

Monuments of Nepa

-Mrs. Sarala Manandhar

Nepal is a small country hidden on the lap of mighty Himalayas. In a poet's imagery, as in practice, she is comparable to the crowning jewel of the mighty Himalayas.

Nepal's history and civilisation and her very soul are now greatly revealing themselves to kindred spirits and responding to the soft and sympathetic touch of the proper chord in the heart. Its proximity to India and Tibet also combine to make it a country of great cultural wealth, indeed, a living museum. The monuments of Nepal are renowned throughout the world and a source of attraction and delight for any visitor from outside.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Nepalese cultural heritage is the smallness of its actual limits. A few traditional styled temples have been built in the larger provincial settlements of central Nepal and an occasional copy, (the result of the whim of the some rich merchants) can be seen in the foot-hills of the Himalayas. However, the major monuments have been concentrated in Kathmandu valley itself. Now-a-days the exquisite craft of the Nepalese style is recognised far beyond the confines of the valley, in fact, even beyond Nepal, but the valley is

considered as its source and home.

The face of Nepal is changing very fast during the last two decades in the natural pace of events. Old barriers are falling apart and new milestones are being covered quickly. Even her ancient architecture can not expect to save it-self from the forces of progress that area on the move, for in matters of practical utility there is no room for sentiment or blind adherence to tradition. While marked variations in quality and decoration can be discerned in the building details, it is probable that the actual building styles have undergone little alteration, apart from the more marked cultural changes that coincided with the advent of the first major western influence during the Rana rule. During the period of only 100 years approximately 50 large palace estates were constructed as private dwellings, most of which are now used as government offices.

One of the biggest factors in shaping Nepal's destiny, as of any country has been her geography throughout its history. The geographical configuration of Nepal has enabled to build up her own type of architectural history which is in indigenous in character. The monuments of Nepal are

mostly living and we are proud of it.

Nepal has preserved an extensive variety of architectural styles like temples (Plate No. 1 A) monasteries, stupas, chaityas (Plate No. 1B) pati (way-farer's rest house), powhas (large pati), dhunge-dharas (Plate No. 1 C) (enclosed and stone-spouted fountain), private houses and palaces. Each different type of structure has its distinctive character and utility but is linked with one another by common ties of technique and style. Bricks, wood, clay, and clay tiles, are the main construction materials of Nepalese monuments.

Physiographically, Nepal can be divided into three broad regions such as plain Terai region, Mid-hill region and Himalayan region. The monuments of these regions are described below:-

The monuments of Terai region:-

The authentic history of monument of Nepal begins with the Stone inscription of Lumbini, in the western Terai. Nepal is proud of Lumbini, where Lord Buddha, "The light of Asia" was born in sixth century B. C. The exact spot of the birth of Lord Buddha was developed as a temple site as Maya Devi Temple, with many votive stupas and monasteries and a bathing tank known as Siddhartha Pokhari.

Little more than two hundred years after the time of Buddha, Maurayan Emperor Asoka visited Lumbini and resumed the legendary fame of the site. Lumbini has always been one of the most important pilgrimage site for Buddhists. The travel route of Asoka is marked with monolithic pillars. From Lumbini the royal entourage of Asoka proceeded towards Kapilvastu and he commemorated the spots with pillars in Niglisagar and in Gotihawa. The famous pilgrims to visit Lumbini after

Asoka were Chinese monks, Fa - Hien in the first decade of 5th cen. A. D. and Hiuen - Tsang in 7th cen. A. D.

The dicimal picture given by Fa - Hien and Hiuen-Tsang evidently gave way to a sunny one in the last quarter of the first millennium A. D. when the land was under a spell of brisk of architectural activity. Ample evidences of it come from the ruins of brisk structures from Kodan, Lumbini, Sonagarh, Tilaurakot (Kapilvastu), Chatradi, Siwalwa, Bikuli, Chaganth and Saina-Maina. Faced with lavishly decorated bricks in most cases, these elegant religious structures were built on ambitious scales and reflect a good measure of prosperity.

The discovery of three very important Buddhists sites with various monuments in Lumbini, Kapilvastu and Devdaha in western Terai of Nepal during the last decade of 19th century was taken by the oriental congress as "one of the most important discoveries of the century".

The climatic variety of Nepal is equalled by the diversity of its architecture. The floors of monuments of Terai region are usually tiled or stone paved on a concrete set on a high platform because of the heavy monsoon conditions of these areas. The close proximity of North India to the Terai obviously has had a great influence on its monuments. Most of it is the result of Maughal influence and has resulted in structures of domes and minarets built out of brick and plaster and often with the use of steel and concrete in some of the later monuments.

Religious monuments, being the most spectacular in this area, predominate other monuments. The temples are almost all in the shikhara style (temple of geometrical

shape with tall central spire rising up the sky). The temple of Maya Devi of Lumbini, and the temple of Kudan, and Paisia can be mentioned here.

Besides the above mentioned monuments of Terai, which are almost in brick, the major religious monuments are to be found in Janakpur (the birth place of Sita, the renowned goddess of Hindu mythology). The most famous temple is known as 'Janiaki Mandir' (Plate No.2 A) built in Mughal architecture. Apart from a few stone monuments to be found in the Surkhet region, (mid-western region) of Nepal, there are hardly a few other monuments built in stone.

The monuments of the Himalayan region:-

The religious monuments (Plate No.2 B) in the northern region belong predominantly to the Buddhist faith with occasional Hindu shrines in some of the low-lying regions.

Comparatively speaking, the difference of building style and architecture is considerable. The structures are built to withstand the rigours of a more severe climate and are therefore very simple and solid. In most areas timber is hardly available and its use is therefore cut to a minimum. The character of the buildings is very introverted and in strong contrast to the traditional buildings of Kathmandu Valley. There is very little external decoration. The artistic beauty of the Buddhist temple and monasteries is mostly found in the interior, in the colourful murals that cover the walls, in the "Thankas" that are hung on the walls and in the elaborately painted clay divinities that adorn the altars; occasionally the structural elements of the building will also be carved and painted to

accentuate the intensity of religious feeling that is blended with the artistic talent of this region.

The construction of all the buildings is determined by the local materials available and the prevailing climatic conditions, without going into too much details. The climatic conditions can vary from minimal rainfall - the Tibetan Plateau area of the Lamtang, Dolpa, Muktinath and Manang districts to areas subjected to heavy rainfall such as Helambu and Solukhumbu region. In the "dry" areas the roof are flat and often serve as the terraces or fore courts to the buildings behind. The "wet" areas have pitched roofs with an assortment of coverings that range from stone slates, stingles and straw or bamboo mats as the traditional materials to metal sheeting, the herald of the western invasion in these remote regions.

The layout of both temples and monasteries follows a traditional pattern that is adhered to with only very minor alterations (mostly in size and orientation) throughout Himalayas. Most of the interiors are unlit; windows are avoided as they will let in the damp atmosphere.

The Monuments of Kathmandu Valley (Mid-hill Region):-

The cultural heritage of mid-hill region of Nepal is particularly concentrated in the valley of the Bagmati where the three main cities - Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur are situated. It has been a constant source of attraction to the outsiders because of its location and wealth of important Buddhist and Hindu monuments. It has always been one of the most important pilgrimage site for Hindus

due to the location of Pasupatinath temple over here.

The first historical record of the temple of valley starts from the Changu Narayan inscription of Manadeva (Lichhavi dynasty) dated 464 A. D. But the grand palaces of Lichhavi dynasty mentioned in the literary as Mana Griha and Kailashkut Bhavan are still to be explored to be archaeologically proved, we are hoping to get succeed in our aim.

The Kathmandu valley is famous for its own medieval art and architecture. It is mentioned by the western scholars that there are as many temples as houses scattered all over the valley. Some of the basic types of monuments are mentioned below.

The traditional style:-

The most interesting and the most prolific form is the temple with sloping and multiple-roofs, of the so called pagoda style, locally called the "devala". The structures are built of bricks around and over a wooden frame-work. The brick walls are pierced by beautifully carved wooden doors and windows with decorative patterns or figures of different divinities. The sloping roofs of clay tiles are supported by wooden decorative brackets called tunals (the struts). The Pasupatinath temple, Nyata Paul at Bhaktapur, Bhagavati at Nala, Kumbhesvara in Patan and Kashthamandapa at Kathmandu are some of the remarkable examples of this style. To achieve the sense of height and majesty, the temples are mostly set on a diminishing stepped plinth.

Though there was a great popularity of the traditional devala style of temples in Kath-

mandu valley, even so the 'Shikhara (Plate No. 2 C) style was not altogether abandoned. On the contrary the style was treated with due respect as is indicated by the placement of miniature replicas of the style in the 'gajura' (pinnacle) complex or in the centre of the dhungedharas as the case may be.

Besides temples, Kathmandu valley is famous for ancient palaces also.

Palaces are known from the oldest days of recorded history. The basic form of the Malla palaces can be seen in the palace of Pratapmalla at Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu built in 17th century or the complex of palaces at the Durbar Square at Patan built at about the same time, and that of Bhupatindramalla - the palace of 55 windows in the Durbar Square at Bhaktapur. The palace complexes invariably accommodate temples dedicated to royal family deity, viz, Taleju Bhavani.

The palace at Basantpur (Kathmandu) built by Prithivi Narayan Shah in A. D. 1769, (the first King of united Nepal) is still largely intact and breathes with its predecessor the old world atmosphere of about 200 years ago.

The old palace of the Shah rulers at Gorkha and Nuwakot (18th cen.) are typically Nepalese, in design, layout and form, and command uniquely a vantage point on the top of the ridge over-looking the entire valley of Kathmandu.

The basic form of monasteries called bahis or bahals (vihara) which number several hundreds, and form the centres of Buddhist worship and veneration is invariably uniform, being composed of cloisters on all four sides of a quadrangle. The Chhushya Vihara is the typical example of

the Buddhist monasteries in the Kathmandu valley.

Kumari Ghar or the abode of living virgin goddess at Maru Tol, Kathmandu follows the pattern of the Buddhist monasteries described above.

The stupas at Bodhnatha and Swayambhunatha respectively, are considered as among the oldest and largest in the evolution of stupas in Nepal, though they are regarded as chaityas.

The tradition of keeping inscriptional records of fresh constructions as well as of repairs of monuments is in vogue even now in Nepal. The records are extremely useful as historical documents and are in keeping with the tradition handed down to the present generation from the remotest times of the Lichhavi.

Conservation of Monuments in Kathmandu Valley :-

It has been observed that Kathmandu valley is a rich store house of a fantastic ensemble of a large miscellany monuments in diverse forms. In fact, Kathmandu can be called an open-air museum of the most unique variety in the world. But due to the time factor, natural calamity, and human vandalism the conditions of most of these monuments are deteriorating. The Department of Archaeology and Guthi (Trust) corporation are undertaking restoration and repair works of the monuments each year on a limited scale due to the budget constraint.

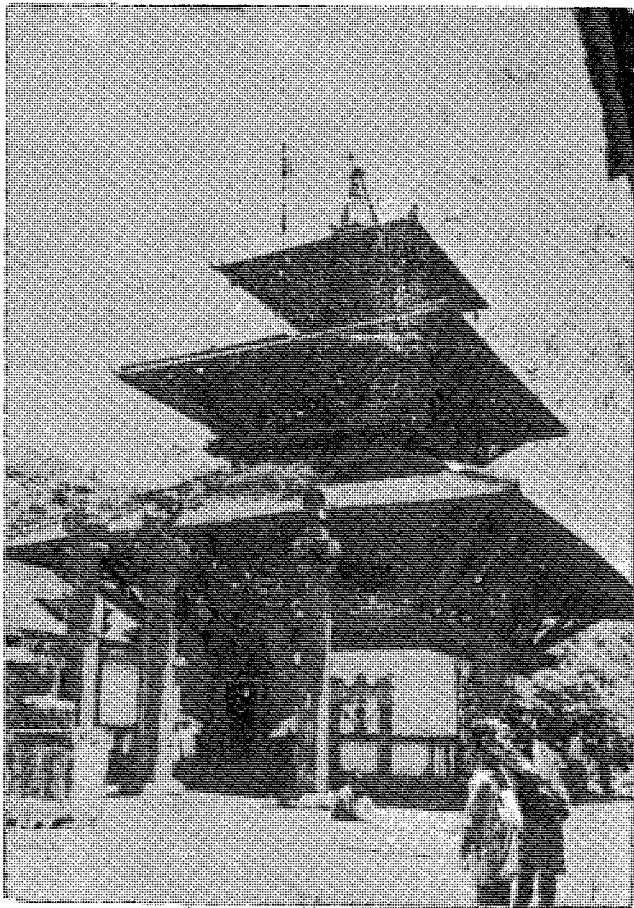
Since 1970, Unesco has been working on the restoration works of monuments. An inventory of the valley's monuments has been completed. But the preservation of the cultural heritage concerns the very basis of

Nepalese culture. Under King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev's guidance, recently a concerted effort has been made by the Nepalese Government to conserve Nepal's important monuments and to this end the first major restoration programme was undertaken on part of royal palace, Hanuman Dhoka with Unesco's assistance and later the restoration of monuments of Bhaktapur was started with the assistance of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Since 1975, the Master Plan for the conservation of monuments in the Kathmandu valley is underway, jointly sponsored by His Majesty's Government of Nepal and Unesco. Under this plan, the Department of Archaeology is carrying, at present, restoration work of the monuments such as Hanuman Dhoka Palace, Gokarneswara temple at Gokarna, Brahmayani temple at Panauti, Narayan temple at Banepa, Swayambhunath Stupa complex and Patan Durbar at Lalitpur. With the help of Unesco, Nepal has been able to bring renaissance of the traditional art and architecture. Besides these, the Department of Archaeology is undertaking renovation work of palaces of Gorkha and Nuwakot along with some other temples.

All plans are useless, if their aims can not be put in practice till the necessary funds would not be approved or available; we do hope such situation will not arise on the implementation of Kathmandu valley Master-Plan. We all try to make it a success, but we need co-operations and donations from friendly countries, international agencies and other generous donors.

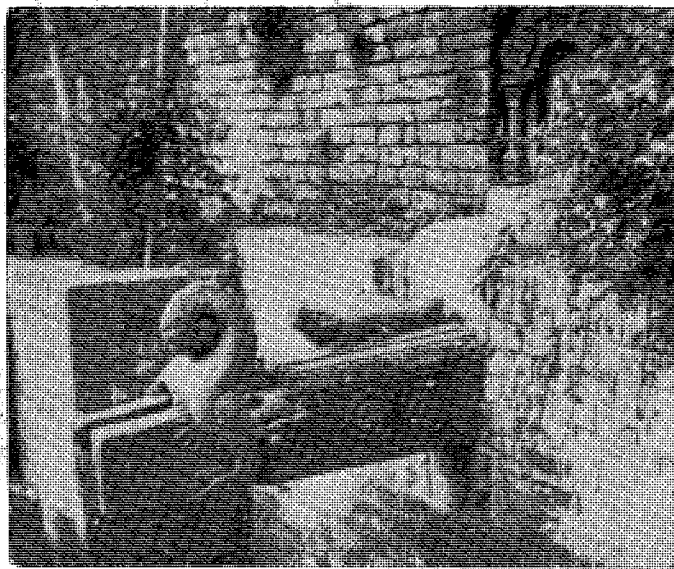
We should realize that this heritage is a valued treasury, primarily, not only of Nepal and the Nepalese but of the mankind as a



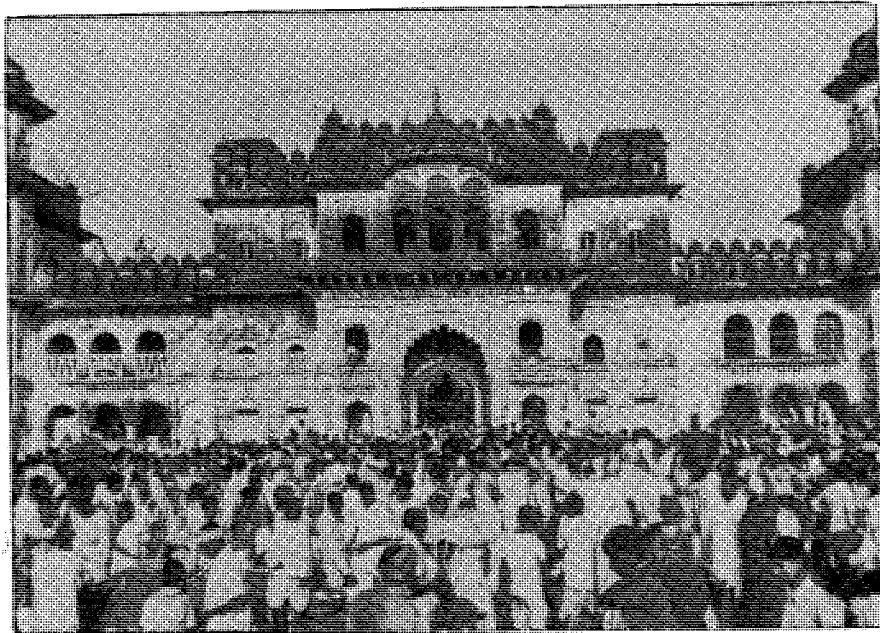
A. Chandeswari temple, Banepa



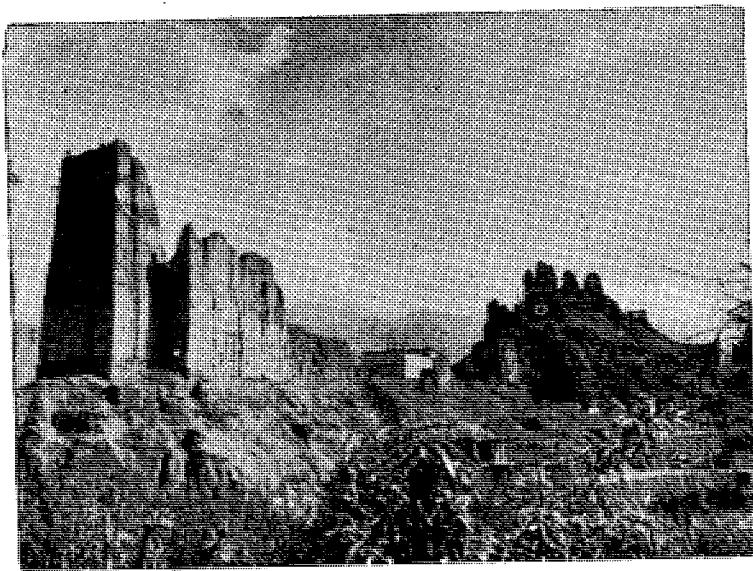
B. Ashok Chaitya, Chabahil



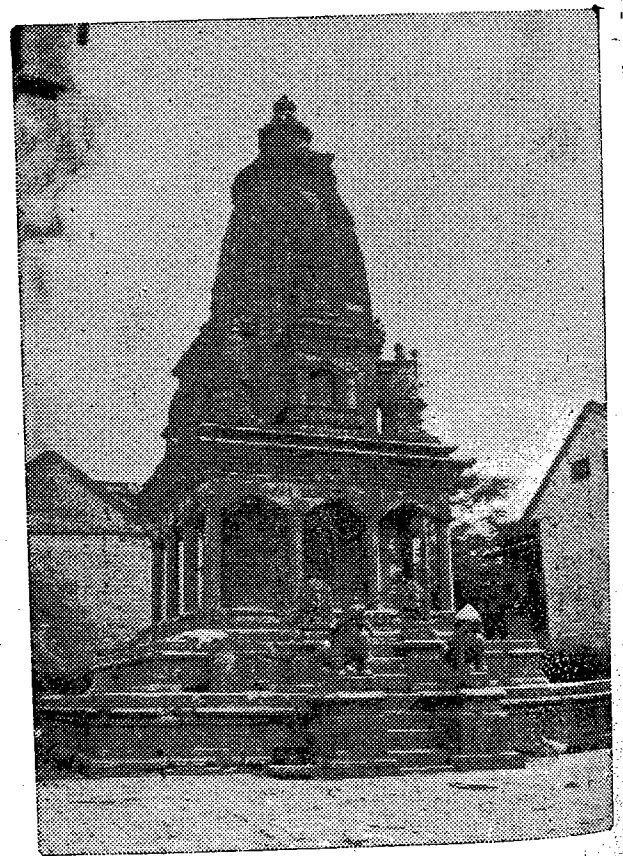
C. Dhunge-dhara, Banepa



A. Ram Janaki Temple, Janakpur



B. Northern Region Monument, Mustang



C. Shikhar Style Temple, Jayabagiswory, Pashupati

whole. Therefore, it is the foremost duty of Nepalese and of all the people of the world to save and preserve these heritages. This would ensure that the heritage of Nepal would be retained intact and would continue to attract scholars and tourists alike, so that the message and beauty that the past of Nepal bears would continue to be held out to posterity.

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