



Matsya Avatāra, Terraacotta, 44 cm x 29 cm. National Museum, Chhauni, Kathmandu

Terracotta Sculptures: as Found in *Toraṇas*

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Abstract

This brief piece attempts to describe and identify the terracotta sculptures of three toraṇas at the Śiva temple in Hanuman Dhoka Durbar, which were damaged by the earthquake of 2015. The UNESCO earthquake experts and the JICA archaeological team headed by Moshimichi Okumura recreated the Toranas out of the retrieved artifacts from the debris like a jigsaw puzzle. The significant rubbles were selected and labelled with tags for identification for recreation of the damaged Toranas. In fact, this piece is about the by-product of describing and identifying broken pieces of the terracotta sculptures of Toranas, which the earthquake of 2015 ruined to rubbles.

Keywords: Śhva temple, terracotta, *toraṇa*

Toraṇa

Toraṇa – tympanum – is the semi-circular or triangular decoration over a doorway of temple, which is bounded by a lintel and an arch. It often contains pediment sculpture or other imagery deities of Hindu and Buddhist and their ornaments. Conventional wisdom has it that it is an integral part of entrance to a sacred temple and an important monument. It is decorated with Garuḍa, Makara, Apsarā and nymphs including floral motifs and clouds. Thus, it is believed to be a gate-way to heaven.

Three sets of terracotta *toraṇa*

I attempt to describe the terracotta

sculptures of the Śiva temple, which were damaged by the earthquake of 2015. It was a kind of jigsaw puzzle. My description is entirely based on the retrieved artifacts from the rubbles and debris that are labelled with tags by the earthquake team of experts from UNESCO. The three sets of *toraṇas* were expertly put together for identification. For this article, I label them as *Toraṇa A*, *Toraṇa B* and *Toraṇa C* for description and easy comprehension.

Toraṇa A: Direction – East

On the basis of eight pieces of sculptures out of nine belonging to *Toraṇa A* faces east. The middle of the *Toraṇa T43* (Sucha 5) has Garuḍa, the vehicle of

Direction: East

Number of terracotta identified: 7

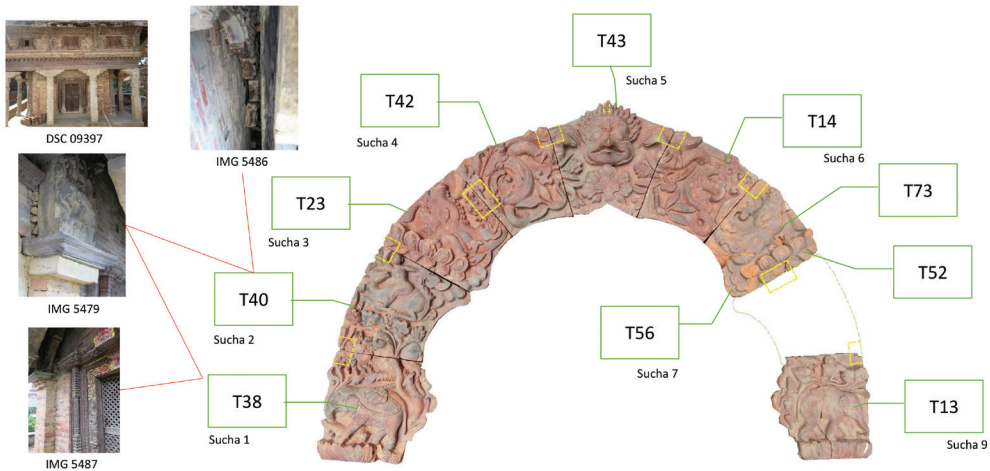


Image I: *Toraṇa A*: Direction – South, Shiva Temple, Hanuman Dhoka.

Viṣṇu, holding two serpent heads, seen on *T42* (Sucha 4) and *T14* (Sucha 6). The other two pieces on either side are *T23* (Sucha 3) and *T73* and *T52* (Sucha 7) – broken slabs. The *T40* (Sucha 2) has a human riding on a deer. It could be a depiction of *Vāyu* – one of the guardian deities residing in ten cardinal directions. A deer is the vehicle of *Vāyu*. The counter-piece on the other side is missing. The *T38* (Sucha 1) and *T13* (Sucha 9), on the both sides there are the lions, the vehicle of Indra.

Toraṇa B: Direction – South

On the basis of ten sculpture pieces belonging to *Toraṇa B* and one piece is missing though. It has same physical dimension as of that of *Toraṇa A*.

However, the sculpture pieces of *Toraṇa B*, have some challenges in identifying the divine images. This is primarily because the divine images do not tally with the Śiva temple including the other attendant deities on either side.

Image II shows nine sculpture pieces out of ten, and one piece is missing. The topmost on either side has four figures in a perfect symmetric composition. The top centre figure *T31* (*devi 6*), is a male deity. He holds two emblems in his both hands, they are difficult in identifying them as they are also worn out. However, the documents reportedly describe it (*T31*) as *Devi* that is a goddess. Its physical features betray. This figure *T31* has an unmistakable

Direction: South
 Number of terracotta identified: 7

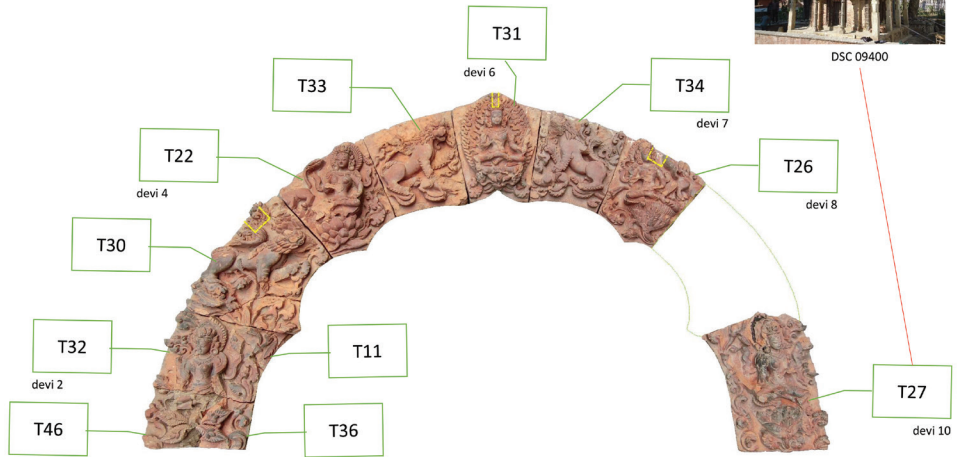


Image II: *Torana B*: Direction – South, Shiva Temple, Hanuman Dhoka.

religious mark on his forehead. The *mudra* is described as *urdha-pundra*: and is essentially associated with Viṣṇu, not with Śiva.¹ Therefore, it can be concluded that it is a male god – most likely the sun god – Surya. Furthermore, it should be intriguing that in the later phase of Hinduism, all the attributes or the solar energy are believed to be the manifestation of Viṣṇu¹¹. In other words, Surya – the sun god – is being practically identified with the Viṣṇu thereafter. The flaming aureole round the figure *T31* also supports that this sculpture indeed represents Viṣṇu – manifested as Surya – the sun god.

There are the intriguing four female deities – two on the either side flanking the central figure *T3*. Assuming the

central deity is Surya according to the iconographical details¹¹, he is said to be attended by his two wives – Rajani and Niksubha: likely *T22* (*devi 4*) and *T26* (*devi 8*). In some cases, he is also said to be attended by two other female companions – Danda and Pingala: *T32* (*devi 2*) and *T27* (*devi 10*) respectively. As the *mudras* of the figures are mostly broken and worn out, it's very difficult to ascertain their identities. The rest of the three pieces – *T30*, *T33* and *T34* – have the familiar motifs of mythical lions – supposedly guarding the divinities.

Torana C: Direction – North

Out of eleven pieces, there are only six pieces intact to make a complete *torana*. Ascribed to the direction of north, the

Direction: North

Number of terracotta identified: 6



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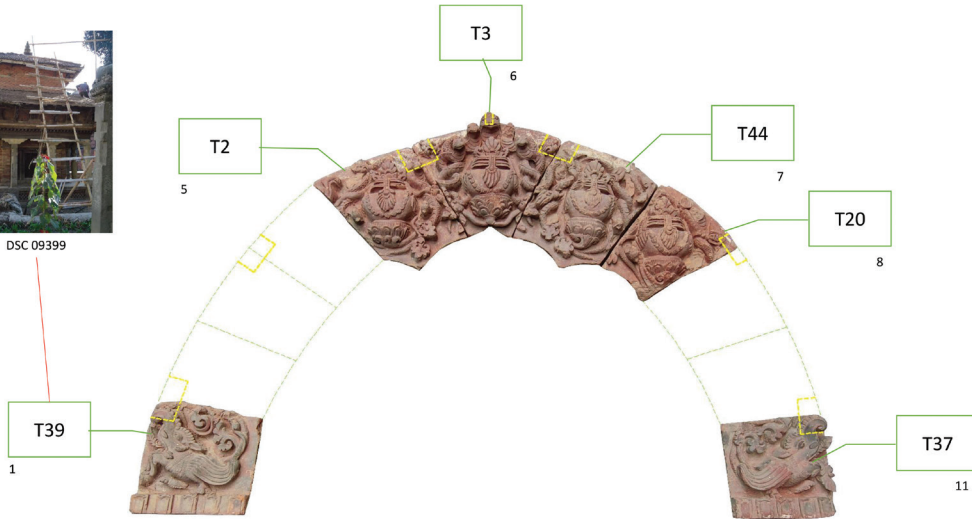


Image III: *Toraṇa C*: Direction – North, Shiva Temple, Hanuman Dhoka

composite shape confirms it has an exact dimension as of the earlier two *toraṇas*. It is apparent that all the auspicious symbols meant for good luck and prosperity. There are four forms of *pūrṇa kalaśa* (*T3*, *T2*, *T44*, *T20*), an auspicious jar with plenty of grains. It could be assumed that the rest of missing parts would certainly contain the same relief motifs. Only two pieces – *T39* and *T37* – on the bottom are *makaras*.

In Hinduism and Buddhism *pūrṇa kalaśa* symbolizes Lakṣmi and Annapūrṇa Azimā respectively. Lakṣmī – the consort of Viṣṇu – regarded as the goddess of good luck prosperity. And Annapūrṇa Azimā is considered the mother goddess of all forms of grains and prosperity.

It gives a clear and innate relationship of Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī and Annapūrṇa Azimā.^{IV}

This *Toraṇa C* with stone sculptures is associated with Viṣṇu like *Toraṇa A* and *Toraṇa B*. It has no relationship with Śiva although the temple is known as Śiva temple.

Conclusion

The terracotta sculptures of three *toraṇas* at the Śiva temple are described on the basis on the recreated *toraṇas* out the debris. The presence of all these forms and motifs on *toraṇas* at temples is an established tradition. This traditional practice of decorating temples, *vihāras* and religious shrines with *toraṇas*

continues even today. The central image on a *torāṇa* is usually flanked by attendants. Images of mythical creatures are associated with the main deity of temples and *vihāras*. For example, if a temple of Durā is built its *torāṇa* has the goddess Durgā in the center with mythical lions on her either side including animals, celestial nymphs, flowers and clouds. Each motif has its significance. In other words, like a signboard of store, the *torāṇa* gives some information about an identity of the main deity that resides in a temple or *vihāra*. As I already said this brief piece is the by-product of the terracotta sculptures of *torāṇas*, which the earthquake of 2015 damaged. Thanks to the restoration of the broken *torāṇas* by the UNESCO experts and the JICA archaeological team, the task of systematically describing the terracotta sculptures of *torāṇas* and their significance became much easier.

It seems terracotta sculpture was introduced to the Taleju Bhawani temple at the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar built by King Mahindra Malla in 1549. The medium of terracotta construction was very fascinating. This is testified by its outer entrances with terracotta arches with toranas. Moreover, the *torāṇa* of main entrance from inside is also embellished with terracotta works. And coincidentally, the terracotta sculpture at the Śiva temple is very similar and consistent with terracotta sculptures at the entrance of the Taleju Bhawani temple. The terracotta arches both at the Śiva temple and the Taleju Bhawani temple are similar and consistent. Therefore, I will not be far wrong in

concluding that both these temples were built by King Mahindra Malla

Notes

ⁱMonier, Williams. 1972. *Hinduism*. New York: Oriel Press, [1877], 98.

ⁱⁱibid. 88

ⁱⁱⁱGupte, R.S. 1972. *Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains*. Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Private Ltd., 52.

^{iv}Kramrisch, Stella. 1960. *The Art of Nepal*. New York: Asia House Gallery.

^vGyawali, Surya Bikram. 2019 B.S. *Nepal Upatyaka ko Madhyakalin Itihas*. Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 127–130.