

Part III

Rituals and Offerings

The display of the treasures (*bahidyah bvaṃyegu*) and the Perfect Great Gift (*samyak mahādāna*)

Gūlādharmā

The entire month of Gūlā, starting with the first day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Śrāvaṇa (late July, early August) is considered sacred to Buddhist. It is accompanied by fasting, a variety of observances and festivals. The time in summer reflects the retreat of the Buddha in the rainy season, when monks spent a month devoted to teaching the *dharma*. An essential is the daily reading of the Prajñāparamitā text, which was usually also done at Vābāhā, using an old, 12th century manuscript.

Many events take place which address the rich ritual infrastructure of Patan. Narasiṃha is taken out in procession on the fourth day of the dark moon, Kṛṣṇa's birthday is celebrated on the eighth day, and Bhīmsen is taken out in procession on the ninth day. Two circum-ambulatory processions in memory of those who died in the preceding twelve month – Gāijātrā on the first day after full moon and Matayāḥ on the second day – cover the entire urban landscape. Thousands of people join in the 12- to 16-hour-long Matayāḥ procession which makes its way by meandering in a clockwise movement, visiting some 316 places associated with Buddhism, monasteries (*bāhā, bahī*) and *caityas*. Along the continuous path which is never crossed, Buddhist households display their private treasures such as miniature *caityas* or statues.

Along the procession, Vābāhā is also visited. In the early 1990s the large Dīpaṅkara Buddha in festive garb, a small image of Buddha Śākyamuni and, placed on tiered pedestal, a 17th-century sculpture of Hālāhala Lokeśvara were exhibited in the ground floor of the Digichē. Earlier it had been an open ground floor, a *dbalā*, which also accommodated musical performances. The *bahidyah*, the deities in the possession of the monastic community, could freely be worshipped for a few days. In recent years this displaying of the deities was given up, partly because of inadequate security and the ensuing rampant theft.

A week earlier, a small image of Dīpaṅkara named Phudyaḥ is carried from Ukubāhā along two processional routes through the urban landscape while helpers collect offerings. It is the day of Pañcadān (originally called *punya jā* – boiled rice (making) merit), when husked and unhusked rice, together with sweets along with a coin is distributed by the people. Along with the Dīpaṅkara, Vajrācārya, and Śākya make their rounds collecting alms. This is one of the occasions when members of the monastic communities assume the role of monks.

Beside collective remembrance of the deceased the month also stands for individual commemoration. On the last day of the month of Gūlā, Gokaṛṇa āṣi (on the occasion of new moon), the sons perform the death ritual (*śrāddha*) for their deceased ancestors.

Vābāhā

Display of the Dipaṅkara
on the occasion of Gunipunhi.

Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
August 13, 1992



Samyak

In the month of Gūlā the Dīpaṅkara of Patan are exhibited in their respective monasteries, attracting crowds of devotees. They are brought from the sanctum where they are kept throughout the year, however stripped of their garb and ornaments. They emerge from the dark corner of the sanctum, to be seen at their own ambit.

On a second occasion, however (only every four years), they enter the public sphere to gather in the company of all other Dīpaṅkara of Patan, and of places within the former kingdom of Patan such as Cobhar, Kīrtipur, Cāpāgaon, and Bungamati and even Bhaktapur (Prasanna-śīlamahāvihāra) and Kathmandu (Itumbāhā). This gathering is called Samyak Mahādāna, translated as “The Perfect Great Gift” by Kerry Lucinda Brown.⁵⁵ It is celebrated on the 3rd and 4th days of the waxing moon of the month of Phāgun, approximately early March (for example March 7 and 8, 1992). The entire event is covered in detail by Brown, who aims at investigating “the role of art, ritual, and performance at the Samyak Mahādāna in constructing Buddhist identity in Nepal.”⁵⁶ She refers to local scholarship and its ambition to construct the historical development and the organization of the event⁵⁷ which we will not repeat here. But we recall the legendary origin of the event, as recounted by an early 19th-century chronicle.

It tells us that a descendant of the Ṭhakurīs of Nhūbāhā, a monastery located in the western quarters, opposite Būbāhā, named Bharibharāḍa (or Balibharāḍa) became poor.

“He collected balls of cow dung, stored this in his treasury and locked it.” As with a standard episode in Newar legends, his wife was curious, happened to find the key and discovered the cow dung turned into gold. Her husband praised her, saying “because of your virtue, the lord has happily provided us with wealth and riches.” The couple “praised Lord Buddha and worshipped glorious Śākyamuni Buddha residing at Bhāskaradeva-saṃskārīta Hiranyavarṇa Mahāvihāra, which was built by his ancestors. (...) He also invited all the deities of the

Buddhist monasteries of Lalitpattana, where *cūḍākarma* initiation was performed and also the *vandyas* belonging to the Buddhist *saṅghas*. He worshipped them and offered gifts. For the *samyaksambhojana* ceremony, he sent away the invitations, according to the rules prescribed in the texts, on the third day of the dark moon of Phālguna.⁵⁸ He had everyone sat at a place called Itilanha, offered them light, and performed rituals, staying awake the whole night. On the fourth day of the dark moon he worshipped everyone according to the rules. In order to have a similar *samyaksambhojana* ceremony performed regularly on the third day of the dark moon of Phālguna, he managed a lot of land. Since then, people have preserved this ceremony on that day at that place.”⁵⁹

The reference to the monastery, better known as Kvābāhā, opens up a historic perspective, because the Ṭhakurī king for whom the monastery was named, Bhāṣkara Devā, an ancestor of Bharibharāḍa, ruled from CE 1045 to 1048. We know that descendance is often constructed to endow a person or an event with the desired depth, but Bharibharāḍa may well have been a historical figure of the 12th century.

Samyak was observed at Vābāhā in March 1992. On the first day of the bright half of the moon in Phāgun a procession set out from the organizing monastery, Kvābāhā, to invite all monasteries of the city to participate in the event. On the third day (March 7), the Dīpaṅkara of Vābāhā was taken to the ground floor of the Digichē to be prepared for the procession towards Nāgbāhā, where in the very early morning of the following day 126 Dīpaṅkara and other Buddhist deities convene. The gilded head always remains fixed to the wooden shoulders of the deity. To reduce the weight, thin wooden arms are wrapped with wickerwork of split bamboo, ending as stumps on which the metal hands are fixed. The head receives the lotus crown with its feather-like ornaments (*kīkipa*), ornamental pendants, a heavy necklace featuring Kīrtimukha, and an embroidered, colourful garb. At his feet



Vābāhā
The Dīpaṅkara as it is stored in the southwestern corner of the sanctum.
Photograph anonymous, August 2021.

were displayed the Hālāhala Lokeśvara, the Lord of Poison, with the Yoginī Gīta.

Before midnight, the Dīpaṅkara was taken in procession to the Darbār Square, where all deities convened to be welcomed. In the early morning the procession continued towards the spacious courtyard of Nāgbāhā, where all deities take position in a sequence that only rarely allows for changes. The first 13 deities represent what Brown identified as the sources of the *dharmā*.⁶⁰ It starts with Vasundharā from Tāgaḥbāhā, Tārā from Cvabāhā, Karuṇāmaya (Būgadyaḥ) from Tabāhā, and ends with Tārā from Tāgaḥbāhā.

Then comes the first Dīpaṅkara on the 14th position from the first of the 15 Mūbāhā of Patan, Tāgaḥbāhā, followed by those from Dhumbāhā on the 16th and Cukabāhā on the 17th position. After the Dīpaṅkara from an unimportant branch monastery, Kulimhabāhā (18th), and the Blue-Horned Ox (19, Dvācā Āju), the Dīpaṅkara of the twelve remaining Mūbāhā (nos. 20 to 31) are positioned. It starts with the one from Kvābāhā, followed by Vābāhā, Dhaubāhā, Tabāhā, Būbāhā, Habāhā, Jyobāhā, Gujibāhā, Bhīchēbāhā, Ukubāhā, Subāhā, and Yachubāhā. Vābāhā's position after Kvābāhā's Dīpaṅkara, with small statues of the original donors, Balibharāda and his wife Tapasu at his feet, does not imply hierarchical importance. The sequence seems to have developed randomly. The long row of deities north of the Blue-Horned Ox, facing south ends with the Dīpaṅkara from Cvabār. Along the houses on the western side of the courtyard the sequence starts with the Dīpaṅkara from Bhaktapur (no. 35), which in 1992 did not come to join the event. Then comes a Brahmin from Sulimha (no. 36), a caretaker of Vāsukīnāga, a person receiving offerings for Gaṇedyah, a caretaker of Padmanāga, and five musical

instruments (No. 40, *pañcatāl vādya*) each receiving an offering. The Phudyaḥ took the 46th position as a Dīpaṅkara in miniature form, a Tārā from Vābāhā was placed on the 63rd position. The second sequence along the northern housefront was taken by craftsmen and musicians (nos. 97-103), who were also entitled to receive offerings (*dāna*). More Dīpaṅkaras from the main and branch monasteries followed until the one from Cikābahī in the 136th position. Then followed the butcher musicians (*nāykhī-* and *jhyālibājā*) and eleven of the community of untouchables (Pvaḥ). After a turn behind the stepwell the processional circuit reached the Vāsukīnāga Phalcā (no. 200), where six beggars were seated to receive offerings. After passing the Gaṇeśa shrine (207), the path led into the courtyard behind the Vāsukī Phalcā, which served as the kitchen (*bhāsaḥ*). After passing by the shrine of Kvaynā Gaṇeśa (no. 211) and a Kṣetrapāla (no. 212), three cooks (*bhani*, nos. 214-216) receive offerings and eight hearths (nos. 221-228) where rice was cooked to be offered to all deities and participants. The cooks were Suvāl Jyāpu of Mikhābāhā and Salīchēnani. The undulating circuit was completed with the arrival at the Padmanāga Phalcā (no. 233).

The sequence provided by the Samyak Organizing Committee in 2008 and 2009 listed 126 deities. It generally conforms to the sequence we listed in 1992: Phudyaḥ shifted to the 40th position, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu came last on position 125 and 126, represented only by photographs of the deities.⁶¹

In 1980 Hemraj Shakya published a list of 100 deities or recipients of offerings, including the five musical instruments (no. 97).⁶²



Vābhā
Display of the Dīpaṅkara
on the occasion of Samek.
Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
March 7, 1992

Vābhā

Display of the Dīpaṅkara
on the occasion of Samek.
Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
March 7, 1992





Vābāhā
Display of the Dīpaṅkara
on the occasion of Samek;
detail of the necklace
featuring Kirtimukha
spouting forth lotus vine.
Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
March 7, 1992

Vābāhā

Display of the Dīpaṅkara
on the occasion of Samek;
the right hand with the
varāda gesture, the left hand
in *abhaya* gesture.

Photographs by Niels Gutschow,
March 7, 1992

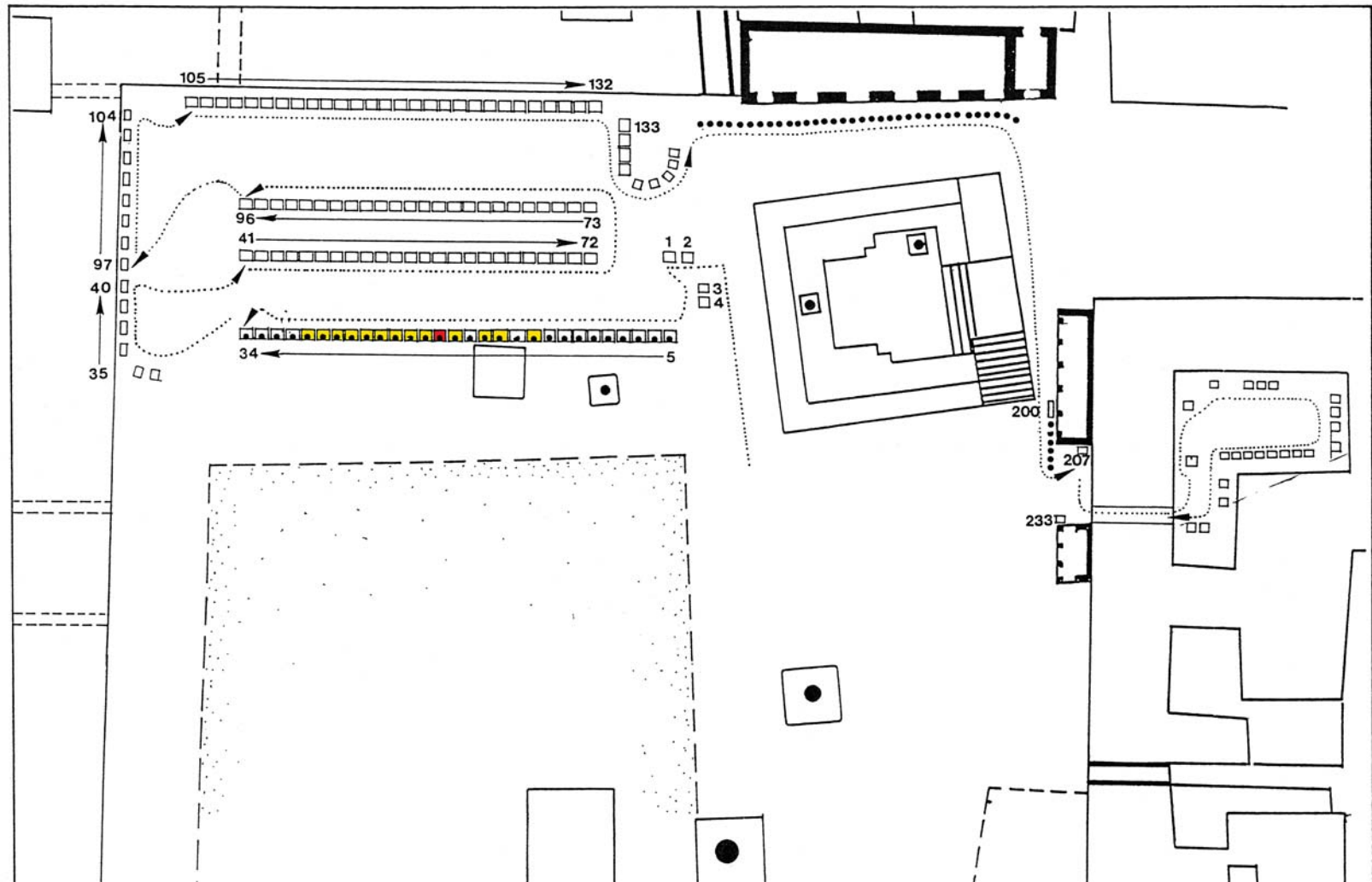




Vābāhā

The 17th-century statue of Hālāhala Lokeśvara is displayed at the foot of Dipaṅkara on the first day of the Samyak event. The six-armed, triple-headed deity, the Lord of Poison, sits in *ardhaparyāṅka* pose and holds Yoginī Gīta with his lower left hand. She is comfortably sitting with crossed knees on his left knee. Bow and arrow in his upper hands indicate his capacity to hit the poisoner.

Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
March 7, 1992



Patan

Site Plan of the Samyak Mahādāna, presenting the great gifts (*mahādāna*) to 233 deities, shrines, craftsmen, musicians, cooks, sweepers, and beggars following a prescribed sequence that underwent little change in the preceding decades.

Rendered in red the position of the Dīpaṅkara from Vābāhā, yellow the remaining 11 Mūbāhā.

Mapped by Niels Gutschow and Nutandhar Śharmā in March 1992.



Patan

The elder (*thapāju*) of Vābāhā, Amṛtarāj Vajrācārya, sits to the *bāhā's* Dīpaṅkara's right side. He occupies the 20th position in the first row of deities in the northwestern corner of the spacious courtyard of Nāgbāhā.

To his right stands the Dīpaṅkara of Kvābāhā. Next to his shoulder the eyes of the small image of the legendary donor of the event, Bharibharāḍa, can be seen.

Photograph by Niels Gutschow, March 8, 1992

Patan
The Dīpaṅkara of Vābhā
on display at Nagbhā.
Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
March 8, 1992





Patan
The Dipaṅkara of Vābhā
on display at Nāgbāhā.
Photograph by Niels Gutschow,
March 8, 1992

The ritual of offering ornaments to the shrine, the Kvāpāchē, the tutelary deity and the Nāmasaṅgītī shrine in August 2021

At seven in the morning of August 9, 2021, the first day of the waxing moon of the month of Śrāvaṇa, the priest Rāju Vajrācārya of Vābāhā started the preparation of the ritual. Rāju acted as the Ritual Officer (*betāju*) of the *bāhā* and as such he also acts in the life cycle rituals of the monastic community such as *bare chuyegu* and *āju luyegu*. The ritual of presenting ornaments to the deity of the monastery and the shrine serves as a good example of how the ritual of offering ornaments is performed. In the beginning, the priest draws *maṇḍalas* and displays different ritual objects in the main courtyard of the *bāhā*.

The collective clients of the ritual are the 32 members of the local women's group for the recitation of the Nāmasaṅgītī Sūtra. The Vajrakīrti Nāmasaṅgītī Khalah group was established in 1979 by 10 Vajrācārya, 7 Śākya, 9 Maharjan (farmer caste), and 6 Āvaḥ (caste of brick-makers and masons) women. They had decided in consultation with the priest in advance not to perform elaborate rituals for this event. They did not even ask an astrologer for an auspicious time (*sāit*) to perform the ritual because the day itself was auspicious, being the first day of the month of Gūlā which is sacred to Buddhists. The guiding motif was *lasatā*, which is a joyful offering, not tied to any specific wish.

Durgādevī Vajrācāryā, the president of the women's group, acted in the ritual as its representative (*yajamāna*). The priest started performing the ritual at nine. In the beginning, he performed Sūryasākṣipūjā, invoking the Sun as witness. Thereafter, he performed Gurupādārghya, welcoming Vajrasattva as the *guru*, Pañcagavyaśodhana, purifying a mixture of the five kinds of products of a cow, and Pūjābhāṇḍasaṅkalpa, receiving the *pūjā* plate from the *yajamāna* after taking a vow to complete the ritual.

Having received the *pūjā* plate with worship material, the priest performed the Gurumaṇḍalapūjā, the worship of

the *guru*, Kāybhāḥpūjā, the worship of a cup of sandalwood paste, Cakrasaṃvarasamādhi, the meditation on Cakrasaṃvara, Kalaśapūjā, the worship of the principal vase in which the deity is invoked and Samarpaṇapūjā, the taking a vow to offer the material to the deity.

Then the priest performed Cakrapūjā, the worship of the surrounding deities, Valipūjā, the sacrificial *pūjā* directed to pacify malevolent deities, Dhaupatipūjā, the worship of the yoghurt pot, Gogrāsapūjā, the worship of the plate of food for a cow, Sinhamhū-nhaykāpūjā, the worship of the vermilion cup and the mirror, and Kiḡaḥ Tanegu, the offering of ritual rice to all deities by the priest and all participants. The *vali* offering was discarded at the Mahākāla shrine, the leftovers of the Nirājanapūjā, and of the waving of lights in course of Kalaśapūjā, were discarded at the stone protecting the threshold (*pikhālākhu*).

After completing the ritual, the priest handed the vermilion cup over to Durgādevī, the client. All female participants took *tikā* from the cup. Thereafter, the priest handed over the ritual mirror, the client and all participants becoming aware of the omniscient face in the mirror. The priest also handed over the main vase to the client and the water from the vase was sprinkled on all as *prasāda* (blessed gift). In the end, the priest offered *tikā* and flowers to all participants.

The ritual was followed by the offering of five kinds of grains, Pañcadāna. The acting priest and the five elders of the monastic community, the Āju (also called *shavira* or *thāypā*), received these offerings (*dāna*), namely the sacred thread (*yajñopavitā*), a scarf (*khādā*), sweets (*lākhāmarī*), and an alms bowl (*piṇḍapātra*) with a coin, husked and unhusked rice, wheat, soybeans, salt, a juice packet, biscuits, an apple, and a banana. The first in the row was the acting priest, the second was Thākura Māna Śākya aged 87, the third Dharma Rāju Vajrācārya (77), the fourth Vikāsa Māna Śākya (72), the fifth Sucitra Māna Śākya (72), and the sixth Giri Māna Śākya (71). They



received a variety of offerings from the participants. Two of them were absent; Thākura Māna was ill and Sucitra Māna had joined a meditation (*vīpasana*) camp. They were represented by their caps, placed on chairs.

After completing the offering of Pañcadāna, the ornaments were installed. A 20-foot-long banner (*patāḥ*) made of brass, decorated with motifs in silver and a gold plated icon of Akṣobhya is taken to the top of the shrine of the tutelary deity, the Kvāpādyah, and fastened to the pinnacle (*gājū*). This should have been done by the priest. In this case a laborer of the Parbatiyā caste was hired. He also had to clean the roof and offer cone-shaped sweets of rice flour (*yaḥmarī*) by throwing it into the crowd in the courtyard.

A 38-inch-long banner (*patāḥ*) and a pinnacle made of brass were offered to the recently made shrine of a female deity in the form of Nāmasaṅgīti. As no icon of the deity

was available in the market, she is represented by a hexagon (*ṣatakona*) on the bottom end of the banner.

A crown, a necklace, a ritual mirror, and bowl for offering water (*arghya*), and five ornamental feathers (*kīkīpa*) of silver were offered to the smaller Akṣobhya of the Kvāpāchē shrine; the four larger ones to the large deity, installed in 1857. Five small silver *kīkīpa* were offered to Nāmasaṅgīti. At the end of the ritual a feast was offered to all participants, consisting of *bajī* (flattened rice), pumpkin, horse gram, radish and fenugreek in the form of *acār*, soup, potato, and yoghurt.

The two banners, a pinnacle, a silver crown and a silver necklace were offered by the women's group. In order to decorate the longer banner, 315 grams (27 *tolā*) of silver were donated by Dharma Rāja Vajracārya and a gilded

Vābhā

The ritual of offering a 20-foot-long banner (*patāḥ*) to the Kvāpāchē by the Vajrakīrti Nāmasaṅgīti Khalah.

Offering of Pañcadāna, five kinds of grain, to the acting priest (left), Rāju Vajracārya, and five senior members (*āju*) of the monastery:

Thakuramāna Śākya (87 years old), Dharmarāja Vajracārya (77 years), VikāsaMāna Śākya (72 years), Sucitra Māna Śākya (72 years), and Girmāna Śākya (71 years).

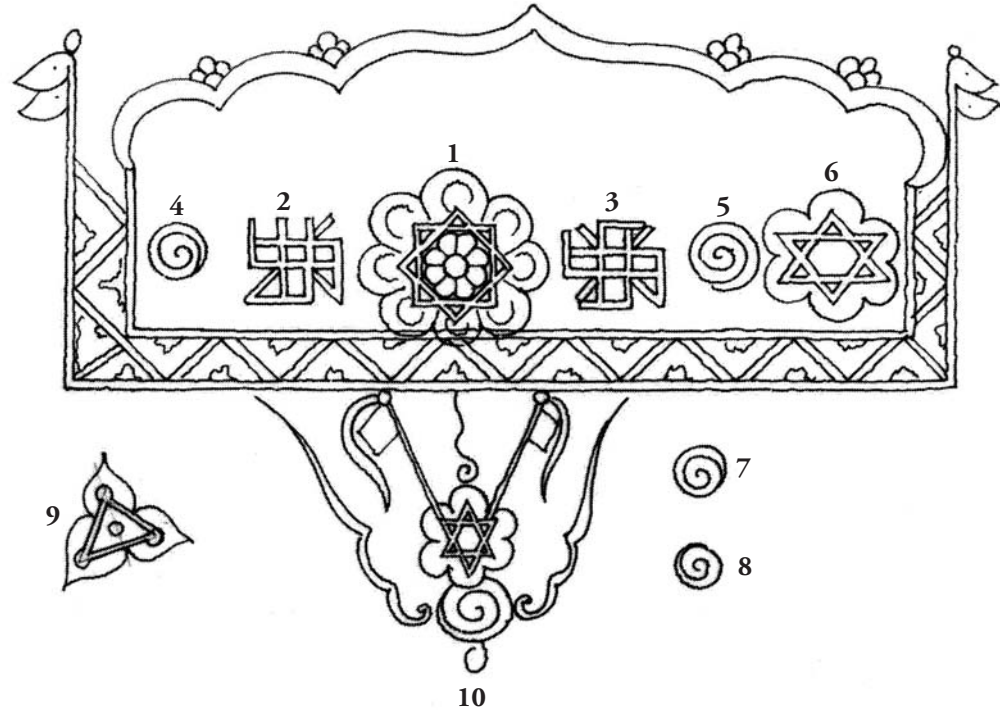
Two of these are represented by the caps in their absence, but received the same offerings.

Photograph by Nutandhar Śarmā,
August 9, 2021

Maṇḍaḥ

Diagram created and used by Rāju Vajrācārya for the ritual of offering ornaments to the shrine, the Kvāpāchē, its tutelary deity and the Nāmasaṅgīti shrine, by the Vajrakīrti Nāmasaṅgīti Khalah on August 9, 2021.

- 1 sacred vase (*kalāśa*);
- 2 a pair of small cups with yoghurt (*dhaupati*);
- 3 “cow’s mouthful,” food on a leaf (*gogrāsa*);
- 4 mirror (*nhaykā*);
- 5 main pot of vermilion (*sinhambū*);
- 6 one cone of rice dough (*gvajā*) with black soybeans as eyes (*valipatra*);
- 7 the five products from a cow: cow dung, urine, milk, yoghurt, and butter (*pañcagavya*);
- 8 a small cup with beer (*thvā*) and spells (*mantrapātra*);
- 9 an oil lamp with a cup for oil presided over by Gaṇeśa (*sukūda*);
- 10 place for offerings (*gurumandah*)



icon of Akṣobhya at the bottom end of the banner by Kalpanā Śākya. The silver mirror and a small silver ornament were offered by Durgādevī, the president of the group. The water container and the four larger ornamental feathers of silver were offered by Sacina Vajrācārya. Tirtha Kumāri Vajrācārya, Subhadra Śākya, Renu Vajrācārya, and Indu Vajrācārya offered small silver ornaments to the Buddha. Minu and Jaśmina Śākya jointly offered five

small ornaments of silver to Nāmasaṅgīti. Rāju Vajrācārya, the priest, had carved the silver ornaments free of cost.

A total of 840 grams (seventy-seven *tola* @ 1300 Rs = 1 *lakh* Rupees = 730 in 2021) of silver had been used. Moreover, the women’s group for the recitation of Nāmasaṅgīti spent about one hundred thousand rupees for the entire ritual.



Vābhā

The ritual of offering a 20-foot-long banner (*patāḥ*) to the Kvāpāchē, a banner and a finial to the Nāmasaṅgiti shrine, and ornaments to the deity, the larger and smaller Kvāpādyah by the Vajrakīrti Nāmasaṅgiti Khalah. Left: the priest, Rāju Vajracārya, 20 of the 32 members of the Vajrakīrti Nāmasaṅgiti Khalah present offerings.

Photographs by Nutandhar Śarmā, August 9, 2021



Vābhā

The ritual of offering a 20-foot-long banner (*patāh*) to the Kvāpāchē by the Vajrakīrti Nāmasaṅgiti Khalah, a women's group established in 1979.

A hired laborer had to clean the roof and affix the banner to the finial.

Photographs by Nutandhar Śarmā, August 9, 2021





Vābhā

The ritual of offering
a 20-foot-long banner (*patāḥ*)
to the Kvāpāchē; part of the
banner, the pinnacle (*gaḥjū*)
and its bottom end bearing
a gilt Akṣobhya / Buddha
Śākyamuni,

Photographs by Nutandhar Śharmā,
August 9, 2021