

The Evolution of Dyochhe

Sudarshan Raj Tiwari

Although to the lay viewer the dominant visual elements and forms such as the roof, exposed and decorative brick in walls and the carved doors, windows and struts may make all of the Nepali temples seem similar, consideration of religious symbolism and ritual practices will reveal two distinct groups: (i) the square Devalaya temple or the Degah and (ii) the rectangular Dyochhe. Whereas the Degah is the idealized place for the realization of the Hindu God on earth¹, the Dyochhe, by nomenclature and the built form shows like a transformation of a human residential building to suit 'godly inhabitants', which does not fit the Degah ideal of temple and is not explained as a development there from. This article explores the evolution of Dyochhe from the perspective of architectural expression in ritual and religious context. As the usual study approaches in Nepali architecture considering materials, methods and skills of construction, tend to blur the differences between the two groups of religious buildings, we shall approach it here through rituals and religious symbolism - this is more likely to reveal differing ideologies, linkages and paths of evolution, sequences of developments and cultural contacts. In any case, the form of religious icons, in most cultures, are conceived as objective symbols to begin with and get worked on only later with building materials, technologies and architectural stylization.

Whereas the temples in the Devalaya or Degah group carry the image of a single deity and as a rule display a single gajur on the roof, the roofs themselves may be in the tiered style or in avarana, ghanthakar, granthakut and gumbaj forms. In contrast, the temples of the Dyochhe group house a number of god images in a single temple and often display multiple gajur or finials over the typical Nepali roof. These temples are generally rectangular in plan and may be observed in three different distinct groups, e.g., (i) the in-town Dyochhe temple that follows the pattern of a residential building; (ii) the open sanctum out-of-town pith temple², which displays varied plan forms with single or multiple tiered roofs and (iii) a in-town temple that displays a hybrid mix of Dyochhe and Degah patterns. In the third group of rectangular 'Dyochhe temples, we observe a sanctum in upper floor that expects communal worship of a mode different from the usual Bhakti mode. In contrast, the pith temple, with open sanctum, exhibits traits of hypaethral traditions.

Symbol and Form:

Dyochhe derives its key symbolism from two simple conceptions; (i) conception of an earthly residence for the family of God in the form of the house of the family of Man and (ii) an idea of similarity and correspondence of the life-style of God to that of Man. These ideas and symbolic stances not only provide the key architectural character that distinguishes the Dyochhe from the Degah, but also present the latter as a folk cultural development with anthropological dimension rarely found in classical Hindu concepts of Gods and their life. Unlike the Hindu Degah temple, which appears to have limited 'humanness' to anthropomorphic imagery and anthropometric dimensions of sanctified spaces, Dyochhe appears as a sanctification and idealization of anthropological state of the family of man and his house. Even the sanctum spaces are varied in composition as well as in religious intent- Dyochhe has as many as three floors with two sanctum levels, and do not exhibit the reducing cores or multiple roofs as in the well-known tiered Degah style. They are tiered only in the sense that they may have a small 'fucha'³ roof on top of its main roof. Indeed, many a Dyochhe does not exhibit its religious

position through the roof form at all. The pile of Dyochhe is not a polala. It is simply a roof, a building element to protect its inmates from the inclement Nature as it were.



The symbolism of the Dyochhe as a residence of the family of God is graphically translated into its building form. Dyochhe usually follows the three floors format typical of a Newar street-side residence (Pikhachhe). The ground floor, typically, has a Dalan as the central space, with small rooms on the sides, one of which houses a stair. The other side room functions as a general shrine. The semi-open Dalan is space for arrival as well as ceremonial resting of khat. Organized like a residence for gods, Dyochhe has two sanctums: a private agam at first floor (in the manner of the master bed room) and another sanctum at second floor (in the manner of a family living room).

Figure 1: Dyochhe with Fucha (Tulaja Bhavani at Bhaktapur).

The agam sanctum is on far end of stair landing and rest of the floor is left as space for preparatory ritual functions. The second floor is a single space, much like the living room of a Newar residential building and is generally used for communal feasts. An attic is usually formed and the space used by the caretaker for kitchen or other functions of their own. In some cases, an additional sanctum/temple space for daily ritual worship is also formed in the same attic. A small area, over the central part of the building or directly over the sanctum



space on first floor, is sometimes given a standard pyramidal roof called fucha and gives a religious appeal to the building form. Likewise, guardian lions on the sides of the entrances, torana over the doors and windows and the religious character and motifs of carvings describe the building as religious.

Figure 2: Dalan in Dyochhe of Bakupatinarayan, Bhaktapur – also Window with Religious Motifs.

The symbolic reflection of the temple as a residence of the family of God with more than one member is also made by the multiple finials (gajurs) over the roofs. The presence of as many as twenty (13 in top tier, 5+1 in second tier and 1 in first tier) finials can be observed in the temple of Baghvairab of Kirtipur. The architectural form of Dyochhe and Pith, their ritual and symbolic content can be seen as a development from hypaethral religious practices with tantric leanings. Originally, the Dyochhe as a whole might have been conceived as the agam of the pith.

The correspondence of Dyochhe floors with Chen-di, Ma-ta and Cho-ta is starkly stated even by the way the elevation is composed and as a building typology, Dyochhe is a pure and simple

derivative of a residential building. This lack of even pretence at change imparts a distinctive symbolic meaning to the Dyochhe. The use of windows in Dyochhe follows the residential pattern and its sanctums, although keeping a sacred closure, expects some light through windows and so are not born of garbhagriha ideals.

Unlike in the Degah, the ritual worship in Dyochhe has no requirement of circumambulation and the religious decorative carvings are, if any, related just to the front. The carved strut imagery displaying the celestial scenes and heavenly bodies, so important in the symbolism of the Degah and ritual purpose of darsana there, occurs minimally here as a décor of little symbolic relevance and appear like later additions as fashionable copies. Also Dyochhe tends to be sited at the sides of courts and attached to other buildings for lack of ritual circumambulation. This ritual and locational characteristic makes them remarkably different from the Degah temples.

Antiquity

Most of the very many Dyochhe temples in the valley today are structures reconstructed or renovated in the late Malla period. However, even as a large number of Dyochhe, particularly belonging to the mother-goddesses, were established and built as the Shakti cult gained popularity in the era following the Lichchhavi period; there is little doubt that cults associated with quite a few other Dyochhe are descended of more ancient cultural traditions and also display as ancient building form, functional organization and ritual reflections.



Figure 3: Matindevakula? (Balkumari Dyochhe at Tyagal, Patan).

Lichchhavi inscriptions mention many regular Saiva/Vaisnav temples for which the steles use such classical terminologies as Prasada, Bhavana and Mandapa. These classical temples display form, symbolism and rituals as ordained in Hindu religious literature such as the Vastushastra and are elaborations of the principle of a garbhagriha (dark seed room) housing a single god image. Alongside, Lichchhavi inscriptions also carry references to a different type of religious building termed Devakula, which appear developed around an apparently opposed concept of an open sanctum housing a multiple images⁴ and distinct rituals.

The Sanskrit lexicon definition of devakula as a family of god or a shrine housing such a family of images confirms the worship of multiple images as a requirement of devakula shrine. As an architectural term Devakula is conspicuous by its absence in the Vastushastra texts. The only previous occurrence of the term has been in a Mathura inscription of Kaniska, where the application is to a temple of the hypaethral kind! Choice of such a rare architectural nomenclature must speak of the great distance between the symbolisms of the prasada and the devakula.

There are no temples today that are 'proven as authentic devakula from Lichchhavi times' and all the known sites have been spots of continuous religious activity; few of the devakula sites appear to have been converted into pigana sites also. And, the rise in popularity of ancestor worship (digudyo practices) and its spatial overlap with pigana sites in late Malla period has precipitated significant architectural interventions there. However, wherever a devakula site

continued on in its tradition unhindered, we find a building in the form of Dyochhe today. The situation appears much like a simple terminological change in some cases such as Balkumari of Tyagal in Patan, Dyochhe of Tunaldevi in Hadigaun, etc.; and we can accept these as examples of devakula. Two of the devakula mentioned in Lichchhavi inscriptions, Matin and Valasokshi, have been located (the former at Tyagal in Patan and the latter at Satyanarayana in Hadigaun) through polygonal studies and spot analyses and both the sites are home to pre-Lichchhavi mother goddesses. Thus, terminological association of devakula with the residence of the family (with a number of members) of god stands proven; and, we can conclude without doubt that Dyochhe is a Malla period transformation of Lichchhavi Devakula. Inscription⁵ on Matin devakula also mentions well coursed brick walls and use of timber doors and windows in its building; the use of the term *vatayana* and not *gavakshya* for window amplifies that its sanctum did not have darkness required in its religious rituals.

The central place of the Lichchhavi capital city of Maneswor or Vishalnagar is now occupied by a temple popularly named Manamaneswori (Hadigaun). Gopalarajavamsabali, a medieval chronicle, states that Maneswori is the royal tutelary goddess set up by the fifth century Lichchhavi king Manadeva and was worshipped with its mukut (a metal mask with stylized face and generally used to personify numinous stone) – a preparatory ritual of veneration still followed in the case of gods in pigan-pith and Dyochhe. While archeological excavations have substantiated its cultural occupation from Lichchhavi period, a Siva-linga of definite Lichchhavi creation with its characteristic tamralep sheen and craftsmanship, is also seen in one of its sanctum, a lobby-like space at entry. The symbolic stones and an auspicious jar, a kalas, kept in another sanctum room in ground floor, is the goddess Maneswori. Obviously, the building was intended as sanctum for a number of gods and fits the symbolic attribute of a Dyochhe. It can be observed from Figure 3 that the two sanctums make a rectangular building served by a wide raised plinth and with its chowk, court in front, the total composition makes a square. If we take the side of the overall square as 8p, then the Maneswori sanctum size translates as 3px3p, lobby shrine as 3px5p, plinth width as p and the courtyard as 4px8p. The rectangular planning, double shrine formation at lobby and interior room, use of raised plinth *peti* on the court side for entry and the court in front add up to define the Dyochhe temple.

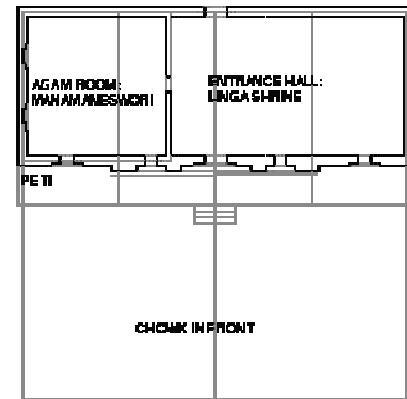
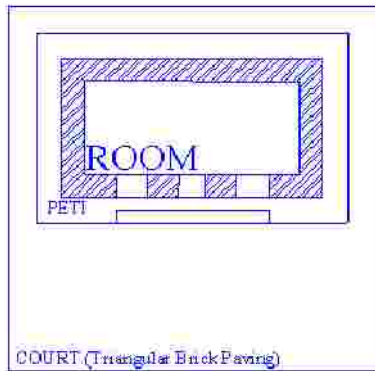


Figure 4: Plan, Dyochhe Temple of Manamaneswori, Hadigaun.

Polygonal approximation studies of Lichchhavi inscriptions⁶ indicate that the Valasokshi Devakula was located about Satyanarayana in Hadigaon. The archeological excavations there have revealed in the south-east corner foundation remains, catalogued as HSN-S1, belonging to a large rectangular building facing north and with a paved court in front, catalogued as HSN 63. This fits in well as the very Valasokshi devakula. The building measures 5.45m x 10.20m on the outside and 4.15m x 8.45m on the inside and has a continuous 1m wide plinth of brick and a forecourt paved at 75 cm below the sanctum level with triangular bricks. It can be inferred from the only other known cases, e.g. Pashupatinath and Changuanarayan that the tradition of paving with triangular bricks was limited to important religious spaces; it may therefore be concluded that the building is a religious building and Dyochhe. It is notable that the measures of the building give a rectangular room whose length is twice its width, a proportion seen in a number of existing Dyochhe. Also the precinct as a whole including the

paving forms a larger square and the proportioning is very close to that of Manamaneswori Dyochhe.

The close similarity of the conjectured building and Manamaneswori Dyochhe and the radio-carbon dating of the foundations to the first century BC by the archeologists (Hadigaun, Satyanarayana 1984-88) illuminates that such building planning pattern and proportioning existed in Kathmandu valley culture as far back as first century BC. This must lead one to the



conclusion that rituals and traditions of the Dyochhe kind belong to Kirat society and pre-date the arrival of the Lichchhavi in Nepal. It has also been observed that hypaethral shrines, which are essentially responsive to worship of a group of gods by a group of worshippers, have been observed in Vindhyaachal area in central India and in Nepal, both known as habitat of Kirats in ancient times. From Lichchhavi inscriptions we can learn that Kirat religious practice also used an open religious site with a collection of natural stones 'digvara', clearly a hypaethral shrine.

Figure 5: Valasokshi Devakula: Conjectural Ground Floor Plan.

From Devakula to Dyochhe

For Kirats, gods did not live in far away dark caves as perceived by the Hindus but were resident in crossroads, funeral sites, riverbanks, edge of forests, under large trees, etc. These places of veneration of Rudra are ordained in Paraskara Grihya-sutra and Hiranyakesina Grihya-sutra. The ritual and symbolism of the Devakula could be sought in these ancient religious documents, where the term Devakula occurs in an architectural sense. Grihya-sutra are essentially compilations of rituals associated with domestic living and were simple enough to be performed without the mediation of priests. Even today, the rites and rituals associated with the worship at Dyochhe and Pigan-pith or even Digudyo sites or at festivities there, are generally performed by the lay participants. The present rituals are also detailed to suit worship with a large community or clan group participating. For the Kirat, the divine family of Rudra was also akin to the family of their own ancestors; this seems to have caused the overlap between the Pigan-pith and Digudyo sites in its revival in Malla period.

The family of gods resident in the Devakula temple appears to have been provided with a second place of ritual presence located outside the settlement and in the domain of nature. The family of gods, principally the gana of Siva, Bhairav and Bhairavi worshipped since pre-Lichchhavi days, were assumed present in spots with 'natural' stones or power places, which are referred in Lichchhavi inscriptions as 'Digvara'. An inscription of Balambu refers to 'Digvara' as 'vastu' of Devakula linking the two as counterparts of the same set. The terms used in medieval inscriptions show that Devakula and Digvara were referred to as Dathugvara and pithugvara respectively in the Malla period as the digudyo and mother-goddess cults gathered folkish character. Over time, the built nature of Dathugvara appears to have renewed the term for Devakula as Dyochhe in the local language and pithugvara transliterated as Pigan or Pith. Whereas, the place of natural presence, Pith, was left un-built, the spirits of the Pith were worshipped conjointly in the in-town building designed as their 'residence'. Worshipped as they were as gana, group or family, the temples got their expressive names. That the sites of presence were tied up into a single ritual system can be seen from the observation of Pigan

festivals, celebrated by the Jyapu farming community of Kathmandu, that reenact the link between a Devakula and its Digvara.

That the Kirat belonged to the non-Aryan tribe of the Sakas, the aboriginals of the Indus-Hindukush region, is known from literary sources. Therefore, the symbolism of the Devakula temples may also show trace relations with Indus religious practices. Otherwise, the Dyochhe temples with open sanctum and enshrining a family of gods are particular to Nepal.

In conclusion – Assimilating Influences of the Mainstream

The varying extent of developmental influences and assimilations to a Dyochhe may be observed by comparing the temple of Akash Bhairav in Indrachowk, Kathmandu with that of Bagh Bhairav in Kirtipur: whereas, Akash Bhairav temple still displays the central *dalan* in ground level, the main sanctum in first level and the community sanctum in second level; Bagh Bhairav, ground level is like a colonnaded sanctum room of a *degah* and the first level is a community sanctum. Whereas, Akash Bhairav has no circumambulation or display of imagery as in a *degah*, Bagh Bhairav incorporates both. Whereas Akash Bhairav does not display multiple roofs, Bagh Bhairav displays both the reducing cores and multiple roofs.

The temple of Bagh Bhairav in Kirtipur is an ancient structure but its earliest repair record is dated to 1515 AD. The inscription states that the building including its top roof had fallen in disrepair and it was restored as per 'Vedic' rites. It is notable that the inscription refers to the religious building by the term '*vesma*' (in Sanskrit and '*nivasa*' in Newar) and not the usual '*devara*' and thus revealing that the building was built as a Dyochhe⁷. The use of three golden *ghata* as finials tells of its rectangular plan form. Its role as 'residence' of God is symbolized by the *fucha* roof, whose three golden finials possibly represented Ganesh, Siva Byaghreswara and Parvati in residence. Although the use of Vedic principles seems to have taken its development to the *degah* way in Malla period, later repairs appear to have maintained the form with additions of decorative and votive elements only. The basic vertical arrangement of religious spaces remains with the main image of the deity kept in the western end of the rectangular room in ground floor; and it is kept dark as if it were a *garbagriha*, only a narrow slit in the east end allowing early morning rays to light the image. The two upper floors are communal worship rooms and both have a verandah going all round. It would seem logical to infer that prior to 1515 repairs, the Dyochhe of Bagh Bhairav could have been a smaller building in three storey residential format with just the *fucha* roof.

The Dyochhe of mother-goddesses have remained most true to their originals, although the motifs and details are influenced by standards and practices of *degah*, the regular Hindu temple. Also, the out-of-town counterpart of Devakula, the Digvara or Pith has undergone a lot of change with open-to-sky shrine built over in many cases. Such Pith temples have taken to the *degah* format exhibiting reducing cores and multiple roofs; yet, true to their origins, the long side of sanctum is kept open with several aniconic stones laid in a line at the back of the cell. And the symbolic need of rectangular shrine space is rarely tampered with and even Pith temples based on square have their ground level sanctum divided by a middle wall so as to create a rectangle of 1:2 proportion.

We have seen that use of such proportions in Devakula temples was current in Nepal since as early as first century BC. Such proportions not conforming to the ideal of the square seem to have gained ground in parts of India later and even found place as 'classical' tradition. Thus, late Vastusastra texts, such as Shilpa Prakasha from Orissa traditions⁸, ordains the requirement

of rectangular plan of ratio 1:2 (obtained by doubling the square) in the design of sanctum of temples for Goddess. The rectangular Yogini Yantra is postulated because the square is said to be eminently static and so unsuited to house creative expanding forces represented by a Goddess. The mother-goddesses of ancient Nepal, such as the matrinal of Matindevakula, are the clear fore-runners of the tradition.

¹ Tiwari, S. R., 'Degah, the Triple Chariot of God', *Vaastu*, Vol V, pp. 29-33, October 2003, ASA, Institute of Engineering, Lalitpur, Nepal.

² The temples referred to here are locally called '*pigan pith*'. The word, *pi-gam*, is a compound word, where '*pi*' means 'outside the town' and '*gan*' is *Vedi* or sacred platform for ritual worship. The word '*gan*' appears derived from '*gana*', a Sanskrit word meaning a group. Inscriptional evidence of the use of word '*pi-gana*' for '*pigan pith*' is available in late Malla period; and earlier inscriptions use the term *pithu gwora* to refer to the same sites, apparently the source for the Newar term '*pith*'. They are distinguished from Shakti '*pith*', whose potency is associated with the myth of Sati, the Parvati incarnate. Similarity of structure of the word *pithu* and *thathu*, *dathu* and *kwothu* used by Newars to differentiate segments of town is notable (*thu* is sanctified place).

³ Fucha is a miniature *Kuta* roof over the main roof of the building. Whereas the use of the suffix '*cha*' must indicate that it is a miniature, the key word '*fu*' is not well understood; it may however stand for the spirit *fu* that commands the last worship in Newar rituals.

⁴ Tiwari, S. R., 'The Architecture in Nepal of the Ancient Period', *Vaastu*, Vol II, pp. 67-72, May 2000, ASA, Institute of Engineering, Lalitpur, Nepal.

⁵ The actual words (from Regmi, IAN, Volume 1, pp. 78) are: Rmatindevakulamardhavinipatitastaka Pankita Vivara Pravista Nakulakulakulitamushika Sarthadura Vighatita Nirava Sheshadwarakapata Vatayanadi Jirnadarusanghatam ... (underlines mine)

⁶ Tiwari, S. R., *Ancient Settlements of Kathmandu Valley*, CNAS, TU, 2001.

⁷ The wording in Sanskrit section of the inscription is 'bhagnavesmashirahsu cha. Chuliko..hemastrayo ghatah' and corresponding to wordings, "nivasa jirnmodhara yanga chvalika ..." in Newari section.

⁸ Kaulacara, R., *Silpa Prakasa*, A Boner and S. Rath Sarma (eds) E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1966.