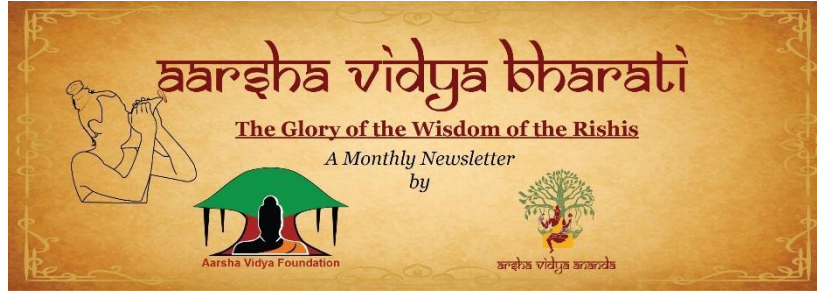

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A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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Tīrthayātra to Pashupatinath, Nepal

By Sowmya Krishnan, Hyderabad

Listed under UNESCO's world heritage sites, the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu, Nepal is the holiest Shiva shrine in the country and one of the most significant abodes of Lord Shiva across the world. Situated on the banks of river Bagmati, the temple is an architectural masterpiece constructed intricately in the Pagoda style, highlighting Nepal's rich historical and cultural identity. Shaivism flourished during the kingdom of the Lichhavi rulers.



Pagoda style architecture

Derived from the amalgamation of the words *Paśu* meaning animal or living beings, and *Pati* meaning Lord or Master, 'Pashupatinath' is the Master of all living beings. The Nepalese regard Pashupatinath as the protector of the country including the Kathmandu valley. I was struck by their unshaken faith which was evident in a narration about how the sacred temple city and the Pashupatinath Mandir were safeguarded by the deity during the massive devastating earthquake in the year 2015.

The glories of the 12 Jyotirlinga temples in India are known to one and all. Pashupatinath is considered to be complementary to the Jyotirlinga in Kedarnath, or an extension to it, leading to it being designated as the 13th Jyotirlinga. The *Śiva Purāṇa* describes Pashupatinath in Chapter 11 of the *Koti Rudra Samhitā*, titled as 'Pashupatinath Linga'.

नयपालाख्यां तु प्रसिद्धायां महितले । लिङ्ग पशुपतिशाख्यं सर्वकामफलप्रदम् ॥

शिरोभागस्वरूपेण शिवलिङ्गं तदस्ति हि । तत्कथां वर्णयिष्यामि केदारेश्वरवर्णने ॥

This translates as follows - In Nepal, a Linga named Pashupati has been established,



Temple entrance

capable of fulfilling all desires. This Linga has the form of a head, and its story shall be described along with that of *Kedāreśvara*. Chapter 9 of *Koṭi Rudra Samhita* narrates this story. Repenting for their *pāpa*-s in the Mahabharata war, the Pandavas went to Shiva to seek his blessings. Enraged by the acts of the Pandavas, Shiva transformed himself into a bull, hid and buried himself underground at Kedarnath. Bhima caught the bull and tried to grab it by its tail, resulting in the hind portion/ hump being entrenched as the Jyotirlinga in Kedarnath and the head that went into the ground re-surfacing in Nepal, established as Pashupatinath.

As per texts such as the *Nepālamahātmya* and the *Himavatkhanda*, the history of Pashupatinath is chronicled through another legend. Once, Lord Shiva in the form of an antelope, fled towards the banks of river Bagmati. The Gods discovered him and caught him by the horn, which broke into four pieces. This resulted in Shiva manifesting as Pashupati, in a four-faced (*Caturmukha*) Linga. A continuation to the lore is that the Linga was buried and lost over time. Many years later, a cowherd providentially dug the place where one of his cows which otherwise did not produce milk, was showering the earth with milk, to ultimately uncover the Linga. Initially in a Linga shaped *Devalaya*, the Pashupatinath temple is known to have undergone several reconstructions and renovations, to erect the multiple stories in the temple complex. The Malla and Shah dynasties have made the greatest contributions.

The temple houses a three feet tall Linga with four faces, pointing to the directions of East, West, North and South. Each face represents an aspect of realizing the form of Lord Shiva, as mentioned in the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* verses 10.17-20. They are *Tatpuruṣa*, *Sadyojāta*, *Vāmadeva* and *Aghora*. The *paramparā* of *Ādi Śankarācārya* is followed strictly in the temple even today. A tradition initiated upon his request in the 8th century, Bhatta priests from Karnataka perform the daily rituals at the temple, with only 4 of them permitted to touch the idol. The Malla kings as a mark of respect to the Sage, honoured the appeal, and the selection of priests continues to happen as per the *Daśanāmi Sampradāya*.



Bagmati river, Pashupatinath

The *Devasthānam* complex captivates devotees with other profound landmarks of spiritual and religious magnitude. A huge *mūrti* of Nandi, the sacred bull, guards the entrance to the main shrine. Post the darshan of the main Linga, as one walks towards the Pashupatinath hill top from within the hallowed portals of the temple, one can reach the Gorakhnath mandir, a shrine dedicated to the yogi imparting teachings of the *Nāth* tradition. Further ahead is the



Guhyeshwari temple

Guhyeshwari *Alaya*, a monument dedicated to *Ādi Śakti*. One of the most revered temples, it is also a *Śaktipīṭha*. Some believe that it is the region where Sati's hips are said to have fallen, while others consider it as the spot where her knees are known to have fallen. The Goddess is worshipped at the centre of the temple in a *kalaśa*, covered with silver and gold. While at the Guhyeshwari *Śaktipīṭha*, I was pleasantly

surprised to come across a group of tourists from Chennai, melodiously singing "Sri Chakra Raja Simhasaneshwari", a composition by Sage Agastyar in praise of Devi.

It is important to see the Birupakshya or Virupaksha *mūrti*, also known as "Kirateswor Mahadev" and worshipped by the Kirat community of Nepal. On the bank of the Bagmati river, the Virupaksha *mūrti* is partially submerged under-ground, with claims that the *mūrti* is slowly growing above ground level, and that the world will be annihilated once it fully emerges, marking the end of *Kali Yuga*. The banks of the river Bagmati flowing adjacent to the Pashupatinath temple, also functions as cremation ghats.

Treading through the premises to reach the other temples, I encountered local fables attached to the place. One tale talks about making a wish with the eyes closed while walking through a section of the ramp, and another about using one part of the stone wall to massage the back. It is very endearing to note that most people have had these wishes fulfilled.

Even after a period of five months, the memories are so vivid. A practice that stood out was the tradition of leather items not being permitted inside the Pashupatinath temple complex, as a mark of reverence. The unwavering trust in Bholenath, rhythmic chanting of "Har Har Mahadev", approaching the sanctum sanctorum in a disciplined manner, and the resolute devoutness of the pilgrims, produces a spiritually energized ambience that is conducive to deep contemplation. To augment that, a city with pristine vitality and serenity owing to the proximity to the Himalayas, and the co-existence of Hinduism, Buddhism and Tantrism, creates an atmosphere that is ideal for an Advaita student to soak in the power of the divine, reflecting on the oneness of it all – "*Ekam Sadviprā Bahudhā Vadanti.*"



Virupaksha