

## **Pulling Rato Matsyendranath On A Chariot**



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On Friday, May 5, 2017, Rato Matsyendranath reached Lagankhel after completing the journey on the spire like a chariot pulled by the devotees. The deity has traveled through the narrow lanes of Patan starting at Pulchok (also in Patan) over a month for trying to understand how the local people have been doing during a year. Local people have the opportunity of revering the deity at their neighborhood at least once a year. The deity travels every year to bless the people and to see how they have been faring. After arriving at Lagankhel, the deity has two major events: one tossing of a coconut set at the top of the spire, and another showing of a jewel-studded vest at Jawalakhel, before setting off for his summer temple at Bungamati. The festival of showing the jewel-studded vest is holding on May 25, 2017.

Matsyendranath also known as Karunamaya means compassionate goes around the town every year to see how the people are doing during the month-long outing. The deity is concern for the welfare of all the people. Renouncing an entry to the celestial world after achieving sufficient merits for qualifying to be there, the deity has opted to stay on in the human world until he could emancipate the entire humanity from destitute and disease, so that they could live in the eternal peace and happiness. Thus, the deity has committed to stay with the humans until all humans are emancipated from the sufferings. So, the deity has been staying on in this world to eradicate all sufferings of the humans. The deity brings rains for the farmers to transplant rice seedlings in the coming months. The deity also is popularly known as the good harvest deity.

Licchavi King Narendra Dev of Bhaktapur, a Tantrik priest Bandhudutt of Kathmandu, and a porter Rathan-chakra of Patan together brought the deity from Kamarupa (current Assam in India) most probably in the fifth century (Gregorian Calendar) to mitigate the drought in Nepal. They took a serpent god called Karkot-naga with them to use him as a bridge wherever they needed to cross a river, and to use him as an agent to secure an access to the demon royal family in Kamarupa. The deity was born as a youngest son of the demon royal couple in Kamarupa. Deities and demons are the cousins born of Brahma: the creator of the universe.

The Tantrik priest transferred the spirit of the deity into a bumblebee, and tactically captured the bee and put it in a holy water jar called *kalash*, and brought it to Nepal. On the way back home, as soon as the trio of the king, Tantrik and a porter reached the area called Chakra-tirtha: a small lake (Katuwal-daha) at the southern outskirt of Patan, a team of priests went to collect the *kalash* with the spirit of the deity.

The process for bringing Karunamaya from Chakra-tirtha to Patan mimicked every year. A team of priests sets off on the eve of the Mother's Day (the millennium Nepalese tradition celebrated following the Lunar Calendar) for the lake and stays there overnight. Next day morning, after taking the dip in the holy waters of the lake, the priests perform the rituals of transferring the spirit of the deity into flowers, and then one priest sets the flowers in the water only to grab it by another priest and put it in the *kalash*. The flowers act as a bumblebee.

After enacting the transfer of the spirit of the deity to *kalash*, the priests and assistants sit at the public-resting space called 'falcha', and they breakfast on 'smaya-baji': a mixture of flattened rice and puffed rice with roasted meat, roasted black beans and some pieces of zinger. Then, they wash down all these foods with homebrewed white rice beer.

Thereafter, they set off for Tabahal in Patan, where the deity has the summer temple to dwell in. Several musical bands lead the priest (a woman) holding a *kalash* with two hands at her belly. All the head-shaved priests dressed up in saffron walk barefoot to follow her, as it is not auspicious to wear a shoe or a sandal while carrying a deity with them. Once every 12-year, they take the deity to Bungamati where the deity resides in the winter temple for six months. So, the deity also is known as the Bunga-dyo.

When the trio of the king, priest and a porter successfully brought the deity from Kamarupa to Nepal, the king wanted to take the deity to Bhaktapur, the priest to Kathmandu, and the porter to keep in Patan. Everyone wanted to have the deity causing the never-ending argument among the trio. Each one had his justification for keeping the deity in his area.

Ultimately, they agreed on a senior most man in Patan to make a decision on where the deity would stay. They believed that such an old man would never tell a lie, as telling lie was one of the greatest sins anybody could commit. So, they trusted the old man to be an impartial decision maker, as at the dying age, nobody dares to tell a lie.

Shrewd Porter Rathan-chakra visited the senior most man with the offering of flattened rice and yogurt at night. He has mixed a pinch of salt in the yogurt without the knowledge of the senior citizen. When the senior most man accepted the mixture of yogurt and the flattened rice, and started eating, he noticed that it had some salt. Nobody in this world ate mixture of yogurt and rice with salt. So, it was a deceit. The senior most man said, "Rathan-chakra, you have unfairly fed me the flattened rice with yogurt unscrupulously putting some salt in them without my knowledge, even then I am obliged to you, as I have eaten the salt you have added to the yogurt and the flattened rice. Tell me, what you really want from me."

With clasped hands at his chest and accepting his fault of adding some salt to the mixture of yogurt and flattened rice, Rathan-chakra said, "Forgive me for adding salt to the yogurt. This I did to keep the deity in our area. Please tell the public assembly to be held at the main square tomorrow in presence of King Narendra Dev, and Tantrik Priest Bandhudutt, and I Rathan-chakra that the deity should reside in Patan." Thus, the porter Rathan-chakra shrewdly made the old man agree on making a decision on keeping the deity in Patan the next day.

Eating salt of someone means an obligation to him/her, as the tradition of Nepalese has it. Salt was very difficult to acquire at that time, and probably very expensive, too as they had to bring it from the high mountains in the north. So, Nepalese believe that eating salt of anybody means an obligation to him or her.

Next day, the senior most man standing on the platform made of seven stumps put one above another addressed the assembly of the common folks with the king, the priest and the porter in front. He said that the country would prosper with the compassionate deity staying with us; no matter where the deity would be. However, it was a national pride anybody to have such a deity.

He said that the king, the priest and the porter had had a good argument among them on where to reside the deity; they could not come to a common understanding of where to keep the deity. Ultimately, they came to me to decide whether the deity should be. That was why I was here. Entrusting me to decide where the deity would reside, the trio of the king, priest and porter had done a great honor to me.

He said, "I really don't know where the deity should be but the deity came to my dream last night, and told me, the deity should be in Patan and Bungamati for six months at each place in turn." Then, following the will of the deity, he declared to the public gathered around the platform that the deity should stay in Patan for six months of a year and in Bungamati for another six months.

King Narendra Dev and Priest Bandhudutt were stunned but they had committed to accept the ruling of the senior most man. They accepted the judgment of the old man even though it was not an impartial one. Porter Rathan-chakra was absolutely happy.

To the surprise of everyone assembled there, the platform made of several stumps came down and the old man got crushed and died. Obviously, he had lied to the king, the priest, and the common folks in general. Thus, he paid for an improper ruling made under the influence of the porter Rathan-chakra by his life.

Thus, the deity remained in Patan on one condition that if the devotees from Bhaktapur could pull the spire with the deity from the 'sundhara (lu-hity)' means golden spouts in Patan to the east then they would pull the deity to Bhaktapur forever. So, the practice of making the spire U-turn immediately after it reaches 'sundhara' continues even today. If the Kathmanduites also could pull the spire with the deity from Pulchok to the north then they could take the deity to Kathmandu. King Narendra Dev and Priest Bandhudutt at least won certain possibilities of taking the deity to their respective city-state.

Before starting a month-long festival of pulling Rato Matsyendranath (Karunamaya or Bunga-dyo) on a spire at Pulchok, the priests serving the deity take the deity to Lagankhel from the temple at Tabahal in Patan for a ceremonial bathing on an auspicious day. On the way, a funeral musical band leads the priests taking the deity for bathing. Probably, it is done so, as the priests have already taken the divine spirit out of the mundane body and put it in *Kalash*. They stripped the deity down to the spiritless body and then cleaned up the deity with water, milk, and honey, and so on in preparation for a month-long outing. It takes a little bit of painting to look as fresh as possible during the visit to the common folks. Living Goddess Kumari presides over the bathing ceremony.

Every year, a spire like chariot is assembled on four wheels at Pulchok. Expert astrologers find the most auspicious day for setting the deity on the spire and then for starting to pull it from there to the old Patan. On the way, it stops at several places for the local people to celebrate the arrival of the deity and then the departure, too. By the time, it reaches

'sundhara' it would be almost a month. At 'sundhara', it takes U-turn, and then moves on to Lagankhel.

From 'sundhara' the devotees pull the deity to Lagankhel where the deity takes rest for a few days remaining in the inner sanctum of the spire. The attendants take care of the deity offering holy water and then regular food offerings every day. Devotees from Patan and from elsewhere continue to visit the deity. They lit thousands if not hundreds of thousands of butter lamps around the spire. Devotees also make flower, food and various other offerings to the deity. Lighting of butter lamps also happens elsewhere the deity stops on his outing in Patan.

The day after the deity arriving at the Lagankhel, an appreciation offering is made to the four different powerful Bhairavas dwelling in the four wheels on which the spire moves on. The priests make offerings of animal blood to each one of the four Bhairavas that have successfully put the wheels moving removing all sorts of evil and demonic spirits trying to obstruct the spire on the way for blocking the deity from reaching to the common folks.

From Lagankhel, devotees pull the spire to Tha-ti neighborhood. At the Lagankhel, devotees pulling the spire with Matsyendranath make two rounds of the banyan tree as symbolically paying a respect to another deity (the mother of Matsyendranath some believe) residing in the banyan tree before pulling it to the north. Then, devotees pull the spire to the neighborhood called Tha-ti where the coconut set at the top of the spire will be dropped down.

The festival of dropping a coconut is held on the most auspicious day ascertained by a group of eminent astrologers. A man climbs up to the top of the spire under the parasol, and he takes out the coconut hidden under the parasol. Then, holding it with his two hands, he carefully demonstrates it to the public gathered around the spire to watch the event, and then he tosses it down to a crowd of fascinated onlookers. Youths scramble to catch the coconut in the air but most of them could not do; so, they continue to scramble on the ground to get the coconut. A belief has it that anybody catching the coconut will have a son in the year.

The dropping of a coconut is actually called "nainkya lue\*" means offering of a coconut from the top. Offering of a coconut is equal to the offering of an animal blood means the highest offering to any deity. Offering of a coconut is done to the deities that don't accept the blood offerings. Matsyendranath is one of the deities that don't accept animal blood.

Next day, at dawn, women only pull the spire to the further down Tha-ti, and set the spire at the crossroads. That is the opportunity the women take to enjoy pulling the deity on the spire. It is only a very short distance women pull the spire. Thus, even at that time, the deity carefully considered the rights of women to enjoy the pulling of the spire of the deity.

On that night, nobody is allowed to visit near the spire, as the local women sleep nude around the spire following the age-old tradition, some experts on culture say. Probably, this is done to hold up the evil and demonic spirits trying to harass the deity at night. However, this tradition must have been ceased.

Then, on behalf of Matsyendranath, the Barahi people make an offering to the ancestral deity called Purna-chandi (Siddhi Laxmi) on the day the astrologers set one day before dropping the coconut. Matsyendranath has simply followed the human tradition of making an annual offering to the ancestral deity once a year every year. Thus, the deity identifies with the common folks.

The deity stays on in the sanctum of the spire parked at the crossroads until the expert astrologers find the auspicious day to pull the spire from this area to Jawalakhel about two kilometers. After the ancestral worship, four astrologers: everyone of them sitting at one of the four pillars allocated to each one of them at the public building called Manimandap at Mangal Bazaar ascertain the most auspicious day for pulling the spire to Jawalakhel.

Jawalakhel is so called because attendants to the deity toss cooked rice to all directions at this place for appeasing the ghosts, and other demonic and evil spirits that might cause troubles to the deity and the common folks. *Ja* means cooked rice, *(o) wala* means tossing, *khel* means an open area, Jawalakhel means an open area where cooked rice is tossed. When the spire reaches Jawalakhel, cooked rice is tossed everywhere at Jawalakhel to mollify the evil and demonic spirits so that they might not cause troubles to the deity and the devotees while residing in this area.

Pulling the spire from the crossroads at Tha-ti to Jawalakhel was reserved for the Kirtipurians. Even today, after the astrologers set the date for pulling the spire, folks from Kirtipur with musical bands, and singing songs in praise of the deity come to initiate the pulling of the spire. Kirtipurians lead the pulling of the spire from the Tha-ti crossroads to Jawalakhel.

On the fourth day of arriving the deity at Jawalakhel, a festival of showing a jewel-studded vest to the public is held. One of the officials of the State-run trust called Guthi Samsthan standing on the parapet of the bottom of the spire demonstrates the vest to the public. The head of State, other State dignitaries, and common folks watch en mass the showing of a jewel-studded vest.

The official of the Guthi Samsthan breaks the seal on the pouch and takes out the vest while the public curiously watches the actions. It is done to confirm that the vest is carefully and securely stored. After the showing of the vest to the public, the official again put it back in the pouch and sealed it in full view of the public for another year to demonstrate it.

A myth has it that the vest belonged to a farmer that had received from the serpent king as a reward for healing the eye ailment the serpent queen had suffered from for a long time, and lost it to a goblin. The farmer noticed the goblin disguised as a human was wearing his vest while watching the festival of the deity at Jawalakhel.

The farmer claimed that the vest was his but the goblin in the human form did not buzz from his stand on as the owner of the vest. The dispute developed into the fistfight drawing the attention of the public, and the security.

The security interfered them but both of them did not stop claiming the vest. The security could not resolve the dispute. The security took the issue to the State authorities present at Jawalakhel for watching the festival of the deity. In absence of any tangible evidence, the authorities also could not decide whom the vest belonged to.

The authorities decided to keep the jewel-studded vest with the deity making possible for anybody to come to claim the vest with the evidence, and then they decided to show the magnificent and valuable vest to the public at the end of the festival of pulling the deity on a spire every year to confirm the vest was with the deity safely stored. So, the festival of showing the vest continued every year even today.

After the completion of the showing of the vest, the deity travels on a portable shrine, devotees carry on shoulder poles to Bungamati to reside in the winter temple there. Devotees come from Bungamati to carry the deity on a portable shrine from Lagankhel to

Bungamati. Other devotees from Bungamati follow the deity chanting and singing the songs in praise of the deity until they reach Bungamati and set the deity in the temple. Several folks hold oil torches to lit the way to Bungamati.

Devotees in Patan follow the deity up to the Nakhu River as the send-off. Several musical bands led the deity on the portable shrine the devotees carry. Some devotees play music and sing songs in praise of the deity on the way. Some devotees holding fragrant incenses burning in their hands follow the deity.

The deity crossing the Nakhu River is another annual event. All the population of serpents including the serpent king, queen and other serpent royal family members show up to watch the deity crossing the river. Devotees from all over the valley reach there to watch the deity crossing the river. Once every 12-year, the deity travels back to Bungamati on the spire. So, pulling the spire on the Nakhu River is a spectacular event, too.

On the fourth day of the deity reaching Bungamati, devotees from all over the valley go to Bungamati, and make ritual offerings. This event is called 'bicha-puja" means genial offerings to see how the deity is doing after a long journey from Jawalakhel to Bungamati.

Thus, the month-long festival of the deity started at Pulchok ends at Jawalakhel in Patan for a year, and ultimately, the deity reaches back winter home.

On the first day of the bright fortnight of the Baishak, the priests bring the deity from the temple at Tabahal in Patan, and set the deity in the inner sanctum of the newly constructed spire at Pulchok every year, from there, the devotees pull the deity through the lanes in Patan making several stopovers on the way.

Before starting the month-long festival, the priests perform the rituals of bathing the deity at Lagankhel. They take the deity from the temple at Tabahal to Lagankhel. They set the deity on a special platform for bathing. First the deity takes the annual bath in water, then in milk, yogurt, and honey. Actually, the priests pour one jar of one item or another on the idol of the deity. This is an annual event, too.

The Living Goddess Kumari of Patan presides over all those rituals and events at all those places. The Goddess sits at Kumaripati to preside over the devotees pulling the spire from the crossroads at Tha-ti to the Lagankhel. The Goddess also sits at the special structure made at Jawalakhel to preside over the showing of the jewel-studded vest. The Living Goddess Kumari is the source of supreme power, and the deity having the sovereignty. So, her presence is required to hold any religious event.

May 24, 2017

\* In the Nepal Bhasa (Nevah) language.



Matsyendranath (Karunamaya or Bungadyo) At Tabahal Temple In Patan  
(Source: The author)



Matsyendranath waiting for Bathing Ceremony At Lagankhel

(Source: Facebook)

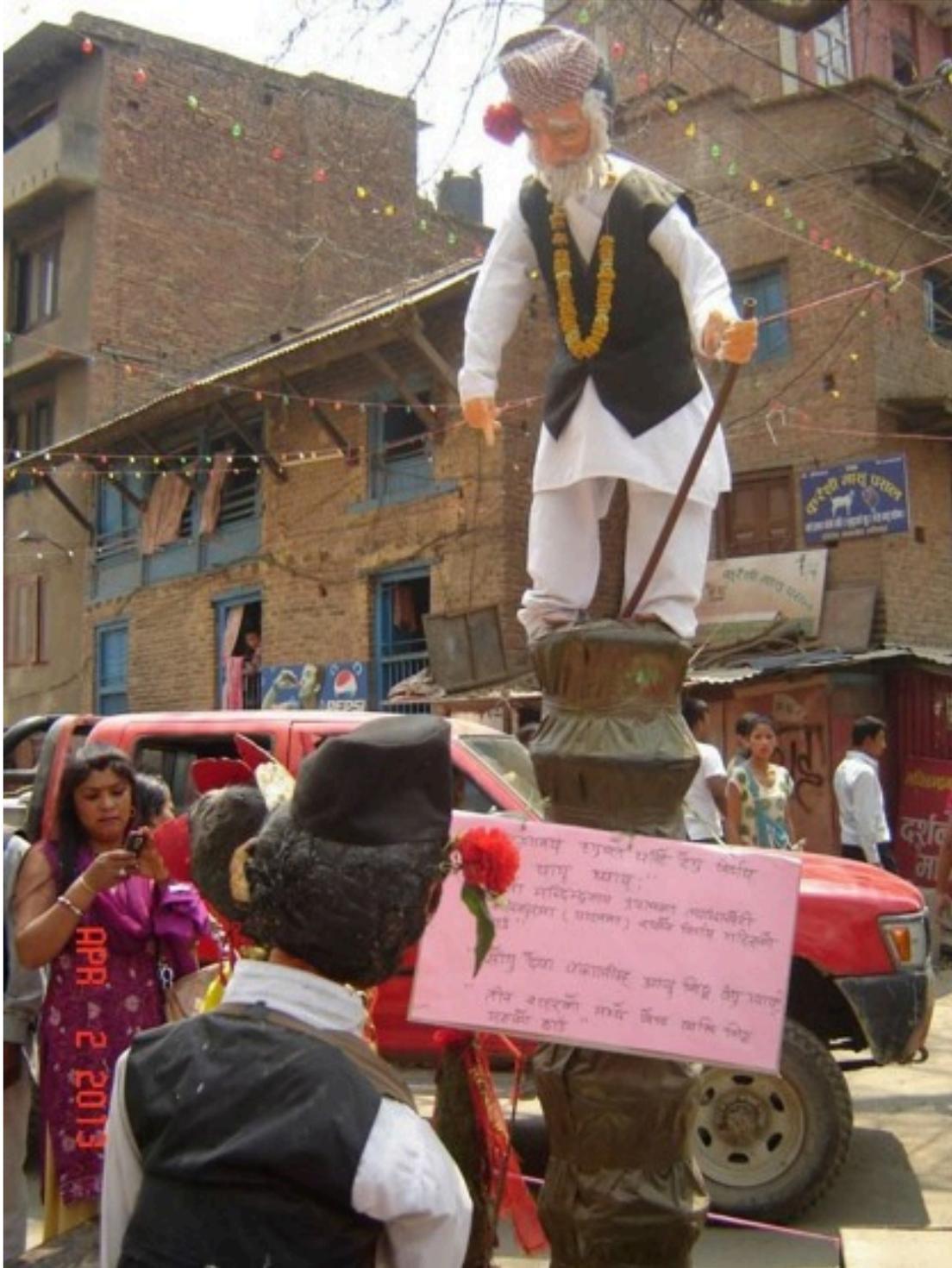


A Team Of Priests Bringing Matsyendranath From Chakra-tirtha  
(Source: Bhakal.com)



Rato Matsyendranath Captured At Chakra-tirtha

(Source: Bhakal.com)



A dummy senior most citizen is deciding where Matsyendranath to stay in Patan, Bhaktapur or Kathmandu. He could not be impartial. He fell down and died instantly.

(Source: The Author: Patan Day Celebration in April 2013)





Matsyendranath carried on a portable Shrine

(Source: Facebook)



Winter Temple of Matsyendranath at Bungamati

(Source: Facebook)