

The taleju bell is a symbol of devotion toward the goddess taleju, who is stoked inside the royal palace. It is said that the bell is rung during the worship of the goddess taleju. The big bell is hung in an open platform above the four stone pillars. One can have a close glimpse of the statue of king bhupatindra Malla and the durbar area from that open platform around the bell. The enormous and astounding Taleju bell is one's pennyworth of King Ranjit Malla. The inscription mentioned on that bell authenticates that it commenced on Thursday, 6 January 1737 AD. Taleju Bell is located right in front of 55 window palace and Golden gate of Bhaktapur Durbar Square. Taleju Bell is rung every morning. The Taleju Bell was placed to mark morning and evening prayers at the Taleju Temple. The Taleju bell was mainly dedicated to the Taleju Bhawani of the palace. Besides that, it was used to notify people about important matters at that time. It is also called Tagoun Ghan which is a newari word that translates to the big bell. King Ranajit Malla, who is also the last king of Bhaktapur is credited with making the Big bell. Goddess Taleju Bhawani is the patron deity of Newari Hindus in the Kathmandu valley. The goddess was brought to the Kathmandu Valley in the 14th century by King Harisimha Deva, who was driven out of his kingdom in 1325 by Muslim armies. Harisimha installed Goddess Taleju, who became the house-goddess of the Malla royal family which are the property of the Rājopādhyāyas of Bhaktapur and Patan. She remained the tutelary deity for the Malla Kings in all three kingdoms of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur and her temple is the most important in each city. Of the three temples dedicated to Taleju Bhawani in Nepal, the oldest one is in Bhaktapur. The Golden Gateway (Sun Dhoka) is covered with gilt-copper sculptures and was erected by Ranjit Malla in 1753–54, dedicated to the goddess Taleju. At the centre of the metal gate or *tōraṇa* is an eight-headed and three-armed form of Taleju, above her is a heavy frame containing Garuḍa, Nāgas and floral motifs. Running down either side of the door are figures of deities including an emaciated Goddess Kālī, and in the top corners of the inner frame are two makaras. On either side of the Golden Gate are large copperplate inscriptions. The three current temples in the valley dedicated to Goddess Taleju were built in the 1500s by the Malla kings, who are said to be the descendants of Nanyadeva. King Harisimha took with him the original yantra of the Goddess Bhavani and installed it in Bhaktapur in Nepal. The Newar community soon adopted the worship of Goddess Taleju Bhawani. In Bhaktapur's Durbar Square her Golden Gate stands supreme in guarding the entrance to the main palace, exquisitely carved in a mix of copper and gold with the pagoda roof, finials, rampant lines, makaras and elephants. In Patan, two temples are dedicated to her: one rises above the three palaces to command the highest level in the city, while the main shrine is accessed

through the courtyard of Mul Chowk. According to legends, Taleju Bhawani herself made a special appearance at the temple's dedication ceremony where she came disguised as a bee. She was originally a goddess from the south of India, but later became the kul deuta (family deity) of the Malla Kings in 14th century. Even when the Malla kingdom was conquered by the Shah rulers, the new kings adopted Taleju as their own new royal deity in order to prove and cement their legitimacy to the throne. Some people also say due to the presence of the royal goddess, the temple escaped with only minor damages in the 2015 earthquake. Kumari is considered to be the human manifestation of the Goddess Taleju. There are several legends telling us why the Kumari is considered as the manifestation of Goddess Taleju. One popular legend states how the last Malla King Jayaprakash Malla played tripasa, a dice game with the goddess. She promised to come every night on the condition that the king wouldn't tell anyone about it. But one night the king's wife saw the goddess which angered Taleju Bhawani and she left. But before leaving she told the king that if he wanted to see her again or have her protect his country, he'd have to search for her among the high cast Newar girls as she would be incarnated as a little girl among them. Hoping to make amends with his patroness, King Jayaprakash Malla left the palace in search of the young girl who was possessed by Taleju's spirit. The worshiping of the Goddess Taleju in the form of a young virgin girl, or kumari, became a tradition in the Newar society and has continued to this day. As per the tradition, the living goddess visits the temple on Mahanawami of Dashain every year. Taleju Bhawani is a revered and powerful goddess in Nepalese history, closely associated with the Malla and Shah dynasties. She holds a significant position as the royal tutelary deity (Kul Devta) of these rulers, symbolizing protection, power, and divine guidance. Taleju Bhawani is considered a fierce manifestation of the goddess Durga and is worshipped as the protector of the kingdom and the monarchy. Taleju Bhawani was believed to play an active role in the lives of the Malla rulers, providing them with spiritual guidance and divine protection. One popular legend recounts how Taleju Bhawani would descend to the palace to play a traditional dice game known as Tripasa (Pasa) with the Malla kings. However, the goddess warned that her visits must remain secret. When King Mahendra Malla accidentally revealed the divine encounters, Taleju Bhawani withdrew from the palace. To atone for this breach, the king built the Taleju Temple in her honor. This story reflects the deep personal and spiritual bond the Malla kings felt with Taleju Bhawani. They regarded her as the ultimate protector of their reign, and their authority was believed to be derived from her divine blessings. Role of Kumari and Royal Rituals: The Taleju Temple is closely connected to the Kumari, the living goddess of Nepal. The Kumari, considered an incarnation of Taleju Bhawani, plays a central role during religious ceremonies held at the temple, especially during the Dashain festival. The temple

is one of the key places where the Kumari is worshipped, and her presence reinforces the spiritual connection between the royal family, the goddess, and the people. The Kumari is selected from among high-caste Newar girls, specifically from the Shakya clan, who are Buddhists by tradition but are revered as the Hindu goddess Taleju once chosen. The selection process is rigorous, guided by Tantric priests who search for a girl with specific physical attributes and spiritual qualities, as she is believed to be the living embodiment of Taleju Bhawani until she reaches puberty. One of the legends suggests that Taleju Bhawani herself resides in the body of the Kumari, maintaining her protective presence on Earth after she stopped appearing to the Malla kings. In Nepal, a Kumari is a prepubescent girl selected from the Shakya clan of the Nepali Newari Buddhist community. The Kumari is also revered and worshipped by some of the country's Hindus. While there are several Kumaris throughout Nepal, with some cities having several, the best known is the Royal Kumari of Kathmandu, and she lives in the Kumari Ghar, a palace in the center of the city. The selection process for her is especially rigorous. As of 2023, the Royal Kumari of Kathmandu is Trishna Shakya, aged five, installed in September 2017. The worship of the goddess in a young girl represents the worship of divine consciousness spread all over the creation. As the supreme goddess is thought to have manifested this entire cosmos out of her womb, she exists equally in animate as well as inanimate objects. While worship of an idol represents the worship and recognition of supreme through inanimate materials, worship of a human represents veneration and recognition of the same supreme in conscious beings. In the Shakta text *Devi Mahatmyam*, or *Chandi*, the goddess is said to have declared that she resides in all female living beings in this universe. The entire ritual of Kumari is based on this verse. But while worshipping a goddess, only a young girl is chosen over a mature woman because of their inherent purity and chastity. Whilst the veneration of a living Kumari in Nepal is relatively recent, dating only from the 17th century, the tradition of Kumari-Puja, or virgin worship, has been around for much longer. There is evidence of virgin worship taking place in Nepal for more than 2,300 years. It appears to have taken hold in Nepal in the 6th century. There is written evidence describing the selection, ornamentation, and worship of the Kumari dating from the 13th century CE. There are several legends telling how the current tradition of the Kumari began. Most of the legends, however, involve the tale of King Jayaprakash Malla, the last Nepalese king of the Malla Dynasty (12th–17th century CE). According to the most popular legend, a king and his friend, the goddess Taleju, approached his chambers late one night as he played *tripasa*, a dice game. The goddess came along every night to play the game with the condition that the king refrains from telling anyone about their meetings. One night, the king's wife followed him to his chamber in order to find out who the king was meeting so often. The king's wife

saw Taleju, and the goddess was angered. She told the king that if he wanted to see her again or have her protect his country, he would have to search for her among the Newari (Shakya) community of Ratnawali, as she would be incarnated as a little girl among them. Hoping to make amends with his patroness, King Jayaprakash Malla left the palace in search of the young girl who was possessed by Taleju. Similarly, there is another story about the disappearance of Taleju. Some believe that the goddess visited King Trailokya Malla every night in the human form. Like other legendary stories, the king and the goddess played tripasa (dice) while discussing the welfare of the country. However, one night, King Trailokya Malla made sexual advances towards the goddess Taleju. As a result, the goddess in rage stopped visiting the palace. The king in regret worshiped and pleaded for her return. Finally, the goddess agreed to appear in the body of a virgin girl from the Shakya family. Even today, a mother's dream of a red serpent is believed to be a portent of the elevation of her daughter to the position of Royal Kumari. And each year, the Nepalese King seeks the blessing of the Royal Kumari at the festival of Indra Jatra. This tradition has changed from 2008 A.D. with the country becoming one of the youngest republics in the world. A variation of this and other legends names King Gunkam Dev, a 12th-century ancestor of King Jayaprakash Malla, as the main character rather than Jayaprakash Malla. A third variation of the legend says that during the reign of King Jayaprakash Malla, a young girl was banished from the city because it was feared that she was possessed by the goddess Durga. When the queen learned of the young girl's fate, she became enraged and insisted that the king fetch the girl and install her as the living incarnation of Durga. Once Taleju has left the sitting Kumari, there is a frenzy of activity to find her successor. The selection process is conducted by five senior Buddhist Vajracharya priests, the Panch Buddha, the Bada Guraju or Chief Royal Priest, Achajau, the priest of Taleju and the royal astrologer. The king and other religious leaders that might know of eligible candidates are also informed that a search is underway. Eligible girls are from the Newar Shakya caste of silver and goldsmiths. She must be in excellent health, never have shed blood or been afflicted by any diseases, be without blemish, and must not have yet lost any teeth. Girls who pass these basic eligibility requirements are examined for the battis lakshanas, or thirty-two perfections of a goddess. Some of these are poetically listed as such: A neck like a conch shell, A body like a banyan tree, Eyelashes like a cow, Thighs like a deer, Chest like a lion, Voice as soft and clear as a duck's. In addition to this, her hair and eyes should be very black, and she should have dainty hands and feet, small and well-recessed sexual organs, and a set of twenty teeth. The girl is also observed for signs of serenity and fearlessness, and her horoscope is examined to ensure that it is complementary to the king's. It is important that there not be any conflicts, as she must confirm the king's legitimacy each year of her divinity. Her

family is also scrutinized to ensure its piety and devotion to the king. Once the priests have chosen a candidate, she must undergo yet more rigorous tests to ensure that she indeed possesses the qualities necessary to be the living vessel of Durga. Her greatest test comes during the Hindu festival of Dashain, also known as Vijaya Dashami. On the Kalaratri, or "black night", 108 buffaloes and goats are sacrificed to the goddess Kali. The young candidate is taken into the Taleju temple and released into the courtyard, where the severed heads of the animals are illuminated by candlelight and masked men are dancing about. If the candidate truly possesses the qualities of Taleju, she shows no fear during this experience. If she does, another candidate is brought in to attempt the same thing. In the next test, the living goddess must spend a night alone in a room among the heads of ritually slaughtered goats and buffaloes without showing fear. The fearless candidate has proven that she has the serenity and the fearlessness that typifies the goddess who is to inhabit her. After passing all other tests, the final test is that she must be able to pick out the personal belongings of the previous Kumari from an assortment of things laid out before her. If she is able to do so, there is no remaining doubt that she is the chosen one. There are claims contrary to the commonly believed ritual and screening process, however. The ex-Royal Kumari Rashmila Shakya states in her autobiography, *From Goddess to Mortal*, that this has nothing to do with the selection process, but rather is a ritual the Royal Kumari goes through each year, that there are no men dancing around in masks trying to scare her, and that at most, there are only a dozen or so decapitated animal heads in the scary room test. She also describes the requisite physical examination of each Kumari as neither intimate nor rigorous. Once the Kumari is chosen, she must be purified so that she can be an unblemished vessel for Taleju. She is taken by the priests to undergo a number of secret Tantric rituals to cleanse her body and spirit of her past experiences. Once these rituals are completed, Taleju enters her, and she is presented as the new Kumari. She is dressed and made up as a Kumari and then leaves the Taleju temple and walks across the square on a white cloth to the Kumari Ghar, which will be her home for the duration of her divinity.