

## Pilgrimage Tourism of Dakshainkali

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### Abstract

*This study deals with the pilgrimage tourism in Dakshinkali, a famous Hindu temple in the southern part of the Kathmandu Valley, and the development of the region as an important pilgrimage tourism destination. This place is called Dakshinkali because the temple of Goddess Kali is on the south side of Kathmandu city. Goddess Kali as power is considered to be another form of Mother Parvati. Although Kali Devi has been established and worshiped in this place since ancient period, the importance of this place increased after the reign of the king Pratap Malla. At present, local products have found a good market because of as the number of pilgrimage tourists are increasing in Dakshainkali. Employment has also increased. Hotels and restaurants are well run. The living standard of the locals has increased as their income has increased. The increase in local government revenue has had a positive impact on the development of the Dakshainkali area. The main objective of this study is to introduce the importance of pilgrimage tourism of Dakshainkali. This article is mainly based on primary sources and also tries to make realistic by using some helpful secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** Goddess, Worshiped, Locals, Southern, Civilization & Shaktism.

### Introduction

Wandering has been a human trait since ancient period. It has continued to this recent era. Even after the beginning of civilization, people continued to travel far and wide for different purposes. Before the development of civilization, people used to move from one place to another in search of prey, but after the development of civilization, the motives of people to roam were increasing. Such objectives were to entertain, to observe the culture of people living in different places, to participate in sports, to do business, to spend leisure time, to attend conventions, to receive medical treatment, to go on pilgrimages, etc. (Bhatia, 1995). Among such various purposes, the pilgrimage tourist who go to places considered religiously sacred and fulfill their inner desires. After the development of civilization, people started writing their travel reports and memoirs while making pilgrimages to religious places. Such memoirs became an important resource for later generations (Weil, 1996). With the development of civilization, religious faith and belief in people was increasing and due to the same faith, religious tourism was also developed.

Nepal has been considered a sacred religious site since ancient period. The Kathmandu Valley has been considered as one of the most sacred religious places of pilgrimage in Nepal. Dakshinkali, a religious site in the southern part of the Kathmandu Valley, is

considered to be one of the best destinations. This holy place is called Dakshinkali as there is a temple of Goddess Kali in this place and it is located south of Kathmandu Valley (P. R. Basnet, personal communication, March 12, 2022). This Kali Devi temple is currently in Dakshinkali municipality. The municipality is bounded on the east by the Bagmati River, on the west and south by the Makwanpur district, and on the north by the municipalities of Kirtipur and Chandagiri. This Dakshinkali temple has been considered as an important powerhouse of Hindus. The Dakshinkali municipality is named after this temple (T. N. Maharjan, personal communication, March 11, 2022). This place is known as Dakshinkali because it is located in the southern part of Kathmandu Valley and there is a temple of Goddess Kali in that place. Kali is considered to be another form of Mother Parvati (wife of Lord Shiva). The objective of this study is to explore the importance of pilgrimage tourism of Dakshinkali and surrounding area.

### **Material and Method**

Qualitative research design and exploratory research frameworks have been adopted in the preparation of this study. This study is based on preliminary information and some helpful sources obtained from interviews with local knowledgeable and expert people who came in contact with the Dakshinkali Municipality in the southern part of Kathmandu District under Bagmati Province, religious sites in the area and especially surrounding in the Dakshinkali Temple. The data has been collected through interviews on the pilgrimage tourism of the Dakshinkali by attending the special festivals when more devotees arrive. The key informant for the interview has been selected on the basis of objective selection method with random sampling. In the presented study, Dakshinkali temple is only mentioned as an important destination for pilgrimage tourists.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **Location of Dakshinkali Area**

Dakshinkali Temple is one of the famous and popular Hindu shrine dedicated to Goddess Kali, "The Black One". It is situated 22 km. outside Kathmandu Valley and one km. outside the village of Pharping. There are plenty of tourism opportunities in the Dakshinkali municipality. Natural beauty, rural life, Hindu and Buddhist temples are the major attractions in Dakshinkali (Dakshinkali municipality, 2020a). Pharping hydroelectricity project completed in 1911, is also present in this area. The rural area which located near Kathmandu valley is famous for Dakshinkali temple. Many people visit the temple on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Foreign tourists either Hindu or non-Hindus come to the temple. The area is easily accessible due to the availability of buses every 30 minutes. Dakshinkali is about a 45-minute taxi ride from Kathmandu so people usually hire a taxi and pay a little bit more to the taxi driver to wait while exploring other sites (Exploring Tourism Nepal, 2020). The area is also famous as dating spots to the young. Being away from town, Dakshinkali has peaceful environment. People visit in search of peaceful environment and get some refreshment from busy life. Some people vow to Dakshinkali goddess for success. They offer animal sacrifice after their wish has been granted.

### **Jatrasand Fairs**

Dakshinkali is dominated by the people of Newar community. They have been living here from the medieval period. Some Newars like Karmacharya, Maharjan, etc. are working as priests of Dakshinkali temple. They receive offerings from pilgrims so, they have good economic status. Newari culture is rich in Jatras (special celebration with worship at the place of God or Goddess) and Festivals. As the major population of Newari people, many jatras are celebrated here. Among them Harishankar jatra, observed on last Saturday of Bhadra is a special jatra of Dakshinkali. (S. K. Maharjan, Personal communication, March 12, 2022). Similarly, Bajrayogini jatra and Gaijatra are also observed in Dakshinkali. Gaijatra runs for eight days after the Janai Purnima to Krishna Asthami festival. Gaijatra was started by king Pratap Malla in the medieval period. There are 98 houses of Maharjan who participate in the cleaning of temple area. Similarly, other festivals celebrated are Thaili Naach (dance), Dakshinkali jatra, Harisiddhi jatra, Bajrayogini jatra, etc. They have their own unique folksongs, dance and musical instruments played during different festivals. Jatras are also important economically, it bring crowds and local people get an opportunity to sell their products. Local people make 'Khuwa', which a unique food item made by milk. Among with local goods, temporary stalls are also made where handicrafts and attracting items are put on sell (P. D. Maharjan, Personal communication, April 17, 2022). Various items bought from Kathmandu are also sold and most of the local people become shopkeepers.

### **Tourists in Dakshinkali**

Most of the tourists coming to Dakshinkali area are Hindus and Buddhists. The temples and gumbas in Dakshinkali attract large number of pilgrimage tourists. The main temple, Dakshinkali is always crowded. But the number of people becomes maximum on Tuesdays and Saturdays (A. Maharjan, Personal Communication, April 18, 2022). During the nine days of Dashain, Hindus from all over the country visit the temple. Similarly, the number of Indian tourists is higher during the months of Ashad and Shrawan. But very few tourists belonging to other religions come to the temple from other countries.

### **Role of Local Self Government to Promote Tourism**

After the people's movement second in 2006, executive power which was limited to the central body was distributed among local units. The main purpose of this handover of power to local units was to identify, utilize and promote local resources. This also motivated local people to protect their religious and cultural heritages. The responsibility of collecting taxes, protecting and developing religious, archeological, historical sites was given to local administration. Thus, local administrative bodies in Dakshinkali are also actively involved in protection and promotion campaign. Office of the Municipal Executive is the main governing body of Dakshinkali Municipality. It consists of Mayor and Deputy Mayor along with other members. After introducing federal system in Nepal, power was decentralized to local level. So, office of the municipal executive is the most powerful governmental body in the study area. Similarly, Mayor and Deputy Mayor are selected by the direct voting of local people (P. Bhujel, Personal Communication, April 11, 2022). So, the representatives are more aware about the problems and possible solutions and the voice of people can be

addressed easily. Understanding the immense potentiality of tourism in Dakshinkali area, municipality has made plans on protection and promotion of religion, tourism, culture, etc.

### **Policy on Culture, Tourism and Religion**

Dakshinkali area has the potential to become a safe and picturesque, attractive tourist destination due to its abundance of biodiversity. Among the religious heritages, Dakshinkali Temple, Sheshnarayan Temple, Bajrayogini, Gopaleshwar Mahadev, Gorakhnath, Padyamsambhav Cave, Pachali Bhairav and many other temples and monasteries as well as Harishankar Jatra are equally famous in this city from religious point of view. Ush Maiya's palace, Vanasur's palace, the abode of 33 crore deities, Jankeshwari temple, Bhimsen temple, Chaukotdevi, Champadevi, Dakshin Godavari, Dakshin Manakamana, Katwal Daha, Grintara and other religious and pilgrimage places are very important heritage of the municipality (A. Maharjan, Personal Communication, April 21, 2022). A master plan will be prepared for the restoration and maintenance of religious heritage and protection of religious, cultural and natural heritage in order to enhance tourism services in the landscape. Publicity will be done locally, nationally and internationally for its promotion.

1. A policy will be adopted to encourage local Jatras and festivals in order to promote the values and beliefs of different castes, communities, religions and cultures. Necessary training and programs will be conducted for the protection and promotion of the language, religion and culture of the local indigenous people.
2. Sanitizers, masks and social distances will maintained to preserve and promote local fairs and festivals as it is difficult to celebrate local fairs and festivals due to Covid-19. Necessary arrangements will be made for the revival of culture by conducting fairs and festivals without the spread of virus infection with the participation of limited number of people.
3. As the outbreak of Covid 19 becomes normal, a policy is adopted to develop the southern urban area as an area that can benefit from the promotion of tourism activities by encouraging the private sector to develop recreational, leisure, adventure sports, footpaths, leisure areas, man-made tourist items and infrastructure. A policy of tax exemption and concession will be adopted to reduce the damage caused to the tourism business due to the outbreak of COVID 19.
4. To develop Shikharapuri city as a heritage settlement and to cooperate with the Department of Archaeology to develop the historical heritage in an archaeological manner. External investors will be encouraged to invest in tourist destinations. To attract tourists by managing the areas like Cable Car, Rock Climbing, Wire cycling, Bunzy jumping, Hiking, Home stay, etc. Pond located in the municipality will be developed as a tourist site.
5. For the archiving of tourist sites within the Dakshinkali municipality and the production of audio-visual materials, video competitions will be held in Dakshinkali Municipality and prizes will also be provided.
6. Arrangements will be made for the construction of artistic entrance gates to enhance the beauty of Pharping Bazaar. (Dakshinkali Municipality, 2020b).

### **Management Committee of Dakshinkali Area**

Dakshinkali Area Management Committee looks after 56 hectare area covering major temples of Dakshinkali. The area is full of natural beauty along with the religious importance. There are shops, restaurants, picnic spots, parking areas, etc. in the 56 hectare. (S. K. Maharjan, Personal communication, March 12, 2022). The area is famous for native and foreign religious tourists to enjoy the surrounding atmosphere and natural beauty of the area. The management committee is sustainable. It does not receive funds from the government rather sustains itself on the collected funds from parking charge, picnic spots and monthly rent from local shops and stalls.

The committee was formed by the government on the decision of cabinet in the year 1968 on the desire of then King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and then queen Aishwarya Rajyalaxmi Devi Shah. The management committee works for the development of Dakshinkali Area implementing its development programmes and generating income through various methods trying to be self-sustained without giving any burden to the government (K. Maharjan, Personal communication, April 22, 2022). The management committee brought into publication of the postage stamps having a picture of Goddess Dakshinkali on June 20, 2000.

Construction of Ministry of Physical Planning and Works was transferred management system to Dakshinkali Municipality on Oct. 2, 2020 (M. Maharjan, Personal Communication, April 22, 2022). The committee changed its name from Dakshinkali Area Management Committee to Dakshinkali Area Development Committee. The ward chairperson of No. 6, where Dakshinkali temple is located, also becomes the chairperson of Dakshinkali Area Development Committee. The committee is still self-sustained as before because the easiness policies are made by the Dakshinkali Municipality now.

Dakshinkali Area Development Committee consists of 15 committee members and 32 staffs working under it. The committee receives income from rental contract of cleaning of sacrificed animals and birds, daily rent from picnic spots, shoes and slippers keeping, donations, monthly rent from shops and stalls around the temple area, parking charges, etc. The rental charges is different for different shops and different picnic spots (P. K. Pokhrel, Personal communication, March 7, 2022). The parking charges also vary for motorcycles, cars, buses and vehicles with tourist number plates.

Any devotee or donor who wants to carry out some memorable works at the designated place must contact the committee. The committee will permit after looking into the proposal on first come first serve basis (R. Shrestha, Personal Communication, April 28, 2022). Such devotees or donors whether individual or any corporate body may record its work on inscriptions too.

### **Pilgrimage Sites of Dakshinkali Area**

Dakshinkali is an important pilgrimage destination, especially to Hindus and Buddhists pilgrims from the country and around the world. The municipality has many important temples like Dakshinkali, Seshnarayan, Bajrayogini, Gopaleshwor, etc. Additionally, there

are gumbas and idols of Lord Buddha distributed in the area. The area receives tourists throughout the year but Dakshinkali gets crowded during the main festival of Nepal, Dashain. Dakshinkali temple receives thousands of tourists during the nine days of Dashain; Ghatasthapana to Nawami (nine daya) (R. D. Maharjan, Personal communication, May, 17, 2022). Hindus consider Dakshinkali as a form of Kali. Kali is known as the Divine famine power. Locals visit the site almost every day. Although, most of the tourists visiting the site are people from Nepal and neighbouring countries like India, the heritage sites do not restrict tourists belonging to other religions. So, Dakshinkali is an important pilgrimage site of Nepal.

### **Temple of Dakshinkali**

Dakshinkali is the main pilgrimage site of the area. The name of municipality as Dakshinkali municipality is named after the temple's name, Dakshinkali. The temple is situated at the junction of two holy rivers; Poornawati and Udharwati (D. Giri, Personal Communication, May 12, 2022). The black idol of goddess Dakshinkali is at the center of the temple fixed to the wall. The idol is decorated by gold and silver metals. The first layer is golden and the outer layer is silver. The idol is not enclosed inside the walls but the temple has a roof which is supported by four metal pillars and chains. The temple is closed to the public for one and a half hours during which cleaning and pray takes place. The temple closes at 11:30 am and opens at 1:00 pm every day (B. Giri, Personal Communication, May 12, 2022). The temple has idols of Lord Ganesh and Astamatrikas. Idols from the left to right goes as, Shree Ganesh, Shree Bhramayani, Shree Maheshwori, Shree kaumari, Shree Baisnabi, Shree Maheshwori, Shree Narasimhi, and Shree Baruni. The entrance of temple has ten idols of lions, five on each side and two huge bells, one on each side. The floor and wall of temple is decorated with tiles and marbles.

The temple is situated in ward number six of Dakshinkali municipality. The temple area restricts playing other music than Bhajan (religious chanting). Bhajan involves praying to goddess through music. It involves singing and playing musical instruments (D. Giri, Personal Communication, May 12, 2022). Music itself is refreshing and attracting. But when we talk about Bhajans, they make us more religious, active and provides relief from sorrows. A separate building is made for Bhajan, which was built in 2000 AD. Sacrifice of 13 animals are given on Trayodasi of Krishnapakshya of Baishakh month and Astami of Krishnapakshya of Bhadra (thirteenth day of dark night and eighth day of full moon night). Thirteen different animals include one male buffalo, seven male goats, three sheep and two ducks (R. Timilsina, Personal Communication, May 12, 2022). Regular Puja (the act of showing respect to a deity with rituals and prayers) is performed by worshipping the deity, which includes offering flowers, fruits, foods, and retrieving the blessed Tika. People believe that if they pray to the goddess and offer sacrifice, she will assure their success and vanquish evil. People are allowed to conduct their own special pray and rituals in the temple, but they have to take permissions beforehand. People offer animals like buffalo, goat, sheep, etc. and birds like hen, duck, etc. They also offer coconuts. Rice, flower, Soybean, alcohol and meat is also offered to the main deity (S. Gurung, Personal

Communication, May 21, 2022). They also lit oil soaked wicks and ritual butter lamps in the temple premises.

### **Shaktism**

Among the different cults of Hinduism, Shaktism is also one of them. The Hindus, who believe goddess or maternal power is called Shaktism. The symbol of Shaktism is powerful, origin, destroyer or isolated power. The praying of maternal power is old tradition of human beings (P. M. Karmacharya, Personal Communication, June 12, 2022). There are many documents available from middle Europe in the age of Palaeolithic, according to which people prayed for maternal power. Some symbol or images of female power made by teeth or bone of elephants are available in Europe today (prashrit, 2014). They were made before 20 thousand years.

In Neolithic age, everyone believed in the maternal power all over the world. The images of maternal power are found in Iran, Iraq, area of Middle-West Asia and Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa of India. Parwati, Hemawoti, Rudraini, Bhawani, Uma, Vijaya, Kausaki, Mahakali, Mahalaxmi, Mahasharaswoti, Vaishnavi, Kumari, Brahmi, Maheshwori, Barahi, Narashimhi, Aayandri, Durga etc. are the famous name of Matri Shakti (maternal power) of Hindu Shakta cult (Satyal, 2002). Manjushree Boddhisatto established two maternal power deities in Dhyanochhagiri and Fullochchagiri near the Kathmandu Valley.

According to Hindu Literatures, Devi Bhagawat, Shyambhu Puran, Skanda Puran, many Shakti (power) deities were established from the early period of settlement. Many sculptures of goddesses are available in the Lichchhavi period in Nepal (Sharma, 1975). The sculpture of Bhagawoti was made by Vijayashyamini in Lichchhavi Period who was the Queen of Manadeva-I. Animals are sacrificed in the temple of goddesses (M. Ranjitkar, Personal Communication, March 27, 2022). Human were also scarified for goddesses once. But offering humans is illegal and only animals are sacrificed. In medieval and modern Nepal the Shaktism is very important cult of Hindus. There are many temples of goddesses in Kathmandu Valley and all over Nepal. Dakshinkali is also one of them.

### **Goddess Kali**

The tradition of worshipping goddess or famine power started from the pre-civilization period in Hindu society. But there is no clear mention of different names of goddess in Hindu epics. Among the different goddess worshipped by Hindus, goddess 'Kali' is one of them. The name 'Kali' was mentioned for the first time in Bhismaparva or Virat parva of Mahabharata. In Mahabharata, Kali is known as the goddess with the interest in meat and animal sacrifice. Purans (religious books) have also described on Kali (M. Ranjitkar, Personal Communication, April 12, 2022). According to religious documents of Hindus, goddess Kali is a form of Parvati (wife of Lord Shiva). According to Markandya puran, Kali is the name of a tongue among the seven tongues of Fire. Kali is worshipped as fierce goddess. Kali is also prayed as goddess of death.

The tradition of worshipping Kali became more common after the Mahabharata period. Many religious texts were prepared describing her glory. Mahakaal Samhita, Kaalgyan, Kalothhar, Bhadrakali Chintamani, Kali yamal, kali kalpa, kali bishaltantra, kali tantra, etc. are some of them. In India, the practice of worshipping Kali is maximum in Bengal. Similarly, the tradition of worshipping Kali is going on in Nepal from the ancient period. In Nepal, different forms of Kali is worshipped. Siddhakali, Guhyakali, Bhadrakali, Mahakali, Shamsankali, Dakshinkali, Dantakali, Rakshyakali, etc are some of them (Chhetri & Khatiwada, 1997). Idol of Kali is made black in colour and the tongue is carved out to lick blood. The figure has raised eyebrows and red-deep eyes. She is carrying sword, skull and headgear/necklace. She has tiger's hide as clothing and her roar is threatening the whole universe (Slusser, 1982). People in Kathmandu consider Kali and Chamunda as same goddess. Kali is considered as the goddess who sit, stand and dance on corpses. Generally, goddess Kali is believed to have eight hands (S. Garg, Personal Communication, March 27, 2022). As people believe goddess Kali to be related with the dead, her idol is built near mortuary. Portraying the fierce form of Kali in idols is a unique sculpture art of Kathmandu valley. Among them, the idol of Dakshinkali is an excellent example.

Generally, people worship Kali on Saturdays. Dakshinkali is one of the important goddess for Hindus but as the idol is established on the bank of river, Dakshinkali to be a local deity (Slusser, 1982). In other places of Kathmandu valley, five different forms of Kali is worshipped. They are Bhadrakali, Kankeshwori, Swetkali, Luchvalu ajima and Raktakali. In Dakshinkali temple, along with the separate pray to main goddess, Astamatrika and Nawadurga are also worshipped (M. R. Ranjitkar, Personal Communication, May 12, 2022). Astamatrika are Shree Bhramayani, Shree Maheshwori, Shree kaumari, Shree Baisnabi, Shree Maheshwori, Shree Narasimhi, Shree Baruni, Shree Kankeshwori and Nawadurga are Sailaputri, Bhramacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Bageshwori, Kaumari, Mahagauri and Siddhidatri. Worshipping Kali as Bankali is also an old tradition of Kathmandu valley. Lichchhavi script found on an idol of Kali discovered from Bankali area suggests that tradition of praying of goddess Kali existed in Lichchhavi period (Slusser, 1982).

### **Priests**

There are three different categories of priests in temple. The main priest comes from the Karmacharya family. The current main priest of Dakshinkali temple is Prakash Man Karmacharya (A. Maharjan, Personal Communication, April 18, 2022). He is leading as the main priest for 12 years. The post is limited only to the Karmacharya family which is passed down from the father to their offspring. The heir is selected by the mutual agreement in the family or working in turns is also accepted if more than one sons want to become the main priest of the temple. The to be main priest has to take Dikshya (ritual learning) from his father (current main priest) before getting into the position. The other category of priests is Bhandare. The post belongs to Maharjan family. Maharjan are considered the security of Lord Dakshinkali. There are about 60 families of Bhandare. Every family serves the temple for six months in every seven years when their turn comes. The third category of Priests is

Pode who look after the cleanliness (S. Thakuri, Personal Communication, March 22, 2022). Priest are not provided with external monetary support. They fully depend on the offerings made by pilgrimage, visiting the site. The priests also have to look after Harishankar jatra that takes place in the month of August. During the Harishankar jatra and Gai jatra, Ponds are cleaned and the workers and provided with tiffin by Bhandares of Dakshinkali temple by their own expense.

Before Nepal became a republican country, the King was supreme commander of the country. The kings of Nepal were Hindus and highly devoted to Kali. Priests of Dakshinkali temple had to take the Prasad (sacred food) from Dakshinkali temple to the royal durbar (S. Aryal, Personal Communication, April 22, 2022). They had to travel all the way to the Palace by foot. But after the kingship was abolished from the country the trend ended. The temple gets too crowded during special occasions like Dashain (R. Ranjitkar, Personal Communication, March 27, 2022). So, management of the crowd, security of the pilgrimage visitor and cleanliness of temple area is very important. Dakshinkali Area Management Committee in co-ordination of other organizations looks after the management of Dakshinkali temple and other surrounding temple.

### Conclusion

The Dakshinkali Temple, located 22 km south of the Basantapur Darwar Squire in the Kathmandu Valley, and its surrounding area is an important place for pilgrimage tourism. Due to this temple, a lot of pilgrimage tourists come to this region from domestic and abroad. Due to the development of such pilgrimage tourism, the products of the local people living in this area have been widely sold and distributed. There is good trade in nuts, milk and milk products, maize, soybeans, sugarcane, etc. Especially more Hindu pilgrimage tourists visit this area. The local administration or Dakshinkali municipality has a big role in the development of religious tourism in the region. Religious tourism in the region has been organized through the formation of Dakshinkali Area Management Committee for the protection of temples, devotees and their belongings, cleanliness of temples, protection of valuable idols of temples and management of worship. As in other monasteries, only Hindus are allowed to enter the area but all religious people are allowed in Dakshinkali so there is a significant influx of other religious people in this area. Due to such various reasons, Dakshinkali area has become an important pilgrimage tourist destination.

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