One of Kathmandu’s primary narratives of origin is tied to the story of Bhairav, the resident of the neighborhood of Indra Chowk. Originally appearing in this story as Yalambar Yalunga, the king of the local Kirati people, he challenges the overtly Hindu deity Krishna, within the setting of the Mahabharata war, who summarily decapitates him. Yalambar then appears to a low-caste Farmer in a dream and commands him to install his severed head at Indra Chowk, the original location of the confluence of the city’s rivers and thus the center of the modern nation’s capital city, where he continues to be worshipped in the form of Akash Bhairav.

Though appearing as a timeless myth, Yalambar-Bhairav’s story of sacrificial decapitation is, I will argue in this paper, a response to the military victory of the Hindu Shah dynasty over the local Newar people in the 18th century: the Kirati people serve as a multiform of the city’s defeated Newar population, Yalambar of the Newar Bhairav, and Krishna of the Hindu Shahs. Bhairav’s story represents a narrative response to this historical situation and its aftermath and re-situates Bhairav’s temple at the city’s true center.

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This event is free and open to the public! Samosas will be served!