

Kashthamandapa

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1. INTRODUCTION

The word Kashthamandapa is a name to conjure with. It is attractive from the points of view of its antiquity as also its stylistic originality. Having passed through many vicissitudes of fortune, it has withstood the ravages of time and man, and stands before us as a representative of the eclectic and liberal traditions of the Nepalese Culture, for it caters to the needs of the Buddhist and Hindu alike. The materials that have gone into its construction comprise wood as the basic frame work as well as its decorative aspects, clay as mortar for its walls and roofs and of course, bricks. It has been enriched with a miscellany of sculptures carved on wood and stone as well as clay figures. The ensemble of deities enshrined in the temple comprise Gorakhnath as the principal object of worship, installed in the principal sanctum sanctorum besides Siva, Parvati, Ganesh, Bhairava, Mahakal, Tara, Sarasvati, Nrityesvara, Buddha and Sakyamuni, in different subsidiary shrines or otherwise, which emphasises the basic character of the syncretism of diversely divergent deities in reconciliation.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Though the antiquity of Kashthmandapa is disputed, there can be no two opinions about its hoary ancestry. The oldest referenc to 'Kashthamandapa' occurs in a manuscript entitled 'Nama sangiti' dated to the 11 century A. D. (12 th century V. S.). The next literary reference to the word occurs in another manuscript called **Paramartha Namasangiti**, dated to the twelfth century A. D. (thirteenth century V. S.) in the following verse:

श्री काष्ठमण्डपपुरे सुरलोकसाम्ये

देवालये वसति श्रीजिनरक्षितः सः

It means that sri Jinarakshita (Buddha) resides in the temple known as the Kashthamandapa which is comparable to heaven itself signifying thereby that the temple was dedicated to the Buddha.

Yet another manuscript called **Pancharaksha** dating from the time of Yakshamalla (1533 V.S. or 1476 A. D.) states:

“ देय धर्मोऽयं प्रवर महायानयायिनः
परमोपासिक श्री काष्ठमण्डप नगरे
श्रीकीर्त्तिपुण्यमहाविहारीय
भिक्षु श्री देवचन्द्रस्य ”

This means that it is the gift of the great devotee who is a follower of the Mahayana, and who is the resident of Kirtipunya Mahavihara, in the city of Kashthamandapa. It thus indicates that the name Kashthamandapa had by this time or earlier been transferred (also) to the town around the shrine of the name. This itself would perhaps justify the assumption of a still older tradition for the prevalence of Kashthamandapa, as a city, as also of the fact that this tradition is older than the times of sri Lakshmi Narasimha Malla, who is commonly believed to have been the founder of the twin tradition of Kashthamandapa as a shrine and city.

The inference about the priority of the shrine designated as **Kashthamandapa** over the township of the same name is supported to an extent by the evidence of copper and silver plates and the iconography of images in stone and wood associated with the shrine. One of the copper plates preserved in the temple itself is in the name of **Panchali** of Kantipur and dated 424 Nepal samvat (AD 1303). Another copper plate inscription associated

with the temple states. "ॐ गोरखनाथलाई नमस्कार" etc. It also indicates that during the reign of Yaksha Malla the temple of Kashthamandapa was enriched with gold and had a golden flag (probably also a flag staff). It is dated in Nepal samvat to 585 is. AD. 1464.

All these evidences point to the distinctive entity of Kashthamandapa as a shrine and to its remote antiquity dating back to at least the eleventh century A. D. That simultaneously the township that had grown around the shrine had come to be called Kashthamandapapura, obviously and inferably after the shrine, is indicated by the mention of the name in the *Paramartha Namasamgiti* pointed out above.

The manuscript entitled *Sragdharastotra* composed during the reign of Yaksha Malla in the year 514 N.S (AD. 1473) describes the township as *Kashthamandapa Mahanagara* and mentions also the *Chyekanamugungi Tol*, which can be equated with the *Chikanmugal Tol* of today, situated not very far from the shrine.

A copper plate inscription found in the temple and dated to 605 N.S. (AD 1484), states

— 'विष्णुमत्याः पूर्वकूले इहैवस्थाने श्री काष्ठमण्डपनगरे' etc. which describes the city of Kashthamandapa to have been located on the left (east) bank of the vishnumati, as the area around the shrine really is. It is thus easy to conclude that the area immediately around the shrine that went by the name of Kashthamandapa came to be so called, and gradually, with the passage of time and the spatial expansion of the residential quarters of the inhabitants of the locality, it came to encompass an increasingly larger area till it engulfed the entire capital.

According to a persistent tradition, the township of Kashthamandapa was divided into two parts, namely (i) *Suvarna Pranali Mahanagara* and (ii) *Sri Yangal*, respectively. These are even now extant and are called *Thane* (upper part) and *Kone* (lower part), respectively, the locality of Yangal comprises *Kathmandu*, and *Lagan* etc, and is known by its

monosyllabic abbreviation as *यं* (yan). It is extraordinarily significant that though the entire capital city has now come to be called *Kathmandu* the word in common parlance, points to the locality around the shrine. It is, therefore, a case of the amazing transference of the name of a street or a locality distinguished by the shrine of *Gorakhanatha* to the entire city, and it must have sprung from the profound respect in which the deity as well as his shrine were held.

The coins of *Mahendra Malla* bear the legend, *Shrimat Kashthamandapadhipati Sri Shri Jaya Mahendra Malla Devasya*, which describes him as the lord of *Kashthamandapa*. The manuscript entitled *Shri Natha Tirthavali* in the collection of *Man Singh* of *Jodhpur* describes the exploits of a savant called *Loyipada*, including the accounts of his construction in *Kantipur* of a three-storeyed palace with the help of a stupendous pillar, brought away from *Kailasa*, cut up into four pillars. The existence of the four enormous pillars, which bear the brunt of the three roofed superstructure reflects the literary account given in the manuscript.

Thus it may be indicated that the shrine had come into existence long before the time of *Lakshmi Narasimha Malla*, who is claimed by a tradition to have been its founder. It is very striking that there is no record whatsoever of the construction or repairs that he might have carried out, if at all, though such a record would be very normal to expect. This inference is also supported by the stylistic form of the images of *Gorakhanatha* (stone) and *Bhairava* (wood) associated with the structure.

3. DESCRIPTIVE

The temple stands on a square plinth, built of bricks, that measures 65 ft. 11 in on each side. The superstructure resting on the single terraced plinth is supported by four massive wooden pillars of square cross-section, that arch upto the ceiling of the roof. Two

successive floors of receding sizes rest on the basic pillars. Wooden stair cases ascending from within the *Sanctum sanctorum*, provide access from one floor to the other. The beauty of the facade is enhanced by a wooden balcony with slenderly carved wooden rails enclosing the *sanctum sanctorum* and superstructures. The main deity enshrined in the *sanctum sanctorum* at the ground floor is that of *shriGorakhanatha* (carved in stone). The structure rises to the height of 65 ft 4 in, which is not very much larger than the basal width. This imparts to it a somewhat stunted form.

The pristine form of the structure, which had been under the occupation till 1966 of fourty-five families, who had built in their ramshackle residence inside the shrine all along the facade, in all manner of ways, and with a diverse assemblage of materials, had to be reclaimed by the unkind act of uprooting of the families from their rather unorthodox and impermissible habitat, and by dismantling of the accretionary structures thus vacated by them. The original lines of the older structure were thus exposed. and their worn out parts comprising the wooden balconies, and the tiled roofs resting on wooden rafters and purlins were extensively repaired by replacement wherever necessary in the latter half of 1966, as a joint, and maiden venture of the Department of Archaeology and the Guthi Samsthan, the funds being provided by the latter.

4. CONCLUSION

The shrine of *Gorakhanatha* called *Kashthamandapa* has now been established to be of much earlier date than the days of *Lakshmi Narasimha Malla*, thus demolishing a popular tradition not founded on facts. That the shrine

should have acquired this name, signifying a wooden pavilion from the extensive use of wood in the basic framework of the pillars, beams rafters, purlins, doors, windows, staircases besides ornamental railings and *tunals*, which contained the brickwork structure, is self-evident. A fairly vivid description of the structural features of the shrine is provided by a late medieval manuscript in Rajasthani collection conveying a continuity of the traditional account of the structure as recorded from memory or personal experience. That *Kathmandu*, could be a phonetic transformation of *Kashthamandapa*, in abbreviative parlance of the common folk would be conceded. It is also reasonable to expect an important shrine in the life of a people to lend its name to the locality that grew around it, including the royal palaces, say as early at least as the times of *Pratapa Malla*, as at *Hanuman Dhoka*. And as the original city should have been small, with the temple and palace as the central nucleus, it is reasonable to extend the application as well as applicability of the name of the royal city to the localities that grew up around it in clusters, keeping pace with the growth of the population. Thus it was the literary form of the name of the most important wooden pavilion that gradually acquired a much wider connotation with the passage of time and encompassed (1) the shrine, (2) the locality and (3) the capital in gradual progression. It is also perhaps the earliest datable shrine, apart from the *Pasupati temple*, notwithstanding the repairs, renovations or modifications that it must have witnessed and undergone in the natural process of events. *Kashthamandapa* is thus deeply interwoven with our entire medieval and modern history.