

THE ROLE OF ICONOGRAPHY IN THE RESTORATION OF LAXMI-NARASIMHA TEMPLE

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Abstract

The Laxmi-Narasimha Temple, originally built in the 14th century on a square base with a two-tiered roof, holds significant historical and cultural value. In the 16th century, the temple underwent renovation, during which a semi-basement was added at the southeast corner of the lower plinth. This section houses a shrine to Tole Ganesha, an important figure which still has deep social and religious relevance for the local community. Photographic evidence from 1912 shows the temple in a severely deteriorated state, with only one storey remaining, marked by beautifully crafted central and side windows (ga-jhya). The temple was completely destroyed in the 1934 earthquake, leaving only the base structure (lakanshin) near the central entrance. The temple was reconstructed as a single-storey building with corrugated metal (CGI) roofing and metal-grilled doors on all four sides. This reconstruction was carried out in 1986 under the initiative of King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth II. Further reconstruction work was later undertaken by Bhaktapur Municipality, in coordination with the Users' Committee, heritage conservation experts, and engineers from Khwopa Engineering College and Khwopa College of Engineering. The restoration process involved studying several similar heritage structures as case studies and relied heavily on historical documents, remaining artifacts, traditional knowledge, and expert consultation. A reconstruction proposal by the late Surendra Joshi, a draughtsman involved in the Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP), also played a key role. This paper focuses on the importance of traditional iconography in restoring cultural monuments and discusses the challenges faced during the reconstruction. It also draws from interviews and literature reviews to explore various iconographic figures essential to the temple's design especially for door portals, struts, windows and tympanum. The Laxmi-Narasimha Temple serves as a model example of heritage restoration, especially in situations where historical details are incomplete or unclear.

Keywords: Laxmi-Narasimha, Iconography, Bhaktapur, Reconstruction, Vishnu

1. Introduction

Laxmi Narasingha Temple is one of the rare temples in the Hindu nation of the world with strong and majority of Hinduism. Hindus consider this temple very sacred and respected as it is dedicated to Laxmi and Narasingha in single roof. It is two-tiered temple reconstructed in the traditional Nepali style of Temple architecture, standing on three plinths. This temple was reconstructed with less

historical evidences by the technical team from Khwopa Engineering College and Khwopa College of Engineering and Heritage Section of Bhaktapur Municipality along with Users committee group and carpenters and masons. As the temple have limited evidences and undergone various changes, research was done collecting various documents and articles from Bhaktapur municipality, the historian, artisans and local people.

Originally, Laxmi Narsingha temple, situated at southern part of Taumadhi Square at Gahiti, Bhaktapur, was built in 14th century by King Jayasthiti Malla(1380 A.D-1425 A.D), which was later renovated by King Jitmitra Malla (1673 A.D-1696 A.D) (Munankarmi, [n.d.](#)). During renovation,

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<https://doi.org/10.3126/jsce.v13i1.93266>

he further added Patal Ganesh under lower plinth in south east direction (Dhaubhadel, 2078). The temple was found in dilapidated condition before 1934 earthquake. The photograph before 1934 A.D (Fig. 1.) is only the latest record found where the central portal is flanked by Ga-jhya(window with small deity). After 1934 earthquake, for the occasion of royal visit by Queen Elizabeth II in 1986 AD in Bhaktapur (Fig. 2.), the reigning king at that time King Birendra reconstruct the temple to single storey with CGI sheet roof covering over the top which was the existing condition before the recent reconstruction.

Different similar temples of Narayan within the Kathmandu valley and Kavrepalanchowk were carried out by the team to know the carving details that are found in the respective temples. The main objective of the study was to identify the concepts of woodcarving and iconography that were used in different elements of temples particularly for door portals, windows and struts. Collecting numbers of researches and evidences and finally the carving work of carpenters shaped the structure.



Figure 1: Laxmi Narsingha temple before 1934 A.D (in the right) Source: <https://www.bhaktapur.com/old-bhaktapur/>

2. Methodology

The reconstruction of the Laxmi Narasingha Temple was guided by a comprehensive and multidisciplinary methodological approach that integrated both traditional knowledge and modern documentation techniques. The study involved literature review, field surveys, measurement drawings, photography, and detailed documentation to record and analyze the temple's architectural and iconographic characteristics. Consultations were carried out with conservation architects, historians, artisans, and relevant authorities to ensure cultural and historical accuracy in the reconstruction process. Archival sources,



(a) Before reconstruction



(b) After reconstruction

Figure 2: Before and after reconstruction of Laxmi-Narasimha temple

municipal records, and oral histories collected from local people, historians, and artisans were crucial for gathering contextual information, as the temple had limited historical evidence and had undergone several modifications over time. The proposal prepared by the late Surendra Krishna Joshi during the Bhaktapur Development Project served as an important reference document. The reconstruction project was implemented with technical support from the Heritage Section of Bhaktapur Municipality, Khwopa Engineering College (KhEC), and Khwopa College of Engineering (KhCE) in collaboration with the Users' Committee. Several case studies of similar Narayan temples within the Kathmandu Valley and Kavrepalanchowk were conducted to compare architectural proportions, wood carvings, and iconographic details. The case study selection was based on architectural resemblance, historical period, and shared iconographic elements.

3. Architectural Description

The temple follows the traditional Nepali style of temple architecture, characterized by its square plan, three plinths and two-tiered roof structure. As the temple is in sloppy land, the rear side of the temple at south east corner is 3.2 m below the upper plinth level, which accommodates space for the Patal Ganesh Shrine. The main sanctum (Garbhagriha) is centrally located, accessible through the stairways from the west which is guarded by pair of lions, Garuda and Mahankal, and surrounded by circumambulatory path that allows devotees to perform ritual around the deity. The sanctum has three paneled door on all four sides flanked by two blind windows (Ga jhya) on either side. The less decorative doors are installed in all the four directions of main sanctum. The sanctum is

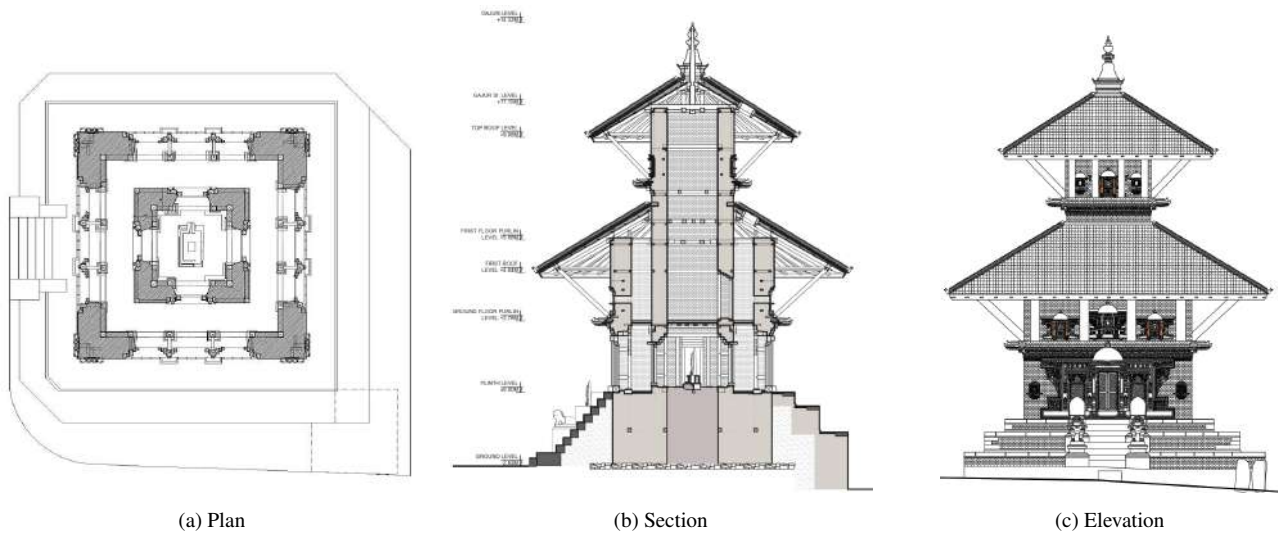


Figure 3: Architectural drawings of Laxmi-Narasimha temple

three storied. The top two storey have three windows on each side, the central one larger than the 2 side windows. The elevation of the temple exhibits balanced proportions, with the lower level defined by intricately carved wooden windows and struts, while the upper tiers reflect the distinct rhythm and hierarchy typical of Newar temple design. The reconstruction employed locally available traditional materials such as brick, timber, and stone, complemented by lime surkhi mortar and traditional joinery methods. Skilled carpenters revived ancient woodworking techniques and carved decorative motifs, ensuring authenticity in both construction and detailing.

4. Iconography Study and Wood Carving Analysis

Iconography plays a vital role in Nepali temple architecture, serving as both a spiritual language and a visual narrative that connects devotees. The reconstruction of the Laxmi Narasingha temple also emphasized the revival of iconographic elements through detailed studies of architectural elements such as struts, windows, door frames (portals) and tympanum. Each of these architectural elements carries symbolic meaning- struts depicting deities and celestial beings, windows representing protection and enlightenment, door frames illustrating the transition between the sacred and human world, and tympanum is the jewel on the top of the door representing a deity inside. To research on carving details and placement of dieties, the team visited different temples which are discussed below on case studies:

4.1. Literature review and Case studies

To better understand the intricate wood carving techniques used in temple architecture, comparative studies were conducted on several similar Narayan temples located within the Kathmandu Valley and Kavrepalanchowk. The primary objective of this study was to identify the wood carving concepts applied to various architectural elements such as doors, windows, bilampus (decorative struts), and more. As part of this research, technical committee members from the Heritage Section, Khwopa Engineering College and Khwopa College of Engineering along with historian Dr. Purushottam Lochan Shrestha and master wood carver Mr. Balam Shilpakar visited several Narayan temples for documentation and analysis. During the case study, initial site visits were conducted at several Narayan temples in Bhaktapur, including Changu Narayan, Laxmi Narayan, Dwarikanath, the Hanumanghat premises, and Wakupati Narayan. These visits focused on documenting the details of the struts and windows. Subsequently, the Laxmi Narasingha Temple at Nara Devi, Kathmandu was studied in detail, particularly for its struts and torana (ornamental gateway) features. Additional research was carried out at Ichangu Narayan Temple to gather further relevant data. In Patan, temples such as Char Narayan, Laxmi Narayan, Krishna Mandir, and the Lun Hiti within palace area were visited to collect information specifically related to the avatars of Narayan. Furthermore, field studies were conducted in Kavre district, covering sites such as Panauti, Sesh Narayan at Dhulikhel, and Thanapati Narayan at Banepa. These visits focused on analysing struts, windows, and other architectural details associated with Narayan temples. Some of the related cases are described in tabular format below in Table 1.

Table 1: List of case studies

S.N.	Temple Name & Location	Period / Date of Construction	Architectural Style & Features	Key Iconography / Deities	Remarks / Significance
1	Thanapati Narayan Temple, Banepa (Kavrepalanchok)	Believed to be built between 4th–7th century (Licchavi period)	Two-tiered pagoda-style temple with elaborate wooden carvings and sculptures	Depictions of various Hindu deities and mythological scenes; stone sculptures of Garuda, lions, and Vishnu motifs	Managed by local Guthi of Bhote Marga in Layaku; features a square sanctum (Garbhagriha) and rich carvings from Puranas
2	Ichangu Narayan Temple, Nagarjun	Originally from 5th century, rebuilt in 18th century	Two-tiered pagoda structure; plain windows with Gwonga Kwo and Bhailakwo elements; decorated struts	Laxmi-Narayan in seated posture; Narayan holding Shankha, Chakra, Padma, and Gada	One of the four principal Narayan temples of Nepal; features painted and carved struts and miniature statues of deities
3	Laxmi Narasingha Temple, Naradevi (Kathmandu)	Date not specified (historical Newar period)	Traditional Newar-style temple with tiered roof and intricate wooden carvings	Dedicated to Laxmi and Narasimha	Worshipped by both Hindus and Newar Buddhists, reflecting the syncretic culture of the Kathmandu Valley
4	Changunarayan Temple, Bhaktapur	4th century (Licchavi period)	Oldest Hindu temple in Nepal; typical Newar architectural form	Vishnu (Changunarayan); inscription of King Manadeva (464 CE)	One of the most important Vishnu temples in Nepal; associated with the ancient cowherd legend
5	Char Narayan Temple, Patan (Jagat Narayan)	Built in 1566 A.D.	Square plan (6.62 × 6.63 m), height 10.6 m; four portals; restored after the 2015 Gorkha earthquake	Hindu deities and cosmological symbols carved on windows	Restored by KVPT, World Monuments Fund, and the U.S. Embassy (AFCP); symbolic carvings on restored windows
6	Panauti, Kavrepalanchok (Triveni Ghat Area)	Temples mostly from 15th century or earlier	Historic Newar town with multiple Hindu and Buddhist monuments	Ten Avatars of Vishnu (each with eight hands); Krishna Narayan shrine	Colorful depictions of Vishnu avatars in Triveni Ghat Sattal; representations of demon-slaying episodes

5. Findings

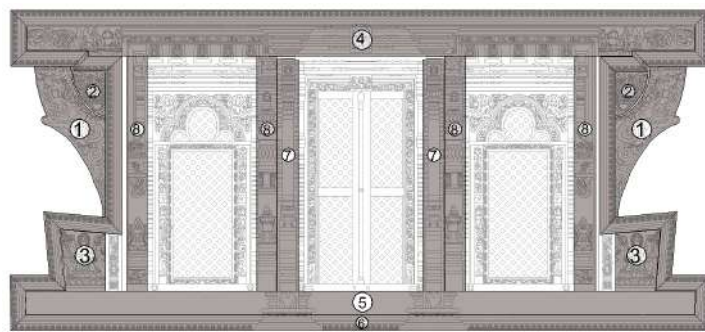
5.1. Door Frames (Portals)

The doors in Nepalese temples are always in odd number and symmetry which acts as loadbearing elements. The portals consist of interior door frame (Duchu) and exterior door frame (Pichu), which are joined together by wooden nails called chuku. The exterior doorframes are intricately carved besides providing support to the facade, whereas the inner doorframes are for structural purposes binding inner and out wall making it monolithic. All the motifs and figures carved in the exterior doorframes has its own meaning and identity. There are different names for the different parts of exterior frame such as Gwonga kwa, Bhailakwa, puratwa, Kulan, Toran, Lakashi, Taang, Mubaha, Hacchibaha as shown in Fig. 4.

There are certain design guidelines applied in ancient temples in each and every member. In case of wall bracket (Gwonga kwa), in early 15th century, the wall brackets are occupied by the pair of river goddesses as

Ganga and Yamuna supported by a mythic aquatic creature called Makara. But these river goddesses are seen replaced by the incarnation of Vishnu in Vaisnav temples in 16th century while by the mid nineteenth, Astamatrikas or four-armed female deities with aquatic association were seen. (Gutschow, 2016). The Bhailakwa usually consists of God Bhairav on either side of the portals maintaining symmetry below Gonga kwa. The puratwo are the edge bands that are found around the portals. Various images can be seen carved in the portals of different temples that were carried out during the case studies which are shown in the Table 2.

Astamatrikas are the eight mother goddesses and are considered as the protector of Kathmandu Valley. The Asta matriakas typically includes Brahmayani, Maheshwori, Kumari, Bhadrakali, Barahi, Indrayani, Mahakali and Mahalaxmi. These goddesses are allocated in 8 different directions. Brahamayani is placed in the east, Barahi in the west and Mahakali in the north. The other five are assigned directions according to the guardians or Lokpalas



1. Gwongakwa/ Yako or wall bracket
2. Yakokwa/ Dyokwo
3. Bhailakva
4. Lapu/Taang
5. Lakashi/ Kharu
6. Puratwa
7. Toran Tham
8. Mubaha
9. Hacchibaha

Figure 4: Design of door frame or portals of Laxmi Narasingha temple

Table 2: Different images carved on different parts of portals of case studies.

S.N.	Name of Temples	Number of Doors	Image carved on Wall Brackets (Yako)	Image carved on quarter round panel (Dyokva)	Image carved on Bhailakva
1	Thanapati Narayan Temple	1 no. (west)	Incarnations of Vishnu	Lord Surya on either side	Two avatars of Vishnu
2	Seshnarayan Temple	1 no. (west)	Incarnations of Vishnu	Unidentified	Bhairavas
3	Changunarayan Temple	4 nos.	Eight avatars of Vishnu	Unidentified female deities	Divine aspects associated with Vishnu
4	Char Narayan Temple	4 nos.	Unidentified female deities	Versions of Lord Shiva and Vishnu	Bhairavas
5	Radha Krishna Temple	4 nos.	Aṣṭamātrikā	Stories of Krishna, Indra, and coronation scenes	Incarnations of Vishnu
6	Wakupati Temple	1 no. (west)	Incarnations of Vishnu	–	–

of those directions: Agni for southeast (Maheshwori), Yama for south (Kumari), Nairitya for the southwest (bhadrakali), Vayu for the northwest (Indrayani) and Isana for the northeast (Mahalaxmi) (Blom, 1989). Similarly, the direction and placement of Astamatrikas for the case studies were also studied (Table 3).

On the basis of literature review, case studies, interview and carpenters, the 4 portals were carved in all 4 cardinal directions of Laxmi Narasingha Temple while the main entrance is the west. Moreover, these portals were carved in reference to the portals of Dwarikanath or Radha Krishna Temple located at Bhaktapur Durbar Square as the architectural feature and the deity residing inside both are the incarnation of lord Vishnu. All the carvings, stories representations are taken from this temple. The wall bracket or Gongakwa features Astamatrika, similar to the Radha Krishna Temple, but the direction and placement of Astamatrika vary, differing from the Radha Krishna Temple, as indicated in the literature review and interviews conducted with historians. The Astamatrikas here are also occupied with their attributes along with their mounts. The bracket features Makara, cloud foliage, Vidhyadhara along with leaves of trees with animals on it. The western portal

features Bhadrakali on Garuda (right) and Bramayani on a goose (left), the Northern portal Kumari on a peacock(right) and Maheshwori on a bull(left), the Eastern portal, Varahi on a peacock like bird (right) and Mahalaxmi on a corpse (left), the southern portal, Mahakali on a lion (right) and Indrayani on a bird like creature (left). The dyokva on this temple also related to the one available on the dyo kva of Radha Krishna temple. Similarly the Bhailakwa also features the incarnation of Vishnu with Garuda.

5.2. Struts

Struts, locally known as Tundal or Bilampu in Newar architecture, are one of the most distinctive and decorative wooden elements in Tiered Temple of Nepal. Structurally, struts serve the purpose of supporting the overhanging roofs by transferring the load of the roofs to the vertical load bearing walls. They project upwards and outwards from the base of the cornice to meet the overhanging roofs. However, struts are highly significant as iconographic and artistic components that visually shows religious and cultural values.

Each strut is typically carved with intricate figures of deities, celestial bodies, or mythological scenes. Struts can

Table 3: Direction and placement of Aṣṭamātrikās in literature review and case studies

S.N.	Aṣṭamātrikās	Literature Reviews				Case Studies					
		According to Rao (1916), Blom (1989) & Rupamandan		According to Historians		Char Narayan Temple		Changunarayan Temple		Radha Krishna Temple	
		Direction	Placement	Direction	Placement	Direction	Placement	Direction	Placement	Direction	Placement
1	Brahmayani	North	East	Left	Right					East	Right
2	Maheshwori	South	East	Right	Left					East	Left
3	Kumari	South	South	Left	Right	unidentified female dieties		Eight Avatars of Vishnu		South	Right
4	Bhadrakali	North	South	Right	Left					South	Left
5	Barahi	East	West	Left	Right					West	Right
6	Indrayani	East	West	Right	Left					West	Left
7	Mahakali	West	North	Left	Right					North	Right
8	Mahalaxmi	West	North	Right	Left					North	Left

be classified into two groups according to their position in the temple: 1. Side struts and 2. Corner struts. Side struts are usually between windows and are even in number, forming odd bays. These struts consist of gods and goddesses in various postures and colors mostly related with the god enshrined in the temple (Dangol, 2011). Corner struts lie in the four corners of the temple. The corner struts, also known as Kunsal (an amalgam of bird and beast) in Nepali are larger and wider than other struts.

The central deity, Laxmi Narsingha is the statue of the Lord Narsingha with Goddess Laxmi on his left hand symbolizing divine protection and balance between strength and compassion. Therefore, the struts must depict the incarnation of both Lord Bishnu (lower roof) and goddess Laxmi (upper roof).

Image of Vishnu is considered as Narayan which is generally represented in three postures i.e standing, sitting and reclining. The standing image is generally known as sthanaka-murti, sitting image is as Asana murti and reclining image is known as sayana murti (Rao, 1985). In Nepal, the image of Vishnu has either two arms or four arms. The Vishnu image carries Chakra, Shankha, gada, Padma and incarnation of divinity are known as avatar. Vishnu is born among men to improve their well-being and to protect the world from demons.

The several case studies on different types of Narayan temples gives broad image on Vishnu and its incarnation. The different incarnation of Vishnu is identified on the basis of their attributes and their mounts which are described below:

- I. Matsya -fish head or fish body
- II. Kurma -tortoise head or tortoise body
- III. Varaha – pig head with human body
- IV. Narasimha – lion head with human body
- V. Vaman- three legged human figure or a dwarf
- VI. Parshuram – man with an axe
- VII. Ram- man with bow and arrow
- VIII. Balaram- man with Basuri
- IX. Buddha
- X. Kalki – man riding horse yet to be born on earth

Vishnu's incarnation is found in sequence in the case of the Sesh Narayan temple of Dhulikhel, the painting on the wall of Triveni Sattal of Panauti. But these chains are mixed up in other temples like Changunarayan temple of Bhaktapur, Charnarayan of Patan. The concepts applied in each are every element of temples is somewhat similar, but the design of the incarnations is found to be totally different. For instance, the Matsya avatar found in Changunarayan is different than that of Panauti and Dhulikhel. The Matsya avatar in Changu consists of a fish head with a human body, whereas the fish body with a human head is found in the case of Dhulikhel and Panauti. A similar case is applied to the Kurma avatar. In addition, the Varaha avatar in all the temples is seen with a pig's head with a human body, and Narasimha can be seen with a lion's head with a human body, tearing the Hiranyakashyap's chest. Foreword, the fifth Vaman avatar can be seen as a dwarf carrying an umbrella and a kamandalu in the case of Hanuman tirtha premises and in the Krishna Mandir of Patan. The Vaman avatar with one leg touching the Balirajas's head, one leg stretched, and the third leg upright, straight postures in case of Changunarayan, Charnarayan, Sesh Narayan, Panauti triveni complex, and in a manuscript collected in National Archives. Similarly, the man holding an axe known as Parshurama can be noticed in all the sites that is visited by the team members. Alike the man with a bow and arrow commonly known as Ram and the image with plough, Buddha, and Kalki riding over a horse can be seen in sequential order in the case of Seshnarayan, Panauti, and the Manuscript of National Archives. Though all the incarnations are found in bilampus of Changunarayan temple, these orders are mixed up in every two alternates Bilampus in the lower level.

On the basis of literature review, interviews and case studies, the attributes for the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu were also listed out as shown in Table 4.

In this way, a total of ten struts were finalized; however, the temple required sixteen struts in a single tier. To address the need for six additional deities, an interview was conducted with historian Mr. Binod Raj Sharma,

Table 4: Attributes and mount of incarnation of Vishnu

S.N.	Name	Upper Right Hand	Upper Left Hand	Lower Right Hand	Lower Left Hand	Mount
1.	Matsya	Chakra	Shankha	Gada	Padma	Fish
2.	Kurma	Chakra	Shankha	Bar	Abhaya	Tortoise
3.	Varaha	Chakra	Shankha	Padma	Gada	Boar
4.	Narasingha	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Shankha	Man-lion
5.	Vamana	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Shankha	Dwarf
6.	Parashuram	Ankus	Pasha	Bana	Dhanus	The angry man
7.	Rama	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Dhanus	The axe man
8.	Balarama	Gada	Ankus	Padma	Shankha	Flute
9.	Buddha	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Shankha	Garuda
10.	Kalki	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Shankha	Horse

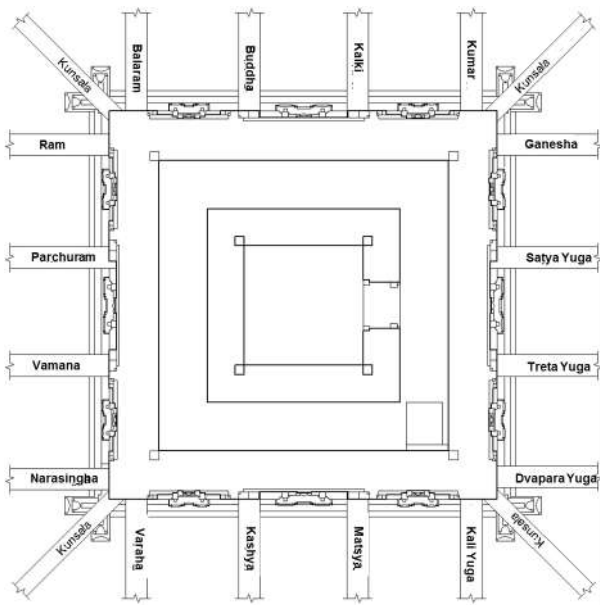


Figure 5: Position of deities in struts of First floor level

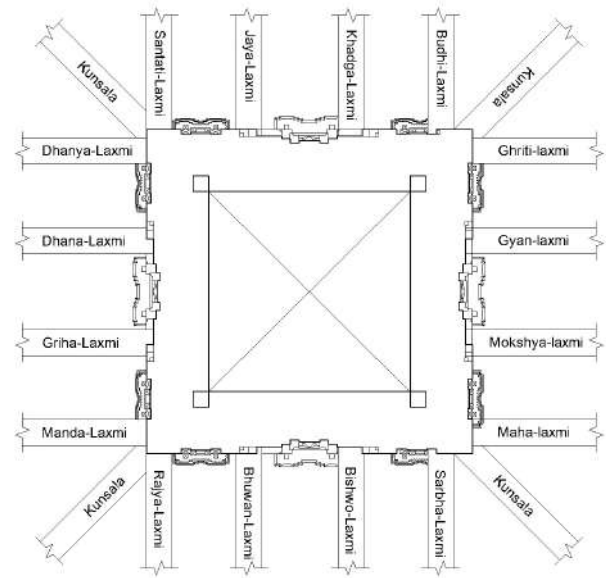


Figure 6: Position of deities in struts of Top floor level

who suggested incorporating not only the ten avatars of Vishnu but also representations of the Narayan from four Yugas (ages)- Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga. He further advised placing Lord Ganesh at the beginning and Kumar (Kartikeya) at the end of the sequence. According to his recommendation, the deities were arranged in a clockwise order, beginning from the eastern façade with Lord Ganesh, followed by the four forms of Narayan representing the Yugas, then the ten incarnations of Vishnu, and concluding with Lord Kumar. To ensure iconographic accuracy, additional interviews were conducted with Mr. Krishna Ram Chitrakar, a traditional painter (Chitrakar), who provided detailed sketches and interpretations of the four Yugas of Narayan. The final carvings were executed by Mr. Balram Shilpakar, a

skilled carpenter, who translated these iconographic studies into intricately carved wooden struts. This collaborative process between historians, traditional artists, and craftsmen ensured that the reconstructed temple maintained both authentic iconographic meaning and artistic integrity.

Similarly, based on the conclusions drawn from interviews and case studies, it was decided to incorporate the sixteen manifestations of Goddess Laxmi on the roof of the upper floor (second tier) of the temple. Accordingly, sixteen distinct forms of Laxmi were placed in alignment with traditional iconographic references. These include Sarva-Laxmi, Viro-Laxmi, Bhuvan-Laxmi, Rajya-Laxmi, Manda-Laxmi, Griha-Laxmi, Dhana-Laxmi, Dhanya-Laxmi, Santati-Laxmi, Jaya-Laxmi, Khadga-Laxmi, Buddhi-Laxmi, Kirti-Laxmi, Gyan-Laxmi, Mokshya-Laxmi, and Maha-Laxmi.

Table 5: Attributes of twenty-four incarnation of Vishnu

S.N.	Vishnu Name	Right Bottom	Right Top	Left Top	Left Bottom
1	Basudev	Gada	Shankha	Chakra	Padma
2	Keshav	Kamal	Shankha	Chakra	Gada
3	Narayan	Shankha	Padma	Gada	Chakra
4	Madhav	Gada	Chakra	Shankha	Padma
5	Purushotam	Chakra	Padma	Shankha	Gada
6	Adhojayaj	Kamal	Gada	Shankha	Padma
7	Sankarshan	Gada	Shankha	Kamal	Chakra
8	Govinda	Chakra	Gada	Padma	Shankha
9	Bishnu	Kaumodaki Gada	Padma	Shankha	Sudarshan Chakra
10	Madhusudan	Chakra	Shankha	Kamal	Gada
11	Achyut	Gada	Padma	Shankha	Chakra
12	Upendra	Shankha	Gada	Chakra	Kamal
13	Pradhumna	Chakra	Shankha	Gada	Kamal
14	Tribikram	Gada	Shankha	Chakra	–
15	Narasingh	Chakra	Kamal	Gada	Shankha
16	Chyanardan	Kamal	Chakra	Shankha	Kaumodaki Gada
17	Baman	Shankha	Chakra	Gada	Padma
18	Shridhar	Kamal	Chakra	Gada	Shankha
19	Anirudda	Chakra	Gada	Shankha	Kamal
20	Hrishikesh	Gada	Chakra	Padma	Shankha
21	Padnam	Shankha	Padma	Chakra	Gada
22	Damodar	Kamal	Shankha	Gada	Sudarshan Chakra
23	Hari	Shankha	Chakra	Padma	Gada
24	Krishna	Shankha	Gada	Padma	Sudarshan Chakra

Scale and Proportion of the struts

Strut is generally divided into three portions: Top, Middle and Bottom portion with respect to its carving. The top and bottom portion are usually different from the middle portion as they are less carved. The top portion consists of tree branches with heavy foliage hanging down and serves as a background of the main deity (Dangol, 2011). The base of the strut is carved with the shape of rocks, foliage or the separate scenes related with the main image of the struts. This portion consists of Yakshya, Gandharvas, erotic scenes, life styles or other deities etc. in the case studies of different temples. To determine the appropriate proportion and dimensions of the temple struts, the team conducted a detailed study of various struts displayed at the Woodcarving Museum in Pujari Math, Dattatraya Square. Through careful observation and measurement, the proportional relationship between the top, middle, and bottom sections of the struts was established. The analysis revealed that the middle section typically constitutes 50% or more of the total length, forming the main visual and iconographic component while the upper portion—about 30% of the total length—features carved motifs of tree branches with dense foliage and the lower 20% includes figures of Yakshas and Gandharvas, completing the symbolic composition. Based on these findings, the final strut design was developed. The head

carpenter, Mr. Balam Shilpakar, prepared detailed hand drawings for two sets of struts—measuring 9 feet and 7 feet in length, 16 numbers of each—for the respective roof tiers. These designs were then meticulously carved by the team of traditional craftsmen, maintaining both proportion and iconographic authenticity.

5.3. Windows

The windows are placed at the centre of temple and axially symmetrical in plan. Most common windows used in temple is Gajhya. It is a blind window with Gongakwo and Bhailakwo at either side of window frame (Fig.7.). The windows of Narayan temple are almost the same design; decorated with various carvings of gods and animals. The carvings of God are mostly dedicated to incarnation and avatar of Narayan. The lower level of temple consists of three windows and uppermost with one window. In case of three window, the central window has highly decorated carving of Narayan and animals. Similarly the adjacent windows are carved with animals and small in size with compare to central one. In some case, the carving of deity (dyo) at central opening whereas opening found in adjacent windows. The torans with incarnation of Narayan are found in mostly windows of temple.

In the Gajhya (central window), the principal

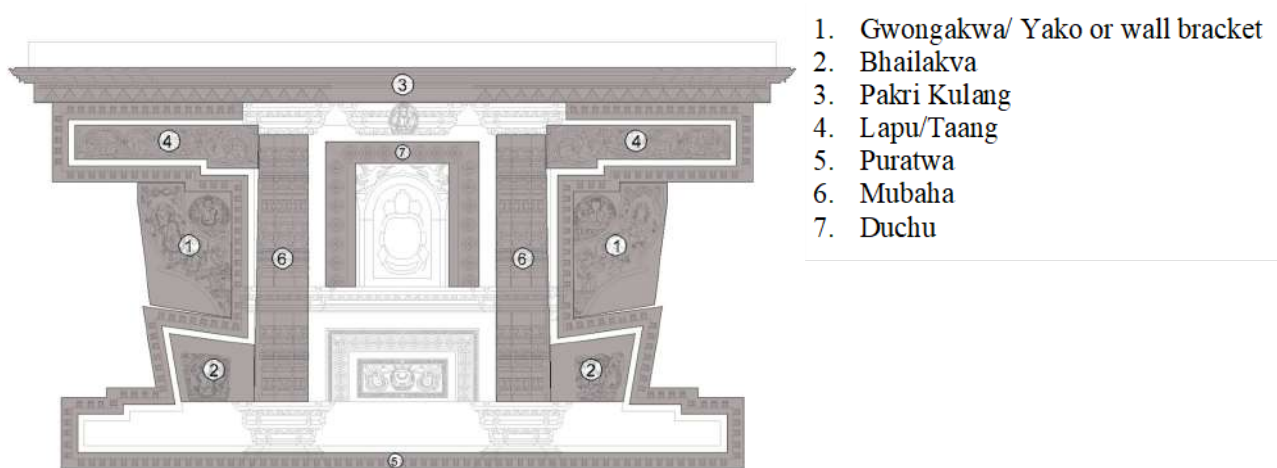


Figure 7: Design of a Ga: Jhya for the first floor

deities—Basudev, Sankarshan, Pradhuma, and Aniruddha—are positioned at the center of the Pakrikulan, each facing one of the four directions. In each window, the remaining six deities from the twenty-four incarnations are positioned within the Gongakwo, inner Gwongakwo, and Bhailakwo. With this placement, all twenty-four incarnations are depicted in the central window, arranged in a clockwise sequence beginning from the eastern direction. The side windows, however, do not depict incarnations. Instead, animal motifs are placed in the Gongakwo, while bird and floral patterns decorate the four corners of the Bhailakwo. In most cases, the window featuring the Vishnu incarnations occupies the central position, whereas the side Gajhya are ornamented only with plant and animal motifs. Table 6 presents the study of the window dimensions i.e., length and height across different temples, revealing a proportional ratio of approximately 1:2.

Table 6: Study on scale and proportion of Window

Name of Temple	Length (cm)	Height (cm)	Ratio
Charnarayan	194	101	1:1.92
Hari Sankara Temple, Kvachen, Bhaktapur	213	106	1:2
Nyatapola Temple (Centre window)	189	95	1:1.98
Nyatapola Temple (Side window)	181	86	1:2.10

6. Conclusion

The study highlights that iconography plays a vital role not only as an artistic expression but also as a guiding framework in the process of restoration. Through systematic documentation, comparative case studies, and consultation

with historians, artisans, and local experts, the project successfully revived the temple’s symbolic and spiritual essence. After conducting extensive research on Vishnu Puraṇ, Roopmandana, Bhagwata purana, Padma Purana along with visit to Rastriya Abhilekhalaya, Kathmandu along with a comparative study with other temples in the Kathmandu Valley and Kavrepalanchowk provided essential references for iconographic detailing and spatial arrangement. These case studies helped identify traditional placement hierarchies—such as major deities positioned on struts and secondary divine figures integrated into portals and toranas. The placement of deities such as the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the four Yugas of Narayan, and the sixteen forms of Laxmi reflects a deep understanding of theological hierarchy (arrangement of gods and goddesses) and cosmological order inherent in Nepali temple architecture. The analysis on the scale and proportion revealed that the middle section typically constitutes 50% or more of the total length, forming the main visual and iconographic component while the upper portion—about 30% of the total length features carved motifs of dense foliage and the lower 20% includes figures of yakshas and gandharvas. The study of the window dimensions of length and height across different temples has a proportional ratio of approximately 1:2.

The wood carvings, executed by skilled artisans, blend artistic expression with religious symbolism, reinforcing both cultural continuity and aesthetic integrity. Through this detailed iconographic and wood carving analysis, the reconstruction not only restored the temple’s physical form but also revived its spiritual essence and cultural narrative within the broader context of Newar temple traditions. Hence, the restoration of Laxmi Narasingha Temple demonstrates how iconography serves not only as a decorative art but as a profound narrative

medium connecting cultural memory, religious belief, and architectural identity.

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