

# THE MUL CHOK, PATAN ROYAL PALACE OF NEPAL-

## CONSIDERATION FOR THE MEANING BESTOWED BY DEITIES ON THE EMBELLISHED STRUTS TO ARCHITECTURAL SPACE

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This goddess, mild in form, is the icon of Hindu Deity on embellished in the *Mul Chok*, Patan Royal Palace of medieval Nepal's *Malla* dynasty (photograph 1). Standing mounted on a lion, the Goddess holds weapons of a sword and a cakra in her hands and under her feet she is having the warrior deity (severed head of a buffalo). A gruesome scene of such a massacre is depicted. Based on the mythological tale of the slaying of Demon-King *Mahisasura* who is in the form of a buffalo, the carved sculpture can be judged as an episode conveying the mightiness of the Goddess.

The struts in the courtyard of *Mul Chok* use numerous such icons (photograph 2). At this juncture, if the icons of the Goddess on the struts may be rounded up as the major factor that design-wise distinguishes the function of each building, then what the icon has to offer to the architectural space may be seen.

If one observes the struts lining all four sides of the courtyard of *Mul Chok*, *Siva* and *Bhairava*, the *Asta-matrika* or the Eight mothers goddesses etc are depicted, the divinities being grouped together. This courtyard is one of the Hindu Pantheons, and amongst them, *Siva's* consort *Durga's* carved figurine has been amply used. This appearance is the same as the way in which the *Malla* royal family venerated their community God *Taleju*. In other words, the struts of *Mul Chok* centrally depict mythology related to *Durga*, their main guardian deity of goddess worship.

The strut is a diagonal member that supports the eaves. By sculpting divine statues here, the architectural space is solemnize (photograph 3). By inference, the *Malla* dynasty is lauding the meritorious deeds of the goddess, and by embodying figurines of the royal family's guardian deity in the main architectural space of the Royal Palace, they intended to gain the favor of *Durga*.

If one looks back into the records for the function of *Mul Chok*, it was used as a religious ceremonial space for the *Taleju* faith and the *Kumari* faith or as a diplomatic reception hall for antiwar agreements etc. Even today, with the guardian deity's rituals involving blood held here, it remains centrally important. Every year, during the *Dasain* festival, a water buffalo or goat head is cut down as a sacrifice, and the head is offered with flowers etc to the *Durga*, the blood shedding salutation being held facing the sanctuary. The icons of *Durga* are also displayed on *torana* or the half moon panel over the door leading to the sanctuary. Rituals involving blood are a way of honoring the goddess. In other words, as a religious ceremony during festivals, the mythology-based icon on the strut is materialized. Inversely, along with other Hindu divinities, it may be comprehended that due to the statue being displayed high up on the strut, the courtyard's ceremonial space becomes all the more gorgeously adorned.

In the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, along with introduction of the *Malla* royal family to the *Taleju* faith, the Royal Place of Bhadgaon established *Mul Chok* as the space for the worship of *Taleju*. Following this, God *Taleju* was introduced to the Royal palaces of Kathmandu and Patan. By manifesting their guardian deity *Taleju*, namely *Durga*, in *Mul Chok's* courtyard surrounded by struts, the royal family sanctified it and made the courtyard sublime.

❖ Icon of *Durga* on embellished strut

❖ Embellished struts supporting the eaves, southern side of the of quadrangle, the *Mul Chok*



❖ South side of the quadrangle, the *Mul Chok*



❖ Bird's-eye view of the Patan *Darbar*. The second building in the right, with two-stories is the *Mul Chok*



The intention being to gain the favor of the supposedly powerful Mother goddess *Durga*, the architectural space of *Mul Chok* is literally the central structure in the design.

Further, the *Darbar* or old royal buildings of Nepal as an architectural complex comprised of key structural elements called *Chok*, which are architecture and the multi-storied tower (photograph 4). There are timber-and brick constructions which use the traditional building elements of Nepalese architecture as reflected in slanting roofs with deep-set eaves, roofing tiles and walls of brick, wooden struts and wooden windows embellished with carvings. The architectural can be described not only as being unique among the countries of South Asia, but also as being of inestimable value in term of world cultural history.

References: "*Mul*" has the meaning of "principal" "root" "element" "source" "origin" in Nepalese and Sanskrit. The naming of this structure is probably connected with its importance within the *Darbar*.

(English text translated by Vasanti Menon Nii, revised by the author)

1...Nippon Institute of Technology Research Mission "The royal buildings of Nepal" 1981  
2..."A Study on Quadrangle Architecture in the Old Royal Buildings of Nepal" (in Japanese, Report of Researchers Nippon Institute of Technology, Special Issue) by Takayuki KUROTSU