

Report on the Monuments of Northern Nepal

(Continued)

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Monuments of the Manang District

The district of Manang, North West of the valley of Kathmandu is certainly in Nepal one of the regions where monuments and sites are of outstanding value from different points.¹

Groups of separated and connected buildings, their architecture, their homogeneity and their place in the landscape are of exceptional value from the point of view of history and art.

The sites and areas including these buildings are of value from the aesthetic point of view.²

Conclusion

In Northern Nepal social and religious customs, buildings and landscapes still remain

in forms evolved centuries ago. The intrusions of modernity are still too few to disrupt the ancient equilibrium of a hierarchical well-ordered agricultural and pastoral society under which was evolved an architecture and art firmly rooted in the philosophy of Buddhism, and exceptionally well related to its natural surroundings.

It is in such a context that development (including tourism) is moving in. As a result new needs and new technologies, new types of constructions, new ideas are entering in, about to become widespread.

The conciliation of rapid economic and social development and preservation of cultural heritage is a problem facing developing countries. (In the "Western" countries the authorities try to resuscitate the Cultural Heritage, left over as a sign of the "remote Past").

Nepal's rich cultural, historical, religious past is one of the important aspects of its general development. The social structure is

1. Two other districts can be given the same importance: Mustang and Dolpa

2. See: The World Heritage Convention, UNESCO

imbedded in tradition. The country is subject to pressures of changes, some are welcome, some are inevitable. Change will occur, but changes can just happen... .. and happen quickly with unexpected or unmeasurable side effects, mostly destructive to the whole structure of the society. It is therefore important to prepare courses of action, in the form of recommendations. These recommendations might converge on rather small issues, on simple interventions rather than on expensive proposals.

We will limit this note mainly on the historical and religious buildings and related movable property.

Let us underline the problems that must be solved in the field of conservation and promotion of Nepal's cultural heritage.

The behaviour of men imbued with Buddhist philosophy, the limitations imposed by an exceptional ecological milieu, the priorities of a developing country, which are of another order, narrow down the choice of operations.

Moreover it is an accepted principle that the preservation of the cultural heritage should never be an obstacle in the struggle for better living conditions.

The responsibilities

Responsibility for maintenance of the Cultural Heritage rests with the Administration, the Clergy and the members of the communities. This maintenance work, however, is undertaken only occasionally. More often than not, repairs are made when a building is on the brink of total collapse. In recent years, the costs having increased, the preservation has declined. Operations should be undertaken at various levels.

The recommendations set down here concern only the inventory of the buildings

and their conservation: monasteries, temples, hermitages, chorten, official buildings, and movable property such as images, paintings.

The most important aspect of preservation activities, although they are not easily quantifiable, is that of changing mental habits. In other words, the conversion of those in authority to a new psychological behaviour. This is an arduous task because no other direct means exist apart from human contacts and the "missionary" spirit of the people in charge of the work. The problem is that of persuading them to accept the *Concept of conservation*, which is an entirely new concept in a developing country.

Recommendations

We suggest the following recommendations for conservations and protection of the cultural heritage of Northern Nepal.

1. The creation of a research unit in the Department of Archaeology to make an inventory of the cultural property. The unit should include an architect specialized in restoration, an epigrapher, a specialist in the humanities (history, religion and ethnology), a photographer specialized in the photographing of mural paintings and images, a master craftsman.

The unit's work will consist in the pursuance of a systematic inventory of cultural property in all the districts.

For each monument and each site a considered statement of facts is essential in order to set up guidelines for the restoration.

A translation of this document in Nepali and Tibetan for distribution among the local authorities would be invaluable.

The research unit will also compile a list of the craftsmen belonging to the various corporations by region and by groups of

villages. These craftsmen will be needed for repair work and they could also promote local production of traditional objects likely to interest tourists.

All available building materials should likewise be listed.

2. The constitution of a special team to intervene in matters related to the maintenance and restoration of imperilled monuments. In some regions, protective measures should be taken immediately, particularly where buildings or ruins need to be protected from rain, or movable objects safeguarded from theft or pillage, the most vulnerable being paintings, statues and books.

Should the government consider it worthwhile, a single monument might be selected in each district for restoration by specialists so as to serve as an example to be followed.

Periodical inspection tours would also fall within the responsibilities of the team, and its head would be empowered to act as advisor after an examination of the problems with the local authorities.

Recommendations 1 and 2 could also be combined. The Nepalese Government may consider the establishment of a "working unit-school" of traditional art and construction, to identify, record, plan, organize and supervise the restorations of the historical monuments of the country. This "working unit" will need to have 5 or 6 people who are master craftsmen in the following areas: carpentry, stone masonry, painting.

Under these craftsmen there should be always a few apprentices who can keep the traditions alive.

Also, in order to handle the type of work that will come the way this "Working Unit" should acquire the services of 2 to 3 foreigners who are themselves master-craftsmen in the traditional arts and constructions. It might be recommended to choose eminent craftsmen in the following fields from a buddhist country where their traditions are still alive: carpentry/architecture, art restoration. The above "Working Unit" will need to develop an approach to the problems of priorities as they exist in the country. Further, to do this and to impart training to the young apprentices it will require a centre and a training area.

To make the "Working Unit" more alive and viable and to play a greater role in the socio-economic development of the country, it should also obtain the services of the following: one expert in appropriate technology, a well-trained who is experienced in mountain problems.

With the services of the above mentioned two experts, break-through can be made in the problems of modern construction in Nepal with the introduction of new materials and methods of construction. Certain problems have been created for the maintenance of traditional forms and the members of this "Working Unit" will be able to develop solutions which will be very valuable.

It may be mentioned that there is no formal tradition of landscape design in the country. This is a very important talent which needs to be introduced.

Finally it should be mentioned that this "Working Unit" should be seen as an action-oriented organizations. Its main utility would lie in training young craftsmen and engineers, in keeping the tradition alive and helping in their further evolution and in the participation in the restoration and renovation of the many

important monuments (and areas surrounding the monuments) of the country.¹

3. The establishment of a permanent consultative bureau where local authorities and chiefs of districts could obtain the assistance and cooperation of specialists, architects, conservators, restorers, etc.

4. The organization of a propaganda campaign aimed at the responsible authorities, the general public and the school children by means of audio-visual media, exhibitions, lectures and seminars on the theme of conservations.

It is conceivable that seminars will be an opportunity to present special facets of conservation. Several topics worthy of illustration naturally come to mind, e. g. the utilization of new building materials with their advantages and pitfalls, the protection of wooden structures, mural paintings, etc.

The members of the communities must assume themselves the protection of monuments and culture.

5. The survey done in the Northern Region's Cultural Heritage programme should be closely linked with the development of the network of regional museums.

A staff member of the Regional Museum should be appointed for this purpose and collect information on:

- history, ethnography, religious customs of the populations;
- objects for the museum collection;

1. At the level of implementation.

A district of artisans unit should be constituted bringing together skilled craftsmen for works of maintenance and restoration.

Such a unit has been suggested by the architects of the Department of Housing and Planning for school building improvement. Such units could have a dual role in assisting both Education and Culture.

-photographs and records of music and oral tradition.

These data will be completed with the results of the surveys done under Northern Region's Cultural Heritage programme.

6. Close liaison must exist between the preservation specialists and the tourism authorities. Buddhism and the environment are the two poles of attraction for *cultural tourism*. The monuments of Nepal are always set in an exceptionally beautiful landscape. The problem of safeguarding the cultural heritage as well as permitting access to it today has assumed the character of an emergency and demands thought.

In addition, it would be useful to train certain members of the community as guides.

7. A specific legislation should be conceived. The present Archaeological Act is not sufficient to protect the sites and shrines in the Northern regions of Nepal.

Basic rules to protect each site and cultural property should be established (see *The World Heritage Convention*, UNESCO, 1981, pp. 13-14). Some of the temples should be listed as "*national monuments*" and taken over by the Government (such a procedure has already been adopted in several countries, for example in Japan).

Prospects

In the field of structures

In the past the location of human settlements and the structure of the buildings were

determined on the basis of what one might call "natural laws". Buildings often grouped together for protection; They are oriented for maximum insolation and complied with the necessity of keeping all arable areas free.

Today it is becoming increasingly expensive to build in the "traditional" style with local materials and to employ highly qualified craftsmen. Unfortunately, the first attempts at building with cheaper and more resistant materials have been a fiasco, followed as they were by the rapid disappearance of traditions and the destruction of the environment.

It should be noted that the dynamic energy and practical side of the enterprising and active mountain populations have made them impatient to use new materials (corrugated iron, cement, nails, glass) while completely overlooking the possible drawbacks and dangers.

Although corrugated iron is both fire and water resistant and will soon replace shingles, and although the use of cement reduces the bulk of the walls and makes them impervious to humidity, these recently introduced materials are often employed inexpertly, without knowledge of the proper methods and very often without due consideration for traditional forms. The resulting effects are regrettable.

Workmanship has also sometimes lost its quality of fine handcraft, and the workers themselves have not yet received the training that is necessary to enable them to adopt the new technique.

Owing to the shift in Old World—New World relationships a change over is now compulsory, especially at the cost-availability level. Wood is both scarce and expensive. Today as the demand for skilled labour continues to rise, it is becoming more and more difficult to find. Moreover it is now necessary to equip

dwellings with such amenities as glass windows, insulation, sanitation.

All these factors in their new forms will require standards of efficiency which go far beyond those of the traditional workmanship.

Nor can the monuments of Nepal evade these considerations. The responsible authorities, guardians of an heritage in imminent danger of deterioration and destruction, will be compelled to promote conservation activities which, at the same time, respect traditional standards.

In the field of tourism

Tourism in Northern Nepal is bound to develop and some economists do not hesitate to predict that a sizeable revenue will be derived from this sector.

Voluntarily or unwillingly, the tourists industry is going to "exploit" the cultural resources; all the more so as Buddhism in its Himalayan form has always elicited curiosity and sympathy.

One has a right to wonder what is to become of this culture in which religion and the ways of daily life are so intricately linked.

For more than twenty five years the inhabitants of the Northern regions of Nepal have welcomed increasing numbers of visitors, tourists, hikers and scholars from around the world.

Increasing number of foreign visitors have given the communities greater employment opportunities and knowledge of ways of life of the "West" but they pose also a threat to the survival of the important cultural traditions and institutions.

The writer of this report as well as many local decision makers in the field, keep in mind this question: must the "benefits" of development come at the expense, or/and eventual loss of a people's culture ?

"The way in which ancient monuments and sites are provided for in different countries becomes a mirror reflecting the very soul of the contemporary culture when the monument is found. I believe that it can be said of all mankind". "We keep what we value and we value what we keep."¹

In the case of the monuments of Northern Nepal a high priority is given now to economic values through increased tourism and the need of better living standards. The construction of new facilities, with modern material threatens what we consider elements of the Cultural Heritage. Therefore priorities should be given to:

- The best possible identifications and conservation of the archaeological, historical, natural sites;
- The zoning decisions, taking in account the quality of the existing features and the existing landscape features;
- The spirit of the site and the feelings of the people, worshippers and pilgrims.

The protection of cultural heritage of Northern Nepal depends on the cultural policy adopted by the decision makers. The crux of the problem lies in the sincerity of attempts to integrate inherited cultures to a world transformed by technological and economical changes. What used to be considered as "little traditions" can and must become part of a national heritage.

It is through the awareness of the authorities on the one hand, and by the means of simple conservation operations on the other, that a well-balanced programme can be brought to a successful issue, unique in its value of universality.

Repair Recommendations

Structure

Walls: If there are signs of serious movement in the building it must first be ascertained whether this movement is still alive. Depending on the severity of the fracture its repair is a matter of bridging the opening either with bonded stone work or the insertion of a simple reinforced concrete bond.

Inner structure: Normally the inner structure should be connected with the outer walls.

Failures in the structures are usually at joints, these weaknesses can be strengthened by insertion of steel plates, thus overcoming the dismantling of the structure.

Roof: The life expectancy of a roof can be prolonged by chemical treatment.

The new roof designs will need either strengthening or altering and in many cases a carefully designed and constructed timber truss will save timber and simplify building construction. These elements are not visible and if a building programme is envisaged in a district and as most of the buildings follow a standard type, it could be feasible to arrange for standard mass produced trusses for both buildings under repair and new ones.

Fabric: There are methods of combatting rising damp. Most of the moisture is borne by the bedding material, the mud mortar between the almost non-porous stone used in wall construction.

The wall bases should be properly protected against rainwater:

the laying of porous land drains in a gravel filled trench along the wall externally, to collect the ground water,

1. W. BROWN MORTON III. - "Environmental Design and Development of Tourism" in Seminar on the restoration of Borobudur, 1978.

correct and careful tabling of the ground around the wall base to ensure that all the rainwater is directed immediately away from the wall,

walls should always be kept clear of any growth as this attracts moisture.

The murals painted on a mud based plaster are the most susceptible to damage.

Normally the paintings start above the limit of rising damp but often the lower parts already damaged by moisture drawn up by capillarity attraction. It is recommended that in such cases the lower section of plaster is removed up to where the murals begin.

Fungal decay: The presence of dry rot must always be investigated and treated as a matter of urgency. All affected timber must be removed and burned.

The causes of damp conditions must be identified and stopped and ventilation introduced wherever possible.

Wet rot: The treatment of wet rot comprises the removal of weakened timbers and their repair or replacement and a treatment with fungicid. The source of damp must be traced and extra ventilation is most desirable.

Beetle attack: Same treatment as the one used against fungal attack. The timbers have to be cleaned.

Roof coverings: The traditional roof coverings must be adapted by using modern techniques to give them longer life expectancy than at present.

Shingles: The shingles should be chemically treated against fungal and beetle degradation/fixing; the shingles should be laid on battens and be held in the traditional manner by battens weighted down by boulders. After one year the shingles should be turned head

to tail and then fixed by nailing, with non ferrous nails.

Stone slates: The slates need careful selection to ensure good quality.

Note: These recommendations should first be tested in situ before any programme is got under way

Glossary

Chorten (tib.)—Votive construction.

Gumaune (nep.)—Element of the roof.

Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava. He spread the buddhist doctrine in the Himalaya region and Tibet in the VIIIth century A.D.

Guthi (nep.)—Religious foundation, endowment.

Niji Guthi—Private endowment.

Guthi Sansthan—Religious donation committee.

Gyang (Tam.)—(In Tibetan Gompa): temple

Halo (nep.)—Literally: plough / measure of cultivated land.

Kani Chorten/Kakaling—Monumental free standing gateway built on the plan of a chorten. The construction limits a village on major trail.

Kanjur (in tib. *Bka'-Gyur*)—Basic writings considered as being the revelations of Buddha.

Kashog (tib.)—Official letter stating a donation.

Khepa (Tamang)—Painter, generally a lama.

Konyer (tib.)—A keeper who is in-charge of a temple, whose duty is to replace the holy water in front of the images each day and to offer butter lamps.

Lalmohar (nep.)—Official letter issued by the king/donation.

Lama (tib.)—Term reserved for senior members of religious group but now used to generalise men who belong to a religious Buddhist sect.

Lhakhang (tib.)—Temple in the sense of place of worship.

Mane Tamang)—Prayer wall.

Mendang—Wall supporting stones carved with religious formula.

Pati (nep.)—Construction shelter for travellers or villagers.

Purohit (nep.)—Priest.

Tama-patra—Copper plate with inscription.

Tol (nep) Group of houses.

Yarsa (tib) —Summer residence or settlement.

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