

A NOTE ON SOME TYPICAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS OF WESTERN NEPAL

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Introduction

Western Nepal, including the whole mountainous and hilly regions, was prosperous during the rule of Khasa King from the twelfth century to fourteenth century A. D. The political hegemony where Khasa King ruled all over the hilly regions was expanded up to the Gandaki river in the east and Kumaun region in the west. The historical and socio-religious influences on material arts and crafts of the region are quite illustrable. Not only were the religious art and craft commonly fostered in the region but also the secular art objects appeared through the means of social service activities made by the King and commoners in the history of western Nepal.

Secular architectural design of western Nepal can be defined as the buildings which had been used as the social interaction between people to people or rulers to common citizen. Mainly three types of potential structures included in this article are as follows:

- A. *Naulo* (Reservoir)
- B. *Dhungedhara / Mangrha* (Water conduit)
- C. *Baithaka* (Pillared Pavilion)

Architecture based on secular design particularly convey the medium of social activities of the welfare state. It has also given equal opportunity to the people for sharing the state achievements in the means of social works. Therefore, states apparatus actively induced on such various social works besides their strong political achievements. These represent in the means of art objects namely *naulo*, *dhungedhara* and *baithaka*. They are described in detail in following sub-topics.

A. *Naulo* (Reservoir)

When we study the development of secular art of the region, it is essential to know that the king and the commoner both were equally eager to maintain the tradition of social activities. For example, to facilitate drinking water to the villagers was considered as one of the vital achievements for the state. Considering the problem of drinking water for villagers and travelers, many types of water conduits and reservoirs were constructed in each and every villages. For the sake of longevity almost all of them were constructed from hewn stones available in the surroundings. Likewise, many such types of reservoirs have been built in house structure so that it would not be contaminated easily by outsiders. Many of them are still standing as a structural form of which front part is left open. Walls have been built horizontally joined by thin mud mortar. The structure is made in an enclosure of stone walls of five meters in height, and mainly the front is left for open veranda. Each and every pillar is decorated with the designs of *ghatapallava* and different creatures such as dove, horse, lion and peacock. Some other pillars' shaft are also decorated with small images of various gods and goddesses on the niches. The roof of the reservoir is made of flat sheet of stones in diminishing character, which almost all of them are in five or eleven courses. And the top of the roof is decorated with round *amalakasila*. For details, some important *naulos* are given below:

1. *Naulo* of Chipur: Chipur village is about 10 km west of the district headquarters of Dadeldhura. On the east of village end the *naulo* is located on mountain slope. It is the two-storeyed and exhibits some distinct characters which could be hardly found elsewhere in the region. The *naulo* has been constructed for supplying water from reservoir and water conduit side by side. Also, it has been constructed with living room on the uppermost floor in order to provide the shelter for the travelers (Figure 1). Thus, it exhibits a multi-functional architecture in the region.

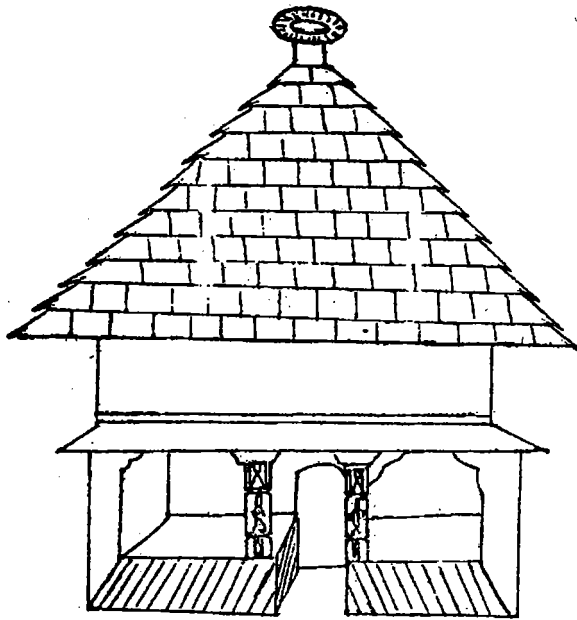


Figure 1: Naulo of Chipur

The inner side of the *naulo* is covered with a water tank, and to reach the water level, there are stone steps in diminishing character. The steps are five in receding order, which is about 50 cm deep from the ground (Figure 2). On either side of inner wall of the *naulo*, there are two water spouts in the case of dry season when people could fetch water easily.

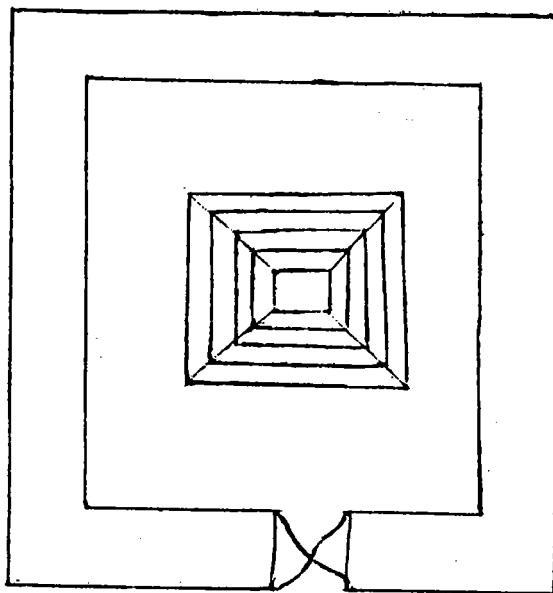


Figure 2: Ground Plan of Chipur Naulo

The *naulo* is made of sand stones in light brown colour. The flat stones are joined almost by thin mud mortar. The facade of the superstructure is left open with veranda on both sides. One meter broad passage leads to the water tank which also separates the porch on both sides, measuring one meter high. The pillars are highly decorated with the designs of the foliages, *puṛnaghata* and figures of the warrior on subsequent small niches. For example, the faces of two pillars are carved out in the following designs:

Pillar of left side

- Face 1. Person riding on a horse
- Face 2. Person standing with a tiger
- Face 3. Foliages design
- Face 4. Person holding a staff

Pillar of right side

- Person riding on a horse
- Puṛnaghata* design
- Puṛnaghata* design
- Puṛnaghata* design

However, almost all figures are crude in nature it unfolds a skill of the prevalent style of the then art. On the south is a flight of steps which lead to the upper floor of the *naulo*. The inner hall of the *naulo* is simple in design, where 15 to 20 people can take rest easily. The roof of the open hall is supported by a single pillar which is placed amid of the hall. The pillar, on the entrance door, contains the figure of a horse rider with a sword in one hand and a bridle on the other.

The structure is roofed with stone slates overlapping in a receding order lower from the eaves. Almost eleven courses of the stone slates are used in roofing and is crowned by round *amalakasila*. The stone trunk where the *amalaka* rests on, is thick and rather cylindrical. It is perhaps a distinct character to be found in the region.

There is a strong belief that the *naulo* was built by Hati Bhat, a powerful minister of Naga Malla (1384-1411 A. D.). During the time of consecration of the structure, as it is said, he got a permission from the king to build the *naulo* at this very site.

Naulo of Ajayamer: On the northern direction of Ajayamer are two *naulos* on the slope of the mountain. Among them, the eastern one has still been serving drinking water to the local villagers. It a single storey and contains the water tank in its interior. It has also a open veranda on both sides of the structure and raises 90 cm from the ground level (figure 3). To reach the inner side of the *naulo* there is a 1.18 meter narrow passage. Two decorated pillars are standing upon the platform which supports the roof of the *naulo*.

Both monolithic pillars are 1.35 meter high and have the figures of different gods and goddesses. The interior part of the *naulo* is covered with water tank with deep square steps made of dressed stone slabs. The domical ceiling is in diminishing character and is decorated with a full bloom of the lotus in its centre. Among the figures in the niches a pair of male and female has been executed in different postures such as one is standing with folding hands and another is dancing in ecstasy. The dark brown stones are used in the whole structure and is roofed with flat stones. The finial of the *naulo* is decorated with *amalakasila* as its crown.

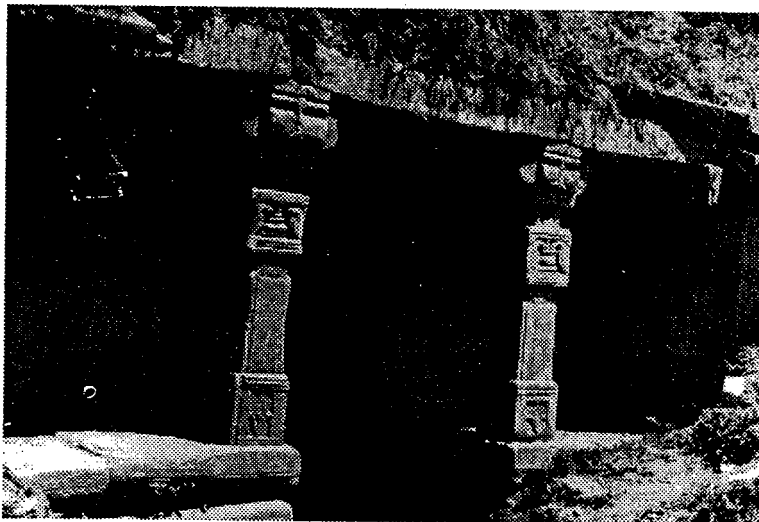


Figure 3

The art represented here is extensively important in its masonry work compared to the *naulo* of Chipur. And the selection of the stones shows a skill in the construction of reservoir for the use of commoner and the king. Similarly, the moulding of the stones more or less give distinct idea of stone masonry in this region.

Pathernauli Naulo of Dullu: On the south-west corner of Dullu Kot there is a stone structure named *Pathernauli*. Previously, its interiorit was covered by the soil. It was Yogi Naraharinath who had dug it out and exposed the original structure of reservoir during his visit in the area. The inscription over the entrance of the *naulo* reveals that it was made by Devavarma, the minister of Prithivi Malla in Sake 1280 (1358 A. D.). The inscription reads '*wapi* has been made in order to provide the resting place

for all the creatures and decorated with five celestial chaityas on its top'. The *naulo* is named '*wapi*' in Sanskrit, which was frequently used for reservoirs at that time.

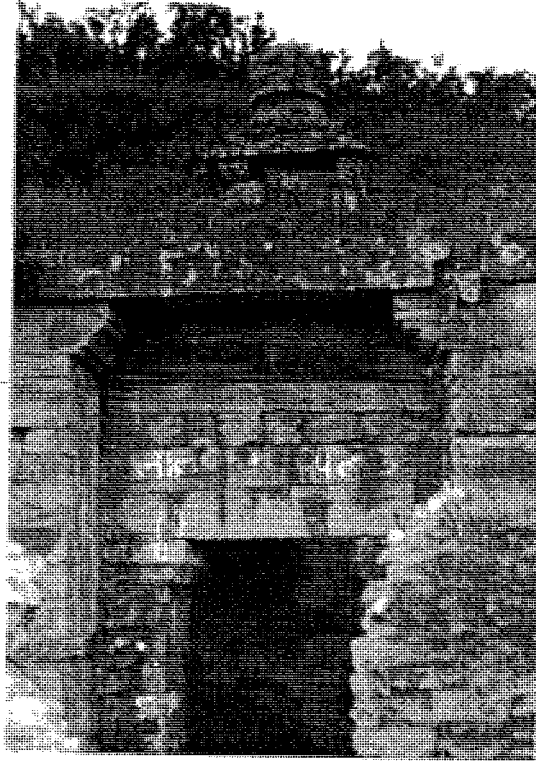


Figure 4

The *naulo* stands on 5.90 meter square plan, and the wall has been built with thick stone beams placed horizontally which cover almost half portion of the either side of the wall's layer (Figure 4). One single stone measures 4.10 meter length, indicates the local knowledge of durability in one hand and the selection of the material available in the area on the other. The main entrance, unlike the *naulo* of Ajayamer, is attached with an open veranda supported by thick wall. It consists of a two meter wide open space which provides the resting place for travelers. The open entrance door is 1.36 meter wide and inscription is carved out on the above beam that supports the burden of the roof. The inner water tank is not seen easily as it has been left unused for a long time. The thickness of the inner wall is 90 cm and the ceiling of the *naulo* represents full blossom of the floral motives. On the top of the roof of *naulo* is one small Buddhist chaitya. Previously, there were five chaityas in a cardinal point and one in the centre of the structure.

But all of them have been dismantled except one. The existing chaitya has been built from dressed stones with simply piling on its square base. Thus, the *naulo* of Dullu represents a distinct style used as a reservoir at the time of the then state.

Similarly, *Siva Naulo* of Dewalhat, Baitadi has an open arched entrance raising up to 1.40 meter from the ground. The *naulo* is built in 1.90 meter square plan and a thick stone *amalaka* surmounts the roof. The *naulo* has been attached with another room on its right. However, the attached room has now been collapsed and only the pillars and the remains of the wall indicate its existence. In the small niche of the entrance wall, is a figure of male. It also further shows a distinct character of art motives of the twelfth century A. D.

Likewise, the *naulo* of Kuchi, Achham represents a Buddhist chaitya on its top. The chaitya is made of dressed stone blocks and stands in one meter high from the base. The entablature of the chaitya has engraved sign of serpent which encircles the structure. This is, no doubt, a distinct character prevalent in the region.

B. Mungrha or Dhungedhara (Water Conduit)

Mungrha is also known as *Dhungedhara* which is extensively found almost at every temple's surrounding and ancient route of the then state. Its main function is to supply water to the villagers and travelers. *Dhungedharas* is simple in design and has a distinct type of skills and technique used on rock stone. It is mostly built in open space against the wall on which few of them are in half roofing structure. The half structure is supported by the pillars, which is akin to open pillared hall. Below the water taps, essentially *amalaka*-quois and bud-shaped motives are carved in single or double horizontal layers of the wall. Thomas M. C. Pinhorn (1989:15-22) has described about water points, a distinct style of water conduit that abundantly found in Dailekh and Jumla. However, the local version and the style of *mungra* in Dadeldhura and Baitadi appear different. Local people commonly called it as *mungrha* in this region. The style of the *mungrha* is almost same in nature, which mostly has a crocodile's face (*Makarakriti*) in the front. Some of them are carved skillfully, yet the face and eyes are dangerous in looking. Tradition has it that most of the *mungrhas* are made in group of two, three or four spouts equally at the level of 1.20 meter high from ground surface. On both sides of the spouts open benches must have been built, it is for short time rest or might have a place for keeping water vessels.

Most of the water conduits are in ruins except some of them are intact. However, some water conduits are renovated by the local people using the original materials.

1. Mungrha of Ajayamer: The *Mungrha* or *dhungedhara* of Ajayamer can be distinctively elucidated for its art design. It is built on the lap of the steep mountain overlooking to the south. The *mungrha* has been constructed with veranda supported by the pillars. Among four pillars in front, two are broken up while rest of other exhibit a distinct carving skills.

The back wall is extensively covered with many miniature figures of gods, men and creatures in a systematic order consisting of four horizontal levels and eight rows of its vertical width. The detail descriptions are in following table:

Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
First Level	Pair of duck facing each	Male standing and Female Dancing	Two Swans	Sun god with lotus flower	Ganesh in dancing	Female in sitting	Male in standing	Horse Figure
Second Level	Three Lozenges	Female in standing	Female in sitting	Female in dancing	Female in sitting	Female in dancing	Single Lozenge	Lozenge
Third Level	Male in standing	Lozenge	Five Lozenges	Twelve Lozenge	Three Lozenges	Small Lozenge	Lozenges	Unclear
Fourth Level	Male figure with lozenge	Three Lozenges	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Lozenge	Unclear	Unclear

It is, therefore, necessary to mention here that the water conduit of Ajayamera is distinct in its representation of gods and many other creatures. The deities so far depicted here are fine and carved out on smooth stone slab, widely available in this area. The figures of Sun god and Ganesh are carved out in their respective posture, which are more or less based on ancient Hindu texts.

Mostly the spout of the water conduit is made in *makara* design, and only a few of them are in the shape of a cow's face. These are in different size ranging from 20 cm to 50 cm long, and half of their portion is inserted into a wall. The destroyed *dhara* of Vinayak of Achham suggests that a long baked clay pipe had been used for getting underground water. Many *mungrhas* or water conduits have 25 cm of their exposed part and contain simple hole for draining. The carving layers of the stones placed on the back wall, indicate the tendency of durability *vis-a-vis* the skill of their craftsmanship.

Some other *mungrhas* are, however, in dilapidated condition, and yet they unfold the technique of stone masonry of their respective time. As in the case of *naulo*, *mungrha* also serves the resting room for the travelers. Mainly there are two kinds of *mungrhas*, with resting place and a temple on the above. These features were widely prevalent at that time.

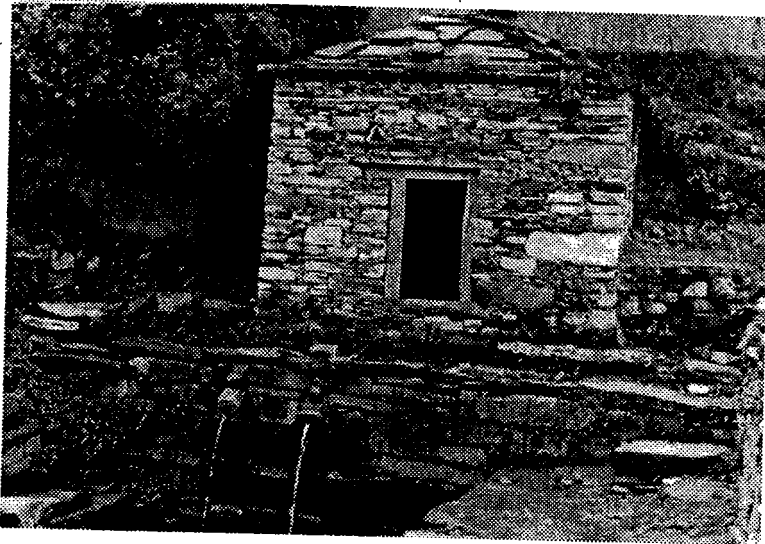


Figure 5

In Dullu Jarkot a *devala* (stone temple) on the upper level of *mungrha* is quite interesting. The *Mungrha* is made with a pair of spout in *makara* style, the common style found elsewhere in the region. The temple measures 4.45 meter high and represents common *sikhara* style. *Vimal dhara* of Thalara also has its own style (Figure 5). On the upper level of this *mungrha* is a small temple with slate roof, and with the image of *Laxminarayan* placed in its interior. Although the image is not significant in artistic style, it has, no doubt, placed an important role at the time of rise of *Thalahara* principality in thirteenth century A. D.

The *mungrhas* of *Sampubada* and *Dasaudibada* of *Jumla* are surmounted by the stupas on above. In *Sampubada* there are five and in *Dasaudibada* two Buddhist stupas are in miniature forms, extensively indicating the faith of Buddhism at the time of *Khasa Kings*. Many other stupas are placed on the open ground and are made of stones simply piled over the square plan. Particularly the middle part of the structure is in shallow character.

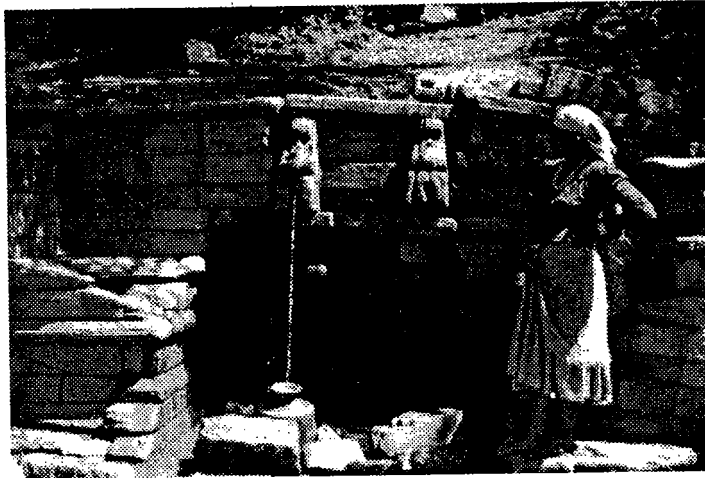


Figure 6

The *mungrhas* of simple structure are extensively found in every corner of the ancient route. They are built against the wall and are chiseled with many moulding shapes on horizontal stones. Mostly amalaka-quois are necessarily placed in single or double layers of the wall and are commonly built with benches on both sides (Figure 6).

C. Baithaka (Pillared Pavilion)

In the architectural history of western Nepal, pillared pavilions play a very important role, and they have extensively been fostered by the kings in this region. Except Dadeldhura, this type of architectural models cannot be found elsewhere in the region. In Dadeldhura district there are four pillared pavilions in numbers, among them three are concentrated around the Ajayamer fort, the medieval headquarters of the state, while one lies in the vicinity of Chipur village. Among the pillared pavilions of Ajayamer, only one has still been preserved its original structure while the remaining are nearly dilapidated. Pillared pavilions of western Nepal are considered as a meeting place of the king along with his people or chief of the administrator. Legend has it that it is also the Justice platform of the King where he delivered his judgment before the audience.

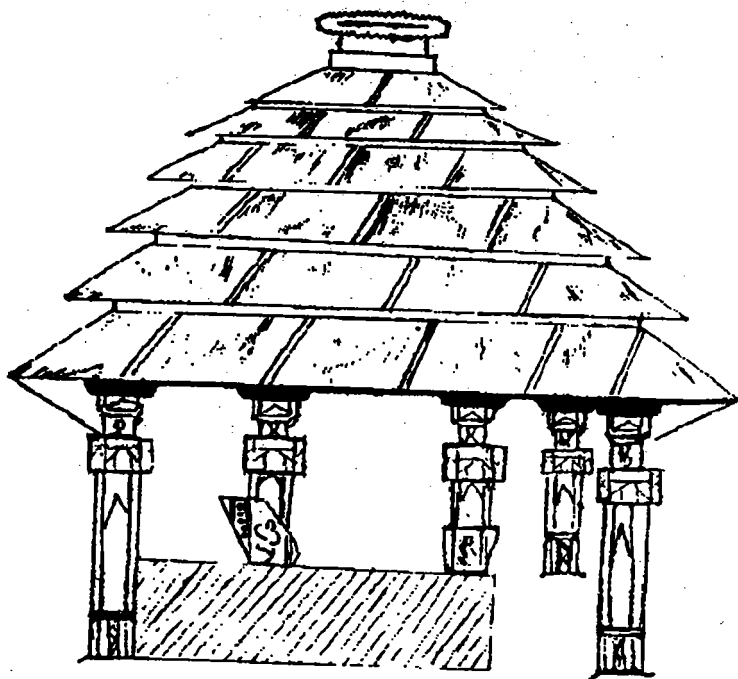


Figure 7

The *baithaka* near the house of Gangunatha, a local resident is perhaps a marvelous stone masonry of Western Nepal (Figure 7). The family of Gangunath still is using as a cow-shed in its open hall. It stands on 4.60 meter square plan and the super structure is supported by twelve stone pillars. Among them two pillars in the front of the hall rest upon 2.02 x 1.00 x 0.45 meter raised basement. Two pillars of the basement are decorated heavily with the flapper vase that raises 25 cm upward (Figure 8). The vases of both pillars have the beads design on either side and with the figure of the dancing female. The female is decorated with head dress, necklace made of beads and *dhoti* as a lower garment. However, the eastern base of this pillar is damaged, its western portion is more or less intact. Other pillars of the open hall, have the design of *purnaghata* and other foliage designs. One of them is smooth with simple carving, and extensively exhibits a distinct feature.



Figure 8

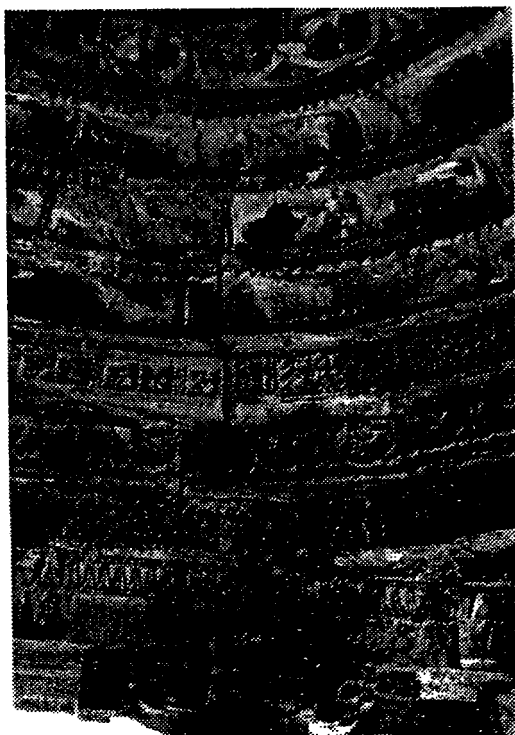


Figure 9

The domical ceiling of open hall is fashioned with a constructive work of arts. The interior ceiling of the hall is oval with courses of the cornice and their exposed parts are carved out on different level in a receding circle (Figure 9). For example, the first level is decorated with half cup-shaped design. The second level depicts the figure of ducks with curving tails. Similarly, the third level shows the design of lotus rosette and fourth level has in semi-circulars. The central part of the ceiling is covered with a lotus in full blossom and a pendent bud in its center. The outer roof is made of overlapping stone sheet in a receding order. Thus, the pillared hall near Gangunath's house is still preserving a distinct stone carving skill of the then period.

Another pillared hall is situated on the mountain slope which is overlooking the ancient fort of Ajayamera. It stands on 3.00 meter square base. The roof of the pillared hall is entirely damaged. Artistically the pillar's shaft is noteworthy to describe especially its minutely carving designs. It stands by six pillars of which three are heavily carved out the designs of flower motives and the figures of different gods and goddesses. The pillars of eastern and southern corner contain the figures of Ganesh sitting on a shrew his vehicle. The other six-handed figure of Ganesh has the emblems of battle axe, rosary, carrot, a bowl of sweets etc. Similarly, the pillar of south-east corner has the symbols and figures of different deities. For example, the details of one of the single pillar is as follows:

- South Face – Sun god holding lotus with his two hands
- West Face – Śiva dancing with highly flexible posture
- North Face – Three females dancing in ecstasy with a drum in center figure
- East Face – Lozenge on a niche

Therefore, the pillared pavilion has been preserving a distinct character up to this time especially in its art carving .

The third pillared hall is situated on the edge of the rivulet which is just below the ancient fort of Ajayamer. It stands on 3.65 meter square plan with eight supportive pillars, and its height is not less then 3 meter. It also contains the designs of *purnaghata*, geometrical and criss-cross on the shaft of the pillars. The stone used here is rather soft and the figures are less artistic in representation. Almost all pillars contain the designs of *purnaghata*, commonly found elsewhere.

The fourth pillared hall of Chipur is now in ruins and only few pillars on the ground display its earlier existence. Also it has used the soft stone similar to the pillars already mentioned in the third pillared hall of Ajayamer. It has also a rectangular plan of 2.75 x 3.75 meter and once had been supported by eight monolithic pillars.

Thus, the examination of the pillared pavilion reprints a great masonry of the architecture of western Nepal. The shaft of the pillars is surmounted by abacus that supports the whole burden of the superstructure. The bracket of the pillar is made of single stone as rightly narrated by Cousens (1985:5) that all Hindu made pillars are widely found in single stone. This is why the Hindu masons virtually make strong structures out of rock-cut stone consisting various designs.

To sum up, Western Nepal has fostered the art and architectural designs along with its strong political stability in the region. Many art forms indeed show the religious and cultural integration of the people's life cycle. These architectural examples with no doubt, are the outcome of the economic prosperity of the state. Hence, the credit goes to the rulers for their indulgence in the development of various art forms during 13th to 15th century A. D. However, many religious art and architectural designs abundantly found in the hilly region, have preserved the traditional religious values and cultural prosperity of the state till now. It is noteworthy that the motives used in the material art deserve more cultural study of the history of Western Nepal.

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Appendix 1*Distribution of Naulo in Western Nepal*

Name	Place	District	Location	Condition
Chipurnaulo	Chipur	Dadeldhura	on mountain slope	not on use
Siva naulo	Dewal hat	Baitadi	on gentle slope	on use
Pathernaulli	Dullu	Dailekh	on gentle slope	not on use
Kapoornaulli	Dullu	Dailekh	on mountain slope	not on use
Naulo	Ajayamer	Dadeldhura	on mountain slope	on use
Naulo	Jayaghar	Achaam	on mountain slope	on use
Naulo	Padukasthan	Deilekh	in front of temple	on use
Naulo	Kuchi	Achaam	village edge	on use
Deu naulo	Patagaun	Bajhang	on mountain slope	on use
Naulo	Bhatekhola	Bajhang	on mountain slope	on use

Appendix 2*Distribution of Mungrha or Dhungedhara in Western Nepal*

Name	Place	District	location	condition
Mungrha	Ajayamer	Dadeldhura	on mountain slope	not on use
Mungrha	Dewalbhanja	Bajhang	in front of temple	on use
Deulimungrha	Talkot	Bajhang	on cultivated land	on use
Mungrha	Mangalsen	Achaam	in front of the Palace	on use
Mungrha	Chhanna	Bajhang	in terrace field	on use
Mungrha	Vinayaka	Achaam	village end	not on use
Mungrha	Jarkot	Dailekh	on mountain slope	on use
Mungrha	Tate	Bajura	on mountain slope	not on use
Mungrha	Patagaun	Bajhang	on gentle slope	on use
Mungrha	Kuikada	Dailekh	on village end	on use
Mungrha	Kalikotdara	Kalikot	on mountain slope	on use
Mungrha	Bhatekhola	Bajhang	village end	on use
Mungrha	Sampudada	Jumla	gentle slope	on use
Mungrha	Dasaudidada	Jumla	plain land	on use
Mungrha	Ukhadi	Jumla	gentle slope	on use
Mungrha	Sunargaun	Jumla	gentle slope	on use
Vimaldhara	Thalhara	Bajhang	near palace	on use
Doki mungrha	Tate	Bajura	on mountain slope	on use
Mungrha	Pikhet	Bajhang	amid of village	on/use

Appendix 3

Distribution of Baithaka in Western Nepal

Name	Place	District	Location	Condition
Baithaka	Ajayamer	Dadeldhura	on mountain slope	dilapidated
Baithaka	Ajayamer	Dadeldhura	near the house	good
Baithaka	Ajayamer	Dadeldhura	near the stream	good
Baithaka	Chipur	Dadeldhura	on mountain slope	dilapidated