

The Nyatapola Temple is a five-tiered marvel located in Bhaktapur, Nepal, renowned for being the tallest temple in the country. Constructed between December 1701 and July 1702 under the patronage of King Bhupatindra Malla, it has withstood four major earthquakes, including the devastating 2015 tremor that damaged much of Bhaktapur. This impressive monument reaches a height of 33 meters (108 feet) and is notable for its architectural uniqueness, including a five-level plinth adorned with statues of animals and deities acting as guardians. Nyatapola forms a significant part of Bhaktapur's Tamārhi square, a vital cultural and tourist hub. Unlike many temples, it has no overt religious significance; rather, it is a cultural symbol of the city. Its distinctive silhouette is used in Bhaktapur's coat of arms. Despite its prominence, the identity of the deity enshrined within remains a mystery, as public access to the temple is limited. The temple's gates are opened only once a year for a ritual performed by the Karmacharya priests, and even historical records of the temple's construction omit the deity's name. Historically, Nyatapola's construction was an extensive community effort, with workers and materials gathered from across the Kingdom of Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. Timber, primarily Sal wood, and stones were donated by locals, with precise records detailing the contributions in a manuscript known as "Siddhāgni Kotyāhuti Devala Pratiṣṭhā." This document is one of the key sources providing insights into the temple's construction, listing the materials, labor, and costs involved. The temple's five roofs are decorated with wind bells, and its construction involved intricate craftsmanship, particularly in the carving of statues like those of the wrestlers Pratap and Jayamal at its base. Interestingly, the name "Nyatapola" is derived from Nepal Bhasa, meaning "five stories," reflecting its unique structure. Despite its grandeur, the temple's origins and deity remain shrouded in mystery, further adding to its cultural and historical intrigue. The Nyatapola temple is renowned for its architectural strength, having survived multiple major earthquakes over the centuries. One of the most significant tests of its resilience was during the April 2015 earthquake, a 7.8 magnitude disaster that caused widespread destruction in Bhaktapur. Despite the damage to the city, the Nyatapola temple remained standing, sustaining minimal harm compared to other monuments. This resilience is attributed to the temple's well-planned engineering and construction techniques. The temple also survived earthquakes in 1833, 1934, and 1988. Nyatapola stands out in Nepalese architecture due to its massive five-storey structure and its five-tiered plinth. Each level of the temple is guarded by stone statues of mythical animals and gods, symbolizing protection and power. At the base are statues of two wrestlers, Jayamal and Pratap, famous figures in Bhaktapur during the 18th century. As you ascend the plinth, the guardians change, with figures such as elephants, lions, griffins, and goddesses

occupying the upper tiers. This architectural layering of protection adds to the temple's significance. Although the temple itself does not have a specific religious function for the public, it holds immense cultural and symbolic significance for the people of Bhaktapur. It is a focal point in the Tamārhi Square and forms an iconic part of Bhaktapur's skyline. The Nyatapola temple is prominently featured in the city's coat of arms and is regarded as a symbol of Bhaktapur's rich heritage and resilience.

Annual Rituals The temple's doors are opened once a year during a ceremonial ritual, which involves the planting of a triangular flag on its peak by the Avāla subgroup of the Newars. Priests from the Karmacharya community perform Tantric rituals during this time, and although the identity of the deity housed within the temple is not publicly revealed, it is believed to be a powerful form of the goddess. This adds a mysterious aura to the temple, as the public does not have access to the inner sanctum or detailed knowledge about the deity. Nyatapola also plays a role in the various festivals celebrated in Bhaktapur, including the famous Bisket Jatra. The temple and its surroundings become a hub of activity during these festivals, with people gathering in the square to celebrate and participate in religious processions. Nyatapola is regarded as unique in terms of its name as it is one of the only few temples which is not named after the deity residing inside it. Its name is derived from the local Nepal Bhasa name "*ñātāpola*", where "*ñātā*" means something with five storeys while "*pola*" means roof in the Bhaktapur dialect of Nepal Bhasa. Newar people outside of Bhaktapur use the term "*Nyātāpau*", where "*nyātā*" and "*pau*" have the same meaning as "*ñātā*" and "*polo*". The name "*(ñātāpola)*" has been in use since its construction as the temple was referred to as such in the ledger of its construction work. Historian Purushottam Lochan Shrestha found a damaged stone inscription being used as a step ladder by soldiers housed in Bhaktapur Durbar Square which uses the word "*(ñātāpola)*" to refer to the temple. Raj Man Singh Chitrakar who sketched the Nyatapola temple in 1844 has inscribed this temple as "Gniato Polo temple of Devi". Similarly, Henry Ambrose Oldfield who painted this temple in 1854 has inscribed this temple as "Temple of Devi Bhagwati at Bhatgaon". Contrary to most of the temples and other important buildings from the Malla dynasty, a stone inscription affiliated to the Nyatapola, which is traditionally attached to the temple itself has not been found. Historian Purushottam Lochan Shrestha found an extremely damaged stone inscription in Bhaktapur Durbar Square being used as a step ladder by the soldiers quartered there in which the name of the temple and a date in which was the date when the temple was consecrated was inscribed. So, far it is the only Malla dynasty stone inscription in which its name is inscribed. Therefore, the main source about the construction history of the Nyatapola comes from a palm leaf manuscript named as

"siddhāgni koṭyāhuti devala pratiṣṭhā" by modern scribes. It is a ledger written in Nepal Bhasa contains the name, wage and work time of every single person who contributed in the construction, details and cost of every single religious ritual performed and the detailed time line of the construction. The manuscript began with the following sentence: Hail the god Ganesha. After performing a *siddhāgni koṭyāhuti yagya*, Maharaja Bhupatindra Malla inaugurated the Nyatapola temple. The construction of the Nyatapola was completed in a short period of six months mainly because all the required materials were already prepared. Similarly, citizens from most cities within the Kingdom of Bhaktapur and the Kingdom of Lalitpur either directly helped in the construction or donated raw materials for it. There are five plinths on the stairways to the entrance of the temple and each of the plinth has a pair of stone guardians. Each of the pair is said to be ten times stronger than the one below them. At the bottom are two Rajput wrestlers named Jai and Pratap who are said to be ten times stronger than normal men. Above them are the giant statues of two elephants and above them are the statues of two *Singhas*, which is a mythical big cat and can be found throughout South and Southeast Asia. Above the cats are the statues of two *Sārdūlas*, a griffin-like creature of local Newari mythology. And in the topmost plinths are the Tantric deities, Simhanī and Vyāghranī, the lioness and tigress deity who are the strongest of all the guardians. There are also a total of five Ganesha idols on four shrines, one on each corner of the structure (one of the shrines, the south western one has two idols on one shrine). The temple of Nyatapola is dedicated to the Tantric deity of Siddhi Lakshmi, who is considered the ancestral deity of the Malla royal family of Bhaktapur and is also regarded as the mother deity of the Newars of Bhaktapur. Carvings of the goddess can be seen all over the temple. However, as she holds the topmost position in Tantric divinity, her primary visage is kept secret from public. Only Karmāchārya priests are allowed enter the temple. The image of Siddhi Lakshmi inside the temple is said to be of immense beauty, at least 10 feet (3.048 metres) in height, featuring the goddess standing with her feet on the shoulders of Bhairava—a fierce manifestation of Shiva. Siddhi Lakshmi can be seen with 9 heads and 18 arms. Around the image, lie other numerous deities. It is said that her image was installed using Tantric methods, due to which, her image is hidden from the public. Legend tells of the days when the Lord Bhairava, the Hindu God of destruction was causing havoc in society (1078 AD). Bhairava's temple stood in Taumadhi Square. To counteract his destructive behavior the king decided to call goddess Bhagavati, then Bhagavati took the form of Siddhi Laxmi and then carried Bhairava in her hand and built a more powerful temple on the honor of Siddhi Laxmi (Narayani Devi) in front of the Bhairab Temple. To make the brick and wood temple strong and powerful, King Bhupatindra Malla ordered

guardians be placed in pairs on each level of the base leading up to the Nyatapola Temple. On the first level is a pair of likenesses of Bhaktapur's strongest man, Jaya mal Pata, a famous wrestler. Next, two elephants followed by two lions, two griffons and finally "Baghini" and "Singhini", the tiger and lion goddesses. After subduing Bhairaba, peace prevailed in the city. The Temple is the tallest temple in the Kathmandu Valley and stands 30 m high. It withstood the 1934 Nepal–Bihar earthquake. The image of Siddhi Lakshmi is locked within the temple, and only the priests are allowed to enter to worship her. The five-storeyed temple, locally known as Nyatapola, stands in the northern side of Taumadhi Square in Bhaktapur. This is the only temple that is named after the dimension of architecture rather than from the name of the deity residing inside. The temple was erected in fewer than five months by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1701–1702 A.D. Siddhi Laxmi is the holistic and full manifestation of Ma Yogmaya. She is the epitome of prosperity, wealth, abundance. She encompasses all forms of Laxmi because the Lakshmi that is known in the public domain is Mahalakshmi and her different forms. Mahalakshmi is rajasic in nature while Siddhi Lakshmi encompasses all three modes of nature (satwa, raja, and tamas) and beyond. As per “Siddha Dharma”, her worship is performed for acquiring immense wealth and all the wealth of the universe. There is no wealth in this universe that she cannot bestow. Siddhi means perfection in any endeavor while Lakshmi means wealth. Besides the word Lakshmi is derived from “Lakshya” which means purpose or in the language of tantra, “Lakshya” means essence. Therefore, the synthesis of the name implies, the goddess whose main essence is perfection. She bestows the wealth of perfection to her devotees. She also bestows both wealth and perfection to her devotees. Mahalakshmi on the other hand bestows Lakshmi to her devotees. She necessarily doesn't bestow perfection or Siddhi. Therefore, in ‘Lakshmi Tantra’, there are two outcomes of Mahalakshmi sadhana. One either becomes a “Vishnu Purusha” or becomes “Ullu” or owl. The one who perfects Lakshmi becomes “Vishnu Purusha” and those who are ruled by Lakshmi become “Ullu” and the literal translation of Ullu means own but in tantra, the owl represents blindness and dweller of the dark. It also means agyana. An owl only has a good appearance but is mostly inactive when all are active furthermore, an owl also implies not perfect in anything from tantra perspective. But the same cannot be said about “Siddhi Lakshmi”.

The origin story of Siddhi Lakshmi: As per “Kaula Siddha” dharma, once when Mahalakshmi visited Ma Parvati just to fulfill her inner desire to feel completeness because she always felt that although she being Mahalakshmi, she still lacks something deeper and that completeness. Whenever she thinks

of Yogmaya Parvati, she always becomes blissful therefore, she visits Kailash, and then she talks to Ma Parvati. She tells her about her inner dilemma to which Ma Parvati replies that she and Mahalakshmi are the same. They are both the manifestation of Yogmaya. No sooner had she said that Ma Parvati reverted to her original Yogmaya form. She then tells Mahalakshmi that all women are the manifestation of Shakti and that Shakti is what pervades everything in this universe. Without them, the universe is incomplete therefore, Ma Parvati is Lakshmi herself but in a holistic form because Mahalakshmi is the rajas manifestation of Yogmaya while Ma Parvati is Lakshmi herself who is the epitome of satwa, raja, tamas, trigunatita and unknown one, the Siddhi Lakshmi. Ma Yogmaya continues as she tells Mahalakshmi that without her, lord Vishnu is incomplete, without Saraswati, Lord Brahma is incomplete and without myself, Lord Shiva is incomplete. She reveals Mahalakshmi to be a rajas manifestation of Yogmaya. If Shakti is absent from Shiva then they transform into a corpse. Mahalakshmi then asks Yogmaya to explain a bit more and the Yogmaya asks her to watch the incidents carefully. As per "Kaula Siddha" dharma, she then reveals to Mahalakshmi that the strongest deity in the physical world is Bhimkaya Bhairava or Vajra Bhairava. She then tells Mahalakshmi that Vajra Bhairava to be a form of Bhairava whose body is very rigid and is undefeatable and she asks the Bhairava to manifest. The Bhairava manifests and starts to create havoc in the physical world. The Bhairava starts to bully and destroy elephants and horses. He destroys mountains and hills. Yogmaya explaining the phenomenon to Mahalakshmi says that the Bhairava is the most powerful deity in the physical world and the Bhairava is powerful because of them. She then asks Mahalakshmi to watch closely and through her yogbala, she extracts herself out from the Vajra Bhairava. The Vajra Bhairava then falls and becomes a corpse. Having said that, Mahalakshmi asks Yogmaya that the world is simply not physical but beyond physical. The world is also infinite and extremely enormous. Ma Yogmaya then says that the most powerful deity in the space realm is Aakash Bhairava. She then orders Aakash Bhairava to manifest. The Bhairava manifests and starts to create havoc everywhere. The Bhairava starts destroying various stars and crushes them to dust. The Bhairava creates havoc in the universe and at that moment, Yogmaya says to Mahalakshmi that even the strongest of Bhairava is incomplete without Shakti. She then with her yogbala extracts herself out from the body of Aakash Bhairava. As per "Kaula Siddha" dharma, the Aakash Bhairava becomes motionless and becomes a statue. The Bhairava doesn't fall because the Bhairava is too strong and powerful because of its nature. Yogmaya reveals to Mahalakshmi that Siddha Lakshmi which is the original Lakshmi and Mahalakshmi being the rajas manifestation of that ultimate Lakshmi is the most

powerful Shakti in this universe and beyond. She then elevates herself and she sits upon the Aakash Bhairava where her feet are supported by the hand of Bhairava. The essence of Siddhi Lakshmi worship: As per "Kaula Siddha" dharma, Lakshmi is limited to the rajasic form of Yogmaya only. Mahalakshmi is the rajasic manifestation of Siddhi Lakshmi. She gradually brings tamas to her sadhaka such that her sadhaka when starts to misuse Lakshmi turns into an own but Siddhi Lakshmi who is the manifestation of Yogmaya doesn't have such problems. The worship of Mahalakshmi only brings you rajasic wealth but Siddhi Lakshmi brings all forms of Lakshmi to the sadhaka. Wealth is something that brings completeness in a person and also fulfills the desires of the sadhaka. Siddhi Lakshmi is that ultimate goddess who bestows her sadhaka wealth which is universal and secondly Siddhi or perfection. The Siddhas from time immemorial have said that wealth is perishable because wealth is always unsteady. It always keeps moving. The moment when a person doesn't utilize the wealth, the wealth becomes unsteady and becomes stagnant ultimately causing its destruction. This scenario can only be avoided through the injection of another virtue in Lakshmi and that is Siddhi or perfection. When the art of wealth is perfected then the wealth always keeps on increasing. As per "Kaula Siddha" dharma, Siddhi Lakshmi means the perfection of wealth too. It also means the perfection of wealth holistically and equally in this universe. The best possible way to increase wealth is to perfect wealth because wealth will then create wealth and the cycle continues. From another perspective, Siddhi Lakshmi means perfection of wealth that means a sadhaka who perfects Siddha Lakshmi perfects wealth. The person is never devoid of Lakshmi nor the utmost virtues like perception anywhere inside this universe because she is dominant in physical as well as in the metaphysical realm. This sadhana is so vibrant and strong because the effect of this sadhana extends beyond many lives. If a person perfects Siddhi Lakshmi in this life, then the person will never be devoid of wealth. Wealth will always find a way to come to the person. Secondly, even after death, the person is not devoid of wealth because the person can be born in any part of the universe yet will automatically start attracting wealth in their lives. The person would never be devoid of wealth whatsoever in this life or afterlife. As per "Kaula Siddha" dharma, the last vital essence of "Siddhi Lakshmi" is to attain Siddhatwa. Through the worship and perfection of Siddhi Lakshmi, the worshipper attains the state of Siddhatwa. Siddhatwa is the highest virtue of any Siddhi. It is also the ultimate state that the Siddha wants to achieve. Siddhatwa means to be free while one is alive and to be reborn again and again. In every birth, Siddhas perform sadhana, they perfect their existence, become free from everything, and again take rebirth. Every time they take rebirth, they become an avatar because it is their conscious choice to be

born again and again. Siddhas never desire salvation because Siddhas are in a romantic relationship with this entire universe. Meaning of Wealth and Siddhi Lakshmi: As per "Kaula Siddha" dharma, wealth has a diverse meaning. Wealth is mostly considered to be material wealth and nothing else. Wealth in a modern-day context has become more like tangible property which can be felt and has material utility but from the perspective of Siddhas, wealth is both tangible and intangible. For the Siddhas, the lowest level of wealth is the material or physical wealth because those forms of wealth arise from the material world and are used mostly for the gratification of the senses. The highest form of wealth is "self-satisfaction" because the essence of all desires is satisfaction. If a person wishes something and the person fulfills the wish, there is a degree of self-satisfaction because all material phenomenon in this universe only leads to pleasure and pleasure leads to self-satisfaction. Everything in life is nothing but experience. A person even if he wins the three worlds, the person only receives a good experience, and a series of good experiences lead to self-satisfaction. Therefore, Lakshmi is the goddess who provides you with self-satisfaction. The wealth from the perspective of Siddhi Lakshmi is "Perfection" of the wealth of perfection. Perfection is when a person perfects something. Perfection is not material wealth but absolute wealth because perfection breeds wealth. For instance, if a person masters something, the person can always attract material wealth through the inner wealth that is perfection. If one perfects something, that thing shall always provide wealth to that person. This is the essence of Siddhi Lakshmi.