

Kumari Jatra In Kathmandu
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Revelers pull the Chariot of Living Goddess Kumari to give way to Living God Ganesh and Living God Batuk Bhairava for them to go ahead of Living Goddess Kumari. Standing at the balcony of the old palace, and flanked by the Prime Minister and the bodyguard, the President makes offerings to Ganesh and then to Batuk Bhairava when their chariots move on to Layaku (Durbar) Square, and finally to Living Goddess Kumari amid the dances of Lakhe, Pulu kishi, Sava-bhaku to the tunes of their respective music thus initiating the Kumari Jatra means pulling the chariots of the three living deities through the narrow lanes of the southern part called 'kone' of old Kathmandu. Next day, pulling of the chariots of the three living deities through the narrow lanes of the northern part called 'thane' of old Kathmandu is held. The Kumari Jatra is one of the main components of the eight-day festival called 'Indra Jatra'. Nepalis have been celebrating this festival since the period of Licchavi rulers who had ruled Nepal from 400 A.D. to 800 A.D.

Originally, on the eve of the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight in Bhadra (August-September), Licchavi King Gunakamdev had started celebrating the Kumari Jatra in honor of Goddess Kumari who had ordered him in his dream to build a new city-state called 'Ye'. On the full moon day, the Licchavi King had celebrated the inauguration of 'Ye'. So, the Kumari Jatra was the two-day celebration of the anniversary of 'Ye'. Later on, one king after another added one new item or another to it ultimately making it eight-day festival and calling it 'Ye Yan Jatra' and then 'Indra Jatra'. Later on, 'Ye' became Kasthamandap and then ultimately Kathmandu. The indigenous people called Nevahs still call it 'Ye', and the festival 'Ye Yan Jatra'.

Traveling of Living Goddess Kumari on the three-tiered chariot to the southern and northern parts of the old Kathmandu is the process of receiving the mandate from the people to rule the city-state called Kathmandu. Then, the Living Goddess transfers the mandate to the most eligible person but practically to the reigning ruler putting a red 'tika' on the forehead.

Filled with women, some men and tourists, the terraces of the temples to the left and right of the Durbar Square have looked like two bunches of flowers from a distance. Most of the women are dressed in red and men are in other colors giving the view of flowers with different colors. They have been sitting there for hours for watching the Kumari Jatra. Many men, women and children come from out of the Kathmandu Valley to watch the Kumari Jatra in Kathmandu. They take the seats on the terraces of these temples at the Durbar Square.

The Durbar Square is also filled with the revelers. They have been there for several hours of afternoon watching various dances such as Lakhe, Pulu-kishi, and Sava-bhaku held during the Kumari Jatra. A man wearing the red mask of a demon called 'Lakhe' dances sometimes chasing a young ridiculer to the tune of a drum and cymbals. Then comes the elephant called 'Pulu-kishi' dancing to the tune of a bell. Two men hidden in the body of 'Pulu-kishi' perform the dance. 'Pulu-kishi' is made of a wicker mat, and linen painted with various symbols covering it and a large painted elephant head attached to it. Then, the 'Sava-bhaku' dance troupe of three: one wearing the blue mask of Akash Bhairava, and other two wearing red masks come to the public stage.

'Lakhe' dances to the tune of a drum and cymbals, sometimes moves very fast dancing and running from one place to another chasing his ridiculer; the ridiculer always keeps the 'Lakhe' at a distance.

'Pulu-kishi' is not so fast but it is restless and moves from one place to another constantly dancing to the tune of a single bell.

'Sava-bhaku' is even less active and dances slowly to the tune of a drum and cymbals. The blue mask-wearing dancer holds a long sword on his right hand. The mask covers the face of a dancer wholly. The two other red mask-wearing dancers have also face covered by the masks. So, they too move and dance slowly.

'Lakhe' is a demon that has come with his divine boss called Taleju Bhavani: the tutelary deity of Malla rulers to Nepal. When the Malla rulers came to Nepal they brought the tutelary Goddess Taleju Bhavani with them. So, 'Lakhe' also came to Nepal in search of his divine boss. So, 'Lakhe' dance is actually the act of mimicking the in search of Goddess Taleju Bhavani. Goddess Taleju Bhavani is one of the manifestations of Living Goddess Kumari.

'Lakhe' has his home at the courtyard called 'lakhe-nani' at the neighborhood called 'Majipat' in the southern part of the old Kathmandu. Members of the association called "Lakhe Guthi" take care of the demon god called 'Lakhe' making offerings to him daily throughout the year, and keeping the mask, uniform and so on safely for every year to perform dances during the Kumari Jatra festival in Kathmandu.

'Pulu-kishi' is a white divine elephant and is the steed of the heavenly monarch called Indra had descended on earth carrying heavenly monarch Indra. To fetch a flower called 'parijat' not available in the heaven but required for the religious offerings Indra's mother Basundhara has to make, Indra riding on the 'pulu-kishi' has come to earth, and left the 'pulu-kishi' at Kilagal previously known as 'kishi-ga' to pick up a flower 'parijat' at Maru Tole of today. Seeing through his transcendental vision, a veteran tantric gardener catches Indra through his tantric lasso when Indra encroaches on his garden. So, the 'pulu-kishi' also goes around looking for his boss called Indra.

Interested people may see Indra caught in a tantric lasso displayed during the Indra Jatra on the Maru Square and at Kilagal, too.

'Pulu-kishi' also has a large modern home at the neighborhood called Kilagal in the northern part of old Kathmandu. A large elephant head is painted on the façade of the third floor of the home for everybody to see it. Members taking care of 'pulu-kishi' have also an association called 'the 'pulu-kishi Guthi' for running the 'pulu-kishi' dance.

'Sava-bhaku' comes from out of the town area called 'Halchok' west of the famous Buddhist shrine called Svoyambhu. Members running the 'sava-bhaku' dance have also a 'sava-bhaku Guthi' to run the 'sava-bhaku' dance during the Kumari Jatra.

Before coming to perform dances on the Durbar Square during the Kumari Jatra, all of the divine dancers receive offerings of 'samaya baji' and alcoholic drinks at their respective god-home. 'Samaya baji' comprises flattened rice, roasted meat, roasted soybeans, and pieces of raw ginger. Then, they come out dancing. Attendants follow them and keep watching them throughout the dancing period.

Then, first all these three dancing troupes: 'Lakhe', 'Pulu-kishi', and 'Sava-bhaku' separately go to the main entrance called Hanuman Dhoka to the temple to Goddess Taleju and register their attendance at the entrance performing the traditional rituals. Then each dance troupe individually comes to the main entrance to the Kumari house and register their attendance at the entrance, too, performing the traditional rituals.

Then only, they perform dances on the Durbar Square. They perform dances individually and separately. Sometimes they come closer to each other while performing dances to the tunes of their respective music. In the past they used to fight against each other, as they did not step back from their respective position and had difficult going along with each other; currently, such fights have been the thing of past.

The three chariots have been standing at the Durbar Square for the last three days in preparation for the Kumari Jatra. The three-tiered chariot to Living Goddess Kumari stands first from the Kumari house, then a single-tired chariot to Living God Ganesh and finally a single-tiered chariot to Living God Batuk Bhairava. The Kumari house has an in-built garage for parking these three chariots.

Carpenters make spare parts and repair the wheels of the chariots. Similarly, blacksmiths make nails and other metal spare parts and replace the old-worn-out metal parts with the new ones. Then, other people responsible for binding the wheels and axles together with the body of the chariots also do their jobs.

On the day of the Kumari Jatra, before all three deities boarding the chariots, tantric priests make offerings to the four wheels of each chariot. They invoke the most powerful and ferocious God called Bhairava in each wheel so that each wheel runs without hitch carrying the load of the divinity and mundane people. Then, they make offerings to the main axel and invoke the Serpent God called Basuki Naga in it. They also invoke other Serpent Gods in the ropes used for pulling the chariots so that none of the ropes break up while pulling the chariots.

Before boarding the chariots at the most auspicious time, tantric priests make offerings to all three living deities. Living God Ganesh and Living God Batuk Bhairava walk in to the Kumari house to accept the offerings made to them together with Living Goddess Kumari.

Living Goddess Kumari sits at the center flanked by Living God Ganesh and Living God Batuk Bhairava to accept the tantric offerings. Following the tantric rituals, priests make offerings to the three deities focusing on the main deity Kumari.

The priests make the offerings of the dishes specially prepared by the cook working at the Kumari house, then the special sweetmeats prepared by the sweet-maker appointed for making sweets at the Kumari house, and finally the special drink brewed from rice by the woman appointed for brewing such a drink at the Kumari house to all three living deities.

The time of the head of state (recently the President) reaching the old palace is set so that the President reaches there just after the completion of the making offerings to the three deities. Then the President does not need to wait for making offerings to the three living deities and initiating the Kumari Jatra to the southern part of old Kathmandu.

The traditional military platoon called 'Gurujuya palton' has been at the Durbar Square ready to honor the deities and the President for some time. Some of them have been playing traditional flutes. The modern military platoon also has been there for honoring the deities and the President. The military band has been playing the music.

Foreign diplomats and representatives of different missions have started arriving at the old palace almost one hour before the arrival of the President. They have been watching the performances of dances of 'Lakhe' 'Pulu-kishi' and 'Sava-bhaku' on the Durbar Square. Then, one minister after another has arrived at the old palace. Then, has come the Prime Minister. Finally, the President has arrived.

The time is so set, the offerings made to all three living deities complete by the time the President arrives. Then, Living God Ganesh and Living God Batuk walk to their respective chariot, and take the respective position in the chariot. An attendant carries the Living Goddess Kumari on his arms to the three-tiered chariot decorated with flowers and set her on the position in it. Living Goddess Kumari does not step on the ground.

Previously, the head of state used to sit on the throne set on the platform called 'thi-majiu' means forbidden to touch at the Kumari house to initiate the Kumari Jatra and then followed the chariot. Next day, the head of state received a 'tika' from the Living Goddess Kumari in public as the transfer of the mandate to rule the city-state for a year. This tradition of the head of state sitting on the throne set on the platform has been done away with for security reasons since a semi-insane man happened to sit there before the head of state arrived at the platform.

Currently, the head of state standing on the balcony of the modern palace makes offerings to the three deities and initiates the Kumari Jatra. Then, on the last day of Indra Jatra, the head of state receives a 'tika' from the Living Goddess Kumari. In 2008, the President has missed to receive a 'tika' from the Living Goddess Kumari, so the President has been involved in the controversial act of directly writing a letter to the Chief of Army Staff.

Living God Ganesh leads all other deities, and Living God Batuk Bhairava follows him. So, revelers pull the Chariot to the Living Goddess Kumari aside giving way to other smaller chariots move forward. First, the chariot to Lord Ganesh standing just behind the chariot to the Living Goddess Kumari moves forward and then the chariot to the Batuk Bhairava.

The President makes offerings of fluffy rice, flowers, and vermilion together to the Living God Ganesh in a chariot from the balcony. Then, the Chariot to Living God Batuk Bhairava moves forward; the President makes the offerings of fluffy rice, flowers, and vermilion together to the Living God Batuk Bhairava in the chariot. Finally, the three-tiered majestic chariot to the Living Goddess Kumari moves forward and stands at the old palace for a minute to have time for the President to make offerings of fluffy rice, flowers, and vermilion together to the Living Goddess Kumari.

The President receives the flower and 'tika' blessed by the Living Goddess Kumari and other two deities from the priest. Then, the President moves on to his official residence.

The three chariots move on from Chikanmugal, to Jaisideval, to Lagan, to Hyumat, Kohiti and then to Bhimsensthan and back to the Kumari house. The three chariots take about three hours to travel the distance of about five kilometers, as they go slowly making time for the devotees to make offerings to the living deities on the way.

'Lakhe' 'Pulu-kishi' and 'Sava-bhaku' also move ahead of the chariots performing dances on the way.

Next day, the three living deities travel to the northern part of the old Kathmandu. The President does not need to initiate the Kumari Jatra this time.

On the fourth day of the dark fortnight of Aswin (September) in other words on the last day of the Kumari Jatra, revelers pull the three chariots to the living gods and goddess to Kilagal and then back to the Kumari house. This is called 'nanicaya'. This is a later addition to the two-day Kumari Jatra.

Then, the head of state receives the 'tika' from the Living Goddess Kumari. This is the transfer of mandate the Living Goddess Kumari has received from the people, to the head of state for ruling the country for a year. Thus ends the Kumari Jatra.

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Akash Bhairav displayed at Indra Chok during Kumari Jatra



Another Bhairav named Hatha Dyo at Layakuli (durbar square)



Dancing Bhairav of Sava-bhaku Troupe



Three dancers of Sava-bhaku Troupe



Lakhe Dancer



Source: Newa facebook

Kumari travels on a portable shrine



Kumari Home



Chariot About To Taken Out of Garage

Acknowledgement: all the pictures are either from the facebook or the online newspapers.

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