GUARDIANS OF THE ROYAL GODDESS: DAITYA AND KUMAR AS THE PROTECTORS OF TALEJU BHAVANI OF KATHMANDU

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Introduction
On the seventh day of the great Dasain festival (Sept-Oct.) the images of the royal goddess Taleju Bhavānī of Kathmandu are taken down from their lofty position in the Taleju temple overlooking the ancient palace compound of Hanuman Dhoka. The goddess is brought to a room of worship at the back of Mulchowk, a courtyard which is distantly facing the stairs leading up to the temple. In there, special rites and sacrifices are performed over the next three days. The journey of Taleju is a short one, not comparable to the lavish processions (yātrā) of various other divinities of Kathmandu. On their way down to the special room of worship, Taleju's Pūjā Koṭhā, the four images or emblems representing the goddess are covered with shiny cloth (New.:taś). The doors of the Pūjā Koṭhā are closed behind the small procession of priests carrying the covered images. Taleju will be just as secluded from the public eye in Mulchowk as she was in her higher temple abode. On the great ninth (Mahānavami) of the ten Dasain days, the only day of the year that the general public is allowed to circumambulate the sanctum of the Taleju temple, the images of Taleju herself are behind the closed doors of the Pūjā Koṭhā in Mulchowk. For the occasion, the procession image of Guhyesvarī, also kept in the Taleju temple, is shown to the public at the Southern gate to the sanctum.

In principle, only those Karmācārya and Josī (non-Brahmin castes of Hindu ritual specialists) who by hereditary right perform Taleju's daily worship are granted a darśana, a sight of the goddess who since Malla times is the main śakti (lit: power) of the realm. However secret the rites are kept and however powerful the goddess remains, a gradual decline of the Taleju cult in Kathmandu is undeniable. Once a year it is given grandeur by the official fanfare of Mahāśaptami, the seventh day of Dasain. At that time the king of Nepal visits Mulchowk to view the Phulpāti (a canopy containing flowers) brought from the Taleju temple in Gorkha, the town of origin of the present

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dynasty. The phulpāti from Gorkha has its own special room, known as Dasain Ghar, in the courtyard adjoining Mulchowk (Nāg Pokhari). The king also receives prasāda (blessed items, i.e. flowers) from Taleju Bhāvānī of Kathmandu through the main priest (New.: mū ḍacāhju) without having a darsāna himself. As for the higher castes connected with the ancient Malla court, which are still mentioned by Pradhan (1986: 311) as partaking in the \textit{khadga yātā}, the sword procession on the final night of Dasain, they did no longer appear in 1992. Some of the temple officiants and one gazetted officer holding the (covered) royal sword were the only sword-carriers on an occasion which once marked the glorious war path of both the goddess and the king. Several Jyāpu (Farmers) who also have to play key roles in the final ceremony threatened to leave the scene after an assiduous and probably better remunerated army guard at first denied them entrance on their arrival at Hanuman Dhoka.

That the \textit{khadga yātā} nevertheless remains an impressive event is in no small measure due to the graceful presence of the dancers embodying Daitya and Kumār together with their respective musical bands. Apart from their presence in the sword procession, Daitya and Kumār make their only appearances in Mahāsaptami morning, when the images of Taleju are brought down from the temple, and in Vijayā Daśāmi morning, when Taleju is brought up again. Both dancers are boys who at the time of their selection for a 5 year period must be between 8 and 15 years old. Daitya has to belong to the Śākya (Goldsmith) community of Kvane, the Lower town of Kathmandu, Kumār to the Tulādhar (Merchant) community of Thane, the Upper town of Kathmandu. If the timing is accurate, the two deified boys for a short while share a single stage inside the palace compound of Hanuman Dhoka on the Mahāsaptami (7th) and Vijayā Daśāmi (10th) mornings of Dasain. They do not form an ensemble, however. When embodying the divinities the two boys are kept strictly separate, and, incidentally, the two of them never met in ordinary life either.

The embodiment of divinities by children or even infants is not unusual in Nepal; the goddess Taleju herself is embodied by the royal Kumārī (Allen 1975), the girl-child who receives the greater part of the popular worship to the goddess. Remarkably enough Daitya and Kumār are to protect the goddess Taleju herself, the central Śakti (lit: power) of the realm, from dangers that apparently may threaten her. The Kumār dancer of the Upper town (Thane) has to protect Taleju from dangers originating in heaven, and he is thereto equipped with a bow and arrow. The Daitya dancer of the Lower town (Kvane) has to protect the goddess from dangers on earth and from the netherworld and is thereto equipped with a dagger.
The Protection of the Protective Goddess
The powerful Taleju Bhavānī thus appears to need protectors (rakṣak) at the
critical moments of transition, those of descending and ascending her temple
abode. Again, it is not unusual for goddesses to have male attendants, most
often Bhairava and Gaṇeśa. The latter two also appear as deified children who
precede Kumārī in her charriot procession, a configuration which comes
closest to a parallel with Daitya and Kumār watching over the movements of
Taleju herself. The explicit protective function of Daitya and Kumār,
however, distinguishes them from the more common attendants or
companions of the Goddess. Equally remarkable is the distinction between
the two protectors themselves. Both of them have a martial character, but
while Kumār is a god, and is commonly considered a son of the Goddess,
Daitya is a demon, an enemy of the gods and particularly of the Goddess
herself. In several of the great divine dances of Kathmandu, such as the
Bhadraṅaḥ pyākhān (Van den Hoek 1994) and Naradevi pyākhān (Pradhan
1986:348,349), Daitya is the prototypical enemy of Goddess and is,
ultimately, always defeated by her. Various other dances of the valley also
express the same theme: the only reason for Daitya to exist, it seems, is to
be killed by the Goddess, just as, conversely, and more in accordance with the
textual sources, the Goddess herself was brought into being to defeat the
demon enemies of the gods.

A general description of the festival of Dasain (also called Durgā Pūja, or
in Newari, Mohani) is given by Pradhan (1986) in his dissertation on the
domestic and cosmic rituals of the Hindu Newars of Kathmandu.
Interestingly, Pradhan divides the cosmic rituals of the Newar into those
situated on the positive pole of the sacred and those situated on the negative
pole of the sacred. Needless to say, Dasain, which celebrates the victory of
the Goddess over her demon adversary, is placed under the heading "The
positive pole of the sacred...". This chapter describes in passing also the
Pacalī Bhairava festival, which takes place during Dasain, and the Indrāyaṇī
festival, celebrated nearly two months later. The festivals of Pacalī Bhairava's
counterparts and of Indrāyaṇī's sister-goddesses, however, are relegated to the
next chapter on "The negative pole of the sacred...", indicating the difficulty
inherent to this kind of classification.

In just four sentences Pradhan makes mention of the subject of the present
article, the performance of Kumār and Daitya during Dasain (1968:309). Brief
but accurate, Pradhan's account passes over the apparent anomaly that Daitya
is staged in this context to protect the Goddess who gloriously defeats him in
the overall pattern of Dasain. A telling Newari poem, which for unclear
reasons is inserted in the chapter on the negative pole of the sacred, praises
the victory of the Goddess in the most vivid terms. Since the poem has been
translated by Lienhardt (1974:144-145) and already quoted by Slusser (1982:333), it is sufficient here to revoke the last sentence: "You (i.e., the goddess Kāli) are red with blood through the blood-drops of the youthful body of your enemy, the Daitya (quoted in Pradhan 1986:319). The incongruity of the young Daitya protecting Taleju during Dasain goes simply unnoticed. Elsewhere, when treating the sources (1986:370-373) relevant to Dasain or Durgā Puja, the Devī Māhātmya in particular, Pradhan proves to be not insensitive to the ambiguities expressed there.

Whether the goddess is called Devī, Durgā, Kāli or Taleju, and her demon opponent Daitya, Mahiṣāsura or Caṇḍa, there is always the strange combination of animosity and mutual attraction between the two opposed parties. Both the textual sources and the present-day conceptions leave no doubt that the demon adversary, most often called Mahiṣāsura or Daitya, is at the same time an ardent devotee of Lord Śiva and an admirer, if not a lover, of the Goddess herself. The killing of Daitya in the Naredevī dances of Kathmandu is most tellingly preceded by an intimate courtship of the demon and the Goddess who kills him. This intriguing matter has been discussed by others quoted in Pradhan (e.g., Biardeau 1984) and more recently by the present writers (Van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992:72,73). Indications are that the riddle is intentional and does not have an instant solution. In trying to disentangle the positive from the negative pole of the sacred, Pradhan separates for himself what is clearly fused in his evidence, and by doing so, he unwillingly demonstrates the sheer impossibility of dividing up the sacred.

Yet the attempt is challenging and deserves further discussion because it touches upon a fundamental issue. All so-called victories of good over evil or their re-enactments, whether in Dasain, Indra Yātra, Gathā Mugaḥ or any other of Nepal's victorious yātrās, entail the problem of defining the "good". Similarly, all explanations of those festivals in terms of a re-establishment or reinforcement of "order" ignore the obvious disorder with is displayed on those occasions. The rakṣasa (demon) Gathā Mugaḥ, who is annually expelled from the city in the first festival after the rice-planting season is, at a slightly more hidden level, the hero of the event (Sayami 1980:5). Conversely, in the next festival of Indra Yātra, the king of the gods appears as a prisoner in his own festival, encaged or bound to the poles which are apparently erected in his honour (Van den Hoek 1992) and which are viewed by most observers as a cosmic confirmation of the royal order. Likewise, and even more so, Dasain is generally considered to express the ultimate victory of order and virtue over disorder and malice, and again, as representing the solid enforcement of the social structure with the king at its apex. The descent of the royal goddess, the numerous sacrifices made to her and the
violent sight of the khaḍga yāṭā are in that way seen as a conclusion, the end of the affair rather than the start of a new and dangerous episode.

The appearance of Daitya and Kumār in order to protect the protective Goddess displays just one of the dissonances in the festival of victory, but a telling one. Apart from Pradhan only Todd Lewis (1984), in his dissertation on the Tulādhar of Kathmandu makes mention of the dance of Kumār and Daitya. Lewis devotes two pages (1984:389-391) to the subject, but his account shows all the limitations of a one-caste, one-locality approach. It is inaccurate on quite a few points, including the identity of Daitya, the Śākya counterpart of the Tulādhar Kumār. The identity of Daitya, which is taken for granted by Pradhan and mistaken for Gaṇeśa by Lewis, thus remains puzzling.

At a closer view, Kumār, in the given context, carries with him a riddle of his own. Belonging to the world of the gods, and being a well-known demon-slayer like the goddess herself, Kumār’s energies as protector of Taleju are directed against ākāśa (the sky), the abode of the gods. The whole configuration thus appears to be a reversal of the established one. On the given occasions Daitya has to ward off the dangers originating from the world of which he himself is the protagonist: the demonic realm. Kumār, on the other hand, has to protect the goddess against dangers springing from the heavenly realm – to which the two of them are held to belong themselves. The performance of Daitya and Kumār, it is clear, does not fit the pattern of the all-victorious goddess who re-establishes the divine supremacy. The functions of Kumār and Daitya suggest that Taleju, in her advance, must fear obstruction from all three worlds: heaven, earth and the underworld. How are the protectors, the young Tulādhar and Śākya boys, supposed to cope with threats that cannot be met by the goddess Taleju herself? As will be seen the two boys are elaborately prepared, but the relation between their training and their principal performance is far from transparent.

The Social Setting: The Tulādhar and Śākya Khalāḥ
Both Daitya and Kumār are selected by lot among the eligible boys (between 8 and 15 years old, with no defects) of the Kvar Śākya and Thāne Tulādhar Khalāḥ (New.: "families", communities). In both cases all local members are involved: There is no guthi within either of the communities that has the more specific task of organising the Kumār or Daitya pyākhaṅ (New.: dance performance). With regard to the special relationship between the merchant community and the cult of the royal family, Lewis argues that, by dancing in the role of a god who protects the goddess who guards the security of the kingdom, the Urāy (the high Buddhist castes of merchants and artisans) express their alliance with royal power while, in return, the king
acknowledges the traders' singular high standing in society. "It is telling", Lewis adds in a footnote without source and explanation, "that in Rana times the relationship broke down so that the military had to intervene on several occasions to enforce the Urāy community's participation" (Lewis 1986:391).

As it is, not all members of Tulādhār and Śākya caste are obliged to participate. The Tulādhār of Kathmandu all live in the Upper city (Thane) but are divided between two quarters: Neta and Asan. Only the Tulādhār of Asan participate in the Kumār pyākhaṁ. The Śākya are divided into a Thane and Kvan population, and only the Śākya of Ombhāl in Kvan participate in the Daitya pyākhaṁ. The caste distinction is generally considered subordinate to the spatial and cosmic opposition between the two parties. Kumār represents the Upper town and Daitya the Lower town in a way analogous to their respective tasks: protection against the evil forces from heaven, and protection against the evil forces from the earth and underworld. As is so often the case, a socioeconomic explanation like the one given by Lewis may be quite true or even obvious, but it does not illuminate the particulars of the ritual proceedings themselves.

In both the Kumār and the Daitya case, an assembly of elders (New.: nāyo) supervises the ceremonies. Remarkably, they are at least nominally appointed by a particular government office, the Rāṣṭriya Abhilekhālaya or National Archives. The Śākya and Tulādhār mū nāyos (main elders) possess a lālmochar (royal ordinance) of King Pratap Singh Shah charging their communities with the responsibility for the Daitya and Kumār dances along with an appropriate royal compensation and remuneration. The mū nāyos are assisted in their task by five khalaṁ nāyo, family heads, who among other things provide the different musical instruments and musicians that are to accompany Kumār and Daitya. The assembly of nāyos is in charge of the all-important worship of Nāsadyo, the god of music and dance. They organize the sacrifices and feasts that are essential in the yearly course of events and more particularly at the installation of a new Daitya and Kumār every five years.

To have a son selected as Daitya or Kumār is not considered an enviable lot. The boys themselves view their role with a mixture of pride and embarrassment, but for the parents it is foremost a matter of concern. Their son, and by implication, the parents, have to obey strict life rules for five years, any breach of which can lead to illness, madness or even death. Both the Śākya and the Tulādhār community collect among their members a sizeable amount of money (nowadays amounting to several ten thousands of rupees) to be given to the new incumbent at start - this in addition to the meagre sum of Rs. 500 which the dancers annually receive from the government. If the lot falls to the richer families, they may try to find an
eligible boy from a more needy family to replace their own son. At least in recent times this procedure seems to be the rule rather than exception.

The evidence to substantiate the fear that a Kumār or Daitya performer is at risk for his life or sanity is not overwhelming. It indeed happened in 1975 that a Kumār died before his term finished, because, it is said, he witnessed some transgressive behaviour of his mother. In the experience of Jogratna Vajracarya, who has for over forty years been instructing Daityas – nine successive ones to date – only one of them showed signs of insanity, and that only after his term finished. Still the cause of his disorder was attributed to not having strictly adhered to the rules of his office which, most importantly, prescribe a daily morning and evening worship of Nāsadyo. As for this ex-Daitya, his sanity could be restored through medical treatment. The statistics of course do not refute the fact that families with a Kumār or Daitya in their midst may live under constant strain.

The training of Daitya and Kumār runs about parallel. For about a month, leading up to their first Dasain performance, they are instructed by a gubhāju (a Vajrācārya Buddhist officiant) in their dance. For each of the gubhājus it is a hereditary function to be guruju (teacher) of the respective dancers, and both of them possess secret texts with directives, mantras and songs for the specific purpose of instructing a Daitya or Kumār. At the end of the dancers’ term the mūnāyos have to inform the National Archives that a new lottery is to be held. Because the one untimely death of a Kumār performer in 1975 occurred just before his last dance – an event separate from the yearly Dasain performances – the terms of Daitya and Kumār also keep running parallel; both were in their third year of performance in 1992.

To avoid repetition in the description, attention will first be turned to the instruction period and the initiatory dance of Daitya. Kumār’s coming into being will then be described in those aspects in which it significantly differs from Daitya’s case. Information regarding the beginning and the end of the dancers’ career comes from interviews with the Šākya and Tulādar elders, the respective gubhājus, Kumār and Daitya themselves and finally a former Daitya and a former Kumār, all of whom are mentioned in the acknowledgements.

The Coming into being of Daitya and Kumār
The instruction and the rituals that lead up to the formation of a new Daitya every five years, should ideally start about one month before his first performance in Dasain. The actual training period, though, may depend on other circumstances, foremost of which is the readiness of a new candidate. In bygone days, the gubhāju (guruju, the teacher) of Daitya related, a māhmī (soldier) from Hanuman Dhoka would come to catch a young Šākya boy – an
account which calls into mind Lewis' above-mentioned footnote about the
enforcement of the Urāy community's participation by military means.

The present Daitya, who started in 1990, recalled that his instruction period
lasted no more than eight days, which led to a condensation of the rituals
required. His predecessor's training, which took over half a month, offered a
clearer view of the generally required sequence of preparations. The time
schedule, however, is not fixed in absolute terms. Whatever the length of the
instruction period, the critical passages are determined by jyotisha, astrology,
and it is the task of the gubhāju to calculate the auspicious moments. The
principal moments are:

1. kisali tayegu, (New.), the pledge made by the chosen one on his first day.
2. akha tayegu or dyo svanegu, (New.), the establishment of the god
   Nāsadyo in the new Daitya's house, one day after the demise of the old
   one - determined by jyotisha.
3. ghamgalā svanegu (New.), the attachment of the jingling bracelets worn
   below the knees, also determined by jyotisha, but ideally about half-way
   through Daitya's instruction period.
4. musi pūjā (New.), the main pūjā starting on the 5th of Dasain with the
   worship of Nāsadyo, and continuing throughout the night and the
   following day up to the first public performance of Daitya on the eve of
   Mahāsaptami.

The first ritual act of the boy becoming Daitya is also the most simple
one: the day after being selected he goes, together with his guru, to the shrine
of Nāsadyo – the god of music and dance – in Ombahāl. Almost every quarter
of town has its Nāsadyo, but the particular one in Ombahāl, Padma
Niteśvara, is considered to be so powerful that women (who normally
perform daily worship at Nāsadyo) cannot enter the shrine. At this Nāsadyo
the Daitya-to-be has to offer kisali (New.: a small earthen platter containing
rice, an arecanut and a coin), which signifies a sacramental bond or promise.
Shortly after, but dependent on an auspicious moment (sāit) calculated by the
gubhāju, the old Daitya will, after partaking in a goat sacrifice to Nāsadyo
and a sacrificial meal (New.: sī kāh bhvay), make his parting dance. The
build-up of the new Daitya's sacrality starts only after the demise of the old
one, his "falling off the stage", an event that will be described in section 7.
The last dance of the old Daitya and the first dance of the new one are
performances in their own right, and have nothing to do with the protection
of the goddess Taleju.

On the day following the old Daitya's death on the stage, the god Nāsadyo
will be brought to the new Daitya's house. This elaborate ceremony is
known by two names, which indicate phases of the process: *dyo sāre yāyegu* (New.: transferring the god) and *ākhā tayegu* (New.: establishing the ākhā). Ākhā generally denotes a room dedicated to Nāsadyo and the practice of music and dance. In this specific case it refers to the temporary shrine in the house of Daitya where he is to worship Nāsadyo daily and where he receives his *mohani* (New.: soot mark on the forehead, lit. "charm") and his *makuta* (New.: divine crown) before setting out for a dance. The actual practice for the dance takes place first at his guru's house (without music) and subsequently in the courtyard of his own house (with music).

The process of transferring Nāsadyo to an ākhā or *ākhācheṁ* (New.: house for musical repetition) is by no means unique in itself. Nāsadyo is a divinity of great importance for the performing arts. He is as essential for the Dhimay music of the Jyāpu (Toffin 1993) and for the Gathu pyākhaṁ (Van den Hoek 1994) as he is for the Daitya pyākhaṁ, the dance of Daitya. A well-illustrated survey of the characteristics of the omnipresent Nāsadyo is given by Ter Ellingson (1990) in an article subtitled "a photo essay". Unless the *ākhācheṁ* in which the musicians or dancers exercise their art is itself a shrine of Nāsadyo – as it is in case of the in-door shrine at Vatu, where Jyāpu exercise their Dhimay and Gathu their pyākhaṁ – the god has to be transferred (*dyo sāre yāyegu*) to the *ākhācheṁ*.

In Daitya’s case the ritual procedure is that two pieces of cloth with the features of Nāsadyo – three eyes and a moustache (called Nāsadyo kāpaḥ and painted by a member of the Citrakār, Painters caste) – are brought to the shrine of the god. The small temple in Omahāḷ also contains the *aṣṭamāṭṛkās* (the common ensemble of eight goddesses), but the two Nāsadyo kāpaḥ are hung in front of the square recess in the middle of the back-wall, which represents Nāsadyo himself. The presence of the god is most often signified by one or three empty cavities of rectangular or triangular shape (see Ellingson 1990:238-240). After a sacrifice of one goat there, Daitya himself carries one of the two kāpaḥ to his house. The installation of the god (New.: *dyo svanegu*) consists of putting this Nasadyo kāpaḥ in the room thereto reserved (New.: *ākhā tayegu*) and the sacrifice of a second goat in the newly established ākhā. That night a special sī kāh bhvay takes place which links the boy who is in the process of becoming Daitya with the one who finished his term the night before.

In the yearly recurrent goat sacrifices which the Sākya make to Nāsadyo in the night preceding Daitya's Dasain performance, the eight shares in the head of the sacrifice (New.: *si*) are divided among the six khalaḥ nāyo, the gubhāju and Daitya. The gubhāju receives the most prestigious part, the right eye, Daitya gets the tongue, a part which does not indicate superiority or seniority but which often signifies the locus of divine power (cf Van den Hoek and
Shrestha 1992:66 and Van den Hoek 1992:551). The head of the goat sacrificed on the eve of the old Daiya's parting dance had been divided according to this set pattern. The heads of the two goats sacrificed on the day of dyo śare yāyegu, the transference of Nāsadyo, will by contrast provide sixteen pieces of sī, in which not only the khalāḥ nāyō but also other members will share in order of seniority. Most significantly, one of the two tongues is still given to the old Daiya, the other to the boy who is yet to assume the Daiya identity. After establishing Nāsadyo in the ākhā, the Daiya-to-be starts taking his lessons from the gubhāju. In the period leading up to the next ceremony (New.: ghaṅgalā svanegu) he is only practically instructed in the movements of the dance without any accompanying music and without special dress or divine attributes.

Ghaṅgalā svanegu, the ceremony of tying his jingling bracelets (pieces of cloth set with bells, an attribute of divine dancers in general), marks an important step in Daiya's formation but is not yet the final stage of the ritual sequence. Its timing again depends on a sait, an auspicious moment calculated by the gubhāju. Both the ghaṅgalā themselves and the musical instruments of the Pancaṭāla group which accompanies Daiya's dance are brought to the Nāsadyo shrine. The ghaṅgalā are placed in the cavity of Nāsadyo himself, the musical instruments are arranged beneath on the floor. Again a pūjā including a goat sacrifice is made to Nāsadyo, after which the instruments are handed over to the musicians and the ghaṅgalā to Daiya. The instruments are carried, without being played, to Daiya's home. After taking the sī kāḥ bhvay of the sacrificed goat there, the ghaṅgalā are put on Daiya's legs by the citāyā nāyō – the only nāyō who is not associated with a musical instrument and whose special function is to decorate Daiya. The musicians take up their instruments and Daiya symbolically makes a few steps on their accompaniment. Starting from ghaṅgalā svanegu, his further training takes place in the courtyard to which his house belongs (at present Ganthināni) and is from now on accompanied by music. The teaching sessions are open only to male members of the Śākya khalāḥ.

The next and final stage in the ritual sequence (musi pūjā) starts two days before Mahāsaptamī, again with a pūjā and goat sacrifice for Nāsadyo. The principal members of the Śākya khalāḥ will spend the whole night at Nāsadyo. Daiya's final transformation starts only the following day and consists of two parts, the first of which is surprising. Dressed in a white long skirt (New.: jāmā) with a turban (New.: betāli) on his head and a wound-up cloth around his belt (New.: janī) – the attire of Nāsadyo himself, it is said – a third eye and a moustache are painted on his face by a Citarākār (Painter). Thereby he displays the principal features of Nāsadyo and thus makes a first dance which, strikingly, does not reflect Daiya but the god
Nāsadyo himself. After his dance he is made to walk seven steps over lotus flowers and betel nuts, which, according to the mū nāyo, marks his final transformation into Daitya.

In the procession to his house, however, this "Daitya" still wears the attire of Nāsadyo. What is more, the Paṅcatāla music, which usually contains one three-headed drum (New.: kvatāḥ) will for once, and only on this occasion, be supplemented with two additional khimā drummers, called Bhrṅgī and Nandī. On the toraṇa of the Nāsadyo shrine itself, Niteśvara is depicted with exactly those two attendants: Bhrṅgī, playing the kvatāḥ drum, to his right, and Nandī, playing a two-headed khimā, on his left (which is a more general representation, see Ellingson 1990:229). Although the two extra drummers are not bringing in an extra kvatāḥ drum, it is clear from their names that they constitute the accompaniment of Nāsadyo. Curiously then, in what is said to be a crucial transformation and rite de passage, the young incumbent is deified not as Daitya, but as a reflection of Nāsadyo himself. On the way to his home, Daitya's retinue distributes samay baji (New.: mixture of beaten and puffed rice, soybeans, meat, garlic and raw ginger) as prasāda (blessed food) to bystanders, something which will not occur any more when Daitya appears in his proper tenue. Daitya will receive his appropriate dress that same evening, after the si kāḥ bhavy that contains shares in the head of the goat sacrificed at Nāsadyo and another one sacrificed that night in the ākhā. Again there are sixteen si to be divided, among, of course, the gubhāju, the nāyos, Daitya himself (the tongue) and other members of the khalāh in order of seniority. The old Daitya may participate, but in contrast with the si kāḥ bhavy at ākhā svanegu, on the day after his own demise, he is no longer obliged to take part.

Unlike the ghaṅgalā, which go from the one Daitya to the other until they are worn out, the appropriate dress of shiny red with yellow brocade has to be newly made every five years at a cost of Rs 3000 (last time). The responsibility for presenting Daitya's attributes on the spot is assigned to specific families who do not live in Ombahāl and do not participate in the selection of a Daitya. The dress itself, for example, is brought by the eldest (New.: ṭhāypā) of the Śākya of Lagan quarter. Likewise, a Śākya from Saubahāl brings the tvahā, the four bangles which Daitya wears around his upper and under arms, and a Śākya from Cikaṃmugāḥ Bahāl brings a necklace of coral. Surprisingly the most important ornament, the divine crown (New.: makuta) is sent every five years for inspection or repair to a Tulādhār in Dagubahāl in Asan – the very point of departure for Daitya's counterpart Kumār – in what seems to be the only connection between the two groups (mediated, though, by a Maharjan (Farmer) who brings the crown to and fro). The assembly of elders which which fulfill the main tasks in the
Daitya pyākhaṁ, including the organisation of feasts and rituals, together
with the total assembly of musicians (at least five Paytāṁ horn blowers are
required) all in all amount to a group of about thirty people involved in
the main events in Daitya's first performance.

Daitya's dance in front of Nāsadyo in the attire of that god is not considered
his first public performance. Only in the night of that day, after the sī kāṁ
bhvay, is he dressed as Daitya by the citāya nāyo, the elder who takes care of
Daitya's decoration. Before going out, on this and other occasions, Daitya has
first to enter the ākha with his guru, who will give him the finishing touch
before he sets out: the black soot mark on the forehead (mohanī) which is
shared with him by the gubhāju himself. For the five years to come, neither
of them can take a mohanī mark from any other god or on any other
occasion. In the ākha the gubhāju also puts the crown on the head of Daitya,
who will then step out of the ākha into the courtyard, greeted with a blaring
welcome by the paytāṁ (long horn) players.

The first dance itself will not be repeated in the five years to come. It is a
public event on a stage (New.: dabā) in the locality itself, namely
Cikaṁmugaṁ dabu, the same stage where also the last dance will be
performed, but then in the absence of any public. Daitya is in his movements
(the sequence of which, without repetitions, takes only a couple of minutes
to complete) accompanied by the Pañcatāla music of the Śākya. The
ensemble consists of at least five paytāṁ players, a tāḥ (New.: small
cymbals), a babhu (New.: big cymbals) and a kvatāḥ (New.: three-headed
drum) player, as well as one or more singers (cf Ellingson 1990:268, who
omits the babhu cymbals, and Lewis 1984:390, who speaks of a "thā"
drummer)

In the morning after his first performance Daitya shall, accompanied by the
Pañcatāla musicians, for the first time act as a guardian of the royal goddess
Taleju. Has he, one may wonder, been prepared for that particular task? On
inquiry it appeared that not a single component of his training is related to
this goddess or to her protection. It is even prohibited for Daitya to take the
mohanī mark which, during Dasain, is given in the name of the Goddess by
every family head to the members of his household. Daitya's training, the
gubhāju affirmed, is entirely centered upon Nāsadyo. The repertoire of songs,
it is true, contains homages to divinities which Daitya passes on his way to
Hanuman Dhoka palace, and for whom he makes a short dance en route
(New.: dyo lhāyeugu). Yet none of those is dedicated to Taleju for whom, in
the words of the old Daitya, "He has not to bow" (i.e. not to make a
nāmaskāra). Similarly absent in his instruction are any references to the
closest of Daitya himself, that is, to the role he has to enact. Daitya is, in
all respects, trained as a devotee of Nāsadyo, up to the point of identification:
during the crucial transition to divinity on the day preceding Mahāsaptamī he
does not appear as Daitya but as a mirror image of Nāsadyo. Although that
transition does not have to be repeated in the years to come, it is to Nāsadyo
that the boy owes worship every morning and evening, both in the ākhā of
his own house and at the shrine of the god.

During his five-year term, Daitya cannot take any food touched by
somebody else (New.: cipah) and cannot sleep outside his own house. In
case one of his parents comes to die, however, he has to take up his abode in
his guru’s house, for he himself cannot be touched by death pollution. Still,
even then, he has to make his daily worship in his ākhā, in the house where
death has struck. Apparently his association with Nāsadyo not only excludes
but also transcends the idea of death pollution that is otherwise so central to
Nepalese thought and society. Although, from the point of view of the palace
and the royal goddess, the godly performer has to act on three occasions only –
and that within a space of time of four days – Daitya remains part of the
boy’s identity during the whole five-year period. At the same time his
vocation as a Daitya dancer seems to be something casual compared to the
daily devotion he owes to Nāsadyo.

With regard to the central position attributed to Nāsadyo, Kumār’s
orientation does not differ from Daitya’s; both boys are ardent devotees of
Nāsadyo from the beginning to the end. A comparison between them,
therefore, does not elucidate main issues like their contrasted identities and
their relationship with the goddess Taleju Bhavānī. The initiation into their
divine roles and their further course of life run about parallel, yet there are
some notable and not always explicable differences. The different stages in
the training of Kumār may, as in Daitya’s case, be contracted under the
pressure of time.

The principal rituals are not determined by jyotisā but by convenience, a
difference which may be attributed to the fact that Kumār’s guruju, in
contrast to Daitya’s, is not also an astrologer himself. Another, perhaps not
all too significant, difference is that in the past two decades, the Tulādhār
have replaced some but not all of the prescribed goat sacrifices by duck
sacrifices. In the latter case Kumār receives, instead of the goat’s tongue, the
right wing of the bird as his share, and his guru the head of it, while the
other parts (in case of a duck only five) are divided among the nāyos. As in
the Śākya khalāḥ, most nāyos stand for the different instruments of the
Pancatāla music. In addition to the mū nāyo, they consist of the kvatāḥ nāyo,
the paytāḥ nāyo, and the babhu nāyo. There is also a citākāri or citā nake
nāyo whose task it is to decorate Kumār and serve food, but he is not
considered to be nāyo proper and does not have a share in the sī. A tāḥ nāyo
is absent in the Kumār pyākhaṁ because the tāḥ are not played by the
Tulādhār themselves but by a group of five Vajrācāryas. Formerly, families other than those belonging to the khalaḥ used to bring different items of dress and decoration for Kumār, like in case of Daitya. Castes other than Urāy participated in it as well, such as Shrestha (giving dress) and Citrakār (giving the jabi for Kumār's loins). At present the nāyo takes care of all attributes except for the shiny upper-dress (New.: tās) of Kumār which still comes as a gift from a Tulādhār family of Asan.

A main difference with the setting of Daitya's sacred space is that Nāsadyo is not transferred to Kumār's own house but to that of the mū nāyo in Dagubahāl, and only for the period of a new Kumār's instruction. Afterwards Kumār has to direct his devotion solely to the Nāsadyo shrine in Taḥcheñbāhāl, to which also his guru belongs. At the start of his course Kumār first brings kisali to his guru and then, together with his guru, to Nāsadyo. Just like the kisali tayeugu by Daitya, this pledge is ideally made on the eve of the demise of the old Kumār. A few days later ākhā svanegu takes place, on the occasion of which formerly two goats were sacrificed, one at Nāsadyo and one at the ākhā, according to the same pattern as that of the Śākya. The practice has however been abandoned since about twenty years ago, and hence there is no question of the old and the new Kumār coming together in a sī kāḥ bhay to share the tongues of the animals sacrificed. The old Kumār gets his last share of sī at a sī kāḥ bavy just before he falls off the stage in his parting dance.

The new Kumār is made to step over three maṇḍalas (New.: tripada käyekegu) on which areca nuts are laid – a ceremony comparable to the seven steps Daitya takes at his final consecration. Apart from installing the Nāsadyo kāpāh in a room of the mū nāyo's house, ten nails are driven into the ceiling above Nāsadyo, which are, according to the gubhāju, to protect the ākhā from the ten directions and their overlords. The list of the latter is peculiar in more than one respect, not least because it includes Kumār himself: Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Kumāra, Vāyu, Īśāna, Nārātya, Nāga, Asura and Īrđhva. The ten nails are encircled by a thread. In this way the guardian of the guardian goddess is guarded in turn against what are generally seen as the guardians of the ten directions: the chain of guardianship appears without beginning or end. At ākhā svanegu the new Kumār symbolically practices some dancing passes which he is yet to learn. After about a week of practice the ghāṅgalā bracelets are handed over to him in the ākhā in the ghāṅgalā svanegu ceremony which is again less elaborate than that of the Śākya. Instead of the goat sacrifice, the dedication of the musical instruments, and another sī kāḥ bavy, the performance of a kalaḥ pūjā (New.: standard worship with flowers, incense, light and foods) is sufficient. In contrast with Daitya's instruction schedule, Kumār is from the beginning being trained with the
accompaniment of music in Dagubahāl. For specific instructions, or if it proves necessary, he receives complementary teachings in his guru's house.

While Daitya and the music accompanying him pay reverence to many gods but not to Taleju herself, Kumār learns to dance to the accompaniment of songs – not caryāgītā – which are dedicated to three gods: one is devoted to Nāsadyo or Nrtyanātha Lokanātha, one to Annapūrṇā and one to Guhyeśvarī – who is also iṣṭadevatā (the chosen deity) of the gubhāju himself. So, while there is no song dedicated to Taleju by that name, the song and dance to Guhyeśvarī, which are also enacted inside the palace compound for Taleju, do according to the gubhāju refer to this goddess; Guhyeśvarī represents Taleju. As for the rules that accompany the teaching of Kumār, he and his guru may not take a mohāni (charm) prepared by anybody else. Like in Daitya's case this mohāni appears to mark the bond between guru and śiṣya. Although Kumār starts his Dasain dances from Dagubahāl and gets his mohāni only on the way, at the Nāsadyo shrine in Tacheṃbahāl, he is commonly seen as divinized already when he comes out of Dagubahāl wearing his makuta. In the view of the gubhāju the part of the dance which precedes his giving of the mohāni does not yet have the required sacred character.

It is also commonly held by the Tulādhar community that Kumār may not sleep or eat outside his house, and this was partly confirmed, with regard to sleeping, by the young Kumār himself. In this regard the view of the gubhāju is less strict: Kumār is allowed to eat outside but not to eat cipaḷḥ, food touched by others. He may also sleep elsewhere, but not in the house of his mother’s brother – who in Kumār’s case is to carry him off the stage after his demise. A further rule is that nobody may cross Kumār at the stairs, and if this happens nevertheless – which is likely once a while – a kṣaṃā (forgiveness) pūjā has to be done for Nāsadyo. Although Kumār is to worship Nāsadyo for five years, the training periods for his dance in subsequent years are limited to about a week of rehearsal with his guru. The ritual is likewise confined to one goat (or nowadays a duck) sacrifice and a sī kāḥ bway on the eve of Mahāsaptami.

The conclusion of Kumār’s initial instruction does not have to coincide with that particular evening as it has to in the case of Daitya. The ritual that precedes the first dance of the divine boys – in Kumār’s case performed at Asan dabū – are equally elaborate, however. The final ceremony, which is called musi pūjā by the Śākya but pidānegu (New.: "making a first appearance") by the Tulādhar, likewise requires the sacrifice of two goats, one on the eve of pidanegu and one that day itself. The second sacrifice is not executed in the ākhā, but like that of the evening before, at the Nāsadyo shrine itself, where the assembly has stayed overnight. The ākhā, by contrast,
does not receive a sacrifice but is removed on the very day of pidanegu; the Nāsadyo kāpāḥ, and therewith Nāsadyo himself, is transferred back to the shrine in Taḥcēmābaḥāl. Appearances are that the Tulādhār are willingly leaving the practice of goat sacrifice in the ākhā, that is, in the house of the mū nāyo. Nāsadyo will be installed there again after five years only, when a new Kamār is to be initiated.

After the morning sacrifice and ājā at Nāsadyo, the gubhāju hands over the musical instruments to the players, and to Kamār his dress. The mohānī that is prepared during the sacrifice will be used for the coming five years at the time of Kamār's dances. After receiving the mohānī, the boy will for the first time make a dance. Unlike Daitya he does so in his full dress. Yet, like in Dāitya's case, the dance is devoted to Nāsadyo and is not considered to be the first dance of Kamār. The boy also gets a moustache, but instead of a third eye, a jayābi (victory sign?) is painted on his forehead. It is rectangular consisting of seven blocks, a vertical one in the middle with three horizontal ones on each side. Spelled as jay jabhī, it is mentioned by Kasā as an attribute of Nāsadyo without further explanation (Kasā 1965: 89) His guru and the other Vajrācāryas are given a vajra sign while the Tulādhār khalāt – consisting of about thirty members – all get a lotus painted on their forehead. There are other indications that Kamār, in this phase of his being, represents Nāsadyo rather than the Kamār who he is yet to become. Like Dāitya, he is, on the way to the mū nāyo's house, accompanied by a musical ensemble which includes two extra khāṁ drums. Although the additional khāṁ are not named Bhrngī and Nandī, the attendants of Nāsadyo, the parallel with the Sākya procedure is too close to be insignificant. On the way home the mū nāyo himself plays the kvatāh drum.

Only after partaking in the si, after consuming the tongue of the goat sacrificed that morning, the boy goes out to perform his first dance as Kamār. The first dance takes place at Aṣan dabū, and even though Kamār has by then obtained his final identity, this performance is given just for the grace of it. It has as yet nothing to do with the specific task assigned to him. Kamār shows himself to the public on his own behalf, independent from the protective role for which he has been called into being. It is as if he still manifests Nāsadyo, be it in the guise of Kamār. In the preface to his collection of songs to Nāsadyo Prem Bahādur Kasā pays attention to Kamār's dance but almost ignores the Kamār identity of the dancer. The Kumo dancer as Kasā calls him, must keep Nāsadyo in him, "draw him along", not only during his dances for Taleju but during his full term as a Kamār dancer. "When his term comes to an end, he is forced down from the stage by the necessary ritual (vidhi). Then only will Nāsadyo leave him and set him free from his bandhān, his bond (Kasā 1965: 81)
The identities of both Kumār and Daitya then contain a fundamental mystery. No part of their instruction is related either to the goddess they are to protect or to their own identity as Daitya or Kumār. Both of them have an almost exclusive relationship with Nāsadyo. It is as if two originally separate enactments, the divinization of the Śākya and Tulādhar boys in their opposed yet similar identities on the one hand, and the descent of the royal goddess on the other hand, meet each other almost by accident, or, to put it more faithfully, by the grace of some higher agency. For at the moment supreme itself, when Taleju Bhavānī makes her short yātrās up and down her high abode, and Daitya and Kumār perform their dances, nobody would call into question the sense of purpose behind it all. Indeed, if Daitya and Kumār manage to come in time, the sheer synchronicity of events offers enough proof of a divine scheme which need not be fully comprehended by any of the participants. The assignment of Daitya and Kumār in those events, which did not become evident from their own preparations for it, may still have a clue in the overall context of their acts during Dasain. As was observed above, they not only accompany the movement of the goddess, but also the khaḍga yātrā, the sword procession at the conclusion of Dasain. Both events will be scrutinized in the following sections.

The Descent and Ascent of Taleju Bhavānī

Both Kumār and Daitya’s own people and the more informed outsiders hold that the two divine figures came along with the goddess Taleju Bhavānī to protect her on her way to Nepal, and that, therefore, the two of them turn up again during Taleju’s short moves up and down the temple. Although Taleju is said to have four representations (see also Pradhan 1986: 309), which are covered when they are taken up and down, a fifth one may be added to them. The image of Guhyesvāri in the form of a maṇḍala, which also resides in the Taleju temple and is shown to the public on Mahānavamī, is taken out in a real yātrā. Accompanied by the guruju peleton (the antiquated army brass band which belongs to the rājguru), the image is carried to the pītha of Guhyesvāri on the tenth day of Mārga Kṛṣṇa in November. This maṇḍala, which is, together with one of Bhairava, taken in a khat from the Taleju temple to the most powerful Guhyesvāri pītha to stay there overnight, is alternately called Taleju or Guhyesvāri, by some people combined to Taleju Guhyesvāri.

Daitya and Kumār do not however come to accompany the Goddess in what is a real yātrā, but only during the short moves of the four images in Dasain. The timing of those moves is determined by calculating an auspicious moment (sāit), which is to be passed on to the responsible Tulādhar and Śākya elders. However that may be, on Mahāsaptami morning (1992) both
Kumār and Daitya came late: Taleju had already been brought down. Not only did both of them come too late for the set time, but Daitya, in addition, arrived only after Kumār had already left the scene, while, according to rule, they should have come together. In the morning of the tenth day of Dasain, Vijayā Daśami, things went better. Daitya and Kumār staged their dance together – but without having any interaction – on the dabū in Trisulchowk, the courtyard adjoining the stairs leading up to the temple, at the very moment that Taleju was being carried up. Their programme, which they also duly performed when coming too late, is identical on both occasions and will be viewed in some more detail now.

On the eve of Mahāsaptami the elders, the gubhāju and the performing Daitya cq. Kumār have a sī kāh bhavy of a goat sacrificed at their respective Nāsadyo shrines (recently replaced by a duck sacrifice in the Tulādhār's case). In the morning of Mahāsaptami the dressing up and decoration of Daitya and Kumār is almost casual. Daitya remains an ordinary boy until he enters the ākhā with his gubhāju and receives his mohani tikā and crown. Kumār's dedication, it was noticed, contains a slight complication: his makuta is put on in the nāyo's house in Dagubahāl but his mohani mark is given by the gubhāju on the way to Hanuman Dhoka, when the small procession passes the Nāsadyo shrine at Tachen bahāl. There Kumār first goes inside the bahāl to worship Nāsadyo with an offering of light (New.: iūā) and husked rice (New.: jāktī) in the company of his father. Considering the importance of the mohani mark it is surprising that Kumār dances as a divinity before receiving it, but, contrary to the gubhāju's opinion, the elders think it does not matter too much.

Both Kumār and Daitya themselves are slightly hesitant to tell about their feelings as divine dancers. Kumār, 10 years old, told that he sometimes has the feeling of being a god during the performance, while Daitya, 17 years old, said that he felt a little unconscious of himself after receiving the mohani. The previous Daitya however (now 20 years old) did not feel such a change in himself, except during his last dance – when Daitya was passing away from him. Whatever the real feeling of the boys, the show itself is entirely convincing. Kumār makes short but intriguing dances (of about two minutes) in front of Dagubahāl (where the mū nāyo lives), at Asan dabū (the site of his first dance), in front of Taḥchembahāl (where he worships Nāsadyo and receives the mohani), in front of Janabahāl (the residence of Seto Macchendranāth) and at Indrachowk, before entering Hanuman Dhoka. Lewis (390) reports that the performances inside the palace compound are closed to the public. In fact the public attention is considerable and, especially at Vijayā Daśami, the stage (dabū) in Trisulchowk where Daitya and Kumār are performing together is surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. Only white
people and very black people (negroes) are refused entrance.

Inside the palace compound both Kumār and Daitya dance for a few minutes at the stage in Trisulchowk as well as in front of the Trikula shrine at the foot of the Taleju temple. Then they proceed to Mulchowk (in line with the temple stairs and Trisulchowk) where Taleju resides in her (closed) Pūjā Kohā. After a short dance in Mulchowk they divert their course to the more Eastern Nasalchowk, the courtyard which was in Malla and early Shaha times the place for performing drama at the palace. After staging a similar dance there, Daitya and Kumār leave through Hanuman Dhoka. In front of the palace gate they make a very short dance before returning by the same way as they came and stopping at the same places for a dance to greet the main gods (dyo lhāyegu).

No effort will be made here to describe the dance movements of Kumār or Daitya. Kumār does not display a martial outlook, but by his serpentine movements, he certainly casts a spell on the public. The bow which Kumār carries goes without an arrow and is held by him without feigning its actual use. Both Daitya and Kumār are accompanied by Pañcatāla musicians. Daitya appears the more aggressive one, especially towards the end of his dances when, brandishing his dagger, he makes a sudden advance before coming to an abrupt standstill. In contrast with Kumār he first dances in the courtyard (Ganthinani) of his own house, where the ākhā is established, and does so again at this return, just before entering the ākhā with his guru to remove the spell. Like Kumār he also dances in the alley leading to the ākhā, just outside his own courtyard. Beyond his own abode, on the way to and from Hanuman Dhoka, he dances when passing Čikāmmugāḥ dabū (the site of his first dance) and once more at the crossroads of Maru, before proceeding to Hanuman Dhoka.

From the viewpoint of time then, and also from that of the ritual involved, the outward manifestation of Kumār and Daitya on the Mahāsaptami and the Vijayā Daśamī morning of Dasain, represents only a fraction of the energies that have been vested in them. They can complete their tour in just over an hour, while their actual presence at Taleju's residence inside the palace compound is confined to about twenty minutes. What we see are two divinized boys who, provided with their proper weapons, dashingly approach Hanuman Dhoka from the North and the South. Those directions also mark the very distinction between them, with Kumār belonging to the Upper city and oriented towards the sky, and Daitya belonging to the Lower city and oriented towards the netherworld. When both of them meet in the very centre of town, it is striking to note that their separation remains. Their is no clash between them but no other exchange either. Evidently the separation between Thane and Kyane has to be maintained in the domain of the Goddess who
supposedly transcends the division.

To protect the Goddess, it appears, the two chosen guardians should not form one party, but, on the contrary, they must constitute two opposed ones. This striking feature is significant within the overall ritual structure of the city, as will be seen in the concluding section. First another riddle has to be tackled, namely the presence of Kumār and Daitya during the khaḍga yāṭrā in the night of Vijayā Daśamī. The goddess Taleju has returned to her abode that very morning and will not be taken out until next year. And reversely, in the night of Vijayā Daśamī, the parties of Kumār and Daitya do not again enter the domain of the royal goddess. They join the sword procession when it comes out of the palace. If their main task and their accumulated powers are all directed towards protecting the goddess, how to interpret the necessity of their presence during the khaḍga yāṭrā?

Khaḍga Yāṭrā

The ceremony called khaḍga yāṭrā (New.: pāyo) is observed at different levels of society and in various manifestations. In every Newar household a mostly secret khaḍga yāṭrā is performed in or starting from the household shrine (New.: āgarāchen) where, among other things, a kālaśa (jar) representing the Goddess is installed. The climax of this khaḍga yāṭrā is the cleaving of a pumpkin — a common replacement of a buffalo and of the buffalo demon — with a sword. Only the male members enact this symbolic victory of the Goddess over her enemy, making shaking movements as if possessed. The household ceremony generally takes place in the morning of Vijayā Daśamī, but the Kusle or Jugi caste performs it the day before and the Tulādhār of Asan the day after Vijayā Daśamī. A peculiarity of the latter is that they bring the khaḍga yāṭrā outside and make a round of Asan shaking their swords before they cleave the pumpkin in a courtyard — with the youngest member, who also went ahead in the procession, taking precedence over the elders.

During the day and during the night of Vijayā Daśamī, the tenth day of Dasain marking the victory of the goddess, various other khaḍga yāṭrā parties go out from different dyochem, a nearly complete list of which is given by Pradhan (Map III, after p. 313). Some of those offer a spectacular sight. The pāyo group of the Vatu Bhadra kali dyochem comes out in the dress of the gaṇa of the goddess and her attendants. Like in divine dances such as the Gathu Bhadra kali pyākhaṁ, they wear the robes of the aṣṭamāṭrkā. Although they go without masks, the different māṭrkās are identifiable by the colours of their robes. Brandishing and shaking their swords the gaṇa makes three short moves in Vatu quarter, one to the East, one to the South and one to the West, before going back into the dyochem. Just preceding their expedition a baupā (a portion of special food for malevolent spirits) is brought out and
deposited in front of the dyochein to placate the bhūt-pret, the ghosts.

One would expect the khaḍga yāṭrā of the royal palace to be more impressive than the one staged by the Jyāpu of Vatu. On the contrary, however, the khaḍga yāṭrins of the central goddess do not represent her gāṇa and, like the Tulādharis of Asan, they go about in ordinary dress. In 1991 the 12-yearly Bhadrakālī pyākham took place starting with the exchange of swords (khaḍga siddhi) between Bhadrakālī (embodied as a masked dancer) and the king of Nepal in the night of Vijayā Daśamī, in front of the Northern gate to Taleju temple (Sinhha Duvāh). The eleven masked Gathu dancers representing the gāṇa of Bhadrakālī took up position there, shaking their bodies and their specific weapons. The king exchanged swords with Bhadrakālī at the moment that the gāṇa was met by the khaḍga yāṭrā coming from the Sinhha Dhoka (the Western gate of the Taleju temple). Kumār and Daitya performed their dance facing the Bhadrakālī gāṇa and the khaḍga siddhi. Because of the added lustre of the king’s sword exchange with the goddess, the number of sword - carriers from the palace was considerably higher than in 1992 (for the Bhadrakālī pyākham see Van den Hoek 1994). In ordinary years the king, who supposedly once took lead in the khaḍga yāṭrā (Pradhan 1986:311) does not attend. In the absence of the impressive gāṇa of divine dancers, the ceremony bears a much more sober character. The luster given to it springs from the outstanding roles of Daitya and Kumār. Their presence in the khaḍga yāṭrā remains a mystery, however, for which no clarification could be obtained. Only the overall composition of the event may still hold a clue to it.

The Karmācāryas start the enterprise with a kotaḥ pūjā (a standard set of offerings on a brass plate) in the room adjacent to the Pūjā Koṭhā which Taleju herself has left that morning. In that room (New.: naḥlasvāṁ taye kothā) the sacred naḥlasvām (New.: barley and maize sprouts grown in the dark) of Dasain is still standing (worshipped daily by a Rājopādhyāya Brahmin from Ghaṭasthāpana onwards) and also the swords are placed there. The kotaḥ, the brass plate containing the items of worship, is prepared by Jyāpu ladies who are called laykumisa, palace women, but the pūjā itself is performed by the Karmācāryas in secret. After completing his worship, the mū aćāhju (New.: Taleju’s main priest) personally went to the Hanuman Dhoka to let in the Jyāpu who had been stopped there by the army guard. Inside Mulchowk several items were handed over to them. A wooden image of Hanuman on a stick is given to the Jyāpu who will go ahead of the sword procession, according to the mū aćāhju to announce its coming. Two other Jyāpu men received a torch of wood, with cotton soaked in oil wrapped around the top of it. Another two were to carry baupās, with paper masks of Bhairava and Kumārī attached to them. Finally two Jyāpu were given sticks
(New.: chali kathi) with which they were to guard the royal sword in the procession. Significantly, one of them represents Thane and the other one Kvané. Six people including the mū ṛacāḥju took up swords, among whom also one very young Karmācārya and a Josī. The royal sword was brought from a special room by a government official. When the party came out of Siṁha Dhoka, Daitya and Kumār, with Daitya going in front, joined the head of the procession preceding not only the pāyo party but also Hanuman and the baupā-carriers. They thus go ahead of the actual khaḍga yātra, but that initial sequence could not be maintained all the way. Daitya and Kumār have to perform their own dances, for which the rest of party does not wait. Furthermore, Hanuman moves forward and backward in an unpredictable way and appears really possessed because, according to the Karmācāryas, a mantra is cast on him by the mū ṛacāḥju in Mulchowk when he wraps a turban around the head of the person to carry – and to be – Hanuman. Interestingly, Daitya and Kumār all along make the same shaking movements as the sword-carriers make or should make. After coming out of the Western gate of the Taleju temple the procession moves first in a Southern direction to the crossroads just below Kāsthamaṇḍap, and then, passing Maru Gaṇesā, it goes Northward through Pyāphal to the army quarters of Kamphukot. It crosses the notorious kot and passes the Mahādeva temple and Makhan on the way to Vanghāha (Indrachowk), the northernmost point.

Kumār and his company leave the procession there, at Indrachowk, and return home. Daitya returns with the procession through Makhan back to the palace and takes leave there. The two bau are deposited at Siṁha Duvāh (the Northern gate to Taleju) in front of the right and the left lion-guardians, who according to some informants, again represent the Thane and Kvané divide. Then the party continues to the Western gate of the Taleju temple and waits there till the Siṁha Dhoka is opened to let them in again. Once inside they ascend the stairs of the Taleju temple and circumambulate it. Down the stairs the khaḍga are collected by the Josī. The mū ṛacāḥju then performs an elaborate welcoming ceremony (lasakusa) for the swords and for the Hanuman image by turning a simpha (New.: wooden measuring pot always used for this purpose) over them, performing a kotaḥ pujā, and symbolically handing over the key as well. The key taken is not the one to Taleju’s Pūja Koṭhā, but to another secret room of worship in Mulchowk where the swords are kept the rest of the year and where only ṛacāḥjus may enter. They again do a short pujā there, according to their saying to put the swords to rest for one year. Thereby Dasain, the greatest festival of Nepal, formally ends. It would however be a misrepresentation to view this ending as a rupture in the ritual activities. Not only do several khaḍga yātras – such as the ones in Kilāgal and Bhagvān Bahāl still have to come out, but also, in that very night, other
Karmācāryas perform a homa in front of Annapūrṇī at Asan marking the start of the yātra of this central and popular goddess. The chain of events, and the network of ritual relations, is hardly ever broken. But Daitya and Kumār's performances stop until next Dasain, unless it happens to be the year of their demise, which will be dealt with in the next section.

What exactly is their role in Dasain? Their participation in the khadga yātra appears to contradict the common statement that they only exist to protect the goddess. Reactions by some participants to this question might indicate a clue. The Śākya nāyo remarked that formerly, but beyond living memory it seems, Daitya and Kumār also had to attend at events like royal weddings and coronations. According to Kumār's guru, the two divinized boys participate in the khadga yātra to protect the royal sword. All those answers were extracted, but the views expressed seem to fit the overall context, which includes not only the movement of the goddess, but that of the swords as well. What Kumār and Daitya appear to protect is the śakti of the realm in the widest sense of the word: its power, which is first of all embodied by the royal goddess who can be called the central śakti herself. This śakti does not however stand on itself, but exists in relation to its shareholder, the ruler of the realm; his sword in particular contains the śakti of the goddess.

Curiously enough, during the centuries that the kingdom of Nepal was divided, Taleju Bhāvānī remained the protective goddess of all three Kingdoms of the Valley, which were often at odds with each other. The same goddess was to give victory to the kings of Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, but on which side would she be? The nature of the goddess Taleju Bhāvānī is clearly more complicated than is indicated by the term 'protective' goddess – which suggests that she may give victory to one party only and defeat to the others. Perhaps equally curious is that the protective goddess of the kingdom has in turn to be protected, not by a single party, but by two young protectors who are, not only in a topographical but also in a cosmological sense, opposed to each other. Likewise the royal sword is on both sides protected by what is called in Newari a chali kathi, a mace. The two stick carriers, however, again manifest the opposition in orientation. One of them belongs, like Kumār does, to Thane, the Upper part of the city, the other has to belong to the Lower part, Kvane. The opposition between the two opposed realms of the city appears to be in-built, as if the śakti exists by the grace of parties that are opposed to each other. Daitya and Kumār closely resemble each other, yet, or perhaps for that reason, they do not enter into a complementary relationship but are kept carefully apart.
The Demise

Both Kumār and Daitya have to die, symbolically one might say, but who or what passes away in them is even harder to determine than in case of the divine dancers of the Gathu pyākham (Van den Hoek 1994). The Śākya mūnāyo suggested that in former times a Daitya might serve until his real death or at least as long as he was able to perform. That the embodiment of Daitya is now confined to five years might be due to the requirements of the time. As it is, however, both the coming into being and the demise of Daitya and Kumār constitute one of the most significant and ritually elaborate aspects of the whole divine enactment. Daitya and Kumār have to be young, and in order to be so, they have to die in time. From the viewpoint of mythology, Daitya is the young lover and enemy of the goddess, killed by her before he comes of age. Kumār, of course, represents a different case, as he, from the puranic point of view, is the son of the goddess. His demise will also be seen to be different from that of Daitya. Yet, if any god stands for eternal youth, it is Kumār, and in that respect there is no difference with Daitya. Both of them require a youthful embodiment.

Daitya is left alone to die at the same stage where he performed his first dance, Cikaṁmugāḥ dabu. A st kāḥ bhvay precedes his final dance. At his going to the stage and at the start of his dance the musicians still accompany him. Then his ghaṁgalā (bracelets) are taken off and the music retreats. Nobody is allowed to see his demise. The Jyāpu who is to catch the boy when he falls off the stage should not look at the parting dance either. Anybody who breaks the prohibition will die vomiting blood, it is told. Because the event happens at late night, there will probably be no bystanders to be warned anyway. Daitya got some special instruction from his guru for his final part, the only dance without the accompaniment of music. In his memory it took more than half an hour of dancing alone before he started to feel unconscious. During his five years term he had never felt possessed. It was only when Daitya left him that he got such an experience. Having become unconscious he fell off the stage, and did not regain consciousness until his guru touched him at home to take off his dresses.

After his demise Daitya is carried home by the Jyāpu covered with a white shroud like a dead man. There is, according to the gubhāju, no need to revive the boy. Since it is Daitya who died in him and not the boy himself, the latter will recover by himself, freed from Daitya’s presence. According to the mūnāyo he is revived by some water sprinkled by the gubhāju together with the uttering of a mantra. However that may be, his mother gives a formal welcome (Nv.: hasakusa) to her son with a kotaḥ pūjā. After his dress is taken off downstairs the now ex-Daitya shares a ritual meal (sagaṁ) with the other members of the kalah. According to the ex-Daitya, the Daitya-to-be
had already started his training a few days before his own demise, contrary to the ideal sequence. Old and new Daitya had talked together on how it was and would be. Neither of them had been chosen by lot; they replaced the ones who had been drawn. After Daitya's demise the ākha in his house ceases to exist and the Nāsakāpāḥ is removed and put at the Nāsadyo shrine by the gubhāju.

In contrast with Daitya, Kumār will not be left alone to die. His last dance at Asan Dabū is a public event, in which he is accompanied by the musicians to the very end. One of the musicians, the kvatāḥ player, actually brings about the end. By pushing him further and further with his drum he is causing Kumār's falling-off-the-stage, kvaphāyegu. The same Newari term is used for Daitya's downfall, but, in its literal meaning of "dropping", "causing to fall down" (Manandhar 1986:34) it seems better applicable to Kumār's case. The gubhāju's explanation for the seemingly involuntary fall of Kumār is that the kvatāḥ drum, while pushing Kumār, draws his šakti out of him. The divine power, according to Kumār's guru, also entered Kumār through the kvatāḥ drum, while the power of the drum itself, it is known, originates from Nāsadyo himself.

The present Kumār has been proposed by his father who wanted to continue a family tradition; both he himself and his own father, the present Kumār's grandfather, had been Kumār in their time. Kumār's father remembers how he was pushed off the stage, but also that he fainted while falling off. Like Daitya, the fallen Kumār is to be covered with a white shroud like a dead man. The one who carries him home is not a Jyāpu, however, but his mother's brother, a relative who plays a major part in the initiation ceremony (Vratabandha) of Newar boys. When in the Vratabandha ceremony the boys are dressed like sannyāśins (world renouncers) and are given the choice to renounce the world, their mother's brother stands ready to catch them in case they might indeed choose to do so. Since Kumār can be considered to have renounced the world for five years in his partly divine identity, the death of the divinity in him can also be seen as a re-socialization. From that point of view it is most appropriate that he is carried by his mother's brother on his way back to the social world.

When the present Kumār's father woke up from unconsciousness, he found himself back in his house, where his Kumār dress and decorations had already been taken off. His guru was there to give him the ritual food (sagaṇ) together with a Sanskrit śloka. In Kumār's case there is no ākha to be removed, although a new temporary one has to be installed in the mū nāyo's house for the instruction of the new incumbent. It is often said by the participants and also by Kumār's gubhāju that it is not the boy who dies, naturally, but Kumār, the divinity who was in him. At the same time it is
not clearly stated that the god Kumār himself is supposed to die.

The intermezzo between the demise of the old Kumār or Daitya and the forming of a new one is kept as short as possible. Yet a sacrifice seems to be made, but one in which neither the boy nor the god is a clearly recognizable victim. What appears to be dying is the living presence of the god, shortly after it re-born in a new and again young embodiment. Nevertheless the short lapse of time between the passing away of the god from the one embodiment and his rebirth or re-entry into another one carries with it the signs of death. Part of the symptoms are experienced by the boys themselves in their falling unconscious. Nobody stated that the boys are at that time partaking in the process of dying, but it is all the same considered inauspicious to enact the passage of death, albeit only that of the god embodied. It is one of the less outspoken reasons to find a replacement in case one’s son is chosen by lot to be Kumār. Finally, while the god has to make his re-entry into a new incumbent, the boy has to make his re-entry into human society, undone from his divinity. Although the feelings of unconsciousness, the symptoms of death, can conveniently be attributed to the boy’s abandonment by the god, a certain parallelism between the two of them, godly embodiment and god embodied, remains lurking in the background, escaping nobody’s notice. In Kumār’s as well as in Daitya’s case, both the boys and the divinities are reborn, but the personae who incorporated the divinities effectively die in that capacity.

**Conclusion**

The short manifestations of Daitya and Kumār during Dasain are somehow disproportionate to the elaborate ritual complex of which they are part on their own account. Or to turn it the other way around: The labyrinth of rules and procedures to which Daitya and Kumār are subject seems to go far beyond the stated purpose of their protecting the royal goddess. The more so since that very purpose does not at all come forward in either the instruction of the boys or the ritual proceedings that lead up to their performance. While embodying different characters, the attention of both Daitya and Kumār is almost exclusively devoted to Nāsadyo, who appears to transcend not only the divinities embodied by the boys, but also their death. During the interval between their demise and their re-entry into new incumbents, the gods seem to be retaken, as it were, by Nāsadyo. The quality of Nāsadyo to transcend the divine play of which he himself is the source and origin, is also seen in other divine dramas which show an alternating cycle of life and death.

There is no phenomenon which is not historically grown, and on the face of it, it seems as if in Kumār’s and Daitya’s case a divine drama dedicated to Nāsadyo is only loosely linked to the central goddess and the major festival
of Kathmandu. The mu ḍāḥju of Taleju, for one thing, is not aware of the
different backgrounds of the boys – Śākya and Tulādhar – or of the
complicated ritual pattern which they are part of in their own environment.
Historically speaking, little can be said. Both the khalaḥ of Daiya and the
khalaḥ of Kumār possess a lālmohara of king Pratap Sing Shah, the
successor to Prithvi Narayan. The performance of Kumār and Daiya
undoubtedly goes further back to the Malla period and is said to have existed
in other towns as well. According to Kumār’s gubhaju, Prithvi Narayan Shah
did away with the Kumār/Daiya pyākham, which was subsequently restored
however by his son Pratap Singh – who therefore appears in the official
documents as the patron of the performance.

Apart from the strikingly loose connection between Daiya’s and Kumār’s
training on the one hand and the stated purpose of their existence on the other
hand, there appears to be another dissonant. The Tulādhar and the Śākya are
Buddhist castes, and the royal goddess is not considered to be a Buddhist
divinity. The signs of Buddhism in the Daiya and Kumār pyākham are
slight. When asked about it, the gubhaju of Daiya told that Buddha is a few
times invoked in the secret texts used for the instruction of Daiya. According
to Kumār’s gubhaju, the dance of his pupil is, at least ultimately, based on a
Buddhist text, the Ratna Candraketu Mahāpratihāra. Kumar’s crown also
contains five jewels representing the Pañcabuddha. Both gubhajus, however,
were frank in admitting that the actual performance of Kumār and Daiya has
little or nothing to do with Buddhism. From the historical point of view,
indications are that the Śākya and Tulādhar were once called upon to
participate in a palace ceremony relating to a Hindu goddess, in a way
comparable to the royal Kumāri, the Śākya girl’s embodiment of Taleju
Bhavānī.

History cannot illuminate the matter any further, and what we see at
present is a ritual complex surrounding the royal goddess in which Kumār
and Daiya apparently occupy a fitting position. The question is: what is the
sense of their appearance, of their contrasting identities and of their so-called
protection of the royal goddess? Their appearance at the descent and ascent of
Taleju does not offer any real clue to the question. As was seen above, Taleju
readily descends in the absence of her protectors when they come late. The
khaḍga yāṭrā at Vijayā Daśāmi, the culmination of Dasain, presents us with a
different case. Not only do Daiya and Kumār make special dances then, they
also go ahead in the procession, making the same shaking movements as the
sword-carriers. According to his guru, Daiya, who goes in front, actually
participates in the khaḍga yāṭrā brandishing his dagger, followed by Kumār
displaying his bow. Rather than just protecting the goddess, they are thus
seen to lead the Śakti of the realm in a way which befits their martial
character.

What remains is the riddle of their adverse identities. Why is Kumār's counterpart a Daiya and not, as Lewis wrongly assumes, Gaçešā, or for that matter, Bhairava? Instead, the very essence of the couple seems to be that they are not complementary but opposed to each other, as if it is necessary for the warlike expedition to incorporate its adversary. And that seems to be exactly the case. Not only Daiya and Kumār, but also the two stick carriers accompanying the royal sword, represent Thane and Kvane, a division which has all the characteristics of a ritualized battlefield (Van den Hoek 1993). If we look into the wider context of Dasain, the main good fortune expected from the royal goddess is that she provides the king with the power of victory. Ironically, during the centuries of political division, each of the Malla kings of the Valley kept Taleju as their protective goddess. This was not due to a transcendental view: Between, and even within the kingdoms, divisions were not transcended at either the human or the divine level. The kings of Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu nevertheless continued to depend on one and the same protective goddess to bestow the power of victory on each of them. There is, again, a truth hidden in that irony.

Of old, the sacrificial nature of warfare was pre-eminent – in spite of all mundane interests involved. War, sacrifice and capital punishment, being closely related, constituted the three sacred tasks of a king since Vedic times – as has been succinctly shown by Heesterman (1985:108-127). In another essay, Heesterman touches upon the role of the woman in it all – not the goddess, but the wife of the sacrificer-king. The woman, who passes out of her own family, has to remain an element of insecurity between two lineages which, through her, establish or maintain a connubial (marital) alliance. In a sacrificial contest – Heesterman's attention centers upon a Vedic midsummer festival – the sacrificer's wife plays a central part because she also represents her own relatives whose connubial (marital) link with the sacrificer's party she embodies (Heesterman 1985:134-136). A similar argument pertains to the battlefield: in a configuration of enemies who are at the same time related to each other – such as existed in case of the Malla kingdoms – women may find themselves embodying both sides in a conflict.

To return to the protective goddesses, their position parallels that of a woman who is related to different parties. As argued elsewhere (Van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992:73), the power of the protective goddess seems to derive from the very fact that she maintains relations with opposed parties, with the enemy and with her "own" party. This may be seen symbolically expressed in the relationship she has with her prototypical enemies: Mahisāsura or Daiya. In the great day of victory she beats the demon enemy and thereby protects the realm. With whom, however, is Daiya to be identified? From
Vedic to Puranic times the demonic aspect and the evil character of kings in general is amply expounded. The goddess, then, may bring victory or defeat to either one of the parties engaged in war. As the mū ācāhu of Taleju explained, Daitya may have demonical traits, but he nevertheless belongs to the gana, the retinue of the goddess who slays him: the goddess incorporates her enemy.

The khâdga yātra (which come out of different Taleju temples at Vijayā Daśamī are not, and were not, opposed to each other in terms of good and evil – nor were, for that matter, parties engaged in actual war opposed in those terms. Instead, the khâdga yātra in Kathmandu with its twofold royal mace representing Thane and Kvané, and with Daitya and Kumār at the head of it, already displays the two sides of the battlefield or sacrificial arena internally. Daitya and Kumār may, when going ahead, be considered the protagonists. They have to die young, perhaps not only because the scriptures prescribe them to be forever youthful, but also because they are heading a sacrificial party which cannot remain without victims at set times. The opposition, between Daitya and Kumār, which is contained in the khâdga yātra, is also embodied in the very nature of the goddess who is not bound to one side in a contest, nor to one ruler or dynasty. Rather she oversees the sacrifice of war as such and claims its victims.

The symbolic enactments of Dasain, of course, have more than one layer of meaning. Daitya and Kumār are explicitly said to protect the protective goddess, and there is no justification to refute that view. The explicit purpose of Daitya's and Kumār's performance, however, is hardly borne out by the rituals observed. Daitya's and Kumār's coming into being is brought about by Nāsadyo, who also survives and recreates them in a new human embodiment. Because Nāsadyo, the patron of temporal grace, has close associations with the death and rebirth of various divine dancers (such as in the Gathu pyākahañā) and with the periodical rejuvenation of musicians consecrated to him (such as the Jyāpu Dhimay), there is no real contradiction between Daitya's and Kumār's dedication to him, and their dance to protect the protective goddess.

Given the superior power of Taleju Bhavānī the purpose itself seems incongruous – unless protection is taken in a much broader sense than saving the skin of the goddess. A possible extension in meaning should include the leading role of Daitya and Kumār in the khâdga yātra, the manifestation of the sakti of the realm. The sakti of the goddess has to be nourished in many ways, rather than to be protected in the strict sense of the word. Plenty of sacrifice has therefore been made to her on the great eighth and ninth days of Dasain. Yet the ultimate sacrifice is that of war, symbolically expressed by the goddess' slaying of her demon enemy on the tenth day of victory. The
khaḍga yātra fulfills a similar purpose. It is unlikely that it has ever been the start of a real war party; therefore its composition is too heavily loaded with symbolism. It did however prelude the war season in times that war and sacrifice were still the main sacred duties of the king – which happened to be so until a few centuries ago. In the composition of the surviving khaḍga yātra, war primarily appears to be a matter of sacrifice, like it was in bygone days.

The ghosts from the North and the South, for whom the two baupā offerings are brought along, the contrasting divine fighters, and the royal mace-bearers expressing the same division of the sacrificial field, are all included in the symbolic enactment of the path of war. The protection of Taleju Bhavānī, in this context, extends to her interests in the sacrifice of war, of which the goddess of victory is the primary recipient. The victory of the goddess lies with the victims, who, it should be added, will themselves enjoy the fruits of sacrifice as well. The kingdom will be reborn through sacrifice, whether it is in victory or defeat. And, as long as any candidates can be found, our Kumār and Daitya will through dying be forever young.

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