

## **Fort as Heritage and Defensive Tool in a Country**

-Dr. Prem Singh Basnyat

Man is a social animal; he is born and bred, lives and dies in society. He has by nature at never ending ambition. He wants to become an outstanding person in society either in prosperity, power or wisdom but all of them cannot be achieved an unlimited way. The person, who could be successful in his ambition, leads the people and becomes a leader. Such leadership in the course of time leads to the formation of kingship, emperorship or a military dictatorship. Military power and prosperity were the measuring rods of a nation. Gradually, the kings started to launch attack against weak countries and annexed them into their territory. Our history is there and we can find many examples in the world and even in our national history. The powerful kings themselves were not safe from external aggressions so every nation wanted to be strong in its self-defense and protection of its own sovereignty. They started to build strong military forts against any enemy's aggression. There were different types of forts of military architecture but the purpose was the same. Especially, the kings and emperors used to build their palaces as castles (a strong fort) for their own protection. We can find such in many parts of the world and as well, many forts were built in tactically important ways for defensive battle.

### **The Military Architecture**

Since the beginning of time man needs shelter. Even the caves in stone ages and houses were the forts against wild animals, opposition groups, rain and other natural disturbances. Any cave, shelter or a house was used, from a military point of view; therefore military architecture does not have a fixed date of starting. It is evolved with the development of mankind. We have some examples e.g. the Bayeux tapestry, dating from the end of 11<sup>th</sup> century, supplements evidence that the substitution of stone for wood in the construction of the military fort took place gradually in the five castles installed in the tapestry, four are still of timber.<sup>1</sup> This reminds us that, while structures that were technically more modern in conception to older tradition, their architects remaining content simply to translate into stone what they had previously used throughout in the construction of palisades. The first generation of keeps are distinguished by their square or more generally, rectangular plans; in effect these continue the plan, imposed by their timber construction, of wooden keeps. They were very thick, high walls with few opening, to avoid weakening the wall.

The architecture of fort changes according to the change of military tactics, technology and weaponry system. In the early ages, army used to have hand-to-hand fight with small weapons so forts were not so strong and troops used to protect their body with iron armour. At that time the emphasis was on protecting the individual's life in battle. The iron helmet and shield were other forms of wardresses. When, gun power was discovered, the war strategy was changed into a missile system with gun and bullets. Initially, the flat trajectory weapons (Straight firing) were made and most of the forts were made to protect lives against flat trajectory weapons. The forts used to have very thick wall with few entrances and gates. There were no overhead protections against bombardment in the fort because high trajectory weapons (Canon) were not much used at that time and the people did not know of aerial attack. Most of the Nepalese forts were built during that period. The offenders used to launch attack with a mass assault upon the fort. Defenders used to build a fort on top of a mountain, which was not easily accessible by the enemy's assault. Mostly, forts were surrounded by deep-water obstacles (ditch obstacle). It is also against the assault of the offender and many of the attackers used to fall inside the ditch obstacle and die during their night assault.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cristine Flon (ed.), *The World Atlas of Architecture*, (London: Mitchell Beazely International Limited, Artists House, 1984), pp. 233-239.

The selection of site and setting of a fort is very important because the place should be dominant to the surroundings, availability of water resources, easy route for logistic supply, weapon ammunition store, barrack buildings, good for firing of flat trajectory weapons e.g. Rifle, Machinegun, Pistol, bows arrows, through boulders, tempus etc. and high trajectory weapons e.g. Cannon and artillery, nearby very difficult natural obstacles and having an escape route in an emergency. Every fort must have water reserve tank or deep well for emergency use. When war breaks out, the regular drinking water facilities may not be available so alternative arrangements are needed. In the Nepalese context, a temple must be made inside the fort for the blessing of the god or the goddess. As well many forts were built with large compound so that the cultivated lands, military families, war material production, depots training camp, mini market were kept inside the fort. The old fort of Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri of India are also the examples. Military architecture of fort used to depend on the economic condition, impending enemy, and types of ground and availability of local resources of the country. The shape, type and size of the forts were different but the military purpose was same e.g. to defend the area.

At any time, anywhere a military area is in danger from enemies' hostility. A fort is vulnerable point (VP) during wartime. The enemy always tries to capture or destroy the fort; an early warning system and tight security should be built for its physical protection. Many sentry posts were built on top of the fort wall or far ahead of area for early warning of enemy's movement, which alerts the main fighting troops of the fort. It is called a 'Watch tower' in today's context. A fort used to have many cannon, guns and soldiers for defensive battle so cannon point, cannon path observation holes (bay) and cannon firing holes were made for high trajectory weapon. Most of the forts have cannon firing facilities and as well many rifle-firing holes (bay) made in the fort or castle. The fort is changing in its facilities according to the change of war equipment. The rich king used to have many forts in his country and that was the symbol of his power. He used to live in very strong castle and every facility was available there. The small and mountainous countries used to have small and few forts. The king's palaces (castle) were built on top of mountain with every difficult feature.

None of the defensive work is fully protected from enemy offensive, as defensive battle is very difficult to sustain. Initially the troops were threatened from flat trajectory weapons and forts were made accordingly but, with the scientific development, high trajectory weapons and air bombardment system evolved. Old forts are not secure from air bombardment and high trajectory weapon firing and gradually, people started making emphasis on very strong overhead protection against heavy artillery firing. Military architecture of the fort is also changed accordingly.

### **Different Names of the Nepalese Forts**

#### **Durga**

The word DURGA means FORT in English language. It is called as GADH, JONG, KOTTA, KWATH and KOT too. *KOTTA or KOT* are derived from the Sanskrit word *Kwatha*. *Durga* and *Gadha* are also Sanskrit words whereas *Jong* is an indigenous term. So the fort is similar to many names in Nepal. Basically, it relates to its fighting purpose and is made for defensive as well as offensive battle also the word fort implies for physical security of the nation. It has no limitation in size. It can be a small place for a single person or many people. It may be a village, city, or army barracks too. But *Gadh* can be very big in size and may be equipped with weapons, ammunitions, ration and other logistic support, which should be available there for a certain period. Because the defenders use it, the initiative goes to the offender's hand. In any adverse conditions the defender and needs stocks and reserves. *Gadh* is bigger than normal fort like a village or palace or very small place too.<sup>2</sup> Nepal abounds in fortified *Gadhs* in many towns or villages. They were established near the strong *Gadhs* and were very important assets for any

---

<sup>2</sup> Somdhoj Bista, *Nepal Gadh*, (Lalitpur: Kanchan Ranjan Bista, BS 2039), p. 1.

nation. The fort is very important in this modern age too. *Gadh* itself means the obstacle (*Khai*), barrier and cover from observation.<sup>3</sup> *Khalanga, Pur, Durga* and castle also fall within the category of *Durga*.

The *Rajanga* (the part of state) is the soul of any nation and it includes the KING, MINISTER, FRIEND, NATION, FUND, FORT and SOLDIER.<sup>4</sup> So, treasuring the *Gadh* fort was very important during ancient period. The *AAD* and water *DAM* are also a kind of fort. The *GADH or Killa* (fort) covers the army base (*Sivir*), Brigade (*Bahinimukh*), local (*Sthaniya, Drong, Sambiddha, Kolak, Nigam and Skandhawar*).<sup>5</sup> The following are the major forts as per the great epic *RAMAYANA* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*.<sup>6</sup>

- (1) **Audik-Jaladurga:** It is a natural island surrounded by water or man-made water obstacles as island.
- (2) **Palvat-Pahadi:** It is surrounded by Rocky Mountains or very deep gorges.
- (3) **Dhanwon-Marubhumi:** The fort without water, vegetation and soil.
- (4) **Ban Durga:** It is a swampy land or difficult to find because it is surrounded by thick forest.
- (5) **Khanitra Durga:** This is man made obstacle with ditches (it has been mentioned only in *Ramayan* epic).

We can find many examples of the kings who used to live inside the fort like buildings.<sup>7</sup> It was called CITADEL too. *AYODDHYAPURI and JANAKPUR* was surrounded by high wall. Likewise, compound walls demarcated Simraungadh, Kirtipur, Kantipur, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. *SHUKRANITI* describes, "The state is the body, *Gadh* (fort) is the hand and boundary is the leg of the nation."<sup>8</sup> In fact, the names of the fort are different in different languages of different communities. The Kirat (ruler) dynasty and their people were good warriors. They had good military strategy and had built many forts in Nepal and were very far-sighted to develop their residential areas with good collective security, which were as follows:<sup>9</sup>

- (1) They made their houses in area safe from flooding. Likewise they used to be in sunny places
- (2) The urban areas were built on a collective basis, which could bestow a collective power with unity against impending any challenge.
- (3) They had many forests near their town. The forest areas were for facilitating as fort in military uses. The forest areas are called BANDURGA and they provide physical protection from the wild animals too.
- (4) They had separate land for agriculture and forest fort. The fertile lands were used for cultivation and other land was used for fuel wood, fodder and compost energy.
- (5) Their arrangement of fuel wood will be made from the fallen leaves and dry wood of the forests, which would not hamper the purpose of forest fort.
- (6) The cultivated lands were irrigated by the local water drainages.
- (7) The houses used to be constructed on higher ground, which could be used a fort in the time of need.

## Gadh

<sup>3</sup> Baman Shiva Ram, *Sanskrit Hindi Kos*, (Banaras: Motilal Banarasi Das, 1966), p. 494.

<sup>4</sup> L.N. Rangerajan (eds.), *Kautilya The Arthashastra*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-127.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-194. and 676-679.

<sup>7</sup> Bista, f.n. No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Rangerajan, f.n. No. 3, pp. 119-20.

<sup>9</sup> Bista, f.n. No. 1, pp. 4-5.

We have several places with different GADHS in Nepal for defense but they are all not exactly like a modern fort. Many of them were destroyed due to negligence, natural calamities or human factors. Simraund Gadh, Kirtipur, Kantipur, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Janakpur, Maddhyapur are the examples. Because, they were well demarcated by strong walls, Nijgadh, Narayangadh, Jitgadh, Tilgadh (Mahottari), Alangadh (Rautahat), Chhipagadh and Tikuligadh (Rupandehi), Dauhawagadh (Bajhang), Rajgadh (Jhapa) are some examples.<sup>10</sup>

### **Dzong**

DZONG (Fort in Tibeto- Burman Language) is the name of fort Kirat Kings. The Kirat dynasty ruled over Nepal for quite a long period. The Rai, Limbu and Sunuwars fall under the Kirat tribe. The syllables NGA and CHON at the end of a word are mostly used in Kirati era. So, Taplejung, Morang, Dang, Bajhang, Pahuncto, Sirhancho etc. are the last alphabets of the words (of the places). So, Dzong were used for fort too. However, not all the Dzong was a fort. Tars, 'LA', Gun, Ka were also related with the forts and Kiranti people.<sup>11</sup> Dzong are fortified castles. It is used for battle and residential purposes too. The Kirats constitute a very old tribe of Nepal and we can find many place names in the Kirati language. According to the situation of time and people the villagers used to be ready to repeal any type of enemies' attack from their fort type of villages.<sup>12</sup>

### **Kotta**

It is a Sanskrit word, which means a fort. The word KOTTA was used during Lichchhavi period when they entered from India to Nepal. They captured the *Kirat Kugion*. The Lichchhavi rulers also made many forts (*Kotta*) against adversaries' attack. They did not require new forts because Kiraties had already built many foothold forts. Later, some Lichchhavi Kings made new palaces e.g. Changunarayan, Kailashkut Bhawan etc. Those palaces were made like the forts for the protection of the King and people. In the meantime Koli, Shakya, Malla, Vrijik, Abhir, Gupta, Varman, Kirat existed at that time. Thankotta, Dumrikotta, Musikotta, Bhirkotta etc. were the fort type of palaces.<sup>13</sup>

The Lichchhavi used the word DRANG also for the developed forts areas. They were SITATIKA DRANG (Sitapaila) THANTURI DRANG (Budhanilkhanta area) KHOPRING DRANG (Bhaktapur) etc. Under a DRANG, there used to be many villages and KOTTAPAL was in-charge of Kotta or Drang. They had MAHAVALADHYKSHYA as Commander-in-chief of army force. The following were the types of DRANG or KOTTA or GULMA: -

- (1) Shaila Durga (Mountaintop fort)
- (2) Bana Durga (Forest Fort)
- (3) Man made dugout or fortified area. They used to be village/palaces/area etc.

Some temples for different gods were constructed inside the Kotta for worshipping the deities. People used to contribute money for the Kotta guards. Lichchhavi Kings Manadev, Shivadev, Narendradev and Amsuvarma were powerful rulers and they maintained and kept well-equipped forts. Forts were of military significance during Lichchhavi era too.

### **Kwath**

It is another Sanskrit word for fort. The people started to settle nearby the river and fertile land. So, forts were made in the valleys as the people settled there. Accordingly, such held habitation areas were places called PUR e.g. Udayapur, Bharatpur, Hariharpur, Kantipur, Laltipur,

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-29.

Bhaktapur, Kirtipur etc. with the change of the time types of battle and the civilization also changed. The strategy of warfare was made with the combination of diplomacy, terrorism, propaganda, gun and bullets too.<sup>14</sup> So, forts were made in strategically vital places e.g., in plains, mountains, valleys, forests etc. But the basic consideration and values of forts were the same as *Kwaths*.

The word *Kwath* was much in use during the time of the Mallas of Nepal (Kantipur, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur) valley. *Kwath* was a strong fort. The Malla kings developed PUR (City) from Kotta of Lichchhavi era. So, many forts (*Kwath*) were made inside the valley as well as in other small areas. Kirtipur and Bhaktapur were very strong and fortified *Kwaths*. The forts were the national property. Without capturing the fort, nobody could be a winner in battle. The royal palace was also the main fort. Without the occupation of which a state could not be conquered, for an example the Gorkha conquest of Kirtipur, Kantipur and Bhaktapur.

Most of the Malla kings of the Kathamandu valley and even the Khasiya Mallas of Western Nepal had given much importance to the forts. Local people had to maintain they're nearby forts intact and the person in-charge was called *Kwath Nayak*. They had very strict rules and regulations about the *Kwaths*. It was a part of duty of the people to co-operate with the government in the construction of the bridges and castles as mentioned in the edict of King Srinivas Malla. Moreover, the people used to donate money and labour for the construction of forts voluntarily. The Malla kings used to fight among themselves uselessly and people were intimidated by those battles. Most of the *Baise* and *Chaubise* (22 and 24) principalities were also aware of importance of forts.

### **Kot**

Again, *Kot* is derived from the word *Kotta*. As mentioned in the previous chapter *Kotta* was in existence during the Lichchhavi period. The Dzung, Kotta, *Kwath* was started to be called *Kot*.<sup>15</sup> It was because of change of time and development of weapon system. Initially human being used the flat trajectory weapons and only the high walls were enough to be protected. When high trajectory weapons developed then people needed overhead protection as castles or *Kot*. However, people were aware of every term regarding forts. The word *Kot* also denotes a strongly built castle.

The development of gunpowder was the turning point in military weapons and tactics. Which enhanced the high trajectory weapons and long range firing. By this time, flat trajectory and high trajectory weapons were made. So, *Kot* (forts) were made stronger according to the threats. War strategies were made for the fort battle. Again, the value of the *Kot* (fort) was very high. The forts were built with big stones. Foxholes were made for firing of guns and strong shelters were made against cannon firing.

Nepal is the abode of deities, land of temples and house of forts, which means Nepal is a strong fort by nature and it is not easy to launch offensive action against Nepal. In comparison to the other era, the *Kirat* period was the *culminating* point in making of the forts. During that period, many forts were built and forts modified from old forts. Lamjungkot (palace) Gorkhakot (palace), Nuwakot, Ligligkot, Dhadingkot, Dhunwakot, Tanahukot, Dailekhakot, Dotikot, Dipayalkot, Ajaimerukot, Jajarkot, Belkot etc. were the forts of importance.

Accordingly the Gadhi, Gaunda, Tharpu, *Kot*, Killa were the words of day-to-day life. The Shah kings, their Prime Ministers, Commander-in-Chiefs had laid major importance to the forts. The Chiefs of Areas (*Badahakims*) and administrators used to be sent to the forts or castles. Because, those places were geopolitically important as administrative and military chokepoints. The value of forts was very high, especially during the time of King Prithvi Narayan Shah and

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-70.

after.

According to the change of period, types of the forts are defined in details. During the time of *Mahabharat* era, the civilization of the human beings was developed. The epic '*Mahabharat*' is like the Bible of the state management and it covers the political importance of the state too. The following are the types of the forts:-<sup>16</sup>

- (1) **DHANWO DURGA**: Generally built in plain area and surrounded by sand (desert).
- (2) **MAHI DURGA**: It used to be built in plain area, but not in sand or desert.
- (3) **GIRI DURGA**: It used to be built on the top of the hill and surrounded by mountains.
- (4) **MANUSYA DURGA**: It used to be man-made forts and some still are in existence. This type of fort is used to be made in the tactically selected area. All arrangements used to be prepared prior to the commencement of the war.
- (5) **JAL DURGA**: It is built on an island large or small size and surrounded by water. Normally, it is a difficult natural obstacle for any invader. Even in the modern age, forts are surrounded by water obstacle.
- (6) **BAN DURGA**: It used to be surrounded by forests. Actually, it was for both defensive-offensive battles. That means for hiding into the forest while enemy makes an offensive, attack, from which soldiers could launch the spoiling attack from hiding place e.g. forest.

Likewise, we can find many descriptions about the forts in *MANUSMRITI* too. It is mentioned in short notes although; it covers the points as *Mahabharat* era. Which are as follows: -<sup>17</sup>

Different types of forts are mentioned in *Manusmriti*, *Arthasastra*, *Yagnavalkyasmriti* and other old Hindu treatises.

The significance and types of forts are elaborated in many Hindu scriptures. *AGNI PURAN* has *MATSYA DURGA* mentioned about *DHANA DURGA*, *MAHI DURGA*, *NARA DURGA*, *WAKSHYA DURGA*, *AMBU DURGA* and *GIRI DURGA*. Likewise, *DHANA DURGA*, *MAHI DURGA*, *NARA DURGA*, *BRIKSYA DURGA*, *JALA DURGA* and *GIRI DURGA*. Both of the *PURANS* mentioned above describe the religious aspects, military significance, and office of King and his subordinates and construction materials of the forts too. In each period, the kings' palaces are made as castles and it was on the top of the difficult mountains and hilly regions.

Human is a rational and conscious being in this earth. He/she is ambitious and would never be satisfied with his unlimited desire. Thus, our civilization started with the policy of "Might is Right" So, the war, weapon, tactics, soldier and forts were always important. They will remain dominant and significant factor in future too. So, items of literature have mentioned the importance of forts. Some of them are as follows. Normally, the literature divides forts into natural and artificial.

*Manasar* highlights about 8 types of forts e.g. *SIBIR*, *BAHINI MUKH*, *DRONG*, *SAMBIDH*, *BARDHAK*, *KOTAK*, *NIGAM* and *Giridurga*, *Bandurga*, *Jaladurga*, *Arindurga* (Chariot fort) *Pangadurga* (many fort) and *MISHRA FORT* (mixed fort)

The *Shukraniti* also deals with the different types of forts and its significance. It is slightly different than those of others which are as follows:-

- (1) **PARIKHA KILLA**: It is a man-made fort surrounded by moat. *Parikha* means ditch and *Killa* a fort.
- (2) **PARIGHA KILLA**: It is a man-made fort surrounded by strong wall.

---

<sup>16</sup> Shiva Prasad Shirma, et al. (eds.), *Nepalko Sainik Itihas*, (Kathmandu: Shahi Nepali Jungi Adda, BS 2049), pp. 5-11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

- (3) **BAN DURGA:** It is a forest fort.
- (4) **DHANWO DURGA:** It is surrounded by dry (drought) lands.
- (5) **JALA DURGA:** It is an island fort or a fort surrounded by deep water.
- (6) **GIRI DURGA:** It is constructed on the top of the mountain and physically manned by security force.
- (7) **SAHAYA DURGA:** Actually, it was diplomacy. Possible adversaries *used to be contained with friendship* and they are courageous fighter.
- (8) **SAINYA DURGA:** It was similar to Gir Durga and protected by a conventional army.

Kalidas a renowned scholar of Gupta period of ancient India described the fort as *PRAKAR*, *VAPRAWOLAYA* and *PARIBESTAN*.<sup>18</sup> The fort is constructed with a water moat and high (strong) wall. Likewise on other six types of forts are mentioned in the DHAMASHUTRA too. So, the forts were one of the main parts or organs of a state and those states were considered to be 'Strong Nations', which had many armies with strong forts. It was not only in Nepal, but also all around the world.

---

<sup>18</sup> Dilliraj Sharma, *Nepalko Killa Bastukala*, (Kathmandu: CNAS, BS 2055), p. 1.