

Restoration of Viswanath Temple at Patan Durbar Square

- Shobha Shrestha

The city of Patan, founded around third century A.D., is situated south-east of Kathmandu. It was the capital of an independent kingdom among many such kingdoms in the valley of Kathmandu. Patan is also known as Lalitpur, which, literally, means the city of fine art. The Durbar Square of Patan has been praised by many writers for its outstanding beauty and richness of its monuments. In this complex, more than thirty monuments, palace buildings, courtyards and a palace garden stand side by side. The Durbar Square, with all these monuments, presents one of the most beautiful examples of Nepalese architecture. The picturesque view of the square, with the palace on the right side and the temple on the left and the Himalayas in front, is enchanting and unforgettable. (Fig. 1)

The palace consists of three main courtyards. The central one is Mulchowk, built in 1668 by King Srinivas Malla. Taleju Temple on north-west corner of this courtyard was built by King Siddhinarasingh Malla. On the south of the Mulchowk is the beautiful Sundari Chowk, which was also built by King

Srinivas Malla as royal residence. The famous Tusha Hiti, which served as royal bath, is in the centre of this courtyard. This hiti (water fountain) is encircled by beautiful metal and stone images. On the north of the Mulchowk is Mani Keshav Narayan Chowk, which was built by King Yoga Narendra Malla in 1733/34. The entrance of this palace complex is decorated by artistic gilded door and Torana above it, which represents the image of Shiva Parvati.

Other important monuments of this Durbar Square are the famous temple of Krishna, Hari-sankar, Degu Tale, Bhimasena and Viswanath temple. Most of the temples besides Krishna Mandir are built in Pagoda style. The Viswanath temple which is supposed to be built by the Guru of King Siddhinarasingh Malla collapsed about two years ago after a heavy rainfall. In this article, I have tried to give a brief description of the restoration works carried out by the Department of Archaeology with the financial help from UNESCO.

It is worth recalling that Nepal signed the World Heritage Convention in 1978 under

UNESCO's initiation. In 1979, UNESCO listed seven important monument areas in World Heritage List. They are three Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bbaktapur; and the Pashupatinath, Changunarayan, Swayambhunath and Baudhnath sites.

Viswanath temple of Patan Durbar Square is one of the important temples of that area. It was constructed during the reign of King Siddhinarsingh Malla in 1625 A. D. (Nepal Samvat 747). The two tiered brick temple with tiled roof is built on a square base of brick plinth with finely carved-stone threshold. The sanctum is enclosed by an arcaded passage. The carved pillar of this arcade is, topped with equally carved torona (tympanum) with images of Shiva. There is an open space between the temple wall and the support pillars, which serves as a pradakshina. The roof struts have images of Surya, Ganesh, Annapurna, Shiva and Parvati. The temple has four doors, the western being the main entrance. One-faced Shiva linga is installed inside the temple. The stone made Nandi is placed on a raised platform of the western gate. On the same side, there are two lions and two human statues. The eastern entrance is flanked by two guardian elephants bearing the images of the donors who have constructed this temple.

The Viswanath temple is erected on two tiered plinth in harmony with its two roofs. The first and second roofs are supported by highly decorative struts. The struts are carved with different figures of gods & goddesses. The windows on all sides of both stories are also beautifully carved; and the central one is topped by a beautiful torana. The roof edges were decorated by bronze windbells. The carvings and decorations of this temple represent contemporary art and architecture of 17th century Malla period.

This temple was repaired in A. D. 1956 during the late King Mahendra's coronation. During His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev's coronation in 1974, major restoration works of the roofs were undertaken. Unfortunately, this beautiful temple suddenly collapsed on 6th of August 1989 injuring seven persons (Fig-2).

Firstly, the four sides of the top roof came down causing the eastern and southern roofs of the first floor to fall. But the northern & western roof of the first roof remained in a dangerous position. One of the main causes of collapse of this temple is the vibration produced by vehicles on the square. It is clear that most of the temples, palace wings, Patis and historical monuments in this square are very old and are in a delicate condition. They need immediate care and attention. Considering the fragile conditions of these monuments, the Government has now restricted traffic in the Durbar Square. At the same time, it was also decided that the bridge at Sankhamulghat will be constructed only as a foot bridge, which would help protect the monuments of this square from the vibration of the heavy traffic. After the collapsed of this temple, the remaining roofs were dismantled to save it from further damage.

For the restoration of this temple, the Department of Archaeology, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, Nepal National Commission for UNESCO, requested World Heritage Committee UNESCO, Paris to provide necessary assistance from its Emergency Rescue Fund. On 23rd October 1989, the Education Ministry, HMG received a telex from UNESCO stating that it would provide the fund for the work. The total amount of fund required was NPR 1022132. After receiving this funding approval, preparation for restoration

started. As it took a long time to get the fund released from UNESCO, the Department provided some loan to start the work in December. (Fig-3) The then Minister of Education and Culture Mr. Parsu Narayan Chaudhari initiated the restoration work by carving one of the struts. On this occasion, UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Jerrold Berke, Mr. Ramesh Jung Thapa, the then Secretary of Ministry of Education and Culture and distinguished people of Patan were present.

The supervision and implementation of the restoration works was done by the same technical staffs of the Department, who were working at Patan Durbar Keshab Narayan Chowk. But there was a technical committee to supervise and monitor the work regularly. The D.G. of the Department of Archaeology was the co-ordinator of this committee other members included the representatives of Department and Nepal National Commission for UNESCO. Theoretically and practically, almost all the work was approved by this committee before making any payment, because the committee was very keen for the quality and standard of the work.

During the restoration work, different problems came up. Firstly, funds did not come timely. Secondly, necessary timber was not available in Kathmandu. It took months to bring timber from western part of Nepal. As a result, the restoration work could not be completed on schedule time. Timber was replaced in seventy per cent of the first and ninety per cent of the top roof. During restoration, all decorative pieces and the timber used for rafters, planks and faceboards were chemically treated before fixing it in the roof.

After the chemical treatment was done by the staff of the Patan conservation laboratory, the rafters were fixed on the roof; and they

were covered by the planks and properly nailed. On top of that, two layers of tarfelt were laid down specially to protect the roof from rain-water leakage. Then the chemically-treated clay was laid down proportionately with the slope level. It would be important to mention that different chemicals were used for different materials. For example, timber was treated by xylophopne or xyloman mixed with linseed oil and kerosene oil. This chemical protects the timber from the insects as well as maintains the original colour of the timber. Jhingatis (traditional tiles) were treated by syltrit dissolved in water in 10 per cent ratio and the clay was treated by karmex with alcohol and water. Finally, the traditional roof tiles (Jhingati) were laid down. Here, all the Jhingatis of the edge line have been nailed to make it strong and supportive. Once the laying out of Jhingati was completed, corner tiles (Dhuri) were laid and fixed vertically. These Dhuris are fixed in a straight position so that it could absorb rain water. Both roofs were restored in this technique. Finally, some minor repair was done on the gold-coated Gajur and was fixed on the top of the roof.

The missing decorative parts—the pillars, struts, brackets and the tympanum of this temple are beautifully carved. By looking at these pieces we can appreciate craftsmanship of this period. Different carvings and struts were damaged when the roofs collapsed. All the broken struts were repaired as far as possible. Only those struts were replaced by new ones which were badly damaged or broken into pieces and were unreparable. On the advice of the Austrian Consultant working in Patan Durbar Conservation Project, the broken struts were joined by iron plates and knotted from the back side which was not visible from the front. The technique was applied

only for the corner struts. The other struts were supported by the wooden planks from the back side fixing with chemicals and nails. Among twenty-eight struts of the first roof, three struts were replaced by newly carved ones. Among the twenty of the top roof, all struts were cleaned, repaired and fixed. All other missing decorations of these struts, torana and cornices were also carved and refixed. Three new toranas were also carved and fixed which were missing from the temple since long time. All these carvings were done by the local craftsmen exactly in the traditional design and style. One hundred thirty new bells were recasted and fixed on both roofs. One of the two elephants and both the riders on the elephant were damaged. The elephant and riders are also repaired.

Although this is a living monument and comes under the control of the Guthi Sansthan, most of the rituals and functions attached to have ceased to take place. The priest is doing the daily rituals on his own capacity. The Guthi Sansthan could not control the sale of the land donated to this temple by the donors. In this situation, the income from this land has stopped. So proper consideration for its maintenance and daily operation was not given. Guthi Sansthan also could not provide sufficient resources to carry on these function. After the collapse of the temple in 1989, the Department of Archaeology, with the financial help of the UNESCO, World Heritage Committee, Rescue Fund, the temple has been restored and the work is completed now. (Fig-4) The Department of Archaeology appreciates and is very much obliged to UNESCO for

providing necessary funds for the restoration of this beautiful temple of Viswanath of Patan Durbar Square, which is listed in World Heritage List. Without the help of UNESCO, it would have been difficult to do this job.

The total amount for the restoration was estimated at NRs. 102,213,240/- in 1987. The Department of Archaeology received NRs-500,000/- (five hundred thousand) in first instalment and Rs. 405,715/- (four hundred five thousand seven hundred fifteen) in second instalment. Because of the inflation of the market price, total expenditure for the restoration work amounted to NRs. 1,312,293/- (thirteen hundred twelve thousand two hundred ninety three). The Department has requested UNESCO to provide the remaining balance of NRs. 161,713/- which is to be refunded to the Department. The Department of Archaeology is thankful to UNESCO for providing the resources to carry out this restoration project. The Department is also thankful to Ministry of Education & Culture, Nepal National Commission for UNESCO, the technical teams of Patan Durbar Conservation Project and people of Patan for their kind co-operation and support to carry out this restoration work successfully.

References

Art & Culture of Nepal

-Dr. S. Amatya.

Nepalese Architecture

-Dr. N. R. Bannerjee.

Nepalese Historic Monuments in need of Preservation

-John Sandey.



Fig. 1--Patan Durbar Square

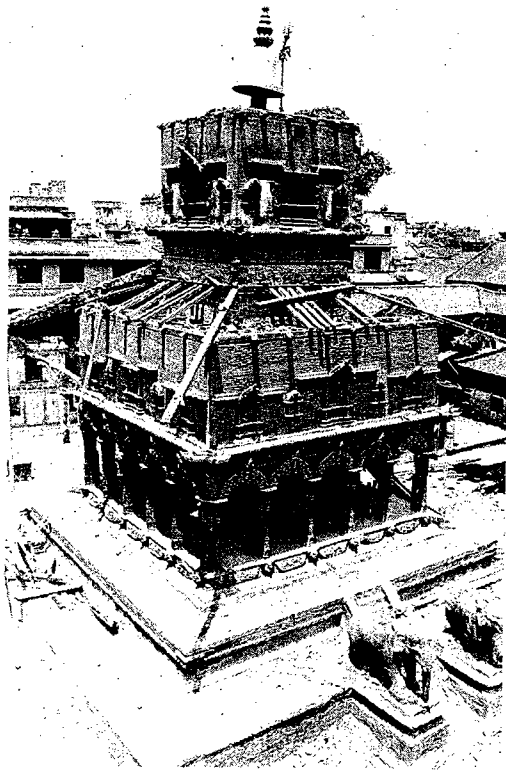


Fig. 2--Viswanath Temple, after collapse

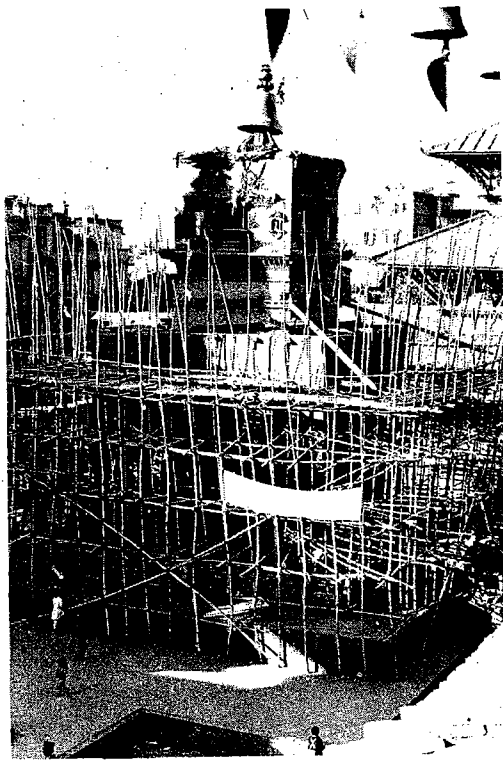


Fig. 3--Viswanath Temple, during restoration

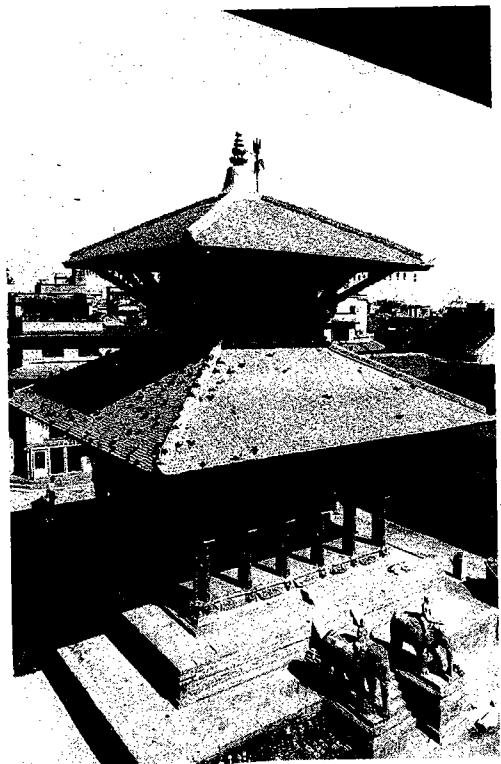


Fig. 4--Viswanath Temple, after restoration