

## Why Kumari House Did Not Fall? Siddhi B Ranjitkar

The earthquake on April 25, 2015, could not bring down even a single roof tile of the Kumari House in Kathmandu when it tore down most of the mighty tall and short buildings in the central Nepal. It was the divine strength of the Living Goddess called Kumari saved it even the foreign expert believed it. Certainly, it has the truth but the secret of its strength has been hidden in how it was built about three hundred years ago.

The last Malla monarch of the Kathmandu City State Jayaprakash Malla built it. Jayaprakash Malla lost his kingdom to his son. So, he went to the nearby forest and meditated on the Goddess Kumari. He promised to build an elaborate abode for the living goddess Kumari and run the festival of the deity on a three-story golden temple on wheels if he were to regain his lost sovereignty. The satisfied goddess appeared in his dream and said, "You will regain the sovereignty for some years only to lose it forever after some years."

After Jayaprakash Malla regained the sovereignty, he called on the best and the most skilled architects and builders in the State, and commanded them to build an extraordinarily beautiful and strongest house for the Living Goddess Kumari. Probably, the monarch knew the recurrences of quakes even then. So, the Kumari house was to be the quake-proof.

The architects designed the most beautiful house with a courtyard at the center for the Living Goddess Kumari. They designed artistically carved multi-opening wooden windows to set on all around the facades of the house, and equally meticulously carved wooden pillars to support the house. They specifically designed a wonderfully artistically beautiful three-opening window set on the main facade facing to the North. Only the Living Goddess Kumari was to look through the central opening made of gold-gilt brass. The right and left openings were for Lord Living Ganesh and Lord Living Batuk Bhairav.

Highly skilled carver-cum-carpenters carved the windows and pillars. They also carved the wooden beams, and every bit and pieces of wooden structures visible. They made every wooden structures with the best timbers available then. They made the wooden structures quake-proof, too.

Equally skilled and expert bricklayers worked to build the Kumari house. They selected the best bricks anybody could make and bake. They made especial mortar, and used it thinnest possible to build the house. They laid the most robust foundation for the height of the Kumari house. Then they laid seven layers of bricks with mortar for a day on the walls. Next day, they tore down four layers of the bricks leaving only three layers. Thus, they went on building a strongest possible house for the Living Goddess Kumari for two years. It is a technically and artistically magnificent house for the Living goddess Kumari. The house has an attached garage for the three-story golden temple used once a year for celebrating the Kumari festival called Ye Yan Jatra in the Nevah language.

As committed to the deity, Jayaprakash Malla also built a three-story golden temple on wheels for the Living Goddess Kumari to travel around the Kathmandu City State during the four-day festival of Kumari jatra also known as the Ye Yan Jatra. On the first day of the festival held on one day before the full moon day in September or October, devotees pulled the chariot to the southern part, and next day to the northern part. Monarch Jayaprakash Malla in his majestic attire with a sword in his hand followed the Living Goddess Kumari on the chariot. Traveling on their respective temple on wheels, Lord Ganesh and Lord Batuk Bhairav also living deities on the temples on wheels escorted the Living Goddess Kumari. Devotees pulled the temples on wheels around the Kathmandu City State. Living Lord Ganesh and Lord Batuk Bhairav are the male deities. Selected following the meticulous process, two male children represent these deities.

Until Jayaprakash Malla set the tradition of pulling the chariot on wheels, Living Goddess Kumari traveled on a portable temple carried by devotees around the City State. Former monarchs also followed Her on the portable temple. They did so to demonstrate that they had the sovereignty graced by the Living Goddess Kumari.

At the end of the Kumari festival, Living Goddess Kumari graced the reigning monarch with a 'tika' on his forehead. Nobody had the right to take the first tika from the Living Goddess Kumari after the festival. If anybody did receive a tika from the deity means then he would be the monarch for a year. It was the granting of the sovereignty for a year.

About fourteen hundred years ago, Licchavi Monarch Gunakamdev built a new Kathmandu City State. He built a city state of eight thousand houses, and named it Ye (later became Kathmandu) following the command of the Goddess Taleju in his sleep. The goddess said, "I will give you the sovereignty of running the city state. The mandate will be for a year. If you do good then next year you will receive it again. I will give you the mandate through the Living Goddess Kumari. She will apply a tika on your forehead. That will be the mandate for you to run the City State for a year. I am Taleju, Living Goddess Kumari, and eighteen-limbed Supreme Goddess Bhagavati."

Living Goddess Kumari became the patron of the City State. The goddess renewed the sovereignty to the reigning monarch. Living Goddess Kumari had once or twice applied a tika not on the reigning monarch but the man next to him. Surely, the man next to him was his son. He lost the sovereignty to his son. He died in that year.

Probably, the Nevah community had the tradition of worshipping the Living Goddess Kumari even before Monarch Gunakamdev. Every City State had and even today has the Living Goddess Kumari. However, after building a new City State, he was the first monarch that had set the tradition of celebrating the Ye Yan Jatra by the name of the newly built City State called Ye in honor of the Living Goddess Kumari. The tradition of the Kumari festival was set only in the Kathmandu City State. Monarch Gunakamdev walked behind the portable temple to the Living Goddess Kumari on the festival day. He publicly received the tika from the Living Goddess Kumari at the end of the jatra.

Licchavi regime had been from 400 A.D to 800 A.D. Thereafter, for four hundred years, the City State disintegrated into several petty neighborhoods called 'Tole' States. Each Tole had a Living Goddess Kumari. Each Tole leader called 'Thakuju' became the sovereign of that Tole. He received the mandate from the Living Goddess Kumari.

Then after four hundred years, in 1200 A.D. a Malla monarch untied all the Tole States into a single City State. The current Living Goddess Kumari became the State Kumari for the Kathmandu City State. All other Living Goddess Kumaris remained the community Kumaris. Some of the Neva communities continue to have the Living Goddess Kumaris.

The Living Goddess Kumari is the Buddhist goddess. She is Taleju or eighteen-limbed Bhagavati for the Hindus. Any careful visitor could see the figurine of the eighteen-limbed Bhagavati embossed on the half circle decorative wooden block set on the main entrance to the Kumari House. Any temple in Nepal has the figurine of the main deity set on the main entrance.

Even though the Living Goddess Kumari is a Tantric deity, the goddess does not take the direct blood offerings. Her other forms such as Taleju and Bhagavati accept the animal sacrifices. At the backyard of Her abode, devotees make sacrifices of animals to Goddess Bhagavati linked with the Living goddess Kumari by a 'pasuka' (an auspicious thread made of five different-color yarns) while offerings went on. Thus, the Living Goddess Kumari receives the blood offerings indirectly. She takes the non-vegetarian food offerings and alcoholic drinks.

A popular myth has been that the Goddess Taleju used to play a dice game with the monarch in the past. The goddess represented by a gorgeous woman refused to come to him again after the monarch misbehaved Her. The truth is the monarchs in the past had been the master Tantriks. They made the extensive Tantric offerings to the almighty goddess to receive the favor of the unlimited power from the goddess possessing the supreme power. While making the Tantric offerings, the Tantriks could even directly talked to the deity. If the Tantrik were to miss any one of the process of the Tantric offerings then the goddess would not appear before him again.

Living Goddess Kumari presides over all the festivals. I have read many articles stating Living Goddess Kumari watched the festival of Ghoda jatra, Bhoto jatra, and other festivals. The reality is that the Living Goddess Kumari is the supreme goddess nothing moves on without Her presence in any festival. She patronizes every festival. She is the patron goddess. She presides over every festival and ceremony. She presides over the bathing rituals and rites made to Lord Seto Matsyendranath in Kathmandu. She presides over the ceremonies held to Lord Changu Narayan at Hanumandhoka in Kathmandu when once a year the lord makes a visit to the Kathmandu monarch.[1]

Living Goddess Kumari is the 'Agam deo' for some of the Neva communities. Only the men with 'dekha' have the access to the 'Agam deo'. 'Dekha' is the tantric rituals

privileged to only the male members of the certain Nevah communities. Anybody learning this technique called 'dekha' has to learn it perfectly and keep it for himself. He has to strictly follow certain do's and don'ts. He might go insane if he were not able to do so. 'Agam deo' is the Tantric deity off-limit to anybody other than the men possessing 'dekha.' For other individuals including women, Living Goddess Kumari is the 'Agam deo' at any festival when they make offerings to 'Agam deo'.

In 1768 on the very day of the Ye Yan Jatra while Monarch Jayaprakash Malla was making offerings to the deities, Prithvi Narayan Shah made a surprise raid and captured the Kathmandu City State. Jayaprakash Malla fled. However, the Nevah community leaders refused to accept Prithvi Narayan Shah as the sovereign. He was not allowed to receive the tika from the Living Goddess Kumari. Negotiations went on for four days. After the successful negotiations at the end of the four day, Prithvi Narayan Shah was allowed to receive the tika, and formally accepted him as the monarch. So, the festival of Kumari was extended four more days. It became the eight-day festival from the original four-day festival.

June 2, 2015



Kumari House in Kathmandu



Central Opening Made of Gold-gilt Brass  
This opening is flanked by Bronze Idols of deities such as Sarasvoti and Laxmi

Note:

[1] Lord Changu Narayan needed to visit the monarch of Kathmandu once a year for the monarch to make offerings to the lord. Because of the enmity among the monarchs, the then Kathmandu monarch could not visit the lord in Changu.