

Digudyo : A Special Deity of Newar Community of Kathmandu Valley

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The local Newar society of Kathmandu Valley is a very devout and religious society, this society has been worshipping many gods and goddesses related to Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism since ancient times. This is confirmed by many ancient monasteries and temples established here. But apart from this, there are some such gods and goddesses in the Newar community, which are worshipped secretly in tantric ways. Only the main members of the family or clan participate in this Puja. Such deities include "Aagamdyo", "Digudyo". No one even tells anyone about it. Aagam, which is believed and worshipped only by the family or clan, is the tutelary deity of that clan or family. It is established in the "Aagamkuthi" (worship room) of one's own house or in a "Aagamchhen" (separate house). Especially this deity is considered to be Matri Shakti (female power). While Digudyo is installed in an open place away from the house and is considered to be male power. Digudyo means Kul devata (clan deity). If the Kul (clan) is good, luck will shine, work will be successful, happiness and peace will spread in the family, but if the clan is bad, everything will be destroyed. Therefore, once a year, according to the classical

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tradition, all Newars here worship the Digudyo (clan deity) for the good of their clan and family. This article focuses on the Digudyo.

[**Keywords** : Akshaya Tritiya, Tahdin, Sithi Nakha, Digu Khya, Subhya, Syukaya Bhoje]

1. Background

The local inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley are called Newars. But Newar itself is not a caste. It is a community of diverse castes. Who came here from different places in different period of history. Because this valley was a naturally safe place since ancient times. Besides, good livelihood opportunities such as animal husbandry, farming, and business were also available here. For this reason, whenever natural disasters, divine calamities, external attacks, etc. occurred in North Tibet and South India, the people from that side used to enter here in search of shelter (Kayastha, 2020 : 1). The social structure here seems to be formed through this process. Therefore, among these Newars, some of them appear to have Mangol facial features, while others are purely Aryan, similarly, some are black and some are white. Thus there is variety in Newars (Nepali, 1988 : 34). The Newars of each of these races have their own ethnic identity, historical background and cultural traditions. But no matter how many differences are seen among the residents about the casteism, there is a good tradition of religious, cultural and linguistic harmony among them. In fact, the only way to know the people of the Newar community is their original language, religion and culture. That is why the Newars of every caste celebrate the festival by worshipping the deities and eating buffalo meat dish and drinking alcohol on the occasion of every festival.

The native Newars of Kathmandu valley are hardworking, straight forward and self reliant. They believe in sin and virtue. So they do not lag behind to do charity, religion and virtue in every step of life. For this reason, many monasteries and temples from ancient times can be seen here till today. In honor of the deity of each of these temples and monasteries, regular pujas (worships), Aarati, Bhajan-kirtan are performed daily. And special pujas are also performed during the festivals. Similarly, Jatra (procession) is also held once a year to commemorate the construction of the temple of the deity. At that time, the deity is ascended on a "Khat" (palanquin) or a "Ratha" (chariot) and perform a Jatra (procession) around the local town with great fanfare. A religious belief that if there is no

worship, the deities inside the temple will be angry and this may cause some unimaginable sad events in the society. The main purpose behind performing the puja/Jatra is to receive the blessings of the local guardian deity for oneself, one's family and whole community forever (Anderson, 1971 : 194)). In addition, idols have no significance without worship and regular ritual worship is considered mandatory to keep the vitality of the temples alive. There are Guthis (trusts) from immemorial times to maintain these temples, the worship of deities, and for the conduct of Jstras. But apart from this, there are some such gods and goddesses in the Newar community, which are worshipped secretly in tantric ways. Formless and invisible, these gods are considered very powerful. Therefore, the worship of these deities can be performed by not just anyone, but only by "Dikshadhari" (an initiated) person. One of the main deities among these deities is Digudyo. But the worship of Digudyo is completely different from the worship of other gods and goddesses. In this Puja, meat, fish, wine, eggs (eggs of duck), as well as animal sacrifices are also given (a report of field visit, 27 March 2021). There are also many people who worship the deity by offering only "Samayabaji" instead of animal sacrifice. In fact, it is a common practice to offer syaabji (chiura, beaten rice), black soybeans, ginger, chweyla (roasted meat) along with liquor to the deity as an oblation and later eat it sitting there as prasad. "Samayabaji" is not only an offering of food but also a symbol of "Panchatatva" in tantric sense as well as a symbol of life sacrifice. It is found that there is its own kind of tantric method in which the deity can be satisfied by offering "Samayabaji" instead of the animal in the worship performed by sacrificing the animal (Juju & Shrestha, 1985 : 13) .

It is mentioned in Bhasha Vanshawali (a chronicle) that the tradition of worshipping Digudyo dates back to the time of King Suvarna Malla of Bhaktapur (Lamsal, 1966 : 53). But the fact that this tradition is even older than this, i.e. from the time of king Anshuvarma, can be known from the records of Licchavi period.

2. Methodology

This article has been prepared in an analytical and descriptive format. Primary and secondary sources have been used by adopting a qualitative research method. Under this, primary sources include field studies, direct observation, study of unpublished texts, information obtained from subject experts have been collected.

Similarly, facts have been collected from research journals and published books in secondary sources. This article has been prepared by studying and analyzing these two types of sources and presenting the facts in a descriptive manner.

3. Digu Dyo (Clan Deity)

In Newar language “Digu” means clan, descent and generation and “Dyo” means deity. So “Digudyo” means the deity that each clan and descent has been worshipping in a special way according to their own tradition. “Digudyo” is the main deity given special importance by the Newar community, because it is the god that protects the clan and lineage. Digu is taken as a guardian deity (Shresthacharya, 1997 : 184). This idol of Digudyo does not have a clear shape, its made of faceless stone and are found installed in open spaces, across the river outside the boundaries of the ancient city. Of course, the residence of Digudyo is found in different places. Someone’s Digudyo in an open space, someone’s around “Ashtamatrika’s Peeth”, someone’s in the forest and someone’s on the bank of a pond (Shakya, Personal communication : 5 June 2021). The place where Digudyo (clan deity) is located is generally called “Digu Khya” : which means open courtyard.

Despite the special importance of Digudyo in the society, there is no consensus on which deity it is. In most places no human form of Digudyo is found. There is only an image of the stone as its symbol. In some places, the symbolic plates of the mother goddess are placed in waves, while in some places Shaiva or Vaishnava deities are considered as digudyo forms. Followers of Hinduism and Buddhism have a tradition of performing Digupuja according to their clan or “Gotra”. Some consider the Mother Goddess as Digudya: Swaroop. Some people have the practice of worshipping Lumadhi (Bhadrakali), Vijayeshwari, Mhepi, Kangeshwari, Maiti, Sikali, Balkumari, Chhinnamasta etc. goddesses of Kathmandu as their Digudyos (clan deities) on special days. In the same way, the number of families who worship Mahadev and Narayan as Digudyo of their clan is also not less. Aadeswor, Kuleshwar and Changunarayan are the main ones among Shiva and Narayan who are considered to be the deities. In some places, Buddhists also have a tradition of considering Mahadev or Narayan as their Digudyo. Buddhist followers of Kathmandu Vishwakarma Vahal have been worshipping Vishwakarma in the form of Mahadev as Digudyo. Similarly, Shakyas of Srigha Vahal and

Asan's Qwhiti Vahal have been worshipping Kuleshwor Mahadev as their Digudyo (Vajracharya, 2011 : 18).

In Bhaktapur, "Thathu Subhya" is one of the main Digudyo spot there. "Thathu" means upper. Which is south east of Kamalvinayak. Due to the presence of Digudyos here, local people call this place "Dugure". Similarly, "Dathu Subya" is the central Dugudyo site of Bhaktapur. It is located near Hanumanghat, where there is a single storied temple on the east side of Omkar Masaan (cremation- ground). There is a crowd of people who come to perform Digu Puja. And "Kuthu Subhya" is the main Digudyos site in the lower part of Bhaktapur city. The original Digudyo temple of Bhimsenthan is called Kuthu Subhya which is located on the left side of the road, after crossing "Mu Tan" (bridge on river) after crossing the road going east from Chupinghat. From the numerical point of view, the most Digu puja is done in this Kuthu Subhya. There are many Digudyos around this temple and right and left on the road. However, this is the most worshipped temple of the area. Apart from this, there are many Digudyos scattered around Sallaghari, Ranipokhari, Siddhapokhari, Bhajupokhari in the western part of the Bhaktapur city (a report of field visit, 27 March 2021).

3.1 When to do Digu Puja

Generally it is believed that every year from Baisakh Shukla Akshay Tritiya to "Sithi Nakha" (Jeshtha Shukla Khashti) every family should complete the worship of their respective deities. But in Bhaktapur and Lalitpur, it start before that. In Lalitpur it starts from Baishakh Shukla Pratipada i.e. from the day of Matsyendra Nath ascends the chariot till Sithinakha and in Bhaktapur, it starts from Subhya which is towards Visket Jatra. Digu Puja of Bhaktapur Navadurga Bhavani is performed one day before Akshaya Tritiya. Similarly, on the same day, Maneswari of Duvakot are also worshipped from Bhairavnath and Bhaktapur Taleju. Digupuja of common Newars starts from Akshaya Tritiya. The first Sunday or Thursday after Akshaya Tritiya is called "Tah Din" (great day). On this day, Digu Puja is performed by Kashyap Gotras, which are the largest in Bhaktapur. This day is especially for "Jyaapu" (local farmers). Thus, after the main days like Subhya, Akshaya Tritiya, Tah Din, every Sunday and Thursday the order of worship begins. This sequence continues until the "Sithi Nakha". Digu worship is done especially for Man Gotra, Bharadwaj Gotra etc. All those who are mourning or cannot perform the puja for other reasons should

complete this puja at the latest on the day of "Sithi Nakh" or Jeshta Shukla Khashti. From this it is seen that the first day of Digu Puja is Subhyake and the last day is Sithi Nakha. But different from this belief, there is another practice in Bhaktapur. Digu worshipers are found in Bhaktapur even after "Sithi Nakha". Malepatis of Bhaktapur Tibukchhen, Napits of Yachhen and Newars of Dhaugwara caste are among those who perform continuous Digu Puja on Bhairavanath's "Khulla Hom" or "Rahu Nakegu" day at Toumadhi (Dhoubhadel, 2021 : 30- 31).

In this puja, it is customary for all the brothers and descendants of their clan or race to go to the clan deity's place and perform special puja and celebrate a feast on the same occasion. Married girls are not allowed to participate in such Puja. But now this is not the custom. Everyone attends the clan shrine and worships and feasts and enjoys.

3.2 Du : Tayagu

While performing Digu Puja, let us also mention an interesting tradition called "Du : Tayagu" (bringing in the clan). Digu Puja is a bit special if someone has got "Ihi" or Belvivaah (Newar girls marrying with Bel, a kind of fruit, which is symbol of god Narayan at early age), "Vratibandh" (Chudakarma) and "Bhin Ihipa" (Vivaah, marriage) in their house within a year. In such a situation, the girl, the boy and the new bride who has been married are specially taken to the Digudyo and "Du : Tayagu" are performed. During that time, if Ihi has been done, she offer "Saupa" (the content of Ihi), if Vratibandh has been performed "Keta Kapa" (a longoti cloth) and if they have married, a handful of betel nuts are offered to Digudyo. It means that the newly wedded bride, the vratibandh boy and Ihi girl are brought into their clan by the respective family. During the time of "Du : Tayagu", in front of Digudyo, "Nayo" (the main member of the family) touches head, shoulder and knee of the Ihi, Vratibandh and married person 3 times with Kulepathi (a vessel of certain standard) and a bunch of key. It is believed that if Digudyo is on the head, shoulder and knees, it will be a good day, but if it is sitting under the foot, it will be bad (Joshi, Personal communication : 7 August 2020). After this, during the Digu Puja, they sacrifice animal and eat "Samayabaji" as Prasad and return home after the Puja.

3.3 Digu Puja

The Newars of every caste perform worship their Digudyo once a year according to their clan tradition. Its called Digu Puja. This

Digudyo is usually worshipped in the month of April and May. Thus, the main reason behind the worship of the Digudyo (clan deity) every year is that the clan deity will forgive if the rituals and cultures of the clan are broken. Also, it is believed that worshipping the Digudyo will increase wealth and social prestige. The reasons for worshipping Digudyo and its benefits are mentioned in an ancient manuscript called "Merutantra" (Munankarmi, 1997 : 66). Therefore, the Newars of Nepal valley, even if they live outside the valley, return to their clan houses to perform Digu puja during the time of Digu puja and perform Digu Puja together with their own brothers.

Among the various communities of Nepal, the Newar community is the Only community that is considered rich in its customs, culture and heritage. It is also a community that is proud of its ancestors and of noble family. They believe that only if their clan is good then their future generation will be good. One's identity can be maintained only if one can preserve the ancestral clan traditions. Therefore, it is understood that Digu Puja is performed to keep alive the tradition, culture and heritage. In the Newars, not all are of the same clan, race and caste. So their clan gods are also not the same. According to caste, different gods and goddesses are worshipped as Digudyo. As mentioned above that being a tantric deity, the idol of Digudyo, made in stone, is not clearly shaped. There are two such deities installed in one line, in some places three and in some places up to five deities. On the day of Digu Puja, it is possible to keep the "Kinkupa" (Mukut or Crown) brought from home on the same established stone.

From the religious point of view the Newar community is divided into Hindus and Buddhists, both sects worship Digudyo, every year according to their traditions. Digudyos of both sects are in different places. This worship performed by Tantrayana is performed by Hindu Newars with Achaju (Karmacharya) priest, while Buddhist Newars perform it with Guvaju (Bajracharya) priest.

As this puja is performed in tantric method, it includes animal (pure black goat) sacrifice as well as meat, fish, duck's eggs, wine, alcohol, black soyabeans, Wo (bread made from flour of black lentil), Chataamari (bread made from flour of rice), Syaabaji (a special type of beaten rice), hyaaun bala (a piece of red cloth), Mohani tika (black mark placed on the forehead), Dhanya swaan - Mu swaan (a special type of flowers) and Samyabaji (a symbol of Panchatatva) etc. are offered to the Digudyo.

When going to perform Digu Puja, the main person of the house takes the main puja, the priest holds the Kalanli (a special vessel for keeping the worship material), Sukunda (Newari traditional oil lamp with handle) performs the puja, and other members of the family take the puja materials and go in order to perform the Digu Puja. The children of the house hold ducks and goats and go to worship Digudyo. On that day, all the members of the family are purified by bathing and washing. The house is also cleaned and sanctified.

This Digu Puja is conducted grandly by the Pujari (priest) from the Tantrayana, sitting as the thakali Jajaman (main host) of the family. During the puja, the smoke of the fire is collected in the earthen bowl and called it "Mohani", which is offered to the deity. In this puja, they perform Digudyo Sadhana on a stone with a triangular hole established as two deities and offer puja. One deity worships Sri Bhairava with violence and the other with non-violence offering only "Panchamrit" and while offering violence, they cover the non-violence deity so that the blood of the sacrifice does not fall. Although the worship method is the same for all, the worship is conducted according to caste-karma. In this puja, some castes do not perform the puja until the crow has touched the offered material after the puja has been performed. They believe that crows will not touch the objects offered to the deity if they are impure and interfere with the worship. Therefore, in this Digu Puja, they purify their bodies and clean their houses by covering them with cow dung. In this puja, they do not use garlic, onion, pork and buffalo meat. In the same way, there are some castes that do not perform worship until the material offered to the deity is picked from the jackal. But nowadays, due to the construction of countries and cities in the jungle mountains, the jackal has become extinct, so to fulfill the tradition, they make a stone jackal and perform the puja by touching the material that the idol has been offering (Karmacharya, personal communication : 3 July 2020). Thus, in Newar society, Digu Puja is conducted according to their caste-karma. However, at the end of the puja, everyone of the family members stand together and offer "Akshata" (rice offered in worship) to the deity in the name of the own relatives who have died in their clan (Shrestha, 2009 : 48).

After the ritualistic completion of the puja, the priest gives vermilion, Mohani Teeka is applied on the forehead of everyone, red tul cloth offered to the deity is put around everyone's neck and flower, fruit offerings are distributed. After that, everyone sits there

and eats Samayabaji, Wo-Chatamari along with Chhwelaa (roasted meat) of the sacrificed goat as Prasad. After the puja is completed, everyone returns their home. In the evening, all the family members sit together and have a feast with various dishes including the meat of the sacrificed goat. This feast is called “Syukaya Bhoje”, in which important parts of the head of the goat sacrificed to the deity are given to the family members as omens based on their seniority (Munankarmi, 1997 : 67).

“Kalan Wayegu” is done after the meal. In this, “Nakin” (the head woman of the family) takes the leftovers of the feast eaten by the “Nayo” (main person of the family) to throw it to the god called “Chhwasa Azima”, which is outside the house on the side of the road. “Chhwasa Azima” is a round shaped stone placed in the center of each tol settlement. Its special name is “Khasthikadevi”. Its corruption has become a “Chhwasa”. At every “Syukaya Bhoje” (feast), it is a custom to offer all the leftover feast to this goddess who protects the village as the guardian of the settlement. Which is called “Kalan Wayegu”. Kalan wayegu work is a fundamental practice of Newar society. Kalan wayegu should be done at the main main feast, and Shraddadi work feast (Dhoubhadel, 2021 : 34). Everyone eats the water brought by washing the brass pot taken to throw away the leftover feast to the Chhwasa Azima. Eating this water is believed to cure stomach ailments.

3-4 History of Digu Puja

When the tradition of Digu puja started here, if we study its history, it can be traced back to the Licchavi period. King Anshuvarma has mentioned them as “Shrikuldevasya and Shasthidevakulasya” in the records of Hadigaon. For the worship of that deity, 3 Puranas and 1 Pana (a unit of currency at that time) were observed from the palace (Vajracharya, 1996 : 302). From that, it can be understood that there was a tradition of worshipping Digudyo (Kuladevata) during the Licchavi period. In the same way, it seems that there is a practice of performing ‘Deghuri Puja’ in the form of Digudyo in the medieval period. ‘Deguri’ (Deguri) was specially worshipped on the occasion of the marriage of King Jayasthiti Malla’s son Dharma Malladeva (Vajracharya & Malla, 1985 : folio 29 & 61). It is said that Deghuri is the form of Digudyo. Deghuri, Deguri, Degudi, Digudi, Digudyo, Digipuja, etc. are corrupt synonyms derived from Devkulika (Sharma, 1997 : 109). From this it is known

that there was a tradition of worshipping Digudyo Puja Deghuri as a deity in the medieval period.

It is mentioned in history that king Suvarna Malla of Bhaktapur offered Digu puja to shree Maneswari Devi located in Handigaon, Kathmandu. This tradition continues till today, according to which, every year on the fifth day of Baishakh Shukla, 2 black goats along with the necessary Puja materials are sent from Taleju place inside Bhaktapur palace (Munankarmi, 1997 : 66).

Whether it was when the reformist ruler of the Nepal Valley, King Jayasthiti Malla, married his son Dharma Malla in 1382, or when the last Malla king of Kantipur, Jayaprakash Malla, got married in 1732, they performed special Deghuri Puja on that occasion. It is known to be the old form of Deghuri deity Digudyo. Which is also mentioned in the appendix below.

4. Conclusion

From the above illustrations it is clear that the native Newars of Kathmandu Valley are cultured people who have been celebrating their religious traditions and original cultural heritage in their own environment since time immemorial. In such traditions, it seems that everyone gives a prominent place to their tradition of worshipping the Digudyo (clan deity) once a year. In fact, the custom of considering one's own clan deity is not absent in other places as well. However, the custom of worshipping the clan deity and celebrating the festival with pomp, as in the Newar society, is hardly found in other societies of the world. If clan is damaged, there will be obstacles in dynasty, loss of wealth, loss of dignity and the way in which we can advance our personality in terms of family and society, keep hindering those things. If the clan deity is displeased, there will be problems in the family, will be quarrels in the house, will be obstacles in progress, bad dreams, various kinds of accidents, etc. are likely to happen. Therefore it is said that Digu or Kul (clan) is the master of lineage. Our fortune would be shine, when we believe it. If we want to continue our future generation in the right way, we should always remember and respect the clan deity of our house. That is why Digu puja is celebrated here once a year with great fanfare. Although Digupuja is a collective tradition celebrated once a year, individuals or families also have a tradition of worshipping separately on various festivals and ritual occasions. Digudyo is also worshipped on the occasion of birthday, marriage, bratavandha, pasni, shraddha,

festival etc. These deities are guardians, protectors of clans and dynasties and provide family happiness and prosperity.

Appendix

A Photos of Digudyos







- B.** In 1382 Deghuri (Deguri) was specially worshipped on the occasion of the marriage of Dharma Malladeva, the son of King Jayasithimalla. It is said that Deghuri is the form of Digudyo. Which is mentioned in the Gopalraj Vansahavali (genealogy) in this way-

“सं.५०३ फाल्गुण शुदि तृतीया बृहस्पति बार चा श्री श्री धर्मदेव ठाकुरस विवाह दिन थ्वन लियो आदीत वारन देधुरि सके पूजा बिज्याडा मेसहमं खुज वलुं मदग्व।” - Gopalraj Vanshavali, folio-29 & 61.

- C.** In 1732 that Jayaprakash Malla, the last king of Kantipur, got married and brought the bride to Deguli, as mentioned in the Thyasafu (Local diary, a type of historical document) -

“सं ८५३ फाल्गुण कृष्ण द्वितीया कुन्हु जयप्रकाशया परत यिहियात के यात पिथिपूजा...थनलि मुकचुकस अग्नि स्थापना यात....पेन्हु कुन्हु होमबेला सोमयं अलिडय यिनाय लिते।।- Purnima, yr. 3, Vol. 4 pp. 38-39.

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Report

A report of field visit on 27 March 2021.

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