Umamahesvar Temple of Kirtipur

-Sukra Sagar Shrestha

The temple of Umamahesvar is located at the highest elevation of Kirtipur lowering over the whole valley of Kathmandu. This is one of the imposing temples in Kirtipur after Baghbhairav. The elevation of the temple rises little over 16 metres.

The temple houses one of the finest examples of medieval stone sculptures of Umamahesvar in the valley. But in the copper-plate inscription attached to the wall behind the main image, he is addressed as Bhavani Shankar, the other name of Umamahesvar.

Hari Ram Joshi writes that the temple was constructed by the Pradhans of Daih Tajiya Tole Mangal Bazar from Patan and gives the supporting document as the copper-plate inscription attached to the temple. Only copper-plate inscription on the wall behind the god does not mention the Pradhans of Patan as the builders. Rather it mentions

1. Joshi, Hari Ram, “Kirtipur Umamahesvarasthit Sarasvati-Ek Adhayayana”, Prachin Nepal, Nr. 21 (Kartik 2029) p. 56
2. Copper-plate inscription attached to the wall behind the main image of Umamahesvara.
   1. अयं नमः स्वामो शंकरामो।। ब्रह्मचर्येऽत्थस्ते बलारामेऽत्थस्ते बृहस्पति मेघेऽत्थस्ते ॥ श्रीमती अनुमयोऽदि श्रीमती आलोकी श्रीमती आलोकी ॥
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   4. भवानी वक्ररूपी चतुर्दशायाया विन जुरे।। श्रीवास धरवेन कुं दुत तरू तरू ॥
   5. पारंश रोकलस्य यु ॥ बोधाहार
   6. मेघायु वेशकुं कुं द्रव द्रव द्रव स्वरुप महान आक्षेप यु न्याय त्रिवेण्य दुर्जय ब्राह्मण ब्राह्मण

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Raurata Vishwanath Babu who established the God Bhavani Shankar and offered rich endowments to the temple in April 1655 A.D. (Vaisakh Sukla-pachyha 773 N. S.) during the reign of King Siddhi Narasingh Malla.

Dr. Ronald M. Bernier gives the date of the temple as one of 1673 A.D. without any supporting document and writes the temple was originally of four storeyed. This is quite unlikely that the temple was built eighteen years after the installation of the image. The sketch of temple drawn by Oldfield in 1855; and close and detail measurement study of the author reveals the temple to be of three storeyed only. Therefore the temple was originally of three storeyed and the top roof should have


been most probably collapsed in the great earthquake of 1833 which shook the valley tremendously destroying many houses and killing numerous laity. It was already in dilapidated condition when Oldfield visited the town in 1855 A.D. and made the sketch of it, almost twenty two years after the tremor. The temple remained in same ignored condition for almost a century.

However the temple was renovated after the second great earthquake of 1934 using corrugated-iron sheet roof. On fourth day Jestha 2004 B.S. a storm caused the upper portion and pinnacle fall to the ground. Again the temple remained without repair and pinnacle for more than thirty years being brought into present shape only in 1982 by the local authority Layak village Panchayat in collaboration with Local Development and Panchayat Ministry HMG/Nepal at the cost of 60,000 Nepalese rupees plus free labour donated by the local people.

The temple is standing over four successive plinths. The fourth plinth supports the entire weight of the temple and has twenty big pillars supporting varandah. The varandah could be reached from rear using a ladder. The present pillars and struts are just plain and uncarved. The original pillars and struts were carved as shown by the two struts used now in the Surya shrine at the bottom of Umamahesvar temple. There were also half a dozen of the carved struts in a Fakeha at the bottom the temple, of which were lost a decade before. Similarly pillars had also intricate carvings which were replaced somehow during the renovation activities in first half of this century.

Two elephants stand on either side of the lower plinth erected in 1662 (N.S. 782) seven years after the installation of the main image. The image of Kubera and Bhimsena are installed just behind the elephants on the third plinth. It was customary in those days to install the icons of Bhimsena and Kubera as guardians in a Shiva temple. A stone slab of N. S. 631 now in collection of Bhaktpur Art Gallery also shows the same motif. Likewise Vishesvara temple of Patan Durbar Square has two figures of Bhimsena and Kubera on the plinth. The temple was erected in 1627 A.D.

As the main entrance leading inside the sanctum is in eastern facade, remaining three facades have the figures of different Gods and Goddess. Among them north, west and southern facades house the figures of Sarasvati, Mahisimardini Durga and Ganesh respectively. All those images are considered as finest examples of Malla stone craft. No image of Sarasvati like the one in this temple have come to light so far in Nepal. But the image of Ganesh in southern facade is not presently in its original place but housed in a Fakeha in Layaku. The original place of Ganesh is replaced by an image of Devi.

All four facades of the temple in ground level has an intricately carved doors, the upper and lower lintels of which are extended far out into the brick walls presumably for added strength. These parts are further decorated with the figures of Gods like Indra, Surya, Chandra,

5. Inscription below right foot of an elephant inscribed.

6. For detail of the Sarasvati image, refer to op. cit. no. 1.
Vishnu, Brahma and so on. The further lengthy portions of the same lintels are decorated with Astamangalas (eight auspicious symbols) and some forest scene providing a feeling as if the carnivorous animals chasing their prey. In between the door-frames and door-wings, the fine example of wooden images of Ashtamatrikas (eight mother goddesses) are depicted in following order:

1. Rudrayani
2. Kumari
3. Vaisnavi
4. Barahi
5. Indrayani
6. Chamunda
7. Mahalaxmi
8. Brahmayani

The lower section of the lintels have the figure of Asiabhairav and the doorways here are carved with the Gods emerging out from the month of Makaras. To the best of our knowledge, this level no doubt, is an original one and could be regarded as the best example of wooden art so far preserved in Kirtipur.

The complex wall as we could say retaining wall with a door leading to the main complex was raised in 1717 A. D. (837 N. S.) and two years later the three level podium of the main temple was also renovated as well.

On ground level in South is the symbolic shrine consisting of a colossal stone Trishula and twelve niches carved six in each side of Trishula. The shrine is considered as Talezu. During the festival day of Fulpati in Dasain, the Fulpati is brought here escorted by musical band and local authority. A buffalo is sacrificed here by the government.

The bell hung now in this temple was originally in Ghantaghar (Clock-tower). This was one among the four quarter striking bells of the tower. After the great earthquake of 1934 which shook all Nepal and destroyed many thousand houses did not spare clock tower also. Then the ruling Prime Minister of

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7. Inscription above main entrance to the complex of 1717 A. D. (837 N. S.)

8. Inscription on the wall of an elephant base in Umamahesvara temple of 1719 A. D. (839 N. S.)
Umamahesvar...

the time Juddha Shamsher offered the bell to this temple on the request of the local authority Duare Jagat Bahadur Pradhan. The bell is casted by Jilette and Johnston Founder Croydon England in 1895. The original bell of this temple as is said, was stolen by the King of Bhaktapur. The bell was already absent when Oldfield visited the town in 1855.

The temple can be reached in few minutes walk from Baghbhairav Temple towards west and small climbing of steps immediately before the temple. Owing to its elevations of 1418 m. from sea-level, when one stands on the foreground of this temple, the entire valley of Kathmandu and distant views of Himalayas as far as hundred miles can be seen from here on clear days.
Uma Maheswar

Scale:

0 1 2 3 [unit unspecified]
Uma Maheswar

Scale:

0 1 2 3 NTR.