Bhairavnath temple. Because of all these reasons, Toumadhi Chowk has become the second most popular tourist destination of Bhaktapur. The story behind having Bhairavnath temple in this area is that there is a belief that Toumadhi Chowk is the original residence of Bhairavnath. When Ananda Dev, the king of 13th century, established Bhaktapur as the capital city of Nepal Mandala, the temple of Bhairavnath was instated in the middle of the city. It is also believed that, later when Bhairav became aggressive and violent, to appease him, the Five-Storeyed temple of powerful goddess Aaradhyadevi Siddhilaxmi was built on the right side of Bhairavnath which was higher than the temple of Bhairavnath. ToumadhiChowk can be called as the IndraChowk (thecentre of Kathmandu city) of Bhaktapur, because there is an inn (Sattal) in this place that lies in between Bhairavnath and Gorakhnath temple facing each other which is constructed just like the grand inns of Indrachowk. These inns then became as Madhi or Mari. Among these Mari, Bhairavnath and Gorakhnath were established in Tawamari and Ainsamari respectively.⁶ Moreover, Toumadhi Chowk is the abode of Bhairavnath, a main god of locals of Bhaktapur. Thus, in his honor, the famous Bisket Jatra of Bhaktapur, begins and ends at the same place. The important thing communicated by S. Karmacharya, the Taleju Priest of Bhaktapur, is that Baba Gorakhnath is also traditionally worshiped in Bhaktapur on the occasion of Bisket.⁷ Especially on this occasion, Gorakhpanthi Kanfata Jogis came and performed “JogiChakraPooja” based on Tantric method. To perform this ritual, a large piece of bread “Roti” is required which is named as Ainsa and this particular bread is prepared in an inn called Ainsamari Sattal. This Sattal lies exactly in front of Five-Storeyed temple and in recent days, Nyataponla café liesinthisSattal. Also, since this whole area was used to prepare the huge bread “Ainsa Mari”, the whole area was then named as Tawa Mari meaning big bread.⁸

This place not only holds religious, cultural and historical values but it is also important from geographical perspective because this Chowk is the heart of the entire Bhaktapur city. It is located at the centre of city dividing it into two parts: South-Western area which called as Kwanetola (lower city) and North-Eastern area which is called as Thane tola (upper city). Since many years this Chowk is considered to be the focal point of traditional and cultural activities including the BisketJatra that start from this point and then circulates around the city. Along with, Five-Storeyed temple and Bhairavnath temple, there are many other cultural sights in Toumadhi like Tilmadhav Narayan Chowk, Narayan (lord Vishnu) temple in the middle of the Chowk, historic GarudhStambha(large vulture Pillar)in front of the temple. Garuda the large vulture, means Lord Vishnu's vehicle. And in the periphery of the temple there are temples and idols of VaneshwarMahadev, Saptapatal, Dhanvarah, Kumar Kartikeya and Surya Narayan. Furthermore, outside the Narayan Chowk, on the east side of the road, there liesChalakhu Ganesh while on the south of Bhairavnath temple, there are huge Shivalingas named Kulma, Sulma and Thalama. On the west side of the Narayan Chowk likes BandiBinayak, Jagannath temple, Jangam Math, Laxmi-Narasimha temple, KrodhBhairav whereas on the northern side there are AisamariSattal, PuBahal, DigGanesh, Chandika, Bhujinkokha. Similarly, on the east side of the Narayan Chowk we can find BetalChowk, Lunhiti (Golden Taps), Bhuchhennani, Lunachen. Finally, in between ToumadhiChowk there are plethora of culturally significant temples and statues including the three Mandapas named TarhanDabu, Chukrhan Dabuand Beta Dabu.

In fact, this large courtyard in front of the Five-Storeyed temple, is not only used for traditional and cultural activities but also many commercial activities, political meeting, conferences, social activities, exhibitions are organized here frequently. As it is the main meeting place between the residents of lower and upper city, it is the busiest place of Bhaktapur. That is why even today, this place witness varieties' of market every day. For instance, in the early morning there will be a vegetable market on this area, followed by a hosiery market and curio market in the later afternoon. In the later evening, youth also gathers here for tea and coffee talks. In addition to these, goats, ducks, chickens, etc. are also traded here. Also, since this Chowk is the backbone of the city, all other places of Bhaktapur from east to west and north to south is easily reachable in short walks. From time immemorial, this place has been famous not only as a place to separate the lower and upper city but also as a stage for festivals, religious activities, dance halls, bazaars, gatherings, open squares for conferences and film shooting spots. Thus, Five-Storeyed temple stood out as the forefront among all other the religiously and culturally important art heritages of Bhaktapur.

Nyataponla (Five-Storeyed) Temple

The Five-Storeyed temple or Nyataponla temple in Toumadhi Chowk (Square) is the pride and glory of Bhaktapur. This has made the beauty of Bhaktapur city even more magnificent. Besides the original architecture, it is also unique in terms of stone sculpture. This immensely attractive temple is situated at the northern side of Toumadhi Chowkand was built by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1702 BS. Munankarmi (1984) in which books also clarifies that the King Bhupatindra Malla worked as the labor himself and carried bricks while constructing this temple. As mentioned above, the purpose behind the construction of this temple of Siddhilaxmi, the goddess of Tantrashastra, is to appease the fierce nature of the local Bhairavnath.⁹ It is understood the place where this temple was built previously belong to a local person named Dukhiram Bharo. After the king acquired his ancestral house and land for the construction of the temple, Dukhiram went to live in a house given to him in exchange for it where he even wrote the Ramayan Grantha (text) to get rid of the pain and anxiety of losing his ancestral house.¹⁰ In this way, it has been supposed that this temple had been built by relocating the inhabitants

to the place named Palikhel. It is further believed that this temple of Siddhilaxmi built on the advice of astrologers, priests and Tantrics eventually calmed down the Bhairav.

Inside the temple, the statue of Goddess Siddhilaxmi Bhagwati full of incomparable art and almost as tall as a man is built on a single stone and under this statue, there is a statue of Bhairav making it look like the Goddess Siddhilaxmi Bhagwati has ascended the Bhairav. Also, Masan Bhairab and Mahakaal Bhairab were established at the right and left side of the Bhagwati statue respectively.¹¹

Since the temple of Bhagwati is not supposed to be seen by common public, nobody is allowed to enter the temple except the priests and neither it is easy to get inside the temple. This is the reason why after so many years Bhairavnath temple is still three Storeyed and BhagwatiSiddhilaxmi remains in Five-Storeyed temple. Apart from this, there are many other interesting stories related to construction of this temple that are popular among the local and the common public. Vaidya (2004) in his book expressed about the belief that after the construction of this temple, the king donated a gold crown to the chief priest (Brahmin), the Achaju (Karmacharya) who performed the puja were honored and the king also organized a feast to the local people because the temple was built in a very short period of time almost 5 months.¹² Indeed, the construction of this temple holds the legacy about nothing is impossible if we have a strong will, diligence, hard work and perseverance to achieve something as significant as Five-Storeyedtemple -Nyataponla. After the completion of the construction, the first year anniversary ritual of the temple was celebrated in 1702 (Nepal Sambat 822) on the AsarShuklaPratipada day. Hence, every year on this day, goats and ducks are being sacrificed in the temple on to commemorate the anniversary. It is also believed that King BhupatindraMalla established the tradition of annual worship for the purpose of regular cleaning and maintenance of the temple. It is also customary to hoist the flag in the Gajur of the temple as a symbol of New Year. On this occasion, Rajopadhyay, Joshi, Karmacharya and Talchabhandel priests of BhaktapurTaleju temple worship Goddess Siddhilaxmi inside the temple according to the Tantric method. Along with this ritual, the locals of TuchimalaTolahoist a Red Crescent flag in front of the temple that is of two and quarter meter in size and white and red in color.

At present, the entire maintenance and management of the temple is being done under the Bhaktapur Taleju. The cost of the Pooja and the remuneration of the priests are being managed by the Government of Nepal Guthi Sansthan, Bhaktapur. According to Yagyaman Karmacharya, the priest of the temple, the full-fledged worship of the goddess that includes the offering of goats and ducks is done only on the day of Varsha-bardhana Puja (Anniversary Day) and Mahanavami day of Dashain and except that there is no any provision to do such Poojain any other day of the year.¹³ Apart from this, this temple has no Guthi (Trust) of its own. As there is no Guthi Ayasta(income), there is no any festival in the name of this temple. Also, neither any hymns are sung in this temple nor any inscriptions were found on this temple. However, in ancient or medieval times while building the temples and structures, it was customary for a king, a nobleman or a commoner to place an inscription on a monastery, including the Guthi Ayasta, for the purpose of perpetuating their reputation. Also, there is a tradition of celebrating a festival related to god and goddess of those temples and there are Guthi affiliated to perform various activities ranging from Parva Puja, Nitya Puja to Aarti in the evening and morning. But there is no such tradition in the Five-Storeyed temple. This shows that there must have been some secret behind this decision of the wise king Bhupatindra Malla. Since the goddess Siddhilaxmi in this temple is a Tantric goddess and also the king's favorite goddess, such an arrangement should have been made as the work related to Tantric Bidhya (Tantric Knowledge) is purely confidential which should not be brought into light.¹⁴ Therefore, apart from Nitya Puja (Daily Worship), the annual Varsha-Bardhana Puja of Asar, Navami Puja of Dashain and Home Puja of Mangsir, there do not seem to have any other festivals.

This huge pagoda-style temple, built with a five-Storeyed thatched roof over a five tiered belt, is considered to be one of the most unique examples of medieval architecture. There are stone steps in front of the temple. Towards the right and left are statues of Jayamal and Pratap (Kutuva), respectively, above them are statues of elephants, above elephants are lions, above lions are Sharduls (eagle-like creatures with beaked noses) and on the top of the lions are the huge stone statues of Singri on the right and Bangri Dev on the left (Information obtained from field study). Each of these creatures (from bottom to top respectively) is said to be 10 times stronger and more powerful than the other.¹⁵ Also four Diga Ganesh have been established in the four corners of the temple. This temple which is more than 100 feet tall has a total of 108 Tundals (slanting poles) starting from the first roof till the Gajoor (top roof). For instance, on the first roof, there are six-six Tundals (slanting pole) and five-five windows on all the four sides. Also there are statues of Kunf on the four corners of the first roof. Among these five windows, the biggest one is in middle and the smaller ones are at the left and right side. There are large windows in the middle and small windows on the left and right. Each windows has Torans (pylons) carved with idols of various deities.

Likewise, the second roof also has six- six Tundals and a Toran encrypted two large windows in the middle and two small windows at the sides. On the third roof, there are four-four Tundals of different statues that lean over the Muthal (festoon archway) and at the four corners there are Kunf, Statues, Windows and Torans. The small windows at the left and right are prepared in such a way that they are permanently closed. Just like the third roof, there are four-four Tundals, windows and pylons on the fourth roof as well. Finally on the fifth floor, all other crafts of the four corners have been replaced by Gajoor (steeple) and Chudamani. Also, there are Fya Gan (Wind Charm) hung on the Muthal of each roof that makes a soothing sounds when the window blows. Under the roof and above the fifth stairs from the ground, there is an open porch of five Kavals on all sides with wooden planks on the floor so that we can sit there and enjoy the sights or we can also go around the temple. In the middle of the walls on all four sides of the temple are wooden gates with arches that are used to enter the temple. The main entrance to those gates is on the south side. On the right and left sides of each of these gates, the wooden idols of Goddess Durga Bhavani have been erected. The stories behind all the activities related to this temple starting from its foundation till the establishment of Gajur on the top has been documented in a hand written report named "Dhara Pou" which was stored in National Archives, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu. Dr. Janaklal Baidhya is the first person to bring light to this book from where the history of this temple can be studied.

This temple built up of five-Storeyed belt coupled with five-Storeyed roof belongs to the Tantric goddess. For this reason, each and everything related to this temple holds a Tantric (Spiritual) values. As an example, the belief behind having altogether tenstoreyed is that this temple has been revived and enlivened by all the ten senses. The total of 108 Tundals in the temple means that if a person who has all the ten senses recites the chant by using 108 Rudrakshamala garlands, his wished will be fulfilled. The thirty-three stone steps leading up to the temple are considered to be the symbol of the Tentiskoti (33 crores) god. There are 64 beautiful idols in total in the temple which is considered to be the symbol of the 64 Yogini Gana.¹⁶ Thus, the value carries by the windows, the doors, the pylons, the Tundals, the roofs, the belts, the animals etc. of this temple makes it an extraordinary example of a unique coordination between art and Tantra. Another important aspect of this temple is that its ability to maintain the ancient belief that even though the temple is built at such a height, the idol of the goddess Siddhi Laxmi established on the ground.

Conclusion

Therefore Toumadhi Chowk, the focal point of Bhaktapur, is of great importance not only geographically but also religiously, culturally and historically. Apart from the incomparable huge temple of Tantric Goddess Siddhi lakshmi in terms of art and architecture, the hidden Tantric mystery and philosophical aspects seem to be very deep and interesting, which is hard for the common public to understand. This can be considered as the effect of Tantra in art, because King Bhupatindra Malla who built this temple was considered an art connoisseur, great scholar and Tantric worshiper and at that time Bhaktapur was a Tantric state. On top of that, Toumadhi Chowk is a significant place for Tantric reason, because Shri. Bhairavnath was endowed for Tantra, mystery and divine power, which represents the fierce and terrifying form of Devahideva Mahadev. Thus, the construction of this temple was one of the many other Tantric cultural rituals to appease the Bhairavnath.

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