

DEVAPATTANA: The Town of the God

One of the holiest of pilgrimages for the Hindus is Pashupati *Kshetra* of Kathmandu Valley. The famous temple of Bhagavan Sri Pashupatinath is located on the western bank of River Bagmati in the town of Devapattana. Devapattana has been a pilgrimage town for over fifteen hundred years. Despite of this fact, the town still displays the traces of a town, which appears patterned after some principles of planning. Cultural historians have concluded that it was the Lichchhavis, who ruled the valley of Kathmandu from the first to the ninth century and who introduced the *Hindu Shruti Shastra* to the valley. Lichchhavis were strong adherents to the classical dictates in doing things the way they did. The surviving pattern of street and the strategic location of the temple tell a story that it was planned on the basis of ancient Hindu science of town planning. In this article, an effort is made to understand its evolution from ancient times so that we may see the grandeur that was the town of Devapattana, the town of the God.

The legend of Pashupati:

In the very ancient of ancient times, in the blessed valley bounded by the snowy mountains, the lord of the *Purna Kalasa*, Sri Vringgaresvora, came to reside. Very many seers, led by Gottama, came to perform fire oblations here and set up the ancient image of Gottamesvora. In the meanwhile, as Sri Vringgaresvori was lovingly frolicking in the forest of Slesmantaka there, the great Lord had his primordial play with her. Their everlasting play took the form of a fiery Linga. After a lapse of a long time, the cowherds were to discover it again and it became famous as Pashupati. In course of time, the *Kshetra* became a *Tirtha* supreme in the middle, *Madhyavarta*, between the Himalayas and the Ganges, for all Hindus. River Bagmati forded her way through the *Kshetra* with the Slesmantaka forest on one side and the Linga on the other.

According to the chronicle, *Gopala Vamsavali*, that is how the Hindu sanctum sanctorum of Kathmandu valley, the Pashupati *Kshetra*, came into being. It was the Lord's own chosen spot and it came into being by itself; so all animals tethered by life itself may seek salvation in Him. He became Pashupatinatha. In ancient times, as the only one of such a *Tirtha Kshetra*, it went by the name of the Lord himself. When the Lichchhavis, who followed the time-honored Vedic and early Hindu '*Sruti Dharma*' and who were socially knitted in the *Varna* system, arrived in the valley, Pashupati *Kshetra* gained a still wider popularity. It was then that one of its legendary kings, Supuspa, is said to have built a temple around the self-created Linga. The same king is also credited to have applied the *Varna* system to the people of Nepal. His successor, King Vashkaradeva, is said to have done a long penance at the *Kshetra*, possibly about 78 AD.

Chronicles add that a later King Dharmadeva built a temple for the Daxinamurti (a Tantrik form?) of Pashupatinath. As King Dharmadeva's son Manadeva became king in the second half of the fifth century, inscribed stone steles that describe edicts and pious acts of royals as well as commoners alike, start becoming copious in the Pashupati *Kshetra*. These inscriptions prove beyond doubt that the legendary *Tirtha* had been a very popular religious site for some time already then. Indeed, although only future studies can confirm whether the acts of Supuspa, Vashkaradeva or Dharmadeva are not figments of imagination of the

devoted chronicler, there is little doubt that the Pashupati *Tirtha* Kshetra has captivated the minds of the Hindus for fifteen centuries, at the very least.

Early Settlements around Pashupati Kshetra :

As the written history of Nepal unfolds, we find that King Manadeva's ritual coronation was held, in the year 467 AD, at Pashupati Kshetra, a little to the east of the temple and across the River Bagmati. In 485 AD, Manadeva also consecrated another Linga temple in memory of his father, a little to the west of the Pashupati temple. The *Kshetra* had come to acquire a new role as the place to hold the last rites of the departed. This area was soon to be named Adhasala as its popularity as a place for funerary rites gained in the society. The settlement around it was simply called 'Pashupati Kshetra', when a noted ruler, *Mahasamanta* Amshuverma, issued an edict in the year 612 AD. For Amshuverma and the following Lichchhavi rulers, Lord Pashupatinath became the source and symbol of the power to rule on earth. The blessings of Lord Pashupatinath has since stuck as a royal epithet in Nepal; the present King Birendra still follows the time honored understanding as he closes all his royal addresses with the words, "May Lord Pashupatinath bless us all!"

The development of the settlement from around seventh century must have been remarkable. It soon acquired a new name, Devagarta Grama. It was so named evidently to express the natural cave like setting of the temple; the snaking gorge of River Bagmati still continuing to echo such an image to this day. The higher lands to the west came to be known as Gartungga or Gvalamtungga, as it was at a land higher than the cave of the Lord and possibly a grazing ground of the cow-herd too. Across the river and to its east, the primordial Slesmantaka area was still retained as the Lord's forest; the aboriginal people, the Kiratas, had made their home on the forested hill to the north, east and south of it. Their towns of Lohpringga and Mhupringga were vibrant until the eighth century. It seems that the settlement was further extended to the western parts of Gvalamtungga as soon. All the three settlements together, then, apparently came to be called Navagriha, as it now had a total of nine quarters. Indeed by the tenth century, the slopes of the ground on the west and the northwest of Navagriha, called Durigvala, seems to have developed too. In the way the terms for villages were applied in those days, Durigvala must have simply meant on the slopes of Gartam or Gvalam, as *dula* was a term applied for the slopes of a hill.

Such a sequence of development of the area around Pashupatinath can be drawn from the inscriptions left for posterity by the Lichchhavis. Many such stone steles, carrying sufficient information, that enable us to reconstruct this history, are located around the temple and its environs.

Today, we simply call the settlement, Devapattana, the town of the God Mahadeva. The town today covers all the settlements of the yore around the temple of Pashupati such as Devagarta, Gvalamtungga, Navagriha and Durigvala of the early historical period.

Although the name Devapattana appears to have been in use for about three hundred years only, yet the name does tell of its location and nature of people who loved there. The name is obviously a conjunctive form of two words, *Deva* and *Pattana*. The obvious reference of the word 'Deva' is to Lord Pashupati. According to *Manasara*, an ancient text of Hindu architectural and planning sciences, *Vashtushastra*, a town is called Pattana, when it is largely populated by merchants or *Vaishya* group. It is not surprising therefore that the

earliest *Sivalingas* at Devapattana have been erected by traders (*Sarthavaha*); Ratnesvora linga set up in 477 AD and Prabhusangha linga of 480 AD both located to the west of the temple in Daxinamurti and Laganlachhi respectively. That it was a trading town is also elaborated by the edict of King Narendradeva that fixes taxes and penalties, such as, *Apanakara* (sales tax) and *Adhikamasatuladanda* (penalty against cheating through unbalanced scales), issued on 678 AD. Therefore, we may conclude that the place could already have got the classical name Devapattana as early as fifth century; but we have no inscriptional or historical backup to substantiate usage of this name since for more than last three hundred years. Whatever may be the reasons behind such reality, there is reason enough to believe that the holy place had an adjunct commercial zone nearby to its west since more than a thousand years. A highway seems to have separated the area of the Lord and the area of the *Vaisyas*.

Was Devapattana a planned town?

The embryo of the town of Devapattana appears laid in the early Lichchhavi period. The Lichchhavis, who earlier ruled the republican state of Vriji from the city of Vaisali on the banks of the Ganges, were followers of Vaisnavism. They were exponents of the Hindu thoughts and sciences as it had developed in the Gangatic plains and these were subsequently applied to the valley. The Nepalese Lichchhavi society also seems to have adjusted to the new path as soon. Vedic practices of *Yagna* and other religious practices as ordained by the *Sruti Dharma Shastra* became common. As a royal house, they seem to have followed such *Shastras* to the letter.

The fact that the town was developed on the river bank is sufficient to tell that it is a Lichchhavi town; for the indigenous tradition was to build towns on hill crests. It is, therefore, appropriate to suspect that it would have followed the dictates of the ancient *Vashtushastra* to plan and lay out settlements. Devapattana as possibly the earliest of their towns would have been planned accordingly to classical religious dictates. Although, it is understood that as a *Shruti Shastra*, *Vastushastra* was developed since much before the period we are talking about, yet it is a notable fact that the written *Vastushastras* that are available post-date the early Lichchhavi period. The presently available *Vastushastras*, compilations named *Manasara* or *Mayamata*, come from South India from as late as tenth century. A comparative assessment of the form of Devapattana, therefore, of necessity, can only be made to the concepts available in these later documents.

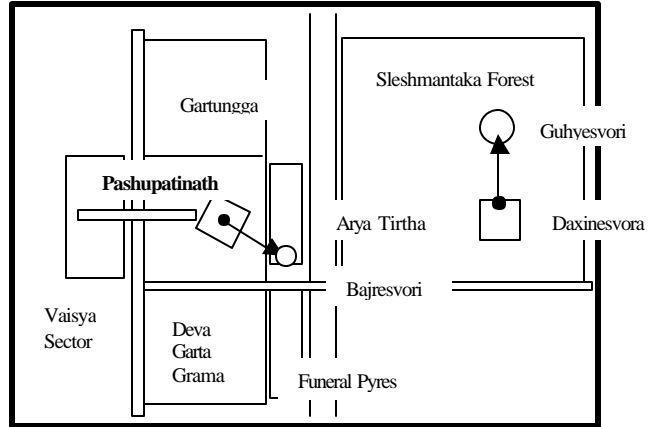
Narendradeva's Tripura Plan:

Whereas *Gopala Vamsavali* reports that the Lichchhavi King Narendradeva constructed a golden water conduit and also settled the city named Tripura in Pashupatinath area, inscriptions corroborate that King Narendradeva had constructed a large water supply system at the pilgrimage site of Lord Pashupati. In 679 AD, King Narendradeva issued two dated stone steles, which carry the phrase, '*Bhagavat Pashupatau Svakarita Mahapranali*', which can be translated as 'the large water supply system that I have myself constructed at the place of the Lord Pashupati'. Although he makes no direct mention of any town of his creation, his inscriptions name two *Gramas*, the generic term applied by the Lichchhavis for a settlement, Gvalamtungga and Devagarta. It is quite possible that along with the temple precinct, these two areas formed the Tripura as referred to by the chronicler. It can be gleaned from ancient texts that Tripura (lit. three quarters) plan of a town was a

mundane image of the three worlds, the upper world of the heavens, the middle world of the earth and the nether world of the dead. The layout of the immediate precinct of the temple of Pashupatinath does indeed depict a Tripura planning.

Figure: The Tripura Plan Schema of Pashupati Kshetra: Kailasha (Gartungga), Devagriha and The Funerary Sector (Devagarta)

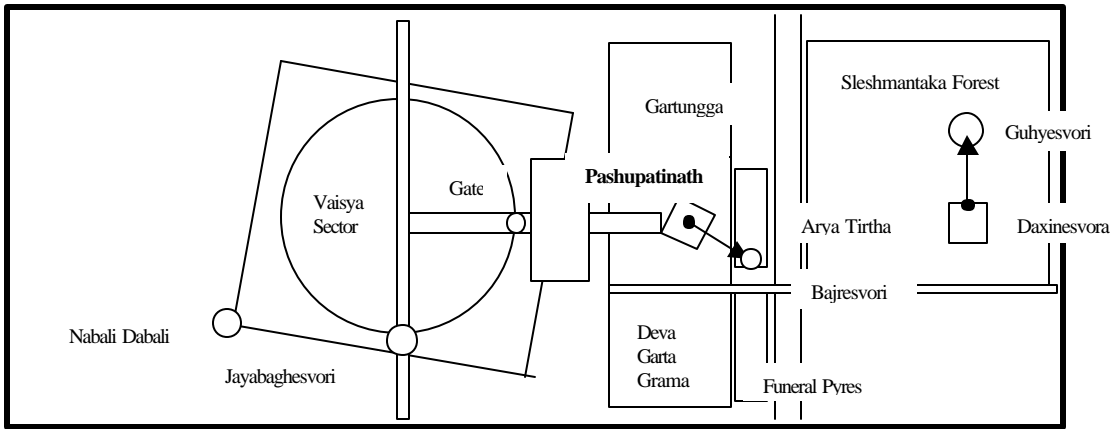
A visit to Pashupatinath will show that the layout of the sacred zone is clearly in three sectors; the northern quarter, a high table land called Kailasha or Gartungga, the middle quarter, the temple court and its fore-ground occupied by the Vaisya (as the lord is also *Vaisyapati*) and the southern quarter the sector for ritual consignment of the dead to the funeral pyre. The conceptual correspondence with the heavens, the sanctified world and the nether world can be drawn.



It may be noticed that the God Vringgaresvora of the chronicle is worshipped as Sveta Bhairava (Daxinesvora) at the Visvarupa temple precincts in Mrigasthali across the river. The Goddess Vringgaresvori now resides a little lower and is now famous as the *pith* of Guhyesvori. The Linga form of God Vringgaresvora, Lord Pashupatinath, has to his southwest the company of Bajresvori or Batsala, who is the guardian of both the Arya Tirtha and the funerary Ghats. Arya Tirtha derives its blissful heavenly quality as it is here that the sanctified waters from the temple of Pashupatinath, the Bagmati (which is the *Mandakini ganga*) and from Guhyesvori meet in an eternal confluence.

Sivadeva’s Karmuka Plan:

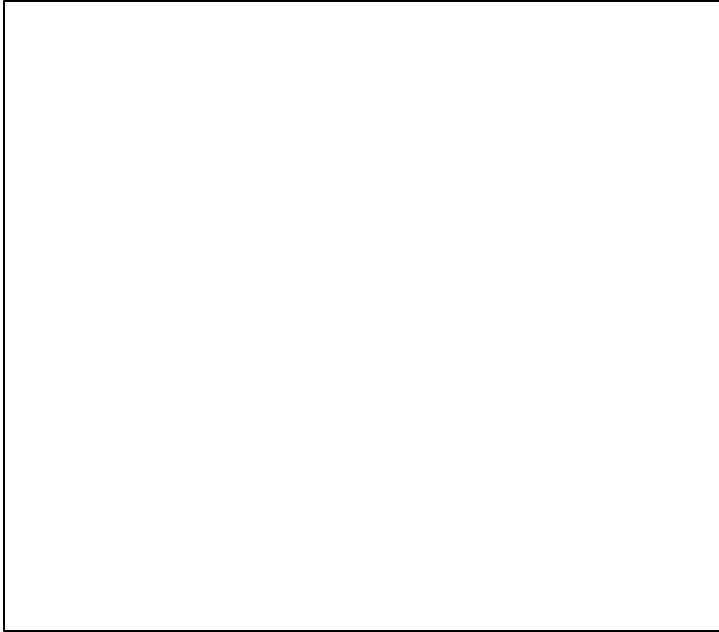
As the town grew up demanding a larger area for the growing population of the traders, it was extended westwards. At the time of Narendradeva himself, the areas to the west had already expanded as Adhasala sector. To the west on higher grounds, a new addition of Navagriha was made. The continuing expansion seems to have led to a planning intervention by Narendradeva’s son King Sivadeva. He apparently reorganized the settlement as Subarnapuri, the golden city. This plan is elaborated by Wright Chronicles:



**Figure: The KARMUKA Plan of Pashupati Kshetra:
The Chatuspatha of Nabali, Jayabagesvori and the Gateway**

Sivadeva I moved his capital to Devapattana from Banerwar. He brought Nrtyanatha from the Satarudra Mountain and established him on the western side of Pashupatinath. He built 9 new tols (divisions of the city) and erected nine Ganeshas. He fully peopled these tols (Navatols) after performing all the requisite ceremonies and established 4 Ganeshas, 4 Bhairavas, 4 Nrtyanathas, 4 Mahadevas, 4 Kumaries, 4 Buddhas, 4 Khambas, 4 Gaganacharis and 4 Chatuspathas (cross-ways) with Bhuta images. Then after establishing an Avarana deity in each tol of Devapattana, he erected an image of Siva. The town was called Suvarnapuri; it was round shape and beautiful with wells, temples, dabalies, dharas and a gate.

The Nrtyanatha mentioned in the chronicle is located at Nasanani near Bhuvaneswori temple, which is almost exactly due west of the Pashupatinath temple. As if to corroborate the chronicle, and surprisingly enough, a quarter of the circle survives to this day in the section of the street that links Jayabagesvori temple and Pachu-tole Ganesh. Since no Malla period town shows use of circular pattern, we can agree that this is a remnant of the Lichchhavi plan for Devapattana as reportedly laid out by King Sivadeva. An observation of the drawing (No. 2) will show that the remaining quarter is aligned to the main access road emanating from the temple in a westerly direction. As ordained in scriptures, the access is not axial to the temple, as the pilgrims should not approach the temple gates from behind the Nandi. The circular portion occupies the sloped land area. The chronicle talks about four major crossings, division of the whole new town in nine sector at the same time being circular; these do not all appear to correlate with reality of the town today. One can, however, observe that three major crossings survive to date: Pachu-tole Ganesh, which seems to be the main gate; Jayabagesvori and Nabali, the four way crossings.



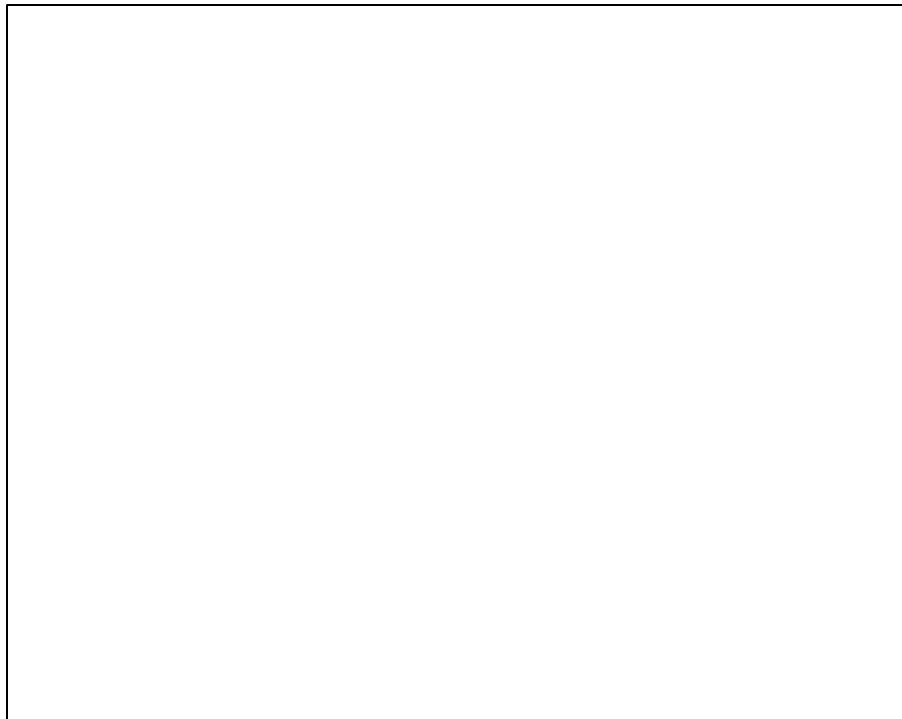
Even in the standard formats prescribed by Manasara, circular form is not usual and is applied only in the case of 'Nandyavarta' in a circular form and 'Karmuka' in the form of a semicircle. The planning of the new Devapattana hints towards its old Karmuka form. Karmuka is a plan form based on the form of a bow and with the central arrow line as a main access to the settlement. It is interesting to note that half the bow and the full arrow line has survived. The tip of the arrow end is occupied by the temple of Lord

Pashupatinath.

Figure: The Schema of the KARMUKA

From this conjecture, it can be suggested that the main gateway to the Tripura Devapattana was probably at the crossing of the temple court axis and the Daxinamurti - Bhuvanewori road near Sadavarta building. The gate of the Subarnapuri Deva-pattana seems to have been located at Pachu-tole Ganesh. Between the two gates was the Adhasala area. In all probability, the reorganized Deva-pattana used the Karmuka plan. It does not appear likely that the new town was based on a full circle.

From the above conjectural suggestions, it may be concluded that the legendary association of Devapattana is substantiated to some extent. Further archaeological research will be necessary to prove whether the gate was located as



proposed or not. The area around Jayabageswori was possibly designed as an out of town node as against Karmuka requirement that it be central to the circle. The site where the apparent center lies is now under private occupation and its original usage is not known. This area however is a commanding site with great potential for a central theme. The findings of Sivalingas of Lichchhavi period in gardens and hill slopes of the area under discussion does indicate change in form of Devapattana in the past, although its conceptual outline is still discernible.

[The drawing shows the conceptual positioning of Tripura Devapattana, Adhasala and Subarnapuri Devapattana. This conjectural planning is superimposed over the plan of the area as it exists today.]