

## Vastu of Bhaktapur and Religious Landscape of Shakti and Vidhya

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Using religious festivals and rituals to mediate the planning of settlements in terms of their form, patterns and hierarchy of streets, squares as well as neighborhoods has been in practice all through the history of town development in Kathmandu valley. While the application of Vastupurushamandala and other tools of settlement planning as outlined in classical treatises such as Vastushastra and Arthashastra started from Lichchhavi period, research has shown that the Kirat settlements were also ritually mediated through the use of *dyochhe* and *pith* set of built and open shrines and the associated processional festival travelling through the main street linking the two. Either way, idea of planning a settlement has been to clad a cosmic image on to the site as per the prevailing faith and beliefs. As the capital town of the Malla state of Nepal, the vastu or planning of Bhaktapur evidences the creation and accretion of powerful cosmic images through the siting and interlinkage of not only its centers of faith and beliefs, temples, *dyochhe* and *pith* of gods and goddesses, but also palace and precincts of the kings, priests and other mundane powers.

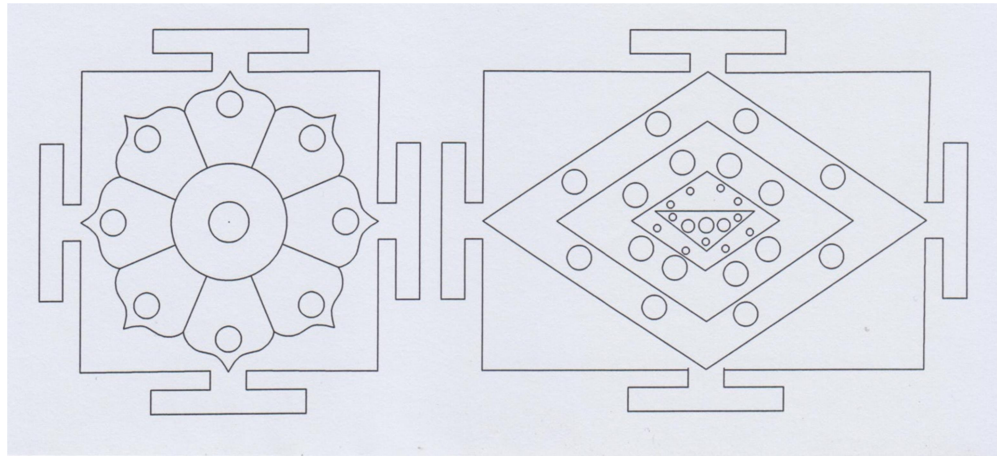


Figure 1: Vastu Yantras of Bhaktapur?

Gopalarajavamsabali (GRV) reports that king Anandadev (1147 – 1167 CE) built the town of Bhaktapur as the capital of the Malla Nepal Mandala with Tripur palace, a Saptagranthakuta temple for the royal tutelary and a Subarnapranali (*hiti*) following principles and rules of classical sciences. Later chronicles provide different elaborations – some describing that the town was planned by placing the *astamatrika* (eight mother goddesses) in the periphery while others adding that he did so by bringing Annapurnadevi from Kashi and consecrating a temple in east while planning the whole

town with Bhairav temple in the middle. Taking the first elaboration, the planning diagram used by Anandadev for layout of the capital has been made out to be the *tripurasundari* yantra (Fig. 1, left diagram drawn after Munankarmi). Kolver has published a painting (Fig. 1, right diagram, line trace off Kolver, 1976) which looks like a geometricization of religious landscape of Bhaktapur with Tripurasundari flanked by Bhadrakali and Akash Bhairav – somewhat getting closer to placing the Bhairav also at the middle of the town as well as to the associated festival rituals still in practice. Similar *yantras* have been adapted by Gutschow (1982) and presented as ‘the Bhaktapur-mandala’ tying Saiva, Shakti, Vidya as well as Narayana temples, *pith* and shrines associated with the town and people of Bhaktapur at various time. Obviously, none of these are planning diagrams or yantras deriving out of Vastupurushamandala being at best no more than geometricized diagrams of sites of gods and goddesses and pattern of rituals associated with the high religious-cultural practices of Bhaktapur observed long after Anandadev’s reign. None of these *yantras* can logically explain the extant pattern of streets and squares. The stylistic disagreement of *saptagranthakuta* with the *dyochhe* building and the absence of *subarnapranali* goes to show that Tripurasundari site is not the center of the capital town as built by Anandadev. Therefore, in order to establish the *vastu* of Bhaktapur as the capital town and the *vastu yantra* used in planning it, this article seeks to examine the various classical instructions and rules king Anandadev had access and their potential in explaining the bounding characteristics, pattern of streets and squares as well as the central core of the capital town.

At the end of the Lichchhavi period, the area occupied by the town of Bhaktapur today had four settlements possibly settled from the Kirat period, namely, Khopringga, Makhopringgadula, Chupringga and Makhopringga that stretched from what is now Surjemadhi in the east to Khauma on the west, roughly straddling a main road that stretched from Talako to Gachhe. The settlements seem to have developed without any Lichchhavi interventions, as we find none of their signatures as seen in Hadigaun and Kathmandu. However, a few decades before Anandadev, king Sivadev (born 1056 AD) had intervened in the Bhaktapur area with the construction of a large water system (GRV). Evidence shows that this water system followed the alignment of the main street entering Bhaktapur area from Muldhoka through Mahalaxmi *pith* temple. It may be of interest here also to recall a popular memory that puts Taladapho hillock (Munankarmi, 1966) to the south-east of the town of Bhaktagram when Sivadev’s father king Shankardev was ruling. According to this legend, Shankardev had ordered the filling of that area as sites with slope downwards in south-east made its *vastu* inauspicious. We

can infer from this account that the central area of the capital town of Bhaktapur during the reign of Shankardev would have been about Bhadrakali *dyochhe* or Khauma. Since Anandadev was from a rival royal house, it would be logical for him to locate the central area of his newly built capital housing the Tripura palace, the Saptagranthakuta temple and the *suvarnapranali* away from Khauma. It might be precisely due to his sort of locational logic that Bhaktapur later came to have a bipolar character as evidenced in the way the chariot of Bhairavnath is pulled as a tug-of-war between the upper and the lower towns during the Bisket festival. The central core of Anandadev's Bhaktapur should thus be to the east and that is what should define and reveal its planned *vastu*. From the description of one of the later chronicles, we may speculate that 'Annapurnadevi' temple set up by Anandadev actually made the core of his capital town!

Inscriptional and archieval sources show that Anandadev may have had several scriptural choices for departures in design and planning as newer religious cults and sects were introduced in Nepal valley about his reign. Three such sources, e.g. Pratisthatantra (National Archives dated 1158 AD, NGMPP # B26/216) copied for his use, Chandi Saptasati (National Archives dated 1162 AD, NGMPP # B37/1) copied in his reign and an inscription (National Museum dated 1141 AD) mentioning his training and admission to his religious faith, define the nature of classical instructs clearly available to him. While Pratisthatantra is a collection of Saiva Tantra ritual practices drawn from the *Nisvasakhya Mahatantra*, its chapters on architectural principles of temple and town building reiterate the *prashada* canons similar to those expounded in Brihatsamhita and Mayamata. It gives in detail the significance and auspiciousness of the *vastupurushamandala* of sixty-four squares (*manduka*) and eightyone squares (*paramasayika*) in settlement planning. Chandi Saptasati is a *puranic* document (Markandeya Puran) that has hymns of the Shakti, their emanation and deadly wars they fought killing the demons, who had challenged the gods. The order of emanation of the seven mother-like goddesses starting with Brahmani in east and ending with Indri in the north provide a prospect of using them to define directionality in townspace. The inscription (no. 24, Bajracharya D. , 2068) reports that prince Anandadev himself had been initiated into the Saiva Tantra Vidya-cult by a famous spiritual exponent and practitioner (*yogi*) *Shankaracharya* (Koirala K. C., 2051 BS) Rudrasiva from Kashi Agnimath. Through the *yogi's dixya*, Anandadev had become an adept in the practice of the 'Tantra as per the cult of Siva-Shankara. That other royal and princely personages of that time such as Arjundev, Basantadev, Someswor and Yasomalla had also been

initiated into Saiva Tantra prayers and practices as per Srividya and Srichakra, tells of an already wide extent of popularity of worship of *Vidya* goddesses in the society. The installation of the ‘hidden goddesses of the directions’ reported in stanza 27, however, could be inferred as referring either to either the eight mother goddesses of the cardinal and corner directions or the ten *vidya* powers resident in the ten directions (eight in cardinal and corner directions plus zenith and nadir) or even the ten *mudra* divinities. For, *sashtra* tells us to evoke the goddess Lalita Mahatripurasundari at the center of Sriyantra (the *bindu* along with the *avarana* of the innermost circuit), while it is in the three ramparts of Trilokyamohan Chakra, the outermost circuit of Sri Yantra, that we find located the ten *siddhi vidhya* powers at the outermost, the eight mother-like *Shakti* goddesses in the cardinal and corner directions in the middle and the ten *mudra* approaches-divinities in the innermost. In their totality, the three define and become Tripura, the goddess of the Trilokyamohan Chakra.

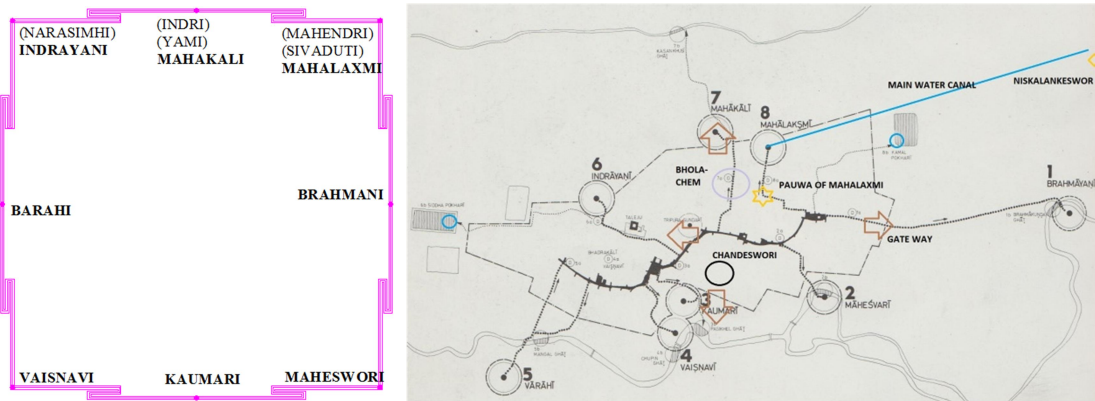


Figure 2: The Shakti in Chakra (left) and Actual Dispersal (right, Base Map Gutschow)

Possibly because *Mudra* divinities were to be ritually realized by the adepts, the physical landscape of Bhaktapur only shows the dispersal of *Vidhya* and *Shakti* entities. It is clear that without the knowledge of Srichakra coming from this inscriptional source, the actual dispersal of *Shakti* seen in the landscape can not be framed. For Chandi Saptasati names only seven mother goddesses including Yami and Narasimhi. While the eighth mother-goddess (north-east) is named as Mahendri in *Varahapurana*, *Bahurupashtaka* names her as Sivaduti giving the other seven Shaktis as Brahmi, Maheswori, Kaumari, Vaisnavi, Varahi, Mahendri and Chamunda. In most tantrik texts, however, the eighth force is given as Mahalaxmi (Rao, 1983). It is known that Mahalaxmi was popular and revered in Bhaktapur since before Anandadev.

In actual, we find Indrayani (or Indri or Mahendri) in north-west, Mahakali (or Chamunda) in the north and Mahalaxmi on the north-east. Mahakali as the seventh force on the north is true to *Bahurupashtaka* (replacing Yami of the *puranas*). The directional placing of Bramhayani, Maheswori, Kaumari, Vaisnavi and Barahi in Bhaktapur tally with the order given in Saptasati and all other traditions. The actual *Shakti* dispersal, however, does not support the geometry of the Trilokyamohan Chakra (Figure 2)

The actual dispersal of the *dasamahavidya* belonging to the period of Anandadev is shown in Figure 3.

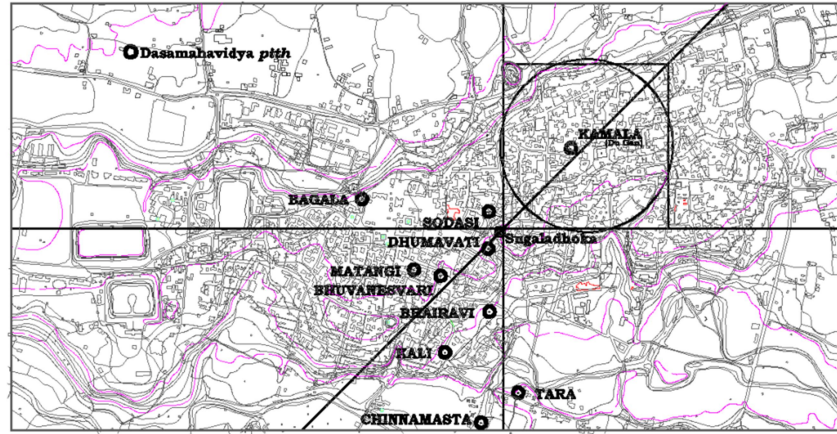
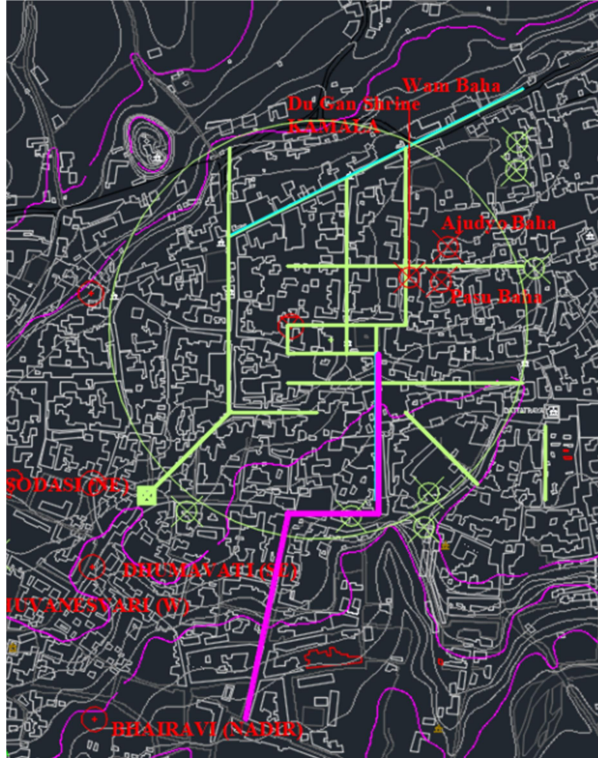


Figure 3: The *Dasamahavidya* of Bhaktapur

Classic literature and experts say that, of the three *siddhavidhya* among the ten *mahavidhya*, Siddhilaxmi is fit for worship for adept-king while Matangi and Bagalamukhi are for the adept-priests and the *shodanyasi* ascetic respectively (Misra, 2064BS). The general planning approach recommended has been to locate these three in the place of residence of the adept king, priest and the *shodanyasi* respectively, while the remaining seven, e.g. Sodasi (Tripurasundari), Dhumavati, Bhuvaneshvari, Bhairavi, Kali, Tara and Chinnamasta, are to be located outside the town, to its west and south and near funeral grounds. In figure 3, the quadrants have been drawn with Sugaladhoka as the origin so as to best fit the requirement of the seven seeking funerary sites.





**Figure 4: Pattern of streets about Nagpokhari**

The location of Bagalamukhi near the *pith* of Indrayeni should tell us that this was where the *shodanyasi* ascetics lived. Likewise, in early times too, like at present, the area to the south-east of Khauma, right down to Jangham Math, used to be the residential area of Rajopadhyaya Brahmins, the adept-priests. Clearly it should be about the current *pith* of Kamala about Dugamala that Anandadev would have built his Tripura palace stretching east to west in three courtyards. It would appear that the *Saptagranthakuta* temple for *siddhavidhya* Kamala or Siddhilaxmi was consecrated in the middle court.

Although absence of substantial geometric pattern in the streets layout of present day Bhaktapur as a whole has been noted (Gutschow & Kolver, 1975), a strong sense of a geometrically laid street pattern is conveyed by a small area about Thalachen and Nagpokhari (See Figure 4). It should be noted that the angular alignment of Mudhoka-Chhuma Ganesh street (shown in blue) reflects the earlier canal built by Sivadev. The diagonally alignment between Sugaldhoka, Lalachhe and the *paurwa* of Mahakali suggests that the capital town built by Anandadev was entered from the south-west (*nairitya*) corner – a feature it seems to share with the layout of the Lichchhavi capital Maneswor (Tiwari, 2001). The street shown in pink is the funerary route from the capital city to Chupinghat.

Incidentally, it is only in the center of this area at Duganmala that we find located one of the ten *vidya* – named Kamala or Siddhilaxmi in classical texts and presently popularly called Prithvi Mata. The *vidya* Siddhilaxmi is the very goddess Annapurnadevi reported in the late chronicles as brought from Kashi and consecrated by Anandadev. It can be noted from the ‘inscription source’ that the preceptor of Anandadev was the *Shankaracharya* of Kashi Agnimath. In addition, Mahakali-Mahalaxmi festival, attributed to Anandadev and annually celebrated along these streets, stands out to confirm that

this is the core of Anandadev's Bhaktapur.

We can learn from Jitamitra's inscription at Nagpokhari (behind 55-Windows Palace) that the term *subarnapranali* refers to a set of a *hiti* dedicated to worship of royal tutelary and its runoff collection pond (*itipukhura*) with a Naga deity (*itipukhuradeva*). At least two such *subarnapranali* royal *hiti* had already been built and consecrated in the capital city of Bhaktapur for over five hundred years before that. One was constructed by King Anandadev near the Tripur palace as already noted. Shortly afterwards, his brother,

King Rudradev (287-295NS) had added another *suvernapranali* in the palace courts. In the area of our interest, even today we find two *itipukhura* still surviving e.g., Nagpokhari and Salanpokhari. It can be reasonably argued that Anandadev could have constructed this 'golden conduit' for the worship of his royal tutelary, Annapurnadevi.

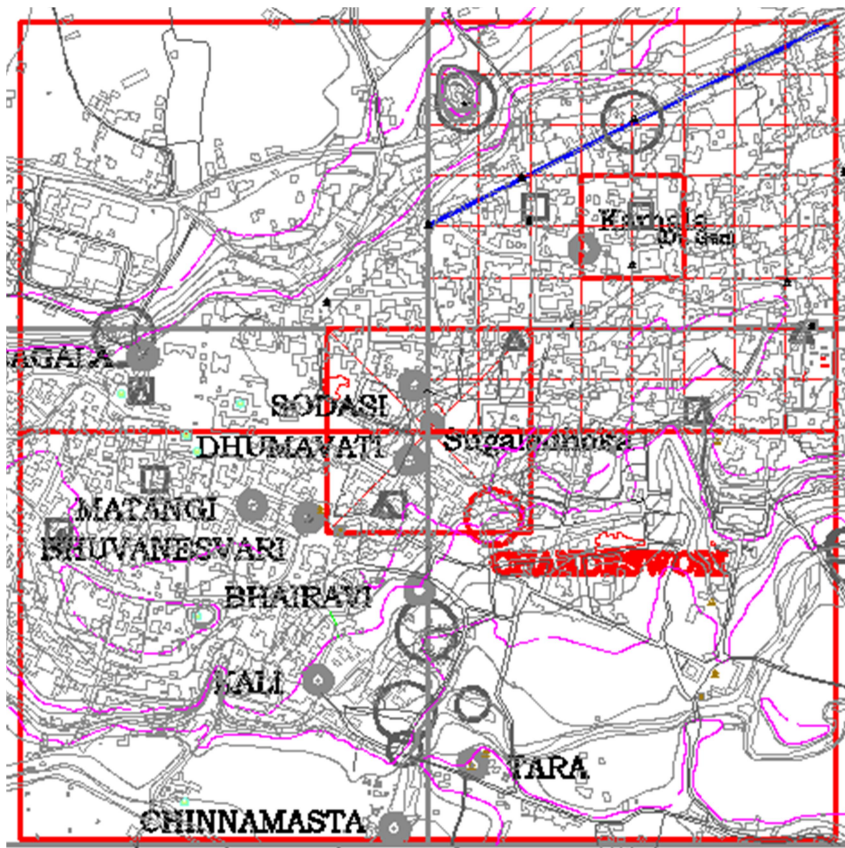


Figure 5: The conjectural *vastu* of Bhaktapur, the capital city of Anandadev

Combining all these findings and inferences and taking cue from the extant street alignment and nodes in a sixty-four square *manduka* Vastupurushamandala as posited in Pratisthatantra source book, the *vastu* of the capital town of Bhaktapur as built by Anandadev is projected (Figure 5). The town appears to have been built on high ground to the west of Khopringga, east of Makhopringga, north-east of Chupringga and north of Makhodula! It had kept to the east of the early palace of Shankardev and took its water supply from its north-east tapping off the system built by Sivadev earlier. In keeping

with the ordained *vastu* practices, town's waste water was drained out to the south-east. At the *brahmasthan*, the central court of Tripur palace, stood the *saptagranthakuta* temple of *siddhavidya* Siddhilaxmi, the Annapurnadevi!