

Last Walk to *Aaryaghat*

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Abstract



The paper focuses on religious aspect of *Aaryaghat* situated on the banks of holy river Bagmati within the periphery and premises of *Pashupatinath* temple. Hindus believe that if the dead person gets the funeral and rituals performed here then the gateway to heaven opens. This final journey is taken as the last walk to *Aaryaghat* and is done with a symbolic religious belief. The *Aaryaghat* of *Pashupatinath* area is a very sacred place where Hindus' cremation process is performed for the purification of the dead and the departed soul. The rituals are related to the Hindu belief of salvation, rebirth and attainment of heaven. After the death, there are various ritual

practices to be done like *Sharadha* annually and such rituals are performed by the kin folks devoutly on the belief of attaining a heavenly place in the realms of trinity Gods. The paper has only focused on the aspect of the last walk concept and the *Aaryaghat* at the *Pashupatinath* through personal observation and secondary literature review.

Keywords: *Aaryaghat, Bramhanal, cremation, salvation, rituals, Bagmati River*

Introduction

The *Pashupatinath* area is believed to be the sacred-most *Dham* (divine abode) of Lord Shiva, also known as *Mahadeva* (Lord of Lords) and popularly revered as *Bholenath* (the pure and innocent Master Lord) who has chosen the area for His *Lila* (divine activities) and resides here with His retinue comprising many sacred *Dakinis* (female deities), *Bhringis* (lower-ranked divine power), *Pisacha* (darker side of divine power) and powerful *Shakta* deities like *Bhairav* and *Nandi*. Shiva-devotees believe most of these divine powers and beings manifest their benevolent power of creations in the form of *prakriti* (nature) and bestow unlimited compassion to all the living beings in the world and particularly to those who reside in this holy place. Hundreds of millions of Hindus, wherever they live, hold this place as the 'once must-be-visited' *Dham* at their hearts. During field observation study visits the author has witnessed the devotees offering prayers devoutly and performing religious acts whole-heartedly. Visibly hundreds of Indian visitors and devotees also flock to this sacred *dham*. Both Nepalese and Indian visitors have expressed that to be a pilgrim at this *Dham* is an ecstatic joy and feel oneself being closer with the *Bholenath*. Their every aspects of life has been intertwined with such religious beliefs and rituals of Hinduism: myths, ideas, values, beliefs, norms and way of living are exemplified in all traditional forms of the religion in everyday life. But at the same time devotees of Buddhism and other religious sects have also been performing many religious rituals which make this *Dham* a cultural mosaic - a unique cultural place of heritage and pilgrimage.

Religious syncretism assimilates into a religious tradition of beliefs. It has a holistic approach encompassing people, natural environment, local belief, spiritualism, philosophy, expression, religious belief, social activities as an integral part (Nyaupane, 2018). The unique aspect of cultural heritage of this area lies in its cultural pluralism since it has multiple layers of histories and cultures associated within this. In the context of cultural heritage, it is important to explore the interconnectedness between the tangible and intangible as well as culturally and naturally formed syncretic aspects of *Pashupatinath* heritages rather than treat them as separate entities.

Various religious groups like Hindu, Kirat, Buddhist, and Jain who are religiously bounded make this statement clear (Koirala, 2051 BS). Every aspect of this holy place i.e. forest, river, grassland, rocks, ponds, open spaces, narrow streets, caves, riverbanks, temples, river, premises, inns, rest houses or crematoria areas etc. are all intricately interlinked with various religious and cultural values and living norms since ancient period of known history.

River Bagmati is regarded as one of the most important cultural heritages because of the water of Bagmati is directly or indirectly associated with the above mentioned cultural values of people. So, this area has become a pilgrimage site where different religious myths, legends, and stories exist and have been flourishing since the ancient historical period till today. Because of this great confluence of rich historical and cultural values it carries celestial religious stories to the social folklores which attract millions of pilgrims with incredible beliefs towards the legend that leads to pilgrimages.

As this area has an unfathomable historical and cultural legacy the belief and devotion has continued not only within one or two generation but has been continuing to present generation; it has been linked to the initial ruling Kirāt Dynasty to recently dethroned Shah Dynasty. A number of literary sources like Gopalraj Vamsawali, Bhasa Vamsawali, Kautilays Arthasastra and other sources mentioned that the Kirāts ruled in Nepal since a long time before the Licchavi Dynasty. Different literary sources mentioned that all together 28-32 kings of this dynasty, who ruled over Nepal for 1200 years. These literary sources claimed that they had developed art, architecture, culture, systematic administrative system, trade, and commerce. However, some scholars have not accepted the existence of Kirāt because of inadequate archaeological sources like inscriptions, coins, arts, architectures, and so on.

Since the Kirāt Dynasty to till date, all these ruling dynasties have built and changed many arts and architectural forms within the *Pashupatinath* premises and the value of shrines have always increased. This is why it is renowned as one of the ancient-most cultural heritage sites, and thus, a world class religious-cultural heritage destination competing to other most renowned Asian sites.

Furthermore, not only the tangible aspect, it is equally enriched by intangibility too. Since birth to death rituals, holy bath, unique procession in *Trishul Jatra* (trident procession) and other like, the *Bala Chaturdashi* (seed scattering rite in Hindu culture for the remembrance of deceased souls), the *Shivaratri* (festival related to the Lord Shiva), and many more important festivals and ritualistic activities and, devoutly believed the gateway to the heavenly abode of Shiva *Dham* have enlivened the local cultural practices which encapsulate the sense of intangible cultural heritage.

Thanks to all those great past efforts to make this area truly a place of devotion where some of the architectural wonders exist proudly, a true treat to the heritage tourists who can enjoy

a lot in this area by engaging in its historicity, legend, master pieces of art-works abundantly scattered, commanding architectures, ancient traditions, rich ethnicities, unique processions and festivals. Thus, this site is also termed as an open air museum where tangible and intangible art and heritage values are visible at once.

Shiva (God of Destruction who destroys evil and demonic forces) is believed to have a presence in some form or another at cremating grounds. The *Aaryaghat* (one of the holiest crematorial places) is believed to be the most sacred funeral ground in the Kathmandu valley. Here at this *ghat* the last walk of a dying or dead person has been taking from very ancient period but no written account of any time reference is found yet. It is located just north of the footbridge and is the site where members of the royal family and other high caste people are cremated, whereas other *ghats* are also used for general people. The *ghat* is composed of a long strip of paved stone and block of stone platforms consist as the steps to the river.

This paper is to explain the religious importance of death ritual at the *Aaryaghat*. It highlights the significance of the *Bramhanal* where holy water comes from the main sanctum of the *Pashupatinath* temple and the water is sprinkled on the dead and dying person which is ritually practiced as the person's last walk before the cremation process.

The paper is prepared based on the interdisciplinary approach. The data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. It mainly relies on site observation and field visits carried regularly from December 2019 to till date. The secondary information has been collected from books, journals, articles and internet sources. However, individual interview and commutative data are not presented in this paper.

The Kathmandu valley

The religious texts, legends and archaeological investigation mention Kathmandu valley to be a large lake before it was inhabited by man (Gutschow, 2011). The religious text, *Swayambhu Purana* explained the Kathmandu valley as a huge and deep lake called *Nagdaha* (lake of snake). The legend Bodhisatwa Manjusri made this appropriate for the human settlement by drained out the water with his sword at Chovar gorge. The myth is that he then established a city called *Manjupattan*, and made Dharmakar the ruler (Levi, 2005). Since then the valley has been a center of migration the Kirats from northern territory; and the Lichhavis and the Mallas from southern territory. This place is beautified not only for trades, pilgrimages and refugees; but also for permanent settlement by rich dynasties who brought their rich cultured administrative systems, trades, industries and traditions to add the mystic beauty of their land (Slusser, 1998).

Monuments of Nepal are blended significantly in this valley - Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhadgaun which represent an epitome of harmony in rural design of typical arts and architectures as the unique and intangible cultural heritage (Nyaupane, 2018). Settlements in the bowl-shaped Kathmandu valley located at an altitude of about 4600 feet above sea level are believed to have started around 723 BCE. The Licchavi (400-750 AD), Malla (1201-1769 AD) and Shah (1769-2006 AD) dynasties were instrumental in developing urban centers, temples, palaces or private and public houses, culture and civilization of Kathmandu valley everywhere the Bagmati and its tributaries (Regmi, 1966).

The history of the valley begins with the accounts preserved in number of chronicles, such as the *Bhashavamshawali* (Yogi, 2013 BS), the *Bhamsavali* (Yogi, 2013 BS), the *Rajvognmala* *Bamsavali* and the *Gopalraj Bamsavali* (Bajcharya & Malla, 1985) which mentioned the

Gopal, the Mahispal, and the Kirat had ruled the valley. The Licchavi period is considered as a beginning of written history of Nepal who were ruling since 5th century in Nepal (Regmi, 2007). In the Licchavi period, hundreds of monuments and art works might be created that have been mentioned in the inscription are not found in these days. However idols and the *Shivalingas* (*Trinity of Hinduism*) are still found in the various places around this valley. Furthermore, some of them are still in existence without any written inscriptions (Koirala, 2051 BS).

Malla rulers replaced the Licchavis and developed this valley as an open air museum (Regmi 2007 BS). This was the period when almost all fine arts, architectures, literatures, music, monuments, ceremonies, rituals, festivals and processions were developed which are showcased by present generation till now (Wright, 1972). The Mallas developed the craft and constructing with bricks and wood to such perfection that whether temples, palaces, the *ashram* and *Matha* (monastic or similar religious establishments in Hinduism, usually more formal and hierarchical to promote and practice Hindu religion), monasteries, private house, inns, *dharamasalas*, *Pati-Patis* are a living example operative management of public infrastructure which is also a place where people gather for several purposes like after natural calamities, processions and festivals, ceremonies, death ritual and cremation process. It is for supporting communities in these extreme to normal events and in addition to their day to day public anchors; *Akhada* - place of practice with facilities for boarding, lodging and training, and a Hindu sect for religious renunciation in teacher-student tradition were built of unique architecture which is the aesthetic value (Korn, 1976). These monuments and structures were constructed to provide the facilities for crematorial activities and to other religious perspectives.

In the Shah Dynasty (1825-2063 BS) most of the monuments, shrine, temples, ghats, and other cultural heritages had been created, developed and preserved. The Rana rulers, in Shah Dynasty period, had emphasized and renovated other numerous monuments and structures like palaces, temples, idols, *ghats* and so on. After the rise of the Rana, they imported and assimilated the style of white stucco places copying the prevalent European neo-classical architectural style (Regmi, 2007) because of their approach and relation with the then British rulers in India and their frequent visits to England and other European countries. Neoclassical architecture is the dramatic use of columns, and a preference for blank walls. The new taste for antique simplicity represented a general reaction to the excesses of the Rococo style. The exterior is built to represent classical perfection and simplicity of form. The Ranas had contributed a large number of architectural constructions in many areas (Tiwari, 2013). For example, several *Devalayas* (small temples related to Lord Shiva) rest house, streets, gates, water wells and so on (Regmi, 1966). Due to the contribution of each dynasties, patrons, artists and common people the Kathmandu valley was enlisted as World Heritage site in 1979. The cultural heritage of the Kathmandu valley is illustrated by seven groups of monuments and buildings which display the full range of historic and artistic achievements for which the Kathmandu valley holds universal outstanding value as well as makes it world famous. Due to the outstanding universal value of art works, architectures and intangible cultural heritages of the Kathmandu valley, UNESCO enlisted seven monumental zones in the world heritage site: three durbar squares, three *Naths* and one *Narayan*: Hanuman Dhoka, Patan and Bhaktapur Durbar Squares; the Stupas of Swayambhunath, Boudhanath and the temples of Pashupatinath and Changu Narayan.

The holiest place: the *Pashupatinath*

The *Pashupatinath* temple is located on the bank of sacred Bagmati River, around 4 kilometers east of the center of the Kathmandu city, particularly in 27° 42" N. latitude and 85° 21" E. longitude. "The area is 1335 m above the sea level and occupies a large physical boundary of approximately 265 hectares wide, abundant with temples, idols, stupas and open spaces" (Tandon, 2053 BS, p. 2). The *Pashupatinath* area expands from River *Manamati* to *Rudramati* where the actual religious site flourished around River Bagmati in between two rivers (Nyaupane, 2018). Remarkably, west of Bagmati is being settled by *Devpatan* (the *Devpatan* is the ancient name of the Pashupati area), the ancient cities and the east is being covered by *Shleshmantak* (playground of the Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati in the mythology) forest.

Geographically, the *Shleshmantak* and ancient *Devpatan* area rise east and westward slopes down till two rivers the *Manamati* to the *Rudramati* by creating plateaus at both sides. Though, the boundaries of the Pashupati area can be identified at present by east of the *Pashupatinath* up to the *Uttarbahini*, on the west up to the *Dhobikhola*, the *Pingalastahan* in the south and north up to the *Gaurighat*.



Picture 1: The magnificent and panoramic view of Pashupatinath temple and Nasal Chock in front of eastern gate; Photo credit : Tanka Prasad Paudel.

Hence, due to its recognition as one of the greatest pilgrimage sites of Hinduism, it also has been the common cradle of various religions that have contributed to numerous tangible heritages like "pagoda temples, *Shikhar* temples, the *Shivalaya*, *Sattals-Pati*, stupa, *Vihars*, the *Shivalingas*, masterpiece idols, *Ghats*, the *Matha*, water spouts, gates and so on" (Koirala, 2051 BS, p. 271).

Hereby, this site is not only the melting pot of various religions and societies it has been significant to the global mankind and humanity. Thus, all the rituals, beliefs, involvement and activities have created life in those tangible heritages to keep them alive centuries to centuries (UNESCO, 2006).

The sanctity and antiquity of this area is evident from the narration of the religious texts,

Himmatvankhanda and the *Pashupatipuran*. It is claimed that the Lord Shiva himself as his earthbound, enamored by the peaceful environment, the forest, the free flowing Bagmati River, plateaus and natural landscape and decided to stay in this area. It has been beautified by the jungle, hills, gorge, open spaces, small forest, river, flora and fauna, chirping of birds which are all inspirable elements that made a complete whole. In regard to the area, sacredness yogis, ascetics, devotees, pilgrims, common people, scholars, researchers, traders, merchants, visited and made it a center of religious affairs. In the course of time, inscriptions, idols, the *Shivalingas* water spouts, inns and so many tangible cultural heritages were set up making it a hub for social-religious activities (Yogi, 2013). Among such diversified destinations, it has the incredible, incomparable and exceptional importance in the world which can be termed as the focus point of Hinduism. Even the Buddhist, the Sikha and the Jain also have accorded equal importance to Lord Shiva and *Pashupatinath*.

The holy river: Bagmati

The sacred and holy Bagmati River has been worshipped by the millions of devotees. It is originated from Bagdwar on the lap of the Shivapuri hill, crossing through the Sundarijal, the *Pashupatinath*, Chovar and passes hundreds of kilometers of plain terrain to join the Ganga River in northern India. The Kathmandu valley's rivers and streams such as *Vishnumati* (*Keswati*), *Hanumante*, *Manohara*, *Dhobikhola* (*Rudramati*), *Godavari*, *Tukucha* (*Ichhumati*), *Nakkhu* (*Pravavati*), *Balkhu* (*Ratnavati*) all join Bagmati river at some point (Baidhya, 2003).

The religious text, *Himvat Khanda* also describes that if anyone bathes in the *Sangamtirtha*/*Aryatirtha* (pilgrimage site) of Bagmati river bank, the devotees obtain the merit of having performed the *Aswamedha Yagya* - ancient Hindu tradition which is one of the most royal rituals of *Sanatan Dharma* (Hindu religion) for achieving spiritual satisfaction, peace and happiness (Yogi, 2013). It is mentioned that if one bathes in this river *Sangamtirtha* (pilgrimage site of the *Pashupatinath*) during the time of solar eclipse or lunar eclipse and then offers donations, performs *Yagya* and ritualistic worships he receives millions times more merit of those pious acts (Yogi, 2013).



Picture 2: The holy River Bagmati, view from Aaryaghat; Photo credit: Tanka Prasad Paudel.

The religious text, *Brihat Samhita* mentions gods dwell where groves are near rivers, mountains and springs. The Lord Shiva and the Goddess Parwati used to come and roam in the *Shleshmantak* forest. Time to time, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parwati get disguised in many forms to roam around this forest where other gods and goddess also become delighted to settle (Baidhay, 2045 BS), slowly and steadily, a large number of devotees and pilgrims started to visit and stay in this place.

Similarly, every dynasty in Nepal has paid high importance to Bagmati River as importance given by various religious texts like *Himaavakhanda*, *Pashpati Puran*, *Swasthani Brata Katha* and so on. As a result Bagmati river bank has been developed with numerous temples, *Matha*, *Aakhada*, *Sattals* (shelter or rest house for spiritual pilgrims), *Patis*, art works of variety of architectures by all ruling dynasties. Hereby, numerous temples, inns, rest house, stupas, *Ghats*, water sprouts, wells, Ponds, *Bihars*, bridges, staircases, *Aakhadas*, *Mathas*, *Dharmasalas* and so on have been consecrated with religious-social and various other purposes (Tandan & Michaels, 2017).

The water from all these sacred monuments and religiously worshipped places mix with Bagmati River emphasizing its sacredness. In the route, Gaurighat to Tilganga there are 65 *Tirtha* (pilgrimage sites) and holy sites which highlight the importance of the river. In regard to its spirituality and holiness, surrounding vicinity is considered to be an auspicious site where Hindus perform all sacraments from birth to death and post-death rituals, prayers to the deceased soul and wishing well-being to the living and the ancestors. This is why Bagmati is considered as the most consecrated river among the Hindus and other sects as well.

The *Aaryaghat* is the main crematory site of the Kathmandu valley and the most sacred one to the Hindus due to the presence of the holy river Bagmati and the Lord *Pashupatinath* in the same place. The eastern gate straightly descends down to the banks of the holy Bagmati River where *Gangamai*, *Birupakshya*, *Mrigasthali*, *Kuruwa Sattal*, *Ghate Baidhya* with *Sattal* and two piers of the *Aaryaghat* are located at the either side.



Picture 3: Two piers of the *Aaryaghat* at the eastern gate of *Pashupatinath* temple on the banks of *Bagmati* River; Photo credit: Tanka Prasad Paudel.

Furthermore south resides the courtyard of *Batleshwori* where the terracotta *Anantadinakaran*, *Panchaganesh*, the office of Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) *Mangala Gauri* and numerous *Shivalingas*, the *Shivalaya* and shrines are situated. Moreover, further south of this courtyard another popular *Bhashmeshwor Ghat* is situated. Notably, two ancient bridges with long staircases link to *Ram Mandir* and the fifteen *Shivalayas* from where the pilgrims and foreigners can have glances and do photography at this premises.



Picture 4: The Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana constructed fifteen *Shivalayas* across of the Bagmati River at the beneath of *Shleshmantak* forest; Photo source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pashupatinath_Temple.

The sanctity is expressed by people not only for holy bath, worships, oblations but people also consider leaving their body on the banks of this river to be a very fortune. It's a belief that no matter how ignorant or sinner is a person, leaving his body on banks of river Bagmati cleanses away all his sins and shall be bestowed the abode of the Lord Shiva. Moreover, leaving body right on the *Brahmodaya tirtha* of *Triveni* (confluence) or on the *Bramhanal* has different glory. Thus to end one's life in the *Pashupatinath* area at the feet of River Bagmati is considered to be extremely glorious than ending life in other sacred spaces (Yogi, 2013 BS).

A cultural heritage destination: the *Aaryaghat*

The *Aaryaghat* exhibits an awe-inspiring feeling at the first sight to any discerning mind. The serene and green environment filled with fine art work of great temples and other monumental works suffice to impress all visitors. The symbolic sculptural art, wood and metal art works, terracotta and stone art, and truly a garden of multi-roofed temples, the most impressive *Shikhar* style *Pashupatinath* temple, traditional rest houses, stupas, monasteries and water spouts with superb art are visible almost everywhere. There are cliffs and caves usage of brick colors in the structures. It is the places where one can see a pure devotion find spiritual consciousness, salvation and a rich living cultural heritage. This whole premise is an open museum where pilgrims find a combination of religion, art, architecture and culture. This is one of the biggest sites for the religious, archaeological, pilgrimage, historical and cultural tourism (Nyaupane, 2019).

People from all over the Indian sub-continent and beyond have frequented to this place for hundreds of years. Those people throughout the time span of hundreds of years, in honor to the place, have created a complex heritage in both ways, tangible and intangible. It has great concentration of tangible heritage such as temples, idols and images, shrines, inscriptions,

inns, rest houses, *ghats*, water spouts, ritual platforms, inscriptions, *Dharmasalas* (traditionally constructed pilgrims house), *Akhadas*, sculptures, traditional streets, stairs, settlements, caves, ponds, and wells that have highly untouched and embraced by intangibility like festivals and processions, rites and rituals, dances, musical performances, oral traditions, religious belief, social harmony and traditional skills. That's why, without linkage of intangibility to tangible one is like a body without life in the eastern culture. So, it has been still proved as the tangible icons which continuously go equally with the intangibility.

Since the ancient time, the ritualistic practice, beliefs, norms and values within the devotees have created deep impressions on the tangible assets. The high degree of patience and passion devotees show in order to pay respect and devotion towards their gods and goddesses is bewildering to a non-Hindu onlooker. The devotees do not care about the extremity of weather, season, day or night, thirst and hunger, rest and sleep (Nyaupane, 2019). This extraordinary craze towards the lord has added the value in such tangible aspects of cultural expression. Hence, such sentimentality and spirituality among devotees show the unspeakable aspects of religious and cultural fervors which create intangibility within tangibility of heritages and traditions.

Deopatan is considered to be a plate of ancient death just like *Kaasi* -pilgrimage site where most of the Hindu worship and perform death ritual like the *Shradha* for the salvation of ancestor- in modern day of Banaras of India. The *Himwatkhand* mentions that those of Bagmati River will go directly to heaven on the east, north and south side of the temple flows the Bagmati River on the side of which are many religiously famous *Ghats* (Yogi, 2013 BS).

Similarly, around the *Aaryaghat* there are other equally important *ghats* like *Suryaghat* to the northern; and the *Bhasmeshworghat* on the southern side located. These *ghats* are considered very auspicious for cremation of the deceased (Yogi, 2013 BS).



Picture 5: *Bhasmeshworghat* is located on the southern side of the *Aaryaghat*; Photo credit: Tanka Prasad Paudel.

The dying one is to be brought to the banks of the river so that they can spend their last hours in a holy place, let their feet deep in the divine waters and pray for their released souls to reach heaven. Along the riverbank there are a number of inclined stone platforms, called *Ardhajal* (half-water), that are normally submerged in water.

These platforms have a special funerary significance. There are a few shrines at the *Aaryaghat* and the most important among them are the shrines of the *Gangamai* (built in 1848) and the *Virupaksha* (600 AD) situated next to the eastern stairway.



Picture 6: The temple of Gangamai and Virupaksha situated next to the eastern stairway to Pashupatinath in front of the Aaryaghat; Photo credit: Tanka Prasad Paudel.

The *ghat* is the funeral or crematoria site situated on the bank of river, the confluence of river where the last rite specially of Hindus are performed in order to burn the corpse and flow the residual ash into the flowing water. Remarkably, the reason of cremation on the bank of flowing river is done in order to gain life again and again. In Hinduism one who is born in the human form regains six more life under the sinless completion of previous life and gains salvation (Tandan, 2053 BS). Even it is supported by the religious belief, the physical body is exhausted but the spiritual body “*Aatma*” (soul or spirit / a form of an invisible energy which is neither created nor can be destroyed) remains for long run until proper funeral rites are completed. That’s why cremation by burning is essential and even need to perform various rituals till thirteen days (Tandon & Michaels, 2017). Among the first of the death rites is cremation. The word in the Sanskrit and various similar dialects is ‘*Antyesti*’ (refers to the funeral rites for the dead in Hinduism, which involves cremation of the body) which literally means ‘*The Last Sacrifice*’ (Hertzler, 1936). In Hinduism, the human body as the whole universe consists of five elements – Air, water, earth, fire and space and the last sacrifice denotes returning the body to five elements of its origins. On this last sacrifice, the body is kept on the pile of wood and then is burned. The burning is preceded by several death rites performed at the place of death and the place of cremation. Other rituals are followed by cremation.

The purifying last drop of water: the *Bramhanal*

The holy water offered to the *Shivalinga* in main sanctum of the *Pashupatinath* flows down to the *Bramhanal* (the holy water and milk offered to the Lord Shiva flowing to mix in the Bagmati river which is used as the last drop to sprinkle the dead body) which has one that is dead or going to die (Koirala, 2051 BS). Notably, Hinduism believes in rebirth so death is not the final/ultimate destination whereas, the one who is being offered holy water of the *Bramhanal* is believed to be sinless and gets rebirth again and again. Tiwari (2013) has claimed that "the triple confluence *tribeni* perceived by the Hindu at the *Bramhanal* in the *Aaryaghat* where ablutions from the *Pashupatinath* temple, and water of Bagmati and from the forest of *Mrigathali* and numerous temples of the *Pashupatinath* area (p. 62).

The main *Shivalinga*, at the sanctum of the temple is being worshipped by the holy water, milk, the *Keshar* (saffron), the *Chandan* (sandal wood), and sugar and so on. Generally, the *Shivalinga* is washed by cold water in summer and hot water in winter as the holy bath at 4:00 AM early morning every day; whereas in front of the eastern courtyard of the temple complex, water heating is installed.

Notably, after the holy bath the main priest draws the *Shriyantra* (symbolic worshipping method of the universe on the top of the *Shivalinga* at the sanctum of *Pashupatinath*) at the top of the *Linga* and starts worshipping by the *Panchamrit* for the welfare of nation and citizen. Worshipping the *Shriyantra* resembles worshipping of whole universe. Furthermore, worshipping the *Shriyantra* with the *Shakti* (power) is the special practiced in the temple. Hence, the *Shivalinga* is the representation of genitals of the Lord Shiva and the Goddess Parwati which is self-evolved the *Jyotirlinga* (self originated the Lord Shiva in the form of flame).

There are three major parts in the *Shivalinga* and they are the symbols of the Bramha- starting (base) part; the Bishnu - in the middle; and the Maheshwor - in the upper part, the trinity gods which resemblance origin, operation and destruction (Koirala, 2051 BS). This holy bath of the *Shivalinga* is flown to the *Bramhanal* and then to Bagmati River which ultimately connects to sea that vaporizes and spreads all over the universe. Even, it depicts the miniature of three world i.e. neither terrestrial nor celestial world. Moreover, it states about birth to death too.

Hereby, any corpse brought in the *Pashupatinath* area is being placed on the *Bramhanal* in order to offer the holy water as the last drop to the corpse through the process of placing the head to the *Bramhanal* then the corpse gets purified with oil, butter, shawl for funeral rite and being offered by flower, garlands, vermilion powder, incense before proceeding to burning ritual.

The *Bramhanal* is a sloped flat stone where the feet of the body is touch let to the water of holy River Bagmati. The water offered to the main shrine exists and crosses the *Bramhanal* touching the body placed there to Bagmati River. Laying the body at the *Bramhanal* and offering the holy water is considered an act of liberation for making deceased soul free from terrestrial world. Similarly, near to the *Aaryaghat Vatsaladevi* temple courtyard has a small image of the *Yamaraja*, the God of death which has been placed to signify this area as the proper place designated for death rituals (Lamsal, 2033 BS).



Picture 7: Bramhanal situated next to the Aaryaghat which is horizontal with the sanctum of Pashupatinath temple; Photo credit: Tanka Prasad Paudel.

Thus, all the bereaved relatives pay last homage at the *Bramhanal* ritual. Most tragic moment is encountered during the procession there where mourning members grieve and bid farewell with tears in their eyes.

The cremation and death ritual

The Hindus have multi-aspects of cremation whereas they mostly practice cremation with help of fire i.e. burning the corpse on the pyre. Notably, the hermits, saints and children are buried. Generally in Hindu tradition, the corpse is washed by black sesame oil and wrapped by white fabric to male and unmarried women, whereas red is used for the married women. Then the toes are tied by thread and red '*Tilak*' (vermilion powder put on forehead) on forehead is marked by the thumb. After that, the corpse is placed on the pyre facing head to north. Thereafter, the friends and relatives, well-wishers round up the corpse and sprinkle water three times and also, flower, vermilion powder are offered to the body. Here the eldest son or the made mourner or a priest takes bath and round the corpse three times. Eventually, the funeral light is lighted at the ear of the corpse and later lit the whole body. In this way, the relatives pour oil and ghee in the fire to let it burn fully. Finally, the corpse gets fully burnt and turns into ash, which is poured to the river (Hutton, 1951).

The secondary rites called *kaaj-kriya* are also performed till thirteen days immediately after the death at first, and then after six months and afterwards every year as '*Shraddha*' (respect and homage offered in the form of prayer and food to the departed souls of parents, or grandparents, or great grandparents) are performed. The changing of '*Janai*' (sacred thread worn by the Brahmin and the Chettri castes) during *Janai Purnima* (the festival of *Janai*) and '*Sorha Shraddha*' (post-death rituals carried out once a year as per the religious text/calendar) before the *Dashain* is also performed nearby *ghats*.

In this context, the Hindu scripture the *Garuda Purana* says, "there is no salvation for a man without a son". The ritual is also held on the death anniversary of the ancestor. The *Shraddha*

is performed only at noon, usually on the bank of a river or lake or at one's own house, all the *Shraddha* is done especially in that the *Tithi* which matches the day of death. It is done on the exact date of death as per the lunar calendar called *Tithi* (lunar calendar based on the moon's rotation around the Earth also is the time taken for the longitudinal angle between the moon and the sun to increase by 12° which is calculated by the priest and performed death ritual on the death day) and again during the *Sorhashraddha* (sixteen lunar day period when the Hindus worship and pay homage to their ancestors, especially through food offerings and long ritualistic performance which falls on the month of Sep-Oct that takes place before the *Dashain*).

Families may also make a pilgrimage to places like *Varanasi*, *Prayag* and *Gaya* of India or *Pashupatinath* in Nepal to perform the *Shraddha*. It is essential that the *Shraddha* is performed by the son—usually the eldest—or male relative of the paternal branch of the family, limited to the preceding three generations (Hutton, 1951).

The *Shraddha* is usually performed bare-chested, as the position of the sacred thread worn by him needs to be changed multiple times during the ceremony (Pandey, 1988). It involves the *Pinda-daan*, (food offering for demised soul) which is an offering to the ancestors of the *Pindas* (cooked rice and barley flour balls mixed with ghee and black sesame seeds), accompanying the release of water from the hand. It is followed by the worship of lord Vishnu in the form of *Kush*, a gold image or the *Shaligram* (the *Shaligram* refers to a fossilized shell used in South Asia as an iconic symbol and reminder of the God Vishnu) valuable stone and the *Yama* (God of death).

Conclusion

Thus *Aaryaghat* stands as a most revered place from all aspects of aesthetics, philosophical, and pragmatics. It offers a state of peaceful and satisfying moment of piety for the pilgrims, a thought of attaining salvation for the death aspirants and presence of one of the richest syncretic state of many yet great religious beliefs for the history, culture, and art scholars. It's the final journey of a person who takes his or her last walk to the *Aaryaghat* with a belief that their soul shall be bestowed to achieve salvation and the ultimate abode would be selected at the Shiv *Dham*.

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