

Donation of a Residential House to Shikhamu Bahāḥ

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Abstract

Situated at the southeast corner of Basantapur ḍabalī in Kathmandu, a small shrine and stone caitya, collectively referred to as Basantapur Bahāḥ or Deśasumantra vihāra by certain scholars. However, the origins of these designations lack scholarly citation. The structural integrity of the site remained robust until the seismic earthquake of 1990 V.S. An inscription on the shrine's eastern exterior attributes its establishment to Bhavani Śaṅkara Baniyā's residence. Bhavani Śaṅkara Baniyā initiated the installation of an Akṣobhya Buddha image within his dwelling in 866 N.S. Another likeness of Akṣobhya Buddha found placement at Rāj Kula Bahi. Along with this philanthropic act, Bhavani Śaṅkara stipulated the annual worship of Kvāpādyah at Rāj Kula Bahi on Kartika Purnima, financed by the income from his endowed properties. Post-donation, the property seamlessly merged into Sikhamu Bahāḥ, a subsidiary branch of the larger religious complex, subsequently known as Baniyā vihāra. Unfortunately, the seismic event of 1990 V. S. left the structure in ruins, with no subsequent reconstruction efforts. Sole remnants include the preserved Akṣobhya images and the enduring caitya.

Key Words: Akṣobhya Buddha, Baniyā Bahāḥ, Basantapur Bahāḥ, Rāj Kula Bahi, Sikhamu Bahāḥ

Introduction

In the southeast corner of Basantapur ḍabalī in Kathmandu, a stone Buddha statue is positioned facing north. This singular-faced representation exhibits two meditative eyes and is characterized by a pair of hands, with the right hand forming the *Bhūmisparśa mudrā* and the left hand open, resting palm-up on the lap. Prominent attributes encompass a unique *uṣṇīṣa* positioned at the topknot of the head and elongated earlobes. The upper body is draped in an *Uttarāsaṅga*, while the lower body is adorned with *antaravāsaka*, displayed both feet, seated in *Vajaparyāṅkāsa* upon the *padmāsana*. The Buddha image is enshrined within a small sanctum embellished with modern tiles on its outer wall. The roof of the sanctum embraces a gently sloping roof, bell-shaped structure from white plaster. Topped with a petite yellow pinnacle, this architectural feature amplifies the aesthetic appeal. Crowned by a small yellow pinnacle, this architectural element enhances the visual aesthetics. The entrance is secured by iron railing door leaves affixed to wooden pillars, allowing a clear view of the Buddha image even when the door is closed. Adjacent

to the entrance gate, on both sides, stand portrayals of the principal disciples of monks in a standing position.

Located in front of this sanctum is a stone *jalaharyuparisumeru caitya* on the northern side. Constructed with a square plinth above the square ground plan and a quarter round, the stupa bears a carved vajra on its fourth side. Positioned above the square plinth is the *viṃśatikona* plinth, and further above is the *jalahari*. Within the central portion of the *jalahari*, a *nāga* is adorned with its head and tail attaching each other facing north. An eight-petal lotus is placed above the *jalahari*, featuring four *Tathāgatas* on its four sides. On the *Padmāsana*, intricately carved lions occupy each of the four corners, while the *caturmahārājā* is positioned in the middle, with Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the east, Virūḍhaka in the south, Virūpākṣa in the west, and Vaiśravaṇa in the north.

On top of it, Akṣobhya Buddha is positioned in the east, Ratnasambhava Buddha in the south, Amitābha Buddha in the west, and Amoghsiddhi Buddha in the north. Above these Buddhas, additional representations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are depicted in the four directions of the bell shape on *viśvapadmāsana*. Above it, the bell shape, a semicircular dome, cubic *harmikā*, *bhagi*, *halipāṭa*, *trayodaśabhuvana*, *āmalaka*, *uṣṇīṣa*, and *ratna* are successively situated. The dimensions of this caitya measure 2 feet 8 inches in length, 2 feet 8 inches in width, 5 feet 4 inches in height, and 5 feet 4 inches in circumference (Bajracharya, 1119). The ground is adorned with paved stones.

Discerning the categorization of the site as either a *vihāra* or a temple complex poses a challenge, given the absence of distinctive elements characteristic of either structure. Despite regular foot traffic in the area, a discernible lack of reconstruction is evident. Critical details, such as the foundation date, benefactors, and the frequency of daily or annual worship activities, remain undisclosed. As a result, this paper endeavors to elucidate information pertaining to the founder, the historical establishment, and the existence of regular religious observances. Inquiries into the site's classification, the identity of its founder, and historical, religious and cultural engagements are systematically undertaken. The neglect of this site has been evident, both from governmental agencies and the public. The question arises as to why it has gone unnoticed. This paper seeks to address various aspects of the site's neglect, with the primary objective of uncovering the truth about its history and current condition. No matter whether it is a *vihāra* or the temple construction, it is essential to protect and promote it through reconstruction. Preserving our past heritage is a matter of national pride. Therefore, this paper focuses exclusively on researching this heritage.

Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design embedded within a historical framework with an analytical research approach. Data for this inquiry is sourced from two distinct sources: primary and secondary. Primary sources encompass available inscriptions, observational records, unpublished documents, and interviews conducted with local inhabitants and subject matter experts. The selection of individuals for interviews is dependent on their demonstrated expertise in the relevant field. Similarly,

Secondary sources employed published books, articles, and personal collections. The analytical method is systematically applied in the composition of this research work to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the gathered data.

Finding

Basantapur ḍabalī was not an open area prior to the earthquake of 1990 V. S. Several houses had existed since the reign of Jaya Prakash Malla, with one notable dwelling being the Bhavani Sankar Baniyā house. In this house, Bhavani Śāṅkara Baniyā established an image of Akṣobhya Buddha on Phālguna śukla in 877 N. S. Unfortunately, the image was stolen in 2065 V. S. The locals replaced it with a new Buddha image. It is a small white shrine at the southeast corner of Basantapur ḍabalī. An inscription on the eastern side outer wall attests to the fact that Bhavani Śāṅkara Baniyā consecrated an image of Akṣobhya Buddha in his house, providing concrete evidence of its association with him. The inscription further notes that he also consecrated a similar image at Rājakula Bahi and generously donated many of his properties to this Bahi. Rājakula Bahi, a branch of Sikhamu Bahāḥ, thus became the beneficiary of Bhavani Śāṅkara Baniyā's donations, turning them into Sikhamu Bahāḥ properties. As the members of Sikhamu Bahāḥ started worshipping the Buddha statue in his house, it acquired the name vihāra instead of personal house. Consequently, his residence came to be known as Baniyā vihāra. Basantapur is also referred to as Basantapur Bahāḥ due to being a Baniyā vihāra located in ḍabalī. Despite some scholars suggesting the name who Deśasumantra vihāra, no documented evidence has been found to support this claim. Hence, the basis on which some scholars say it is Deśasumantra vihāra remains unclear.

Discussion and Analysis

This heritage belonged to a vihāra and was named Basantapur Bahāḥ, Deśasumantra vihāra, or Baniyā Bahāḥ by John K. Locke (Locke, 1985). Notably, he does not provide sources for the names Basantapur Bahāḥ and Deśasumantra vihāra. Hemraja Shakya's *Boudha Vihāra va Grantha Suchi* in which he has listed Sanskrit name "Deśasumantra Mahāvihāra" and common name "Basantapur Bahāḥ" in the list of vihāras of Kathmandu at number 47. (Shakya, n.d.). Ratnakaji and Vijaya Ratna Bajracharya in their book *Nepal Deh ya Vihāraya tah cah* mention the Sanskrit name "Deśasumantra" and common name "Basantapur Bahāḥ" in the list of vihāras in the periphery of Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa Mahānagara (Bajracharya 1103 N.S.). Mary Shepherd Slusser (1998) writes a key to the vihāras, with names of the chief eighteen vihāras prominent in Kathmandu in *Nepal Mandal* Vol. II; the sanskrit name Deśasumantra and the newari name Basantapur Bahāḥ are listed in 51. John K. Locke provides names the works of Hemaraj Shakya, Ratnakaji, Bijaya Ratna Bajracharya and Mary Shepherd Slusser. They did not provide specific sources for "Deśasumantra Mahāvihāra" and "Basantapur Bahāḥ". Their list contains only names without description. The absence of sources for these names prompts the question: why does they write these names? John K. Locke has written about these writers and their books in the preface of his book *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal*. However, John K. Locke has provided some information about Deśasumantra vihāra.

There is confusion regarding the location of Basantapur vihāra. Currently, a caitya exists in the northeast corner of ḍabalī, while the Akṣobhya Buddha and the caitya are situated in the southeast corner of ḍabalī. According to vihāra vāstu, there should be an image established in the main sanctum of the vihāra. However, a Buddha image is not visible in the northeast corner of ḍabalī. Therefore, a vihāra must be in the southeast corner. The Saṅgha of members of the Śrīkhaṇḍa Tarumula Mahāvihāra or Sikhamu Bahāḥ of Maru tole claim that this vihāra was branch of Sikhamu Bahāḥ. Even before the great earthquake of 1990 V. S., there were six vihāras, including five branch vihāras and Kumari vihāra, located in the current Basantpur ḍabalī within the territory of this vihāra (Bajracharya, 2060 V. S.). John K. Locke (1985) also mentions that the Vajrācārya of Sikhamu Bahāḥ still performs as a traditional ritual. In this context, it is an extension or branch of Sikhamu Bahāḥ. Before the earthquake of 1990 V. S., the five-branch vihāras of Sikhamu Bahāḥ, located in the present Basantpur ḍabalī, were in good condition. Subsequently, after the great earthquake, the Saṅgha members of vihāras might have been relocated and demolished by the government. However, the remnants of vihāra still persist to this day (Ranjitkar, 2075 V. S.).

Even now, there is a caitya to the east of Basantpur ḍabalī. This caitya was within the compound of vihāra. This vihāra was termed 'Basantpur vihāra'. After the earthquake of 1990 V. S., the vihāra was not be reconstructed. According to the Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition, the kulaputras of Śrīkhaṇḍa Tarumula Mahāvihāra must circumambulate the chaitya, while performing the pravajyābhiṣeka function for the purpose of entering the Saṅgha. This vihāra was known as Basantapur vihāra (Rajendra Man Bajracharya and Manju Sri Bajracharya. *Personal Interview*. 1st June 2018). But John K. Locke mentions that Basantapura vihāra was in the southeast corner of the ḍabalī. Aakasha Bajracharya has written John Locke's information. She adds the local belief that Basantapur Bahāḥ was donated by the Baniyās to the Vajrācāryas of Sikhamu Bahāḥ. Unfortunately, the Bahāḥ's structure was demolished in the earthquake of 1990. On top of that, the Ranās did not allow its reconstruction. Consequently, only Kvāpādyah remains standing today (Bajracharya, 2022).

The only inscription, located in the eastern direction of the outer wall, inscribed in Pracalita script and Nepalbhasa. Due to the indistinct and entirely erased letters in the lower segment of the inscription, additional details have escaped our comprehension. Thus, some of the information are erased, the paper could not explain in fact information. There is no reference to the Deśasumantra vihāra, Basantapur Bahāḥ and Baniyā Bahāḥ in the upper half of the inscription.

The inscription inscribes:

१. --वज्रसत्वअक्षोभ्याय ॥ सौंदर्यकामोपम : ॥ गाभीर्योभि
२. -विलसति प्राद्रा प्रतापे रविः भुपेन्द्रमस्तु जयप्रकाश नृपति ३
३. ----- वुतादृश महाराज्ञ विजय राज्ये ॥ दानपति काष्ठमण्डप
४. -सिक्वमगुडि सतिम्ह छेया धर्मात्मा बनिया भवानिशंकर व-
५. -निम्हसेन स्वइच्छान थओ छेंस ३ वजासन अक्षयोभ्य शारिपुत्र

६. --प्रतिमा दयकं प्रतिष्ठा होमादिन याडा संवत ८६६ फाल्गुण शु
 ७. ल्क मासि कुन्हु जुरो, कार्तिक शुक्ल नवमि कुन्हु ३ राजकुरबहिरिन
 ८. अक्षोभ्य प्रीतिं घण्ट ग्व ७ थओत नामन सालिक म्हं २ दुन्ता थ्वते सक
 ९. रा धनयात फाल्गुण अमावस्या श्री ३ सूर्यग्रास महापर्व बेलास, क्व ख
 १०. बुरो ९ चुर ३ क्वखदोर गा थ्व बुरो ४ चुर ३ मार बुरो १ छेखा ५ पाता
 ११. ६ केव खा ३ थ्वति बुया वरसासन शुक्ल नवमि कुन्हु राज व
 १२. हिरिस श्री ३ क्वाचपाल महा - छा वे चिकं पु १ ३
 १३. मजक पचा

It mentions that during the reign of Jayaprakash Malla, two righteous persons, including Bhavani Śaṅkara Baniyā near house to Śrīkhaṇḍa Tarumula Mahāvihāra of Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa, performed homa pūjā by installing Akṣobhya and Śāriputra images in their house on the day of Phālguna śukla in the year 866 N. S. On the day of *Kārtika śukla navamī* in the year 867 N.S., they also installed Akṣobhya Buddha and two statues in Rājakula Bahī. Later, on the day of *Phālguna amāvāsya*, on the occasion of the solar eclipse, they donated all their wealth, 9 *ropanī* 12 *ānā kwokhadola* or field, 1 *ropanī* and 12 *ānā*, five houses, plots for six houses and 3 *keba* (garden). He has expressed the desire that *Kvāpādyah* of Rājakula Bahī should be worshiped on the *Kārtika śukla pūrṇimā* every year, using the income generated from these fields.

This inscription indicates that this building was the residence of Baniyā Bhavani Śaṅkara. The two righteous individuals referred to are likely he and his wife. On the day of *Phālguna śukla* in the year 866 N.S., both of them established the Akṣobhya Buddha and Śāriputra in their house. This reveals that the current statue of Akṣobhya Buddha and the stupa in the southeast of Basantapur ḍabalī was not part of a vihāra but rather the private residence of Bhavani Śaṅkara Baniyā. They also installed the Akṣobhya Buddha, and it is possible that statues of themselves were placed in Rājakula vihāra or Lāyku Bahī on *Kartik śukla Navami* of 867 N. S. Additionally, they made significant donations, including several fields, five houses, and plots for six houses, seven *ghantās*, and a garden, all dedicated to the worship of the main deity, Rājakula Bahī. Furthermore, they requested that *kwapa dyah* of Rājakula Bahī should be worshiped on the *Kārtika śukla pūrṇimā* every year.

John K. Locke (1985) also mentions that the local name of vihāra is 'Baniyā vihāra' because it was constructed by Baniyā and a family of Tuladhar are settled there. Although the inscription does not indicate the Basantapur vihāra or Deśasumantra vihāra, the member of the Sikhamu vihāra say Baniyā vihāra. John K. Locke also mentions that the Newari name of vihāra is 'Baniyā vihāra' because it was constructed by Baniyā and a family of Tuladhar are settled there. Baniyā is the trading class Tuladhara. He also writes that the vihāra might have been constructed to serve as the *dyah pālās* of Sikhamu Bahāḥ by the Tuladharas for their own residence. The inscription does not show that it was constructed to serve as the *dyah pālās* of Sikhamu Bahāḥ by the Tuladharas for their own residence. The inscription doesn't indicate that it was built to function as the *dyah pālā* of Sikhamu Bahāḥ for the Tuladharas' personal residence. Instead, the inscription states that

Baniyā Bhavani Shankar owns his house. That is why John Locke's guess is not correct. The inscription suggests that the owner was Bhavani Shankar Baniyā, possibly along with his wife. Both individuals adorned their home with images of Vajrasattva and Akṣobhya Buddha. The recent Buddha image is confirmed as Akṣobhya Buddha's due to the presence of a carved vajra and two elephants on the pedestal. These carvings provide compelling evidence of the symbolic representation of Vajra and the elephant, which are associated with Akṣobhya Buddha. This study posits that Bhavani Śāṅkara and his wife may have been childless. Consequently, they had decided to donate their entire wealth and property to Rāj Kula Bahī.

Before Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the Kathmandu Valley, a *samyak dāna* was offered every 4 years in Kathmandu. Since his time, it had become a custom to make *samyak mahādāna* in the enthrall every 12 years. It is a tradition for the Baniyās of this vihāra to offer *sakha ti* to Dipankara Buddha and other Buddhist deities during *Samyak Bhojan* (Shakya, 2036 V.S.). It is proven that he believed in Buddhism and was a donor in his lifetime.

After the donation of this vihāra, the members of Sikhamu Bahāḥ began worshipping the Buddha image in the Baniyā household. Eventually, the house came to be known as Baniyā vihāra. Over time, it underwent a transformation and was officially renamed Baniyā vihāra, replacing its earlier association with the Baniyā's house. This indicates that John K. Locke referred a 'Baniyā vihāra' based on the accounts provided by the local residents. The vihāra's location in the Basantpur area is called Basantpur vihāra. However, there is no formal name evidence available to explain why it was also referred to as Deśasumantra vihāra.

According to Rajendra Man Bajracharya (1133 N. S.), there were six vihāras, including five branch vihāras and Kumari vihāras, in present-day Basantapur ḍabalī before the 1990 earthquake. We can find photos of Malla's period houses at Basantapur ḍabalī, taken by an unknown photographer before the 1990 V. S. earthquake. It suggests that these houses were possibly donated by Bhavani Śāṅkara Baniyā to Sikhamu Bahāḥ. Perhaps, there were six houses; five plots and three *kebas* behind these houses, which were donated by him. After the donation of all these assets, they became the property of Sikhamu Bahāḥ. Even today, members of Sikhamu Bahāḥ assert that the houses in this ḍabalī belong to Sikhamu Bahāḥ. Locals say that Basantapur Bahāḥ or Baniyā Bahāḥ was gifted by the Baniyā to the Vajracharyas of Sikhamu Bahāḥ. The houses are demolished from the 1990 earthquake. Askasha Bajracharya writes Ranas did not permission to reconstruct these buildings.

The Akṣobhya Buddha of Baniyā's house was stolen in 2065 V. S. The headless Buddha image found in Rāmghāta after two-three months of the incident. Kamala Bajracharya, daughter of Chandra Kumar Bajracharya, chief Cakreśvara of Sikhamu Bahāḥ, who was member of the same vihāra have sent to Prahari Vritta Jana Sewa to examine of the headless Buddha and it was proved that it belonged to the same spot at that time. The chief Cakreśvara was ill, but he wished to new image re-established instead of headless Buddha image. But he was expired after the image was stolen. According to kamala Bajracharya,

she commissioned the new Buddha image for Bhinche Vahāla in Lalitpur at a cost of Rs. 65,000/- /- (Sixty-five thousand rupees). Upon completion of the Buddha image, she attempted to reinstall it at its original location. However, the Sudhāra Samiti of ward no. 23 did not permit the installation at that time. After the image was stolen and a year had passed, the Kathmandu Municipality, under the leadership of this committee, provided Rs. 1,00,000/- (One lakh rupees) to carve a new Buddha image and installed it. The responsibility of *jivanyāsa* of the image by Kamala Bajracharya's family, guided by the family's guru (Kamala Bajracharya. *Personal Interview*. 20 June 2018). It shows that the present statue was re-established in 2066 V. S.

The houses were demolished after the great earthquake; Ranas did not give permission to reconstruct these buildings. Subsequently, the area turned into an open space or public place. After the increase in the number of schools in Nepal, they began constructing schools in public places. In this context, Nava Adarsa Lower Secondary School was established in 2015 in the southern part of Basantapur ḍabalī. The adjacent building served as the Kathmandu contact office of Mahendra Sanskrit University (now Nepal Sanskrit University).

Conclusion

Currently, there is no daily worship taking place in this place. The absence of religious and cultural activities is attributed to the moving of the kulaputras associated with this place. However, Kamala Bajracharya says that she conducts regularly pūjā only on *aṣṭamī* and *pūrṇimā* of each month, along with occasional cleaning. According to her, she learned from her father that daily morning and evening rituals, including lighting the lamp, used to be performed. Despite being referred to as a branch of Sikhamu Bahāḥ by the members of Sikhamu Bahāḥ, no religious or cultural activities have been conducted at the place as a vihāra. Subsequently, Bhavani Śaṅkara's donated houses perished approximately one hundred and fifty years later. His donated statue of Akṣobhya Buddha was also stolen, and a new one was installed. Consequently, his history is erased; there is only one inscription. The establishment of the Jalaharyopariyu caitya in front of the image remains a mystery, as there is no information about its creator or the time of its establishment. Therefore, the area of the small temple of Akṣobhya Buddha in the southeast corner of Basantapur ḍabalī is not a vihāra; It is a private house donated to the Sikhamu vihāra.

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