

The Royal Devotion to Deity Taleju

—Sushila Manandhar

The King of Nepal issued a *Lalmohar* [document] regarding the *guthi* of Taleju and Degutale of Patan in 1897 V.S. Paush Sudi/Roj/ [1840 A. D.]. The date on the Lalmohar showed that it was issued during the regime of King Rajendra Bikram Shah. The inscription is the first relevant document of Shah regime about Taleju and Degutale of Patan. Though the inscription issued by King Rajendra Bikram Shah concerns the *guthi* granted by his father [Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah], it also indicates that King Girvan Yuddha was not only a protector of the Malla traditional culture, but also its promoter during his regime. Translation of the Lalmohar reads as follows:

Shree	
Shree Taleju	Shree Deu [tale]
1	2

The [Rukka] order given by His Majesty This document authorises Pandit Mitra Sharma, the ownership of the *guthi* of 1 2 of Patan, which was granted to Pandit Padmanava Bhattarai by His Majesty, my father on condition that Rs. 121/- be saved and the *guthi* be held every year and that the remaining amount could be used for personal

purposes. Hereby I grant the ownership to Pandit Mitra Sharma to run the *guthi* as before. Dated 1897 V.S. Paush/Sudi/Roj. [This inscription is secured from the Documentation section of CNAS, T. U., Kirtipur. The photocopy of the Lalmohar is given at the end of the references.]

The document informs that King Rajendra Bikram Shah's father (Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah) granted some *guthi* to Pandit Padmanava Bhattarai for running the annual functions of Taleju and Degutale of Patan. After running the *guthi* and submitting Rs. 121/- annually, the remaining sum of the amount could be used by the *guthi* holder. King Rajendra Bikram Shah transferred the power of the *guthi* holder from Padmanava Bhattarai to Mitra Sharma. This is only a renewed copy of the main document, pointing out that only the *guthi* holder could continue to be responsible and the authority as before. The document does not mention the location of the *guthi* land, but the statement of the Lalmohar "... after holding the *guthi* and submitting Rs. 121/- annually, the remaining amount could be used by the *guthi* holder for his personal

utilizations..." (inscription), shows, the *guthi* income was higher than the total expenditure.

The document does not describe the responsibilities of the *guthi* holder in detail. So I visited the temples of Taleju and Degutale at Patan Dubar Square to observe and interview the priests. Since only priests are allowed to enter both temples, I had an informal talk with Ramjwalananda Rajaopadhyaya, the priest of Taleju at Mulchok courtyard. According to him, he is the twelfth generation ancestral hereditary priest of the Taleju Bhavani. From the very beginning his ancestors conducted all kinds of worship and seasonal festivals. The *guthi* office of Tabahal gives the required amount for the whole expenditure. When asked about Bhattarai who is related to the *guthi* of Taleju and Degutale of Patan, the chief priest answered rather negatively. Both deities are the tantric image of Bhavani, so the priest of both temples must have a knowledge of Tantricism. Since Bhattarai is not a Tantric Priest, it is not possible for him to be a priest in these temples. Due to the appointment system of Chief Priests Degutale, there is no hereditary succession of priests. The But chief priest cannot appoint a non-tantric priest like Bhattarai. The priest added that being the tantric images, both deities' figures are mysterious. According to Amatya (2026 V. S. :239) Taleju is a symbol of *Shakti*, complexed origin of *Trikon* and *Poornakalash*. These days, same symbolic *Mandal* of *Shakti* (*Trikon* and *Poornakalash*) kept at the *Mulchok* (courtyard) of three palaces of the Kathmandu Valley. Thus the field visit yielded nothing related to the document.

The document has special importance from the religious, historical, and cultural viewpoints. Taleju is the family deity of the

Malla kings of Nepal (Regmi, 1966: 171 and Tiwari, 2019: 11-12). They established the image of Taleju Bhavani in their palaces, such as: there is an interesting story about the deity established inside Bhaktapur Durbar square by Harisimha Dev (Kirkpatrick, 1793: 190. and Lamsal, 2023;/32-34); at Kathmandu Durbar Square by Mahendra Malla, ruled 1560-1574 A.D. (Regmi, 1963; 42-43, and Lamsal, 58-59); at Patan Siddhi Narsingh Malla; ruled 740 N. S.-781 N. S. (Wright 1972, : 233 & Lamsal, 62.).

Though the above mentioned version about the establishment of 'Taleju' at Bhaktapur Durbar (Nepal) is very popular among the people, some scholars reputed it. They gave new opinion with various proofs on this issue, which threw new light on the conception of Nepalese royal family deity Taleju. According to Tirthalal Naghavani [2043 V.S.: 9-14], Harishimha Dev is not the first king who brought Taleju to Bhaktapur (Nepal), but the Taleju is a royal deity of Nepal from the Licchavis regime. Brish Dev is the first king, who established "Raja Devi" as royal personal deity. The first historical king of Nepal Mandev ruled 521 V.S.-562 V.S. (464-505 A. D.), established a golden image of former deity and called it "*Manesvari*". Later on, in the Malla regime the deity "*Manesvari*" is called in several names, like *Shree Manesvari*, *Shree Svaistadevata*, *Shree Bhavanai*, *Shree Manmanesvaristh Devata*, *Shree Durga Devi* and *Shree Svasth-Devata Taleju*. Thus the traditional royal deity has been called *Taleju* from the Malla period. Mary Slusser (1982: 67 & 317-319) is also of the same opinion regarding the Taleju of Nepal (Bhaktapur). She pointed out that *Manesvari* and *Taleju* have different names for the same goddess, who play the same role as the most usual personal deity for

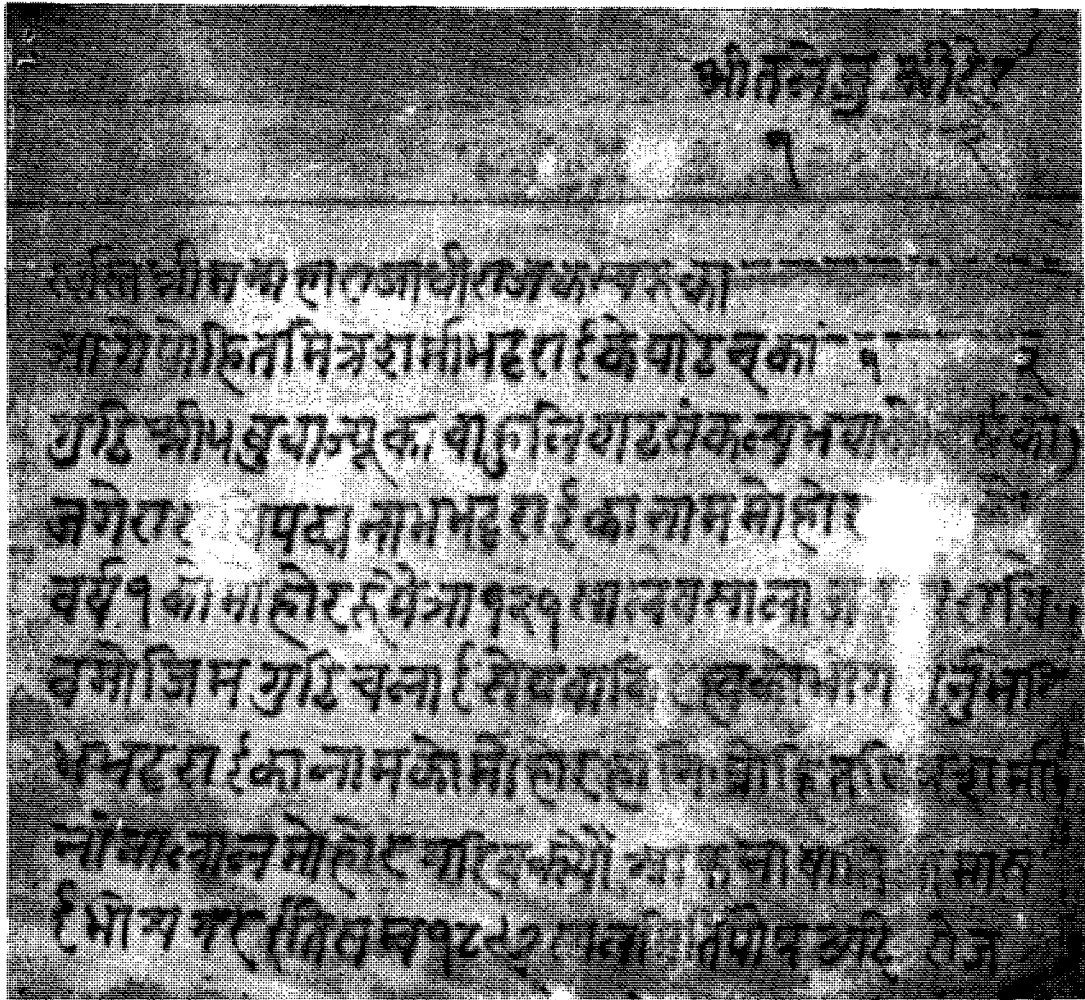
the royal dynasties of Nepal, like personal deity of the Licchivis and lineage deity of the Mallas. The Taleju Bhavani of Bhaktapur is considered the oldest image among the images of the three Malla kingdoms of the Kathmandu valley, it is not established by the King Harishimha Dev. But the traditional royal personal deity has been recognized as the Royal family lineage deity of the Malla kings.

Being the family deity of the Malla kings, the three Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley constructed the temples of Taleju in their kingdoms. According to Nepalese traditional beliefs, all kinds of goddesses (Bhavani) are the patron deities of human beings, mostly of children. The Taleju has been the Patron Deity of Nepalese Kings (Bernier, 1978: 72). Almost all the Malla kings and members of the Royal family of the three kingdoms were devoted to Taleju and granted a lot of *guthi* and other things for worship. Since the document is related to Taleju and Degutale temples of Patan, a brief historical background of these temples are needs to be mentioned here.

Siddhi Narsingh Malla was the first independent king who succeeded in establishing the kingdom of Patan with a formal recognition from Kathmandu (Tiwari and others, 2021:1-3). He constructed an image of goddess Taleju Bhavani in Patan on the advice of Guru Bishwa Nath Upadhyaya (Wright, 1972:233). He also made a pond and offered a garden full of flowers (Puspabatika) to the Taleju Bhavani (Regmi, 1966: 272). He renovated the temple of Degutale Bhavani in 767 N. S. (Lamsal, 2023:62; and Sanday 1982: 77), which was built during the King Siva Shingh Malla's rule over Kathmandu as well as Patan (Lamsal, 59). In 786 N. S. his successor (son) Shrinivash Malla built a courtyard called Mulchok and built a temple

for Tulaja Bhavani with the help of his wife Mrgavati (Regmi 1966:284 and Tiwari, 2023: 11-12). Only in Dashain festival Devi Taleju is brought down to the courtyard and kept in this temple for public worship. He [Shrinivash] renovated the burned temple of Degutale in 1662 A. D. (Sanday, 1982:77). Yoga Narendra Malla who ruled from 1684-1705 A. D. showed his devotion to Taleju and Degutale by depicting "*Taleju Sahaya*" in his coins (Regmi, 1966:330), and erecting a pillar in front of Degutale and placing his and his son's golden statue on it. King Visnu Malla, and his Queen Chandra Laxmi Devi offered a large bell to Taleju in 857 N. S. [1737 A. D.] (Itihash Prakashan Mandal, 2012 V. S. 64.).

In 1769 A.D. the unification of Kathmandu Valley was completed and the founder of modern Nepal King Prithvi Narayan Shah adopted the policy of "status quo" in religion and Newari culture. The above mentioned document and Girvan Yuddha's other three published Lalmohars (Vajracharya and Shrestha, 2037 V. S. 285-292 and 297-300) regarding the Taleju Bhavani, show that he was a devotee of Taleju Bhavani, because he granted the *guthi* to Taleju as well as Degutale of Patan (Above mentioned document.). He twice granted *birta* land to worship the Taleju of Kathmandu and also granted *birta* once for worshipping Taleju of Bhaktapur, in 1856 V. S. Aswin Sukla Astami Roj 1. or the year of 1799. In the three Lalmohars he highlighted that to fulfill his parents desires, he granted various *birta* and *guthi* particularly to the *Taleju Bhavani*. It reveals that King Ranabahadur Shah and his queens were also devotees of Taleju Bhavani. Former King Rajendra Bikram Shah's document is concerned with the continuation of his family tradition. Thus it becomes clear that the Royal family of Nepal, whether it be the Licchivis, the Mallas or the Shahs, are



The Lalmohar

all devotees of the Taleju Bhavani.

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