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Founder
S. S. Shashi

Chief Editor
Dharam Vir

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Historical and Religious Significance of Seela and Lions around Panchakumari in Maitedevi Temple Premises

*Mani Bhadra Gautam**

Maitedevi temple was built in 685 BS in the time of Lichhivi King Amshuvarma. It is known as shakti temple of Panchakumari and also as a parental home (Maite) of Devi. The Seela and Lions placed in this temple have religious significance. This paper states that the literature covers up the different things, places, and people with the parts of life, love, death etc. Every rituals and religious functions from birth to death celebrated in different places of the world are the parts of spiritual literature with tantric if they acquire the literary elements and bear the literary values. This study is based on the religious things and activities this researcher went through and observed around the Maitedevi temple premises. The method of this study is field visit, interview with the priest, temple visiting people, religious fanatics and other concerned people related with the temple and religious people groups. Finding of this research is that religious things, people, places and functions are the parts of spiritual in literature.

[**Keywords** : Seela, Rituals, Goddess, Disguised, Radiant flame, Blessing, Shining, Ecology etc.]

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1. Mythical History of the Maitedevi Temple

Talking about the origin of the Maitedevi temple, there are legends and hearsays. According to hearsay, a flood of light made a radiant flame in a tantric way near to Gyaneshwar Mahadev and Maitedevi temple premises but it disappeared immediately and a unique thing was found there which names as Astamatrika and Panchakumari. People around there, especially the Bajracharya built the temple in Pagoda style in guidance and help of King Amshuverma in 685 BS and started worshipping there as a temple of Astamatrika and Panchakumari. Old woman was roaming around there for food and shelter to whom a low caste Newar, Poday gave some food. The lady is supposed to be the Goddess Devi disguised in a mysterious form who blessed him to be the Devpal. She left the shining stone at the time of her departure in another tantric way that is known as Seela and worshipped by the people.

The temple is believed to be a parental home (Maite) of Devi and it is named to be Maitedevi temple and it is also a hearsay that this temple is for five Kumari (virgin) goddesses. Maitedevi temple is addressed differently by the local people living around Maitedevi as shakti temple of Panchakumari and Mahalxmi, too. Maitedevi temple is also known as the temple of Hindu tantric goddess and it is much popular among Hindus. Religious people have a great faith on coming there to worship regularly. Priest, Tirtha Jyoty Bajracharya says that the rituals take place regularly, especial days for puja-aaradhana are Tuesday and Saturday and the special programs are held on the time of Asthami and Navaratri in the time of Dashain "...around two hundred people come daily to observe and worship daily but 500-600 people in Asthami and Navaratri" (Oral interview, 9th Magh 2076). There are lions in different shapes and sizes for the protection of Seela and other properties around the Panchakumari.

Present structure of the temple was changed in the time of Rana Prime Minister Chandra Sumsher in the beginning of the 20th century. Earlier structure is said to have been built by Amshuverma during the Lichhivi period in the 7th century. Woodwork and metal craft structure was framed by local carpenters. According to the legendary myth, a couple of peacock appeared and turned touching everything into gold. The Mayurkunda, two stone lions guarding the Seela and Goddess from the entrance of the temple and the huge

Peepal tree expanding its branches up to the temple roof to save the temple from heat and rain are other valuable things in addition to the particular Seela and Lions.

2. Significance of the Lions and Seela

The significance of lions around the 'Maitedevi Temple' premises is not as easy and simple, as we simply believe it to be, but undoubtedly it is a complex historical temple of great religious values and literary as well as artistic importance. The temple is significant not because that is located in the heart of Kathmandu valley; but because the temple has its own, long history, it preserves among all the other historically valuable things. According to the 'Seelalekh' and 'Abilekh' kept around the side walls of the temple and record kept on the club by the help of its protection committee. Despite its historical and religious importance, according to the chairman of the club Mohanji, it is important from environmental perspective, too. Club people, committee members and priests are always busy in its protection not only from the external attack; but also from the neighboring people who try to harm in the temple's property and environment around with ill intentions, so therefore there is a long painful history in its protection because of the criminal activities and bad eye-sight of the land grabbers, who claimed to loot the land of this temple and broke down the wall while the committee was constructing a building (Oral interview 24-09-2076).

Though there were so many difficulties, its protection committee and holy Priest tried their best to keep everything around it in proper condition as said in John Armstrong's philosophy. John Armstrong in his *Intimate Philosophy of Art* writes :

The investment that onlookers make on the object of their gaze turns simple, value-free thing into an art of work with its aesthetic appeal. So, aesthetic appeal is not always in the object under observation; emotional and intellectual program within the onlookers make the object appeal the way, it is designed. How much emotional baggage, how many convictions can you safely take with you into a gallery or around a building? This is worth asking, if only because our emotional baggage and convictions usually play an important part in forming our interests and attachments. (Armstrong 106)

Protection of the national property, save of environment, religious, social and cultural values is not as easy as we think. Thus the amalgamation of rites and rituals, existential hollowness and uncertainty in a person provides the condition for the divine presence in the Seela. Lions symbolize as the protector/savior of the temple's property. The temple take care and protection committee work time and again for re-construction of the damaged parts.

Among all the things-the things inside and around the temple, much valued things are: The Seela, Panchakumari Mata and pictures of the Lions. There are different portraits of the lions as the bahan of Devi all around the temple in different shapes and sizes including males and females. Two of them, male, are seen to be very furious with the flames of fire in their mouth that symbolizes an expression of anger against evil spirits, devils, ghosts and Mephistopheles. On the side of the front gate of this temple, there is a male lion catching a flag that is not only built for an artistic decoration of the temple but it has the historical significance of bravery and power performance against the enemies.

Next to the side, there is a pair of lions that symbolizes the love and unity on the one hand and passion on the other hand. Similarly, on the other side there is a lion near to the peacock by catching a flag that symbolizes the Nepali nationality. Likewise, on the two opposite sides there are two female lions that symbolize femaleness and motherhood. Hence, the lions in different shapes, sizes and structure all around the temple and front side gate of the temple have different historical as well as religious significance. According to Shyam Sundar Rajbamshi, The Department of Archeology (Rastriya Abhilekhalaya, Puratatto Bibhag), the lions in different shapes, sizes and structure have following significances :

Religious significance of the lions to keep the portraits in the different shapes and sizes all around the temple is that they are not only the bahan of Devi but also they are the representative symbols of power and bravery. Therefore, the lions are saved in different shapes because they are bahan of Devi on the one hand and power representative on the other hand. Despite its artistic joy and beauty, it symbolizes bravery to fight and kill the devils for the protection of Panchakumari Devi from ghosts, spirits, and mephostophilis if they should come to attack or steal anything all around the temple. (Oral interview)

The symbolic meaning of the frightening and angry lions in different places of the temple and side of the front door is to stop anything else from going inside the temple and capturing the temple's property.

Male and female, bodily constructions of the lions are artistically made and they are stated in the different places because they are designed to protect the natural happenings in regard to the theory of re-productivity. The portraits of the lions catching the flags are not only for the decoration near by the temple; but they are for the save of nationality and historical value-significance rather than the savagery attack of devils inside and all around the temple. Red, big and violet eyes of the lions symbolize the horror, terror and violence. There are different types of lions set on the different places whose names, shapes and sizes are as follows: Name given to the lions kept in front of the door is a 'Couple of Lions' and the material used to make the portrait is metal. Length of the lions is 30 inches and width of the lions is 15 inches. Number of the lions placed in front of the main door is two--in front of the Panchakumari Mata inside the temple (right and left side). Time of the construction is 'Shuva Sambat' 792 Ashwin Krishna Pachhe. Significance of the lion goes on the comparison and the contrast of love, passion, and the protection of the temple. Name given to the next lion is lion with a flag that is made by the metal materials. The length is 13 inches and the width is 4 inches. The lions placed on the side of Panchakumari Mata were constructed in Eti-sambat 1986 Magh 29. The statues of the lions are built by Manandar families, inhabitants of Putalisadak, Kathmandu. Significance of the statue of the angry lion is for the protection of the property in the temple premises and the decoration of the temple. It also tries for the protection of national honor with the symbol of nationality. Name given to the next lion is 'Lion Ailabet' (Sardul). Material used for the construction is metal; whose length is 47 inches and width is 19 inches. The Portrait is placed in the eastern part of the temple in 'Ishan code'; time of the construction is B. S. 1996 Falgun. Sardul Lion is made by Ram Narayan and Betimaya Manandhar, an inhabitant of Dillibazaar in keen desire to protect their 5 children from any external attacks of witches, ghosts and evil spirits and to keep them in fresh environment.

3. Environmental and Ecological things in Maitedevi

Environment around the temple is amazing. Environmentalists like Lynn White argue that the deep rooted dualistic thinking separating the transcendental divine self from the mundane mechanical nature has been the prime ecological impetus behind the natural devastation; the world has gone through these days and so it must be protected. People go through the anthropocentric assumptions underpinning the bio-centric perspective as said in myth :

God has created Adam and Eve, as an afterthought, Eve learned a lesson to keep man away from being lonely. Man named all animal differentiating from each-other, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose saved to serve man's purpose. (White 148)

Significance of the environmental protection around the temple is to save the humanity as people come around the temple to pray the god to save themselves and their children and temple from any external attacks.

There are two stone structured lions near by the Seela in the side of the door as the savior of Seela. 'Ajarmaran Lion' is made up of hard materials called copper and metal that also protects the Seela. Length of the lion is 48 inches and width is 19 inches. The portrait is placed in the North side of the temple outside the main door. Name given to the next lion is 'Sardul Lion'. Material is undoubtedly the metal and its length is 38 inches. Width of the lion is 17 inches which is placed in the western side of the main door. The statue is made by Harsaman, an inhabitant of Gyaneshwor. Name given to other lions are 'Couple of Lions with Flags' (Dhyoja Lions). Material used for the construction is metal, whose length is 32 inches and breadth is 11 inches. The statue is placed on the eastern and western parts of the main gate of the temple. The statue is made by Harsaman, an inhabitant of Gyaneshwor in Shree Sambat 1962, Shrawan 24 that is rather known as metal Abhilekh. Significance of the statue concerns with its cultural values. Hence, the temple, Maitedevi, is placed with great artistic decoration that's significance is nevertheless comparable with any things else in the country. However, according to the priest the government is not paying the due attention for its

protection. Hence, in regard to the overall well beings of the Maitedevi Temple, according to Mohanji, who always spends time to take care of the protection of the temple says that the protection of the temple is more valuable than his own personal properties and homes that he tried to get help from governmental and non-governmental offices and agencies, even met to His Majesty the King and Royal highness including family members, too whereas he failed to get as much help as he expected to get. However, he is able to keep records by filing all the documents including courtly decisions and so on. The Maitedevi complex is made by religious people to send their soul strait to the heaven in tantric way after their death and environment is aimed to keep an eco-friendly but the modern development around it is a problem. Significance of the temple is for reservation and preservation of the artistic realities. Artistic values go in the religious protection of the temple.

According to the report given by Mohanjee, "Dynamism of the lions around the Maitedevi complex encompasses so many ingredients of life within its territory. In fact, the dynamism can be taken as the microscopic reflection of macrocosm" (np). It is not only the significance of the lions on the walls and all around the temple premises that symbolically stands for all five basic stuffs of the existence ranging from the gross soil to the ethereal sky, the rites and rituals, and the socio-cultural functions performed in the complex really exhibits the all-inclusive tendency. Every rites and rituals from birth through wedding to the death are encompassed within the premises of the temple. Some people forget environmental ethics and create some problems there. Especially the migrated people who do not know about its historical values are less aware about its ethical values and responsibilities. An ethical necessity to safeguard the temple, nature and natural things is :

The idea of transmigration is this: After death, the soul migrates from one body to another, celestial, human, animal or vegetable. In Buddhism, as it is popularly understood, what regulates transmigration is ethical retribution. . . . There are some destined to be born as a dog or a cat or a hog or a cow or some other animal, according to deeds which can be characterized as preeminently in correspondence with those natures generally ascribed to those particular animals. . . .

Sometimes we are said to be born as plants or even rocks.
(Suzuki 100-101)

Despite its sacred value, this public space does not reject the resumption of any secular functions. For instance, one should not feel quite astonished to see the religious functions, and finds a group of people talking about politics, love and sex in the evening. During elections, this space is the point of contention as political parties try to use its walls and other places for their publicity.

The point to be considered in this regard is that what is the spirit or philosophical situation that allows the possibility of everything within the territory of the temple. Most probably, the formless centrality of Seela in the temple is the main impetus behind such all inclusive tendency. Certainly, the Lions' portraits on the side of Seela makes remind to the religious savior of Hindu Mythology as said in conversation made between King Suratha and Rishi Markandeya in *Saptasati Chandi* stories regarding the creation, form and influence of the Goddess :

King : Who is that Devi whom you name MahaMaya time and again? How was she created? What she looks like? I would like to know about her form, influence and appearance.

Rishi Makandeya responses : Oh, King,! In fact, MahaMaya is the perpetual form. The whole world is her appearance and the world is infused with her power everywhere. She manifests herself in various forms. Although she is infinite and eternal beyond the cycle of life and death, sometimes she assumes certain forms in order to fulfill the wish of the gods. (143)

Rishi Makandeya and King's Conversation manifest the God's power as worldly savior. Likewise, the lion's disposition would have limited the function--the function according to the meaning and significance of the works of arts in creation of universe.

Goddess in creation process of the universe seems to be making an account in the basic stuff of universe. All manifestations are just different combinations of light. Paramhansa Yogananda writes :

Among trillion mysteries of the cosmos, the most phenomenal is light. Unlike sound waves, whose transmission requires air or other material media, light waves pass freely through the vacuum of the interstellar space. . . . Light remains the most subtle, the freest from material dependence, of any natural

manifestation. . . . With a few equation strokes of his pen, Einstein banished from the universe every fixed reality except that of light. (266-267)

The divine light floating in the wide heaven from the body of the goddess starts gifting her many things. Goddess herself has a cosmic reality on natural manifestation.

In encounter with Shyam Sundar Rajbamshi, I got quite a valuable and inspiring suggestion about the Lions, Seela and Panchakumari in the Maitidevi temple premises. Despite of his busy schedule in his office, he helped me by describing everything in details about them. I questioned him that --What is a key significance of those lions all around the temple? Why the committee didn't keep cows, bulls, buffalos or anything else instead of lions? He kindly answered me that because the lion is *bahan* of Devi that could only be able to protect her from any kinds of danger they face in front of the Maitidevi Temple premises. Thus, the portraits of those lions have their own great value and historical as well as religious significance. The lions symbolize for the power and victory over ghosts, evil spirits and mephostophilis. The lions in different shapes, sizes, and structure indicate the different artistic and picturesque decorations with the values and significance mentioned above.

Speculations on the significance of the 'lions' at the Maitidevi complex premises at Maitidevi have the dynamic centrality. Like in many Hindu-tantric temples, lions are kept at the center and all around its periphery of the complex totality of the Maitidevi complex. For centuries, the temple has been serving as the center of many rites, rituals and activities that take place in the temple premises. Observing the artistic decoration and other idols situated in the complex, one may be surprised by the sheer simplicity and bareness that the 'Sardul Lion' at the front door of the temple displays. Why people for centuries did not think of changing the portraits with an artistic idol of cemented structures and other valuable decorations by using the pearls and other jewelries? Does it have the philosophical and spiritual dimension associated in instilling an undecorated pure metal structure and is not replacing it later with something artistic and valuable change with any significant improvements? Does everybody involved with the temple have the same idea regarding the importance of those

particular groups of lions? What special quality/aspect does it have so that it can be the sacred foundation of the complex? Or not having any particular attribute has been the real impulse behind the power those particular groups of lions enjoy? How does the artistry manage to be the fulfiller of every wish? How do all the people observing all the lions feel so near to it? What psychological dynamics unite the hearts of so many people visiting it every day and the expressionless expression of this idol? Can that bahan be said to be the symbol of power only found in the western tradition from the birth of religious as well as cultural demonstrations? Or the centrality of the lions for the protections of Devi defies the notion of logo centric tendency by allowing the possibility of total stories?

These are some of the issues this article tries to address. Lions at one level can be the symbolic power for the protections of Devi and it can be the creation of artistic power on the next level. The notion of chaos provokes the idea of chaos and cosmos with nothing and being of absence and presence in significance of chaos parlaying positivity.

Sensitive observer of nature, John Muir notices the miraculous dimension of the natural, ecological and environmental things and says :

One has seen pines six feet in diameter bending like grasses before a mountain gale, and ever and anon some giant falling with a crash that shakes the hills. . . . But when the storm is over, and we behold the same forests tranquil again, towering fresh and unscratched in erect majesty, and consider what centuries of storms have fallen upon them since they were first planted, . . . hail, to break the tender seedlings; lightning, to scratch and shatter; snow, winds, and avalanches to crush and overwhelm.
(179)

Before talking about the meaning associated to the significance of the lions, it would be appropriate to develop certain theoretical position behind the idea of chaos itself. Perhaps, the notion of order and deep anthropomorphic expectation merge at certain point for the protection of the temple by using the lions as a vehicle has the order to extent animal as well as human biological perceptive mechanisms and the complex cultural networks assigned for the protections.

The value of systematic growth or reductions of the worldly things and the matter or the idea under consideration transcends the

human comprehensive faculty; it must have the fate of chaotic disposition. Or chaos may be the result of the frustration of ethical expectations inculcated in an acculturated subject. Like in many Hindu-tantric temple bareness of the Seela at the core area of Maitedevi temple displays why people for centuries did not think of changing it with an artistic idol of valuable metal? It has a philosophical and spiritual dimension associated in instilling an undecorated pure stone and in not replacing it later with something artistic and valuable idea regarding the importance of that particular Seela impulse behind the power that this particular Seela has in the expressionless expression of this idol stone. Seela at one level can be explicated as formless chaos and on the other it provokes the idea of game of absence and presence.

The notion of order and deep anthropomorphic expectation merges at certain point. Something has the order to the extent human biological perceptive mechanisms and the complex cultural networks assign it with the value of system. Once the matter or the idea under consideration transcends the human comprehensive faculty, it must have the fate of chaotic disposition. Tantric and chaotic disposition may be the result of the frustration of ethical expectations inculcated in an acculturated subject.

4. Conclusion

Maitedevi complex encompasses so many ingredients of life within its territory. In fact, it can be taken as the microscopic reflection of macrocosm. It is not only the Toran on the roof, Seela, Lions, Panchakumari and structure of the temple that symbolically stands for all five basic stuffs of the existence ranging from the gross soil to the ethereal sky, the rites and rituals, and the socio-cultural functions performed in the complex really exhibits the all-inclusive tendency. Every rites and rituals from birth through wedding to the death are encompassed within the premises of the temple. Moreover, despite its sacred value, this public space does not reject the resumption of any secular functions. Seela established at the central part of the temple is the guiding force behind all the activities in the complex and the lions are the saviors.

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