



Talking Spaces

A Collection of Research Articles on
Public Open Spaces of the Kathmandu Valley

Edited by
SHIVA RIJAL

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Introduction

SHIVA RIJAL

Talking Spaces grew out of research, lecture series, discussion sessions and radio and television interviews that run from June 2011 to September 2012. These events focused on generating awareness among the general public about the historical importance and contemporary relevance of public open spaces in the Kathmandu Valley. Interactive Mapping and Archive Project (IMAP), a project of Social Science Baha, funded by the Ford Foundation, funded the research activities.

Architects, researchers, concerned government authorities, and lovers of public open spaces in the Valley created forums and disseminated information on the issues raised during the discussions. The exercise intended to specifically focus on the following issues: the gradual constricting of public spaces in the Kathmandu Valley due to private and government encroachments, the post-1990 emergence of unplanned and largely uncontrolled urbanisation that failed to evoke and address the age-old, but still functioning, urban fabric of the cities of the Valley which has led to lack of spaces for ordinary citizens to enjoy personal, social and cultural activities at a time when the population of the Valley is estimated to have reached over 4 million, the lack of professional mechanisms needed to manage public open spaces; and sadly, the non-existent open dialogues among the many stakeholders.

Partly academic and partly activist in nature, this exercise coincided with the government's plans and actions of expanding roads at different sections in the cities of the Valley and other parts of the country. The government formed the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, led by Keshav Sthapit, the former mayor of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, and the High-Powered Committee for the Integrated Development of the Bagmati Civilisation led by

Mahesh Bahadur Basnet. One of the major activities carried out by these organisations to address the issue of open spaces of the Valley was to remove the squatters from the Bagmati river banks. Similarly, the government launched a master plan to develop ten cities in the hills to divert the migration from the cities in the Tarai and the Valley. Till date, there has been no significant development in this regard.

In between, the 2015 April earthquake took the people out of their homes to the public open spaces. The following months were very difficult times when the people in the Valley realised and lived through the significance of public open spaces. Almost all heritage sites in the Valley got hit by the earthquake. Several of them have been restored now, some by local authority and some with the help of donors. On top of that, the 2019 Covid pandemic hit the public open spaces as most of it remained empty for a year and half. Two rounds of local elections have taken place. Some in charge of managing the public open spaces of the Valley have gotten criticised for meddling with the heritage sites whereas some have received appreciation for mobilising available resources to reconstruct monuments and manage public open spaces. By looking at the past two local elections, one can assume that issues concerned with heritage and its management are going to be or already a major agenda for politicians and those competing for elections in the Valley. Nepal's free media has been actively creating awareness about the significance of public open spaces and heritage site management in the Valley. This assures us a hope that institutionalisation of democracy in Nepal is sure to make its heritage sites and public open spaces safer and more vibrant.

This collection on public open spaces of the Valley has come at a time when unplanned urban development has created a socio-psychological reality arising out of people's belief that owning and driving a car is the ultimate goal of family and individual life. Due to this socio-psychological nature of urbanism and transitional political situation of the country, and the fact that several master plans designed to manage urbanism in the Valley were merely

plans on paper, there is much unpredictability concerning the future course other than the many plans of urbanisation that will inevitably follow.

Urban designers, as the contributors argue, do not exist in Nepal. Niels Gutschow, in a personal conversation, observed that the ‘urban planners’ from the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport are often engineers and not architects, and engineers do not bother too much about the three-dimensional world evoked by architecture and the public open spaces of the Valley. It is common knowledge that with the exception of land-pooling and road-building, planning as such has made little headway in the Valley. All the contributors seem to agree that the present developmental activities in the Valley are ‘unplanned development’ and regard it as ‘haphazard’. On top of that, the real estate business is changing the skyline and streetscapes of the cities, and making life much more difficult. In many places, the housing plots in land-plotting schemes became so expensive that it is better to build a house just ‘somewhere’, preferably on one’s own land. Within municipalities in the Valley, one needs a building permit. Prices have destroyed urban plots; fortunately, the height of buildings in Bhaktapur is controlled but in Patan and Kathmandu one can easily build six storeys or more on any urban plot to exploit the value. Land value is staggering in the Valley, and it does not reflect any ‘real’ value but is based purely on speculation and is guided by real estate interests. This is also one reason why the ‘arcaded platforms’ and other forms of public open spaces are being ‘stolen’ by the original *guthis* and sold as everything has a value. The entire situation appears to mirror the ‘greed’ of society. Gutschow paints a stark reality that in this drama the planners play a very small, and insignificant role; if they have a role at all it appears to be all politics.

Spaces of the Newars

Public open spaces form the core of the performance cultures of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley. Bisket Jatra and Dashain in Bhaktapur, Jatra of Bungadyah (Machhindranath) in Patan, Indra

Jatra in Kathmandu among hundreds of other festivals and cultural performances of diverse natures take place in the spaces, which are also known as open spaces for the public. *Dabus*, old raised platforms for performing plays, constitute an inseparable element of Newar urban space. For example, the one where the Gai Jatra performance takes place in Bhaktapur, the one in Patan where the Kartik Naach is performed, the one in Panauti where troupes from Harisidhhi and Bhaktapur perform and the one at Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square area in Kathmandu where Harisidhhi Naach takes place are the most significant spaces for the Newars of the Valley. Niels Gutschow (2011), in his three-volume tome *The Architectures of the Newars*, reveals the intricate relationship between the built architectural spaces and the performance cultures of the Newars. Among the several forms of public spaces, the ‘arcaded platforms’ can be taken as significant examples. Situated in the nooks and corners of the urban settlements of the Newars, ‘arcaded platforms’ become stages for various activities ranging from musical performances to the day-to-day gathering of people. According to Gutschow (2011), the numbers of such platforms vary. There have been 300 in Patan, 150 in Bhaktapur, and 28 in Panauti, and these platforms are abundant in Kathmandu city.

The size, number, and nature of public open spaces vary from place to place and time to time. In the Kathmandu Valley, public open spaces mainly refer to the precincts of temples and *caitas*, *bahas*, *bahis*, *ghats* (riverside cremation areas), and durbar squares among others. Though they remain scattered, blocked, neglected, and encroached upon in the current urban developmental context of the Valley, they evolved out of the exercise by the Newars of carving out some meaningful patterns in the urban settlements as per the need of the people, culture, and nature. Mohan Pant points out that open spaces such as the ‘open courtyards in front of the door of one’s dwelling, the neighbourhood square at the end of the lane, the market square and the town square a few blocks away in the main street of the town’ and ‘at the periphery of the town open spaces such as *khya*, *dewali* sites, riverside *ghats*, *matrika* shrines and

gateway squares' in Thimi, a medieval Newar town, were designed to address the 'sustenance of town life' (Chapter 3). These days such spaces have become places for people to meet and, importantly, to relax. Significantly, many rituals and culturally important events take place in such spaces. Hundreds of thousands of people, from the Newar as well as from the non-Newar, Hindu, and Buddhist cultural communities, live in and around such spaces. It is here they go through ritual performances and celebrate their private and familial moments. It is also believed that both mortals and divine beings share such spaces. Niels Gutschow defines Newar cities as 'stage and auditorium of social action' that the music of 'drums and cymbals' informs the arrival of 'specific season' and deities (Chapter 2).

Since such spaces are offered to and protected for divine beings, Newars, as a matter of faith, take care of them throughout the year. This is one of the reasons why such spaces keep on constantly drawing respect and care from the Newars. This faith and performative dimensions of Newar cultures have remained a very powerful force in managing and protecting such spaces. The open spaces of the Valley, mainly streets and squares, Sudarshan Raj Tiwari (2002) argues, are 'remarkable examples of socio-cultural civility' and points out that the very long tradition and culture of 'linking the social groups with the spaces' has played an important role in renewing not only social bonds but also managing such spaces collectively on a regular basis (Chapter 6). The bond between people and spaces within Newar communities takes place in a diverse manner. The Jyapu (caste) Newars have a very strong but distinct sense of belonging to their local community spaces. Spaces for Jyapus are part and parcel of their cosmos, the haven for the soul of their ancestors and kith and kin. Gerard Toffin writes that the individual male Jyapu's affiliation to 'a given territorial unit' from his community 'depends explicitly on his membership to a specific funeral group', the community acts out the beliefs and their spaces 'inhabited by supernatural beings of an ambiguous nature' (Chapter 4). Out of this faith and spatial bond between mortals and divine

force come various forms of rituals and festivities. Therefore, such sites are much more than the public open spaces for the Newars, as they are part and parcel of their faiths and ways of life. They are the spatial mediums that connect them with their ancestors.

Almost all articles included in this collection point out the fact that the open spaces in the Valley are the sites of a great many cultural performances of both sacred and secular nature. Such spaces become 'liminal' sites as gods and mortals, tourists, and natives, Newars and non-Newars come to share and provide greater performative dimensions to them. Evoking this performative dimension of the spaces, the meeting point between gods, goddesses and the Newars of the valley, Tiwari (2002), in his book *The Brick and the Bull*, writes that gods 'come out to renew their relations with humans, just as humans, as believers, visit the gods in their temples. Either way, for the residents of Kathmandu, the result is joy and festivals' (Tiwari, 2002, 2009). These ritualised performances in the meeting spaces between mortal beings and deities bring the spaces to life. Such religio-cultural bond between community spaces and the denizens have remained one of the most determining forces behind defining the nature of Newar urbanism. Evoking the genesis of urbanism in the Valley, Mohan Pant writes, 'community and public facilities built alongside the street and in squares' in Thimi provide both 'physical shape and a form which constitutes the identity of Newar urbanism' (Chapter 3). Similarly, sites, such as ponds, riverbanks and *hitis*, or stone-step stone water taps, located at different points of Newar settlements, reflect another important typology of the open spaces and Newar urbanism. Ponds like Gahana Pokhari, Lagankhel Pokhari, Nag Pokhari, Matatirtha Pokhari and the banks of the Bagmati river at Gokarna and various *hitis*, which are also open spaces for the general public, become sites for important rituals and festivals during various seasons. Highlighting the performance cultures associated with such spaces mentioned above, Shreemanjari Tamrakar writes 'Sithi Nakha, Gahana Jatra, Nag Panchami and so forth are a few examples where space predates the festivity whereas religious festivals such as

Holi, Machhindranath Jatra, Indra Jatra, Ghode Jatra have been designated to particular spaces for its celebration in the city. And here, the active participation of the viewers and devotees during these festivals and processions represents their social/religious nature and portrays the venues as public spaces' (Chapter 5).

Spaces of spiritual orders emerged in antiquity, long before the Valley became the place of multicultural communities. Newars and non-Newars alike used to treat culturally important spaces with great love and care. As a result of the continuation of this tradition, such spaces are 'never devoid of human actions and responses and utility' and people have saved them for ages as part of the 'covenant' by performing 'folkloristic cycles of celebrations,' and this has also kept 'the space structure in wonderfully fine shape in the Nepal Mandala,' writes Abhi Subedi (Chapter 7). Such spaces have worked very well because they have remained as the metonyms of negotiation between nature, culture, and human beings.

Bharat Sharma argues *bahal*, *bahi*, courtyards, nodal points, and squares are proof that 'man and nature are indivisible and that survival and health are contingent upon an understanding of nature and her process'. Spaces such as the Bhedasingh nodal point, Sharma writes, 'offer an ambience of socio-religious order, and with time the nature of commercial activities change and so do the merchandise on the ground zero' (Chapter 8). Public spaces in the Valley also have roots in the economic activities of the past.

The open grounds, market places, durbar squares and so on can be taken as the economic and cultural bridges with the world outside. Old cities in the Valley, Pratyush Shankar points out, have 'a road that passes through' the trade routes linking them to the world outside and open spaces along with the market can be taken as 'an important symbol of the connection of the city with a very different world outside and far away' and together they provide 'a sense of it being an administered city with human institutions of trade, commerce and an egalitarian society which allows flow of new ideas and people' (Chapter 10). Moreover, spaces of religious significance to the Newars also become very secular and democratic spaces as

people from all walks of life and followers of different cultural faiths are seen sharing the space. Taking the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square as a case study, I argue that ‘the cycle of the season’ as well as any fine day in winter or summer heralds ‘the mosaic of people connected by similar faiths and fates’ in a single space (Chapter 11). Though the importance and cultural significance of these spaces were realised by the government as early as the 1950s, not much has been achieved in the domain of protection and management of such spaces in the Valley. Irrespective of the fact that the Department of Archaeology was established in 1953, Ramesh Rai points out, it has been given a low priority as it has been under six different ministries so far: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Youth and Sports and Culture, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Ministry of Culture and State Restructuring, Ministry of Federal Affairs, Constituent Assembly, Parliament Affairs and Culture (Chapter 12). Thus, archaeological research and activities pertaining to preservation and conservation in Nepal have not been taken as seriously as they should have been.

Spaces Down the History

As this volume reflects views and contemplations on the public open spaces in the Valley of individuals from different professional and cultural backgrounds, the chapters in the collection meet and diverge on several points. The contributors agree that the Newar form of urbanisms has almost ceased to exist since the beginning of the Shah rule in Nepal. Except for the constructions of a few temples and religious shrines, ‘the expansion of traditional Newar urbanism in Kathmandu Valley’ had come to a complete halt by the beginning of the Shah period, writes Mohan Pant (Chapter 3). Researchers argue that the period, or the aftermath, of the victory of Prithvi Narayan Shah over the Kathmandu Valley in 1769 paved the way for the centralised form of governance and developmental activities. The Kathmandu Valley became the site of all kinds of government offices and residences of the *bharadars* or the family members close to the central power. The Rana regime (1846-1951) did its best to

prolong its power at every cost. Mahesh Chandra Regmi writes, 'If the *raison d'être* of Rana rule was the exploitation of the country's resources to sustain a centralised state and administration and ensure the personal enrichment of the Rana ruler and his family, internal and external circumstances during the second half of the nineteenth century were singularly favourable for the attainment of that objective' (Regmi, 1988). Moreover, the Panchayat polity (1960-1990) gave continuity to the centralised form of development, political, and economic traditions. Researchers argue that the political history of Nepal directly hampered the mode of urbanism in Nepal. Pitambar Sharma argues, 'After the conquest of the Valley in 1768/9, Kathmandu became the centre for politics, culture, and economy as well (as) for military. This has become a continuum, and has paved the way for a political culture of maintaining the status of the Capital Valley out of the resources generated from the countryside. Thus, the investment in the agricultural production as well as modernising the process of farming in the countryside got ignored' (Sharma, 2006).

Much harm had already been done to the culture, or *parampara*, of the Newar mode of urbanism and architecture in the period between 1769-1950; and this resulted in forgotten memories and the trail of *imaginaire* that the Newar artisans could have marched through. Arjun Appadurai (2009) calls the loss of such architectural and spatial nature in India, mainly in Bombay/Mumbai city as 'amnesia by displacement'. I would like to cite him at length to highlight the issue he stresses:

I do not mean exactly the displacement of whatever was on a particular site before something new is built on it, though surely that does lead to one kind of forgetting. But what is harder to trace, more elusive and more general is the displacement of the entire archive of plausible alternatives by the style and form of what is actually built in any given site in a place like India. ...Yet, one of the things about what does get built is that it naturalizes the possible and gradually contributes not only to that chain of examples, influences and derivations which new can later christen as some

sort of style, but as such a style develops, it steadily pushes out of view a whole repertory of unbuilt possibilities, each of which might have germinated other lines of influence and other traditions of built form. These possibilities become steadily less thinkable, until over time they are hardly available to the imagination any more. This is how the amnesia produced by architecture actually works. (21-22)

The contributors to this collection metaphorically speak about the dynamics of urbanisms in the Kathmandu Valley that did or did not happen. Most of the articles concentrate on the post-1970 urbanisation in the Valley and the consequences that the public open spaces have gone through since then. The 1970s was the period when the Nepali government failed to execute several master plans designed to manage or tame the course of development taking places in the Valley. On the other hand, this was also the period when large-scale migration to the Valley started taking place, adversely affecting the ratio between number and spatial locations.

Every decade since the 1970s has seen a 'decline of open spaces by 5 per cent per cent' writes Bharat Sharma (Chapter 8). There are several economic and political factors that are responsible for this decline. Firstly, the urban planners failed to exert an influential force to determine the future course of planned urbanisms in the Valley. Several master plans were developed and put forward, but partly because of the lack of vision and readiness to execute these plans, and partly due to the 'landholding mosaic of the Valley' and 'thousands of years of continuous habitation and a specific socio-political evolution', such master plans became only 'paper works,' writes Biresh Shah (Chapter 9). Secondly, governments in the past could neither plan the cities in the Valley nor could they develop the rural areas; yet the cities in the Valley developed comparatively better than those outside. As a result, citizens from different parts of the country started to migrate to the Valley for education and job opportunities. Above all, according to Abhi Subedi, the valley-centric political developments have produced 'macho bullies', party

cronies and ruling elites of ‘different aggressive avatars’ who have ‘seduced’ the spaces (Chapter 7). On the other hand, a larger number of people started sharing the spaces, which were solely used by and shared among the Newars. As a result, Kathmandu Valley started to become much more multicultural, and this paved the way for the ‘building up of socio-cultural diversities’ here. The more culturally diverse the cities in the Valley became, the more the ‘public space in the traditional core’ decreased, creating the conditions to ‘wipe out the socio-cultural characteristics’ of the Valley, writes Tiwari (Chapter 6).

This was also the period when state institutions, such as Nepal Police and Nepali Army, started to occupy various open spaces. Tamrakar states, ‘There are numerous examples of public spaces in Kathmandu being taken over by the state bodies like Nepali Army and Nepal Police’ (Chapter 5). This trend of encroaching into the Valley’s open spaces did not stop even after the 1990 democratic dispensation. Lila Mani Joshi, joint secretary of the Ministry of Land Reforms, on a television talk programme disclosed the fact that the famous Rawal Commission formed in 1996 had found that almost 1800 *ropanis* (one *ropani* equals 5476 square feet) of public land in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City area alone was missing.¹ In addition, of the total amount of missing land, only 400 *ropanis* have been recovered so far. Tiwari believes that it is ‘the thoughtlessness of the public institutions entrusted to look after public good including public spaces’ rather than the poor who are responsible for the encroachment (Chapter 6). Thirdly, the government has failed to create sustainable model of renovating and preserving various culturally important sites out of the locally available resources. This failure has led to a reality where such acts of preservation are only possible with the help of donors or similar support.

With all the changes, Gutschow writes, the Valley has now become ‘centres of a multi-ethnic’, and ‘the meaning and bearing of this change on society’ is going to be fully understood only in

1 Lila Mani Joshi, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Land Reform, speaking on the radio programme ‘Sajha Sawal’, BBC Nepali Service, 1 December 2011.

the years to come (Chapter 2). Therefore, looking back in anger is not going to help us until we come up with a method to solve the problems associated with the public open spaces of the Valley. Some important things have happened, especially in the domain of locating the number and variety of the heritage sites in the Valley in the post-1970 developmental context. Ramesh Rai points out that a survey conducted in 1975 reported that the Kathmandu Valley has 880 heritage sites of international stature. Of these, 94 were grouped in the highest priority class, 159 in the first class, 243 in the second, and 392 in the third class (Chapter 12). Not only such sites, including public open spaces, need to be protected but spaces to address the changing lifestyles and aspirations of the people need to be created too. Therefore, I argue that urban planners need to analyse and study the manners and activities of the people who come to use these spaces, and 'not only feel the creative sway of the pasts and the aesthetic power of the space but also live through the moments of the present' (Chapter 12).

Spaces of Fear and Hope

Subedi writes that discourses concerning public open spaces in the Valley in the recent years have become largely 'a fear discourse' as the Valley is located in an earthquake-prone zone. He points out another fear: the growing urbanisation in the Valley has been 'crowding our cities with kitsch culture and mindlessly creating jungle of monstrosities' (Chapter 7). Fear also looms large in the minds of the lovers of the arts and culture as Gutschow warns that new urban settlements in the Valley are already, or will become, 'devoid of ritual performances' (Chapter 2). Moreover, these new settlements do not have any artistic and culturally important sites. Carved windows and doors, temples and *hitis* and so on, so abundant in the ancient Newar towns, are missing in the newly built areas. Standing at the crossroad of urbanism, we realise that though cities never remain static, 'the essence of human planning exercise' in practice for ages 'must be given continuum', writes Sharma (Chapter 8). The primary fear is that this is not happening at all in the recent

urbanisation in the Valley.

However, the contributors also point out that the prospect of creating and managing public open spaces, vis-à-vis, urbanism in the Valley is still possible. They highlight that the cities of the Valley contain various spaces that have the potential to grow as a hub of arts and cultural activities. Gutschow believes there should be ‘political stability, dedication, professionalism, and international funds’ to turn places like the entire Hanuman Dhoka Palace complex into a ‘great site of global importance’ (Chapter 2). Moreover, I emphasise that projects of protecting such spaces should not be the affair of ‘grand investments and mega plans’ but they should be developed and expanded at a ‘slow pace, unit by unit at par with the need and aspirations of the people’ (Chapter 11). Shah argues that it is equally important for urban planners to study not only the spaces of the past for inspiration, but also of newly developed areas such as Kalanki, Balkhu, Sitapaila, Bhainsepati, Imadol-Gwarko, Gatthaghar, Bansbaari-Budhanilkantha, and Dhapasi, and realise that it is ‘possible to develop a contemporary public space typology’ via ‘planned intervention (Chapter 9). Similarly, Rai believes that the post-1990 period has ‘increased and promoted consciousness about heritage and cultural sites’ which is a ‘positive change’ (Chapter 12).

Conclusions and Questions

This collection puts together diverse views as well as questions about public open spaces in the Valley. It shows that space is heritage, conditionality of urban existence, and by that token, physical and metaphysical reality. All the writers in the volume speak about the loss, preservation, and proper utilisation of space in Kathmandu Valley. Though discussions about the loss and preservation of space in a metropolis are not unique to Nepal, the spectacular heritage of brilliant plans of open and constructed spaces that still vies to project a total picture of a consummate civilisation of urbanity and its aesthetic and physical structure that is the Kathmandu Valley and discussions about its space, merit special attention. Diverse responses of the writers, both

native and foreign, in this volume tend to prove this point.

Readers will come across some pertinent questions raised by the contributors. I take these questions as calls to establish a creative force that addresses the issues raised. Without resorting to the big discussions, I want to put a series of syllogisms based on common experience. I put these in the form of questions, which, to my mind, speak volumes about the study and preservation of the hallowed spaces in the metropolis. Why does Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square still serve as a taxi stand and why is traffic given free access here when it is already banned in Bhaktapur? Why is the police office still there, equipped with heavy vehicles, barbed wire accumulating dirt on the periphery, heavily encroaching upon the Kotilingeshvara temple? Why is the palace guarded by the military while it is only a museum, administered by the Department of Archaeology, leaving very little space for ritual activity? What does the board 'only for Hindus' mean? Are Buddhist Vajracharyas from the Kathmandu Valley, or Muslims from Nepalgunj, or tourists from Lahore or New York banned? Whose aggrandisements do such directives fulfil (Chapter 2)? How does a unique geography impact the way material and other cultures are shaped over a period of time, and more importantly, can it influence the nature of public open spaces? What is there in these public urban spaces that this anomaly of perceived exclusion or intrusion is maintained? At a time when virtual cyberspaces have become almost as real as physical public spaces, and as the more successful people of society spend more time indoors, why is it important for us to take up the issue of public urban spaces? What direction do we think the usage of public urban space will take in such circumstances and what are our expectations (Chapter 6)? How does a city, which keeps expanding organically across the Valley floor, find a structure that can be comprehended by its citizens? How does the domain of the public (so essential for a healthy urban life) find forceful presence in this city (Chapter 9)? What are we going to do with public open spaces, such as Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, in the context of multiculturalism and globalisation since people from a wider range

of cultural faiths and practices are going to share the public open spaces in the days to come (Chapter 11)?

Though the views of the contributors compiled in this collection do not provide any conclusions about the public open spaces of the Valley, they nonetheless call for action from stakeholders, politicians, architects, and members of civil society to carry out their responsibilities of defining the cities of the Valley as meeting points between the arts and cultures of the past with those of the present and future. However, looking at the profound simplicity embedded in the simple exquisite shapes and in the small but sublime spaces created by past generations, we find that there is something deeply liberating and valuable in these formations. That very power of simplicity, that very desire to save the simple and profound has compelled people all over the world to save such spaces and create conditions of resistance for any eventualities that may occur for human denizens living in any urban spaces anywhere in the world. This volume is a small attempt at fulfilling that responsibility. This is inadequate, to say the least, but definitely a move in the right direction.

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Urban Space as a Stage for Performances

NIELS GUTSCHOW

Contemporary Dreams of Modernity

Republica, the English language daily, published a number of small contributions, photographic and textual, under the title 'Walk-able Kathmandu' on 13 April 2012, the auspicious occasion of Baishak (or Mesha) Samkranti, the beginning of Bikram Sambat 2069. Intentionally or otherwise, the newspaper chose an extremely symbolic context: it is, in fact, the day remembered by the chronicles for the creation of the Door of Speech (Bagdwar) as the source of the Bagmati river, formed through the words of Buddha Krakucchanda. On the same day, a *mela* is held at Kotwal, the place where the Bagmati has drained the Kathmandu Valley ever since the Bodhisattva Manjushri cut the mountain with his powerful sword. The legend is about the creation of the Valley for human habitation. Were the designs presented by a generation of young students published in anticipation of the creation of a new and certainly better environment?

Sameer Poudyal dreams of Patan Dhoka being 'transformed into a state-of-the-art automobile station with wide roads to facilitate vehicular movement' and Upendra Subedi suggests introducing at Thapathali 'an underground road at the junction' which 'could thus ease the flow of traffic, and subways instead of overhead bridges could be helpful for pedestrians'. Rubina Manandhar suggests 'protective railings and proper streetlights installed for after-dusk hours', while 'zebra-crossings could help pedestrians and plantation of trees and shrubs could improve the environment and make the places aesthetically pleasing'. Similarly, Rojina Shakya suggests that 'metered parking system, lane dividers, solar-powered street lights and more greenery could completely change Jawalakhel'. Summing

up, Sworup Nhasiju presents ‘re-imagining Kathmandu’ under the title ‘I have a dream’, such as a ‘river-walk along a pristine Bagmati and transportation network to challenge even those of more developed countries, including a metro and an organised traffic system. With clean streets, fresh air, and no more having to study by candlelight, or waiting in the dark of the night for water from the municipal pipes, Kathmandu could very well be the Geneva of South Asia’.

For decades I have collected clippings, preferably letters to the editor, from newspapers such as *The Rising Nepal* (in the 1970s and 1980s), *The Kathmandu Post* (in the 1990s), and *Republica*, which keep complaining about ‘haphazard and unplanned development’ and at the same time dreaming of smooth traffic, access to water and electricity. As none of these commodities (if traffic is also a commodity) will ever sufficiently be available, neither in the near nor in the distant future, dreams are the only realm to cherish such visions. Taking these wishes for granted one has the feeling that all of those young people who had just graduated from colleges in Nepal dream of living somewhere else. And, all of them seem to be driving a car, and indeed making it the central experience of life.

Joseph Rykwert’s Philosophy of Space

Regarding public space, the motorable road as the ultimate symbol of modernity and its increasing speed seems to be the most desirable goal: here the public meets to fight for space to cover an intended distance. Let me recall Joseph Rykwert, the eminent architectural historian and critic, who in 1976 reprimanded ‘the disability of the modern planner’ to develop an ‘interest in movement’. Here, movement is not ‘the routed movement of goods and traffic. On the contrary, as cities become more and more congested, so the power of the traffic engineer becomes more absolute and shamanistic. In the meanwhile, the volume of traffic continues to rise in unforeseen ways, increasing the call on the engineer’s mysterious and frustrating services. But the movement of people is disregarded. To the engineer, it seems a mere inconvenience, if an unavoidable one—to be indulged in the old city-centres—when their streets have

become completely impossible for the flow of vehicles'. Movement, not just from one place to the other, Rykwert says, 'is an essential part of our cognitive experience as urban men. It is by touching its surfaces which articulate a space, by inhaling its good and bad smells, that we can come to terms with it, know and possess it, make it ours. A city which does not allow for such a movement in its physical structure is not ultimately fit for human habitation. The support which it may give in terms of supply and protection cannot compensate for the failure in scale and quality'.

We should not forget that Rykwert is not a planner but rather a philosopher of urban issues. Therefore, he says that 'it is all too easy to praise the medieval city for the comforts of its space, for the propensity of its inhabitants to make theatre out of everything, even the simplest activities such as cobbling and joinery'. Choosing the term 'theatre', Rykwert brings us to the central focus of the present anthology, edited by a scholar in performance studies. The historic city is indeed a vast stage for the performance of urban and life cycle rituals and privileged in space and time as an arena appropriated for the performance of collective repetitions of recognisable actions.

Rykwert presented his argument at a conference in 1977 convened at Darmstadt, Germany, to bring together 22 architects, historians, Indologists, and geographers from eight different countries to talk about 'urban space of rituals', with case studies from Nepal, India, Thailand, Bali, Japan, and China. At that time, we were all fascinated by the traditional urban form and the city as the stage for festivals. Günter Nitschke had coined the term 'architectural anthropology' for such studies, which had been initiated in Japan in the mid-1960s by Ito Teiji and Kojiro Yasuhiro. Around that time, Rykwert's articles in the Dutch publication, *Forum*, centred on the 'Idea of a Town' were raising questions beyond utility and economy. There was certainly a sense of romanticism around such a debate but the fact that prominent voices such as Sumet Jumsai from Bangkok and Robi Soelarto from Bali and Jyotindra Jain from Ahmedabad shared similar concerns about urban space indicated that this exercise

was not simply motivated either by a nostalgic central-European bourgeois feeling of loss or by an orientalist gaze. The fascination with ritual, theatre and spectacle certainly had repercussions on the western attitude towards urban traffic. Ever since, there has been increasing awareness about curbing traffic and recovering urban space for what Rykwert called 'movement'.

With case studies from Kirtipur and Kathmandu, Newar cities figured prominently at the conference. The first bilateral restoration project had been completed in Bhaktapur in 1972. The Bhaktapur Development Project had attracted architects and planners since 1974 and serious research into urban settlement patterns, social topography and urban rituals were taken up at the same time. Not accidentally, one of the first books on Bhaktapur, published in 1975 by Bernhard Kolver and me, was titled *Ordered Space. Concepts and Functions in a Town of Nepal*. Order was not meant to be an orderly traffic but a cosmic order which had guided the Malla kings to create a unique urban culture which experienced its zenith by the end of the 17th century. A decade earlier, Bernard Rudofsky had presented *Architecture without Architects* at an exhibition in New York's Museum of Modern Art, fascinating a whole generation of architects, such as Carl Pruscha, who had worked in Nepal since 1966. It was the urban fabric and urban myths which fascinated the generation that followed.

Rykwert's criticism of contemporary (i.e., mid-1970s) architecture postulates 'the assumption that the architect's principal task is the conceiving and making of disparate objects, separate buildings. Even when buildings are related to each other by regulation or the architect's choice, there is no conception available to us of the city itself as a determinable and not a determining entity. The city is not a field of natural forces meshed round a number of isolated objects such as buildings or blocks of dwellings, but at once stage and auditorium of social action'.

The city as a stage and auditorium of social action is precisely what I want to emphasise with a few narratives from Bhaktapur, namely Bisket Jatra and Ghatamugah.

The Ambiguity of Urban Space

The contributor of this volume, Abhi Subedi, quotes a number of studies to locate himself in a variety of contexts in this volume. Starting with Kapila Vatsyayan, who in 1991 in her *Concepts of Space*, wrote that the physical centre of societies was the stage to reaffirm ‘the relationship of the micro-macro, terrestrial and celestial’. The editor of this volume, Rijal turns to Mathew Carmona and his colleagues, Claudio Megalhaes and Leo Hammond, who, referring to contemporary social and cultural contexts, maintain that public space is ‘bound to contain a certain element of disorder and tension’. In present-day Bhaktapur, the ‘cosmic significance’ (Vatsyayan) of new year is re-enacted in all its complexities, producing more than ‘disorder and tension’, however guided, and at the same time contained by a ritual. Chaos and even violence is not produced spontaneously but as a performative act in which every citizen is a potential actor, at least a participant.

Rijal thus refers to Nira Yuval-Davis, who refers to open space as the potential ‘theatre of citizenship’, and to Simon Unwin, who says that ‘the most ancient types of places’ are those which are to do with ‘worshipping and performing rituals’ and with ‘suffering’, ‘rites of passage’, and ‘dying’. Indeed, Kathmandu Durbar Square is rich in all of these expressions. In his description of activities, Rijal, in fact, omits mention that the platform in front of the Shiva-Parvati temple (which is dedicated to Navayogini and Tarakeshvara) serves as the stage for an important rite of passage (*ihī*) for girls—the marriage to the *bel* fruit, often performed on the day which commemorates the beginning of the golden age, *akshaya tritiya*. The ritual mirrors the ambiguity of space: is the *bel* fruit identified as Shiva, Vishnu, the Buddha, or is it the golden boy, Suvarnakumara? In ritual, nobody has to bother. Knowledge is owned by the performing Brahmin. The client (*yajamana*) merely acts on his instructions. The same is true for the great urban rituals. The performative act, of which every individual is aware since childhood, is independent of meaning such as ‘cosmic significance’.

It is the inherent ambiguity of ritual which allows non-Newars and

even tourists to participate and delve into and share the complexities of Kathmandu's Durbar Square. In metropolitan Kathmandu, space has to, as Rijal says, 'remain open to the people of all types' and only be marginally accessible for economic exploitation. As the realm of 'social and political voice' the durbar squares will certainly develop into a meaningful arena in a secular republic.

Bhaktapur and Bisket Jatra

Surprisingly, social action has survived in Bhaktapur and the city offers a vast stage while the auditorium is there to acknowledge the presence of living gods, to witness the advent of the new year in April, the expulsion of the ghosts on the day of the dark moon in August, the farewell to the deceased on the day following the full moon and many other events.

Rykwert referred to social forms as the inevitable rhythm which 'must always appear quasi-magical' and be linked to myth. And he makes it a point to understand myth 'in the most generalised sense of an explanation, (allusive or explicit) of the meaning of man's fate, and of his place in the world. The mythless ritual is that of religion degraded into religiosity'. In contrast to the 'rituals of religiosity', which are 'self-contained', having no reference to the order of the world or the order of society', Bhaktapur's rituals are all about the order of the cosmos and the hierarchy of the many deities which protect and populate every nook and corner of public space.

Collectively, the Eight Mother Goddesses (Ashtamatrika) protect the urban domain. Their aniconic shrines encircle the historic core, marking symbolically the cardinal and intermediate directions of the universe. The city is indeed a realm or field (*kshetra*) imbued with special qualities. Beyond their designation within the pantheon of the great tradition of Hinduism, the aniconic deities which demand blood sacrifices represent the landmarks of a universal religion of space.

On yet another level, the notion of *desha*, the territory between the two rivers, the Hanumante in the south and the Kasankhushi in the north, plays an important role in carving out an auspicious and

pure territory from a limitless and unordered, potentially chaotic continuum of space. In Bhaktapur, this space is labelled Khvapade, being vaguely further defined by the shortest connecting line between the rivers in the east.

Within this configuration, the Vedic distinction between *grama* (settlement) and *aranya* (wilderness) can be observed. Based on the ancient texts, *aranya* can be characterised as the area ‘from where one can no longer see the roofs of the settlement’. Such wilderness is dangerous and full of threats. Demons dwell there and ‘one goes home at nightfall so as not to spend the night in this dark and dangerous area’. Among the malevolent spirits there are the Ghantakarna, who in multiple form is believed to enter the urban domain in the unprotected period of the early monsoon rains.

When scholars from various disciplines joined for a conference in Stockholm in 1992, I presented a paper on Bisket Jatra, calling the entire urban ritual a ‘cosmodrama’, while Anne Vergati (1996) referred to the legend of ‘the killing of the serpents’—the event that recalls ‘the founding of the town of Bhaktapur’. Ever since, Bhaktapur and its Bisket Jatra have fascinated not only visitors and scholars but also dramatists. Abhi Subedi, Nepal’s eminent poet and playwright, turned the legend into a drama in 2006 with the title *Bruised Evenings*. In the first scene, Bhairava and Bhadrakali perform ‘the dance of creation’. The legend is about two snakes appearing from the nostrils of the princess to kill her lovers after they had consummated marriage. Finally, a foreign prince liberates the princess who is in the power of evil forces represented by the snakes. The hero becomes the king, founds the city as the centre of the liberated territory, and initiates the festival in honour of Bhadrakali. Subedi (2011) calls the festival ‘a *jatra* of liberation’ and ‘the celebration of the victory of man’s free will’. Drums ‘herald the beginning of a new history of Bhaktapur’. Referring to the evil snakes, an elder in Subedi’s play says: ‘Those who are in power should not have illusions about their strength is the message of our festival’ while the princess finally says: ‘But I will not act on others’ dictates from now on’. The drama obviously reflects the

uprising of 2006, known as Janaandolan II and anticipates the end of monarchy in 2008.

The playwright uses a legend to carve out a story that speaks to the present generation. Transferred from the urban arena to a proscenium stage, with the drama festival as context, the epic dimension of liberation is reinterpreted. Neither is the princess liberated nor is Bhaktapur founded, but Nepal is liberated and the turning of the entire country into a republic is imminent. No doubt, legends and historical event as well as urban space will constitute the raw material from which new stories emerge to be staged in a new urban context, if not on the durbar squares.

So, how does the legend surface during Bisket Jatra? First of all, the festival lasts for nine days, an auspicious number which also incorporates spatial symbolism and refers to the nine protective deities of Bhaktapur, the Navadurga, a troupe of living deities which include the Ashtamatrika, and a central one, Tripurasundari. The festival marks the beginning of the new year, according to the solar calendar, on 14th April (Baishakh Samkranti), which in fact is meant to be the spring equinox (as the Indian zodiac is sidereal). That is the day most suitable for the beginning of a new year in the northern half of the globe and was already celebrated in Babylon in a way quite similar to the one in Bhaktapur. In Bhaktapur, those territorial deities which are present in movable iconic form leave their god-house (*dyabchen*) on New Year's Eve to be united with their 'original' aniconic form in the shape of an unhewn stone. The return to their 'house' with the beginning of the new year heralds their rebirth, gracing the urban habitat for another 12 months. Aspects of ritual renewal emerge on a variety of levels. A pair of chariots carrying Bhairava and his consort Bhadrakali is rebuilt weeks in advance but only Bhairava plays a major role three days before New Year's Eve. His chariot is placed parallel to his temple in Taumadhi Square and as soon as the deity is brought to the chariot a tug-of-war starts that creates havoc. Hundreds of men of the two halves of the city drag the chariot in their respective directions until one side wins. It is not a simple sportive event, but a fierce fight

that includes the hurling of stones. The city virtually falls apart into its two constituent parts. Spatial and civic order collapses for a short period in order to return to the established order on New Year's Eve. Before the chariots reach their final destination, they are paraded along the main streets and often collapse following the breaking of an axle or one of the large wooden wheels. Such incidents look accidental, but they are part of the cosmodrama to demonstrate another aspect of chaos. On New Year's Eve, a long wooden pole is erected to confirm the continuity of time as well as space. From the top of the pole two banners hang, heralding the victory of the princess over the two snakes.

But tragic accidents also occur. In April 2012, three persons were trampled to death by the chariot and one youngster was killed when he fell from one of the eight ropes (representing the Ashtamatrika) while climbing to the top of the pole. Casualties reinforce the existential experience of the festival, which is about death and rebirth, chaos, and reintegration.

Before the return of the movable manifestations of the deities on the ninth day of the festival, all deities of the town are worshipped along the processional route that winds through urban space. Almost the entire population joins the procession to witness the renewed presence of the deities. While the chariots move along the main road and the prominent ritual axis (north-south), the processional route does not encircle the urban entity (as for example in Kathmandu on the occasion of Indra Jatra) but moves through urban space, thereby connecting all prominent squares. The route does not set apart an inner from an outer area. It does not define a boundary but stands for the entire urban fabric.

Every urban entity of the Kathmandu Valley has its specific characteristics. Rituals and processions take advantage of the given fabric in search of suitable stages for performances which address either a defined social body, such as a lineage or a funeral association, a confined locality, or the entire urban territory.

The Expulsion and Beating to Death of Evil Spirits

The expulsion of evil in the form of Ghantakarna (Ghatamugah in Newari) from the urban domain is tied to the agricultural calendar. The period of planting rice starts on a decisive threshold day of the calendar, Sithinakha, the sixth day of the waxing moon in June as the rains are expected on the day of Bhalbhalastami, a fortnight later. With the beginning of the rains a period of more than a month commences in which the ordinary social order and conventions are disturbed. Obscenity is publicly licensed in the fields, where men and women work side by side. Obscene slogans are called out loudly by young men. ‘The remarks are grossly sexual’, as Robert Levy experienced in 1975, ‘and at any other time of the year they would be considered (...) extremely bad behaviour’ (1990, 516). But within this period, they are simply ‘a violation of status restraints that in other contexts would be extremely aggressive and insulting’. By being confined to a period of time, aggression obviously provides emotional relief. The disorder has a vitality about it that represents, as Levy writes, ‘generative life—both of the individuals and of the enviroing world’. Obscene speech has to be understood as a rain-making effort, almost something like a rain charm.

Marking the end of the period of transplantation of seedlings, the 14th day of the waning moon in August, named Ghatamugahcahre in Newari, marks another threshold day. On the following day, civic order is restored and obscene slogans cease, and the sound of drums, which were silent for the preceding six weeks, is heard again.

It is believed that in the period of transplanting rice the city remains unprotected and that this state allows evil spirits, collectively called *bhut-pret* but identified with Ghantakarna, the chance to enter the urban realm and infest the houses of its inhabitants. A number of legends are tied to Ghantakarna. It is either an enemy of Vishnu, roaming around with a bell (*ghanta*) in his ear (*karna*), or as a creation of Shiva, made to free Bhadrakali from smallpox.

During the intensive growth of the rice seedlings between June and early August, the fields are constantly cleared of weeds. Having worked for weeks in the fields, the cultivators have been exposed

to the spirits of the earth, who cling to them like burs and thus gain access to urban space. Ghatamugahcahre, the day before new moon in August, defines the point in time that this toilsome and dangerous work outside the bounds of the city, in the ‘wilderness’, is complete. It is a significant turning point in the calendar, and this is a welcome opportunity to get rid of the spirits through a variety of acts. To the extent possible, the urban territory is again secured against possible attacks of evil spirits. It is also the day to reinforce individual houses against similar threats. Three- and five-pronged cramps are driven into the lintels of the principal entrances to ward off potential enemies. On still a third level, men will wear an iron ring on the index finger of the right or left hand to be immune against an attack.

Local communities used to order a local painter (Citrakar) to paint a worn-out winnowing tray, portraying the spirit with a hideous face with glaring eyes, a gaping mouth with intimidating fangs and a crown of skulls. The winnowing tray is fixed to a life-sized effigy which is made of straw, fixed to a bearing structure of willow sticks and reeds. First, long, strong reeds are bound together to form a cone, which is then covered with bundles of straw. Additional sticks perpendicular to the cone form the arms of what will soon look like a threatening spirit. An old pot may serve as the hat. Most important, however, is the making of a huge male member with which the spirit is believed to copulate with innumerable women, creating terror for urban society. As the spirit’s most provocative feature, his male organ is a movable stick. A rope is tied to a short bamboo, tufts of cotton wool emerge from the top to demonstrate the fiend’s constant flow of semen, and two large citrus fruits are added as his testicles. The penis is only provisionally fixed to the effigy. Later that day, it is constantly moved by the person who occupies the interior of the cone, gesticulating towards women who watch the scene from a safe distance.

The urban space with its winding lanes, broad and narrow squares and courtyards is protected by a variety of deities on various levels, represented in aniconic form by stones or in iconic form in temples. While aniconic protective deities—namely Ganesha, Bhairava or

a Matrika—manifest themselves in stones that emerge from the ground, hundreds of other stones (called Chvasah) are incorporated in the pavement and to absorb impurities and ritual waste.

Ghantakarnas were being fabricated at 89 crossroads on 17 July 1977, when I undertook a survey across the entire urban space of Bhaktapur. The larger-than-life figures were installed preferably at crossroads, where evil spirits are believed to meet at night. More than a hundred smaller three-footed figures plaited from straw were placed on top of the absorbing stones. Late in the afternoon, these small figures are set on fire and housewives throw quantities of rice, salt, turmeric, and black lentils into the fire. Mothers hold the bare behinds of newborn children over the briefly and wildly flaring flames in order to protect them effectively from future attacks of spirits, and with reference to Bhadrakali, from smallpox.

It takes hours for the Ghantakarna figure to be readied for being conducted out of the city. During the forenoon, groups of four to eight men get to work. Finally, one of them slips under the spirit's straw covering and, to the beat of drums, violently dances his way to the nearest of the 18 exit points of the city core as counted in 1977. Repeatedly, the spirit interrupts his prearranged itinerary in order to plunge with the flapping organ into a group of laughing onlookers along the route.

Over 50 urchins proceed out in front with long straw torches, letting forth a ceaseless litany of obscene sayings. In doing so, they refer to the spirit's sexual powers, obviously enjoying the limitless freedom the day allows them to overstep the bounds of propriety, which are otherwise precisely defined and faithfully accepted. A few grown-ups follow the long procession of the boys, constantly shouting 'fuck hole' (*pay bhau*), and, thereby, indirectly referring to the rains that have impregnated or rather fecundated the fields. In addition, the sound of drums and cymbals pervades urban space—a notion essential for the quality of Newar urban space. Sound alone indicates the specific season and tells us that movable deities are being paraded. Through the smoke of dampened torches groups of more than 50 people slowly move forward. The path to

the ultimate destination is pre-designated for each of the many Ghantakarna figures since 'time immemorial'. There are about 30 places to burn the straw effigies, located either just beyond the limit of the historical core, across one of the two rivers or at a distance of up to two kilometres.

The end of the spirit's ritual journey takes a surprising turn. The Ghantakarna figure is placed somewhat circumspectly on the spot predetermined for it. But, at the moment when the burning figure collapses upon itself, the boys go wild and begin madly to beat the fire with long sticks. Clearly, not only is the spirit consumed by fire, he is also actually clubbed to death, and every one of the boys contributes to this with all his might, being engaged in an act of aggression.

To sum up, a threshold day invites purificatory measures on a very personal level (the body) and on the level of the household (the house) and turns into a public performance in urban space. This performance reconfirms a critical relationship of the urban core, the essentially protected and pure territory, with the surrounding 'wilderness' to which the threatening evil forces are returned to be annihilated. Almost all squares—even if they are only street crossings—turn into stages for a performance that attracts only a small audience. The evil spirits *need* to be driven away on that very day. The action is not voluntary but ritually defined. The fact that the performance is defined in terms of time and space turns it into a compelling event. It is exactly this quality of action that remains confined to the core areas of Newar settlements. What has evolved in a complex historical process can for a variety of reasons not be taken over by the fragmented urban sprawl.

Conclusions—If Not Dreams

The urban culture of the Newar has shaped a complex urban fabric which allows for a variety of performances. The urban sprawl which encompasses gated communities and, in the last few years, even high-rise apartment blocks, is and will be devoid of any ritual performances. This fact alone causes expectations to rise when it

comes to discussing the future role of the former royal centres, the durbar squares, including their palace complexes. Since the 1970s, they have become the centres of a multi-ethnic Valley and now they belong to the people of a secular republic. It will probably take many years to fully understand the meaning and bearing of this change on society. For the time being, the entire setup is full of anachronistic peculiarities. The square or what one would call public space is not exactly defined as the plinths of temples keep being encroached upon and ‘beautifications’ are ongoing in the name of selfish donors. The most important impact of being listed as a World Heritage Site is in fact the preservation of the historical environment which precludes any beautification. It is rather the use of space that answers the changing aspirations of society.

Regarding Kathmandu Durbar Square, one might ask why it still serves as a taxi stand and why it is a vehicular thoroughfare whereas traffic is banned in Bhaktapur. Why is the police office still there, complete with heavy vehicles, barbed wire and all the dirt on the periphery, encroaching upon the Kotilingeshvara temple? And the palace itself? The museum dedicated to the life of Tribhuvan, Mahendra and Birendra, has become a museum of itself. Why not move the exhibits to the Palace Museum of Narayanhiti Durbar? Imagine only the Baithak of Janga Bahadur’s palace wing which replaced a 17th-century wing in ca. 1868, facing north towards the square: a wonderful large hall that could then be open to the public for performances. Unfortunately, neither the architecture nor the interior spaces of Bhimsen Thapa’s palaces and those of the Ranas has ever been appreciated and proudly incorporated into the cultural heritage of Nepal. The brochure of the museum does not even mention these. Janga Bahadur’s hall and Chandra Shumsher’s Baithak (which remain inaccessible for no intelligible reason) are indeed high-ranking achievements, rivalling the architectural achievements of the Mallas. The palace belongs to the people of Nepal, but does anybody understand the implications? Why is the palace guarded by the military, while it is entirely a museum administered by the Department of Archaeology, with very little

ritual activity alive. And, what does the board 'only for Hindus' mean? It is a leftover of the Rana administration, which tended to guide and terrorise everybody and it mirrors the pundits of Varanasi trying to exclude British missionaries who were trampling onto their sacred grounds with leather boots. Are Buddhist Bajracharyas from Kathmandu or M'uslims from Nepalgunj or tourists from Lahore or New York banned in the name of a putative religious sentiment? The idea of World Heritage is in fact that architectural and cultural as well as natural heritage belongs to humankind and that includes all.

The entire Hanuman Dhoka Palace complex will turn into a great site of global importance once it unfolds its immense potential to turn into a vast complex of interior and open spaces, including the garden with its pond which till now can only be seen from the roof tops of adjoining plots distorting the townscape. The interplay of palace/museum and public urban space will eventually turn into a globally important landmark once its potential is realised. This is the dream and for sure political stability, dedication, professionalism, and international funds are the inevitable preconditions for its realisation.

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Open Spaces of Kathmandu Valley Towns

Historic Structures and Their Evolution

MOHAN PANT

Introduction

A city can best be described through the structure and features of its open spaces that constitute the realm of public and community activity. Open spaces reflect the image of a city—the social structure of its inhabitants and the spatial structure that contain it. Kathmandu Valley towns have both typological varieties and hierarchical categories in the constitution of its open spaces. The open courtyard in front of the door of a dwelling, the neighbourhood square at the end of the lane, the market square and the town square a few blocks away in the main street of the town represent both hierarchical order and typological diversity of open space within the town settlement. Further away, at the periphery of the town, open spaces such as *khya*, *dewali* sites, riverside *ghats*, *matrika* shrines and gateway squares continue to extend the list of open space whose location, function, and symbolic aspects, distinct from each other, are all vital to the sustenance of town life. They are settings of daily activities both secular and ritual. This essay focuses on one specific category of open space, which is within the historic town settlement area and forms an integral part of dwelling clusters and town streets. These spaces are domestic courtyards called *nani*, the *bahal* courtyards and large residential courts along with the neighbourhood square and the street itself. Unlike the city of today, with its vehicular roads, the traditional town was for pedestrians and the street constituted a major open space and characteristic feature of the town. These types of open space are closely knit in the urban fabric, and a change in their form and function implies

a change in the structure of the town itself. The study is on the features of these open spaces and their development in history, particularly from medieval times.

***Nani*—The Basic Unit of the Settlement**

In Kathmandu Valley towns, *nani* is a ubiquitous toponym. They are to be found within the quarters of neighbourhood localities. The quarters of the neighbourhood consist of a number of clusters, which until today characteristically belong to a particular clan that can be usually identified by the common surname of the inhabitants. The cluster includes dwellings, passageways, courtyards, and other open spaces, such as *keba* (vegetable garden), as one spatial and sociological unit. Such a residential cluster is defined by a common entrance and passageways that link the dwellings of the cluster. This is the typical feature of a *nani*. Typically, the names of *nanis* take attributes of topography, relative size, clan identities or other peculiar features of the place. For instance, *thatu* (upper) *nani* and *kothu* (lower) *nani* indicate the relative topography of the locality, *tadha* (large) *nani* and *chidha* (small) *nani* the size, *pama* (*pradhan* in Nepali) *nani* and *pyatha* *nani* take the surname of the inhabitants of the *nani*, *nasa* (*nrityanath* in Sanskrit) *nani* and *mahadeva* *nani* are named after the shrines located within the respective *nanis*. Cluster units are not always known by the toponym *nani*. A cluster of dwellings can also be known by a particular *chhen* (the house). In such instances, the *mula-chhen* (the main house) gives the cluster community its identity. But the physical and social structure of the cluster is similar to the *nani* thus making the *nani* a typically representative social and spatial unit of the traditional Newar settlements of Kathmandu Valley towns.

The *nani* is mentioned as the locality of a resident at least from the 12th century onwards. The palm leaf documents from Rudravarna Mahavihara of Patan mentions numerous *nanis* when citing the addresses of the vendors or the buyers. One of the documents dated 224 NS (1103 CE) makes the structure of one *nani* particularly clear:

[...] Furthermore, the sole Western Main Door in this circle of houses, (situated) in the western region (at the) road and lane/drain (of) Yamvi, in the Western cchu, (its boundaries being) north of the house of [Yuva] Bharoka, east of the house of him who belongs to the circle of Devu in sri-Satigvalaka, in their midst, the....(of) a house defined by its own boundaries, with the creditors exclusively enjoying the yard in front of the door. (Kolver and Sakya 1985, 112)

In the above description, the structure of the *nani* is clearly indicated by two features—the circle of houses (*griha-mandala*) and the ‘main door’ to enter this circle of houses.

Nani provides the first immediate open space to residents in the form of courtyards. These courtyards exclusively belong to the clan territory of the *nani*. Depending upon the size of the *nani* cluster, there could be from one to several courtyards (Fig 1, Fig 2). These courtyards are inevitably linked to one another by passageways, as are the individual dwellings of the clan families.

The physical development of the *nani* is a consequence of the gradual increase in the population of the clan, which begins with the ‘ancestral house’, *mula nani-chhen*, filling up the homestead compound by the expanding family in later generations (Fig 3).¹ The large homestead typical of a rural village takes shape in time as a *nani* consisting of a cluster of dwellings with courtyards. In most of the instances, the *nani* courts take their final enclosed shape in an incremental manner.

The courtyard is shared in its daily use and thus belongs to the families of the clan community. In property sales, the right of use of the shared part of the courtyard is explicitly mentioned. The earliest of such instance is in the 12th century document

1 *Mula nani-chhen* are identified in the study of classification of dwelling types of Thimi by Pant (2002). In addition to differences in plan forms, *mula nani-chhen* have special importance during Navadurga rituals and the clan members retain the memory of the ancestral home through this ritual tradition.

Figure 1:
Dupat Tole settlement cluste
(Pant and Funo 2007)

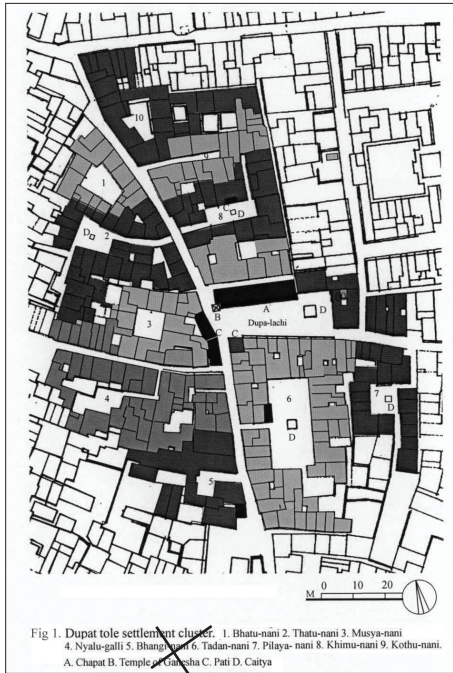


Figure 2:
Chapalichhen,
Thimi. The quarter
has five nani
clusters. Each nani
has a kshetrapala
placed in front of
the main entry.
(Pant 2002)



Figure 3:
The initial stage of the settlement quarter with the area divided into a number of plots and the house at the interior of the quarter. Chapalichhen, Thimi. (Pant 2002)

mentioned above. In usual situations the boundary of the division to which one has the right of private use is drawn by extending the boundaries of the plot or the dwelling fronting the courtyard.

In later development phase of the settlement, a second type of *nani*, different from the one mentioned above, is to be found. These are structured not in the interior of the quarter but along the lanes branching from the main street of the town. In such instances, the lane is usually wider and serves as the activity space of the households built right by the side of the lane. Thus, the structure of open spaces with courtyard and passageways characteristic of the first type of *nani* changes in the later phase resulting in a different structure of the town. The first is of a private nature used exclusively by the clan. The second is also used as a lane by resident communities as part of the network of street and lanes in the town settlement (Fig 4).

Both of the above two types of *nanis* have a symbolic artifact—the *kshetrapala* at the entry point. While in the first instance the *kshetrapala* is located exactly at the centre point of the entry gate of the dwelling clusters in the interior, the *kshetrapala* of the second type is at the centre of the lane right at the point where the dwellings of the community begin. Both, thus, are at the border point defining

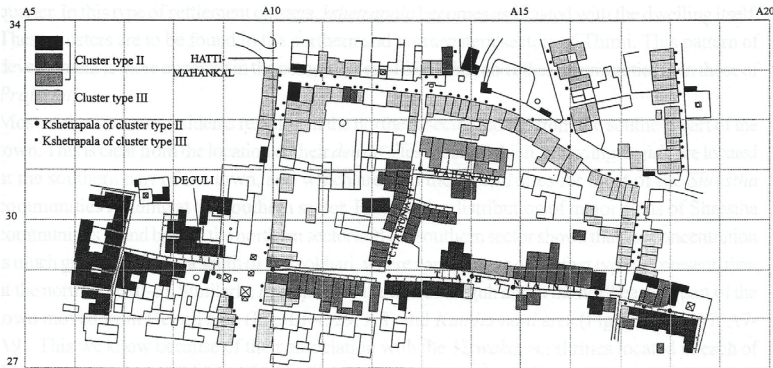


Figure 4: Nani clusters in linear form. Deguli Tole, Thimi. (Pant 2002)

the entry and the beginning of the territory of the clan community. However, the territory in the second type of *nani* is not evident to the person unfamiliar with the locality unlike in the first one.

In Thimi, all parts of the settlement clusters that developed until the Malla period can be identified by either of the above two types of *nanis*. In Patan, such *nani* structures are particularly clear at the eastern and northern section of the town where Jyapu communities are concentrated.

Usually, in Buddhist community quarters the *caitya* is enshrined in its courtyards. A well is also one of the common facilities in the cluster. In many instances, one also finds the *dalan*, a three-bay ground floor space that opens on to the *nani* courtyard.

The courtyard is surrounded by covered passageways leading to the next courtyard. The passageways are always lined with timber posts supporting the upper floors of the dwelling. Thus, one can see the community space of the clan under the floors of private dwellings of a clan member. Usually, the network of passages of one *nani* is closed at the end cluster of the *nanis*. However, there are also a number of instances where neighbouring *nanis* are linked by such passageways. This fabric of private and community space bonded into one unit is a special feature of the *nani* settlement pattern. However, this form of courtyard with covered passages

is increasingly becoming a thing of past with the colonnaded passage being filled by brick walls and then ultimately closed. In such instances, passage to the neighbouring courtyards requires passing through the open court itself. One can find different stages of transition of these open courtyard spaces when one visits the interior of *nanis* in all town settlements.

Bahals

Bahal, the Buddhist monastery, is of particular importance in understanding the open space structure of cities such as Patan and Kathmandu with large concentrations of Buddhist communities. The courtyard typology adopted for monastery architecture has its tradition in two millennia of history as evidenced by the cave monasteries of India. The *bahal* architecture of the Valley towns follows a standard plan form and façade. With the advent of Vajrayana in the late Licchavi period, communities of *bahal* began to live around it in a concentric arrangement at the exterior ring of



Figure 5:
Concentric
developments of
settlement around
Buddhist monastery.
Subahal and Bhinchhe
Bahal, Patan. (Pant
and Funo 2007)

the *bahal*. There are numerous instances of this pattern of Buddhist community settlements. Subahal on the east of Patan is a typical example (Fig 5). The distribution of *bahals* is concentrated more in the southern and western sections of the city.

With respect to the clan structure and its spatial consequence, the *bahal* shows a close parallel with *nani*. The essential difference between the two forms is that in *bahal* settlements, the religious precinct of the *bahal* itself constitutes the core, both as the origin of the settlement itself and in the spatial organisation of the dwellings of its community.

Open courts in *bahal* settlement clusters have a wide range of variations, from the standard *bahal* court of around 15 metres by 15 metres to 70 metres by 56 metres, such as that of Nagbahal in the northwest quarter of Patan (Fig 6). Adjacent to such courtyards and further interior, are other courts, some of which are branch bahals (*kacha-baha* in Newari) of the main *baha*. There are also courtyard clusters known as *nani*, which are part of the *bahal* structure of the settlement. Some of these *nanis* are similarly generous in size, such



Figure 6: Nagbahal, Patan. The area exhibits an example of planned residential settlement with large open quadrangles with community facilities. (Pant and Funo 2007)

as that of Elanani and Sasunani behind Kwabahal, and Daubahanani at the west of Daubahal.

Among the numerous courtyards and *nanis* in Patan that constitute the primary open space for the members of respective communities, a particular size for the court quadrangle appears in a greater number. This size is 57.6 metres by 57.6 metres. Further, it is to be noted that all open courts that are the centre of the settlement cluster are planned and is within a grid frame of the town. The sizes of the courts are governed by the modular measure of the grid. This measure is of ancient origin whose root goes back to Indus cities such as Mohenjo-Daro. One standard modular measure is called *rajju*, which is mentioned in Kautilya's Arthashastra, and is equivalent to the metric measure, 19.2 m, whence comes the dimension of 57.6 m. This measure is a three-*rajju* module and is called *nivartana*.

The beginning of the proliferation of *babals* in the town and the employment of large community courtyards bring a turn in urban morphology and the system of spatial structure in the city. In the earlier structure the settlement clusters were organised by a hierarchic system consisting of main street with lanes branching from it and then ending in the *nani* court, resembling a tree. This presents a linear sequence from the public sphere to the private sphere. But in the *bahal* pattern, streets are to a great extent replaced by large courtyards. The structure of the settlement cluster is a lattice with numerous linking paths between courtyards and between courtyard and street. If one carefully examines the urban fabric of the east and northeast sections of Patan with the western section of the town, the change in the structure is evident in the distribution and richness of urban squares. The squares are more elaborated and greater in number in the northeast quarter of the town where *babals* are fewer in number compared to those of the south and west (Fig 7). This explains the consequence of the large size of the quarter blocks and the fewer numbers of urban squares in the western part compared to the small blocks separated by lanes and more neighbourhood squares in the north-eastern quarters of the town.

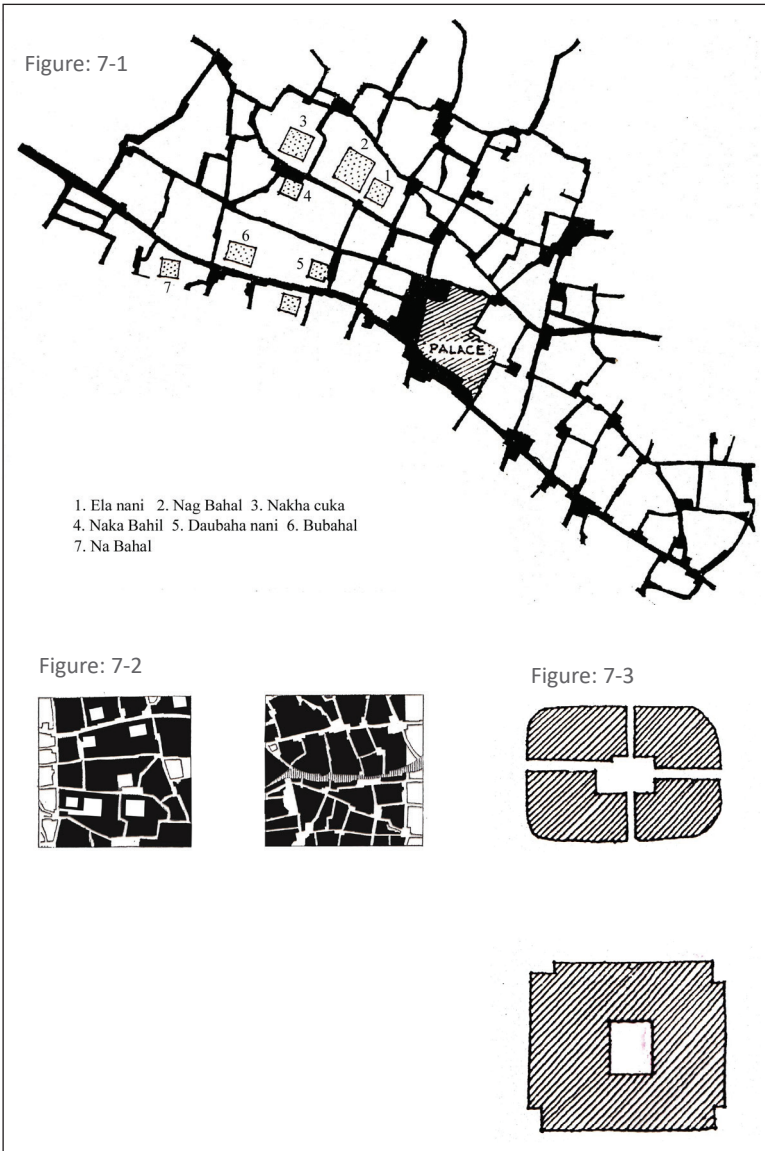


Figure 7: Street pattern of northern section of Patan. 7-1: The change is observed in larger quarter blocks and few squares at the west than at the eastern sector of the city. 7-2: Comparison of street pattern and quarter blocks between east and west of Patan. 7-3: The transformation of a square into an interior courtyard. (Pant 1990)

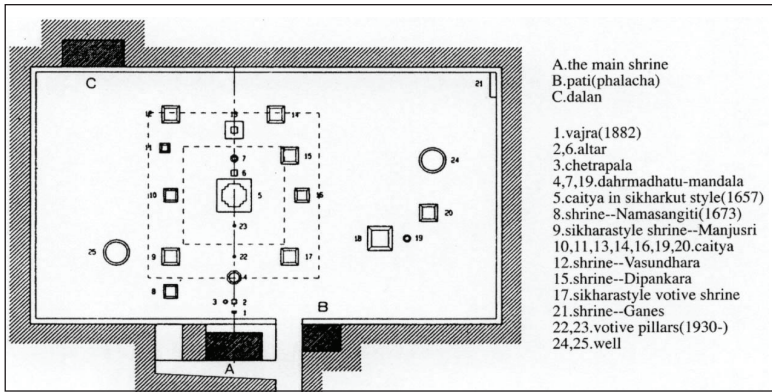


Figure 8: Bubahal, Patan. The foundation date of the artifacts of the court suggests an earlier bahal structure at the central part prior to 17th century. (Pant and Funo 1998, 2007)

It is not explicitly clear when such large courtyards began to be employed in the planning of the settlement quarter, but wide, open rings around the typical *bahal* court could have been introduced as early as the beginning of Vajrayana arrival in Nepal. The records of Nabahal, Patan, show that large courts were employed at least by the 16th century. A study of Bubahal, founded in the 12th century suggests that the first *bahal* monastery core was in the central zone of the present *bahal* court (Fig 8). Existing ritual artifacts in the court indicate that the core *bahal* structure collapsed sometime in 15th century and the space was reorganised at the time of reconstruction. This removed the central monastery structure of the cluster and the outer ring merged with this earlier core making a large courtyard that probably served better the diverse needs of the increasing size of the community.

The shift from the street and square system to the *bahal* system has a number of consequences for the value of open space and the image of the city. To the inhabitants belonging to other quarters, the large courtyard and its accompanying facilities, such as temples, shrines, fountains and *patis*, are behind the streetscape, and therefore, the casual use of these facilities is out of their reach. In contrast, such facilities are immediately accessible to all urban

citizens in the street-square of the earlier *nani* system.

The *bahal* structure is particularly common in the localities of Vajracharyas and Sakyas. *Nanis*, including those with large courtyards, belong particularly to Jyapu community. It is interesting to note that communities such as Shresthas have no large open courts. The size is usually of a single residential court for the Shresthas. This seems to suggest that the open space structure of the town is closely related to the nature of the community type.

At present one can observe large *bahal* open courts functioning in a number of ways. Besides their ritual functions, there are various kinds of utility spaces and community facilities in the buildings enclosing the courtyard, such as the community house (*guthi chhen*), reading rooms, cooperative banks, and neighbourhood and ward offices (Fig 9). In the open court itself there are wells and playing areas, such as a table-tennis boards, volleyball or badminton courts. In some cases, the *bahal* court with its adjacent wings are used as elementary schools. All such courtyards, including the *nani* of the Jyapu community, are studded with *caityas*, some of Licchavi origin, indicating the ancient history of the settlement quarters.

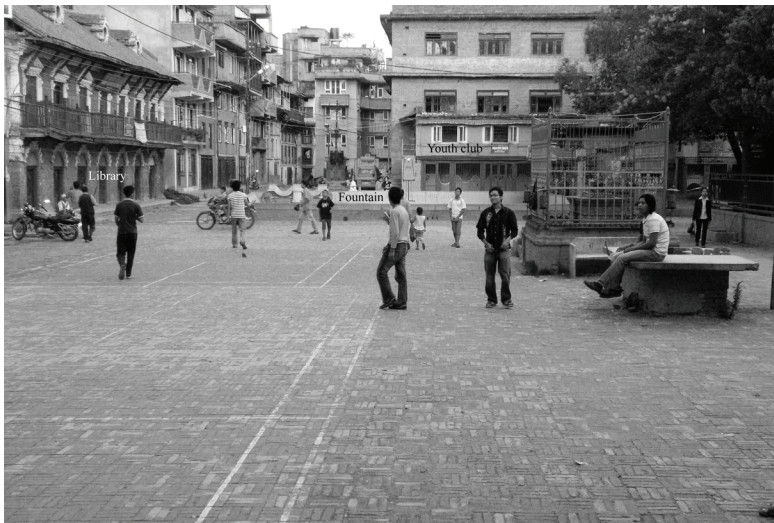


Figure 9: Community facilities in Nagbahal, Patan. (Photo by Pant 2006)

Figure: 10-1



Figure: 10-2



Figure 10:
Figs 10-1, 10-2. The courtyard of Cidhan Baha in Wotu tole, Kathmandu.

The high buildings, commercial use and auto parking destroy the ambience of traditional bahal religious structure, and impoverishes the condition of light and ventilation in the surrounding houses and the court.

(Photos by Pant 2011)

The presence of diverse spaces, ranging from the religious to the utilitarian, from the formal to the informal and used by women and men of all age groups makes such places functioning at all hours of the day.

Seasonal festivals, such as *bahi-dyo-boyegu*, *mataya* of Patan or *panchadan*, keep these open spaces in a continuous and orderly network in the settlement. Comparable to this network are the exhibitions of handiwork and ritual art observed in the squares during *Ganesha-chauthi*. People of the town move from one square to the other to observe the riches and feats of artwork performed by their neighbourhoods and localities farther away. Unfortunately, new developments have, to a great extent, disfigured this picture of open spaces with their use for commercial purposes and as vehicular parking space. In many instances, in Kathmandu, the low three to four storey dwellings have been converted into taller buildings twice their original height thus changing the spatial ambience of these open courtyards (Fig 10-1, Fig 10-2).

Neighbourhood Square

In the hierarchy of urban structure, *nani* may belong to the category of domestic space as it belongs to the households of a clan. Beyond the threshold of the *nani*, in the street and squares, is the realm of a heterogeneous community—where all communities of the *tole*, or neighbourhood, share the facilities built there. The most typical open space is the neighbourhood square. The sharing of common facilities, such as the well or the water fountain, *pati*, resting place, and shrines built in the square, is one important aspect that makes *tole* an urban community in contrast to the private and therefore parochial nature of the *nani*. Thus, the square of the *tole* is a symbolic space representing the urban culture of the settlement.

In general, neighbourhood squares are located at street crossings or at the meeting point of the streets. The square at the side of the street crossing is always configured in such a way that it takes a space at one corner of the quarter which belongs to the territory of the respective *tole* (Fig 11). This pattern may be observed when

Figure 11: Saugal, Patan.
 The *tole* includes territory
 at both sides of the street
 but extends much deeper
 towards north.
 (Pant 2012)



in current popular usage, *chowk* is also a common term to indicate a traffic junction. In the absence of a historical understanding, the use of the term is muddled, and has created confusion about the urban square and other open space types of traditional settlements.

There exists a kind of hierarchy in the structure of the squares. This derives from differences in location, on the one hand, and, on the other, partly from the historical precedence of the locality. The significance of the square and its size varies depending on whether it is located on major streets or on minor ones and lanes branching from the main streets. Some neighbourhood squares in the main streets assume the role of market square and town square. Major squares often house shrines dedicated to Siva and Narayana, frequently also a *caitya*, and have *lohan-hiti*, stone water fountain, and *dabali*, a raised platform used as stage for performances. *Pati* is the most common and essential feature. *Toles* at periphery usually have smaller territory, and likewise, are the size of their *tole* squares. However, gateway squares are of special importance, where elements such as town gate, pond or fountain, a *chautara*, a resting

passing through the major streets of Patan and other towns.

It is also a general feature that streets and squares are usually not the boundary of *tole* territory. The territory of the *tole* extends to both sides of the street and the square. Thus, in the matter of access and configuration, the *tole* square is, in principle, at the centre of the *tole* territory. Neighbourhood squares located along the major streets serve as market places and are usually larger in size than those along the minor streets. These squares also have been bestowed with shrines and other community structures, which are greater in number as well as more monumental in form than within *nanis* and *bahals*. Cross-sections along the major streets crossing north to south and east to west in Patan very clearly show this structure of squares.

The primary ritual symbol of such neighbourhood squares is the shrine of Ganesha. In medieval documents, the deity is mentioned as *tole-devata* and is always given prominence in axis and location in the configuration of square. This shrine is particularly monumental in the localities of the Jyapu community. In the *toles* of this community, a community house known as *chapa* is also built in the square (Fig 1). *Chapa* serves numerous functions for the festive and ritual activities of the community.

In many instances, the *tole* square is known as *lachi* in local usage, especially in the quarters of the Jyapu community. In fact, *lachi* is a more frequent toponym for such squares than *cuka* (*chowk* in Nepali), which appears to be reserved more for the enclosed courtyards within the quarter, or for quadrangles enclosed by the wings of a residential dwelling, or of a palatial structure. In a manner similar to the *nani*, *lachi* usually carry nominal attributes such as the *Tapalachi*, *Dupalachi* and *Bhindyolachi* of Patan.

In typological variations of open space, *livi* is another term that occasionally suggests a neighbourhood square. *Livi* is the backyard, usually located in the interior of dwelling clusters but which have turned into enclosed courtyards with the addition and extension of dwelling units. At present there exists some confusion in understanding the specific nature of the *lachi*, *livi* and *cuka*. Further,

Figure: 12-1



Figure: 12-2



Figure 12: Fig 12-1 and 12-2. The two squares in Thecho, one with the shrine of Balkumari (Fig 12-1) and the other with that of Bramhayani (Fig 12-2) belong to the upper half and lower half of the town respectively. (Photos by Pant 2011)

place, with a *pipal* tree, a number of *patis* and shrines dedicated to various deities, are to be found. These elements constitute a set in defining the setting for the gateway square of the town.

Squares are also symbols and boundaries of the bipartite division of the town settlement. This is one of the features of Kathmandu Valley towns. For instance, Kasthamandap of Yangal, the lower town, and Thasamandap of Yambu, the upper town of Kathmandu, were identities that distinguished the two sections of the city in medieval times. The two squares in Theco, one dedicated to Brahmayani and the other to Balkumari, both Ashtamatrika deities, and Thanelachi and Konelachi in Tokha, are such examples where the respective squares stand as symbols of the division of the town into two (Fig 12). Toffin (1996) mentions these communities possessing such distinct identities without a higher order structure to link them in a settlement as moieties.

It has been mentioned above that the structure of the street and square pattern of the town underwent a significant change with the introduction of large quadrangles in the interior of the quarter. This is particularly apparent in areas of Buddhist communities. There, however, exists a topological similarity between the square and the large courtyards and *nani*. Nakhacuka of Patan is one telling example of how the courtyard incorporated within it a square (Fig 13).

In the three major towns—Patan, Kathmandu, and

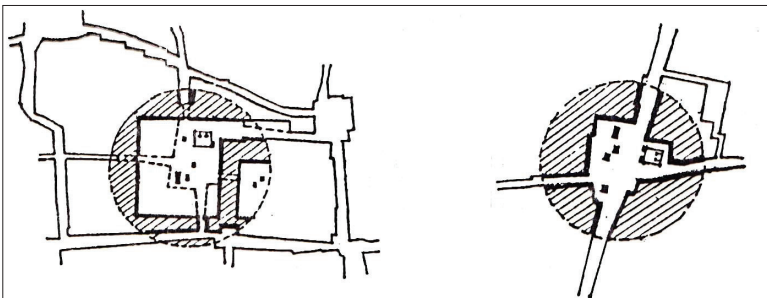


Figure 13: Nagbahal (left) and Saugal (right), Patan. The community artifacts such as fountain, shrines and sattals at the corner of the bahal court can be compared with those of Saugal Square. (Pant 1990)

Bhaktapur—durbar squares stand out as the central square of each city. A feature they share in common with other small-town settlements of the Valley is that they are located in front of the palace. In smaller towns, the local administrative court, called *layaku*, takes the place of the royal palace. However, the squares in front of the *layaku* are not always the most prominent square of the settlement. The most important square is always the one where the shrine of the town deity is located, as for instance, Balkumari of Thimi and Baghbhairava of Kirtipur. Bhaktapur's Taumadhi square is also of this order as far as town rituals are concerned.

Thus, when one considers the rituals of the town, a hierarchical order of squares is apparent. The square of the town deity commands the town community, while the squares of Ashtamatrika circles are the next in importance. The third is the neighbourhood square, with Ganesha's shrine as its symbol. *Nani* courtyards do not belong to this hierarchical order. Yet, in a sociological context, in the management of rituals, the clan community is an important entity rendering the whole settlement, of which the *nani* is the basic unit, into a hierarchically structured closed network. In the Buddhist order, one may draw a parallel with *Panchadan* and Machhindranath Jatra that connect the monasteries and courts with the *caitya* enshrined there.

Street and Community Urbanism

Morphological analysis of *nani* clusters shows that until the early Malla period dwellings did not line the streets. The townscape then was rather rural, with dwellings and their clusters located in the interior of the quarter. The streets were lined by homestead boundary walls built of rubble, bricks, and reed fencing. The dwellings were built further inside, as can still be found in certain remote corners or peripheral parts of the town. Frontage to the street was of little value. The entry gate was preferably not on the main street but on the lanes that branched from the main street. The market street was not yet a feature of the town. In Thimi, until the end of the Rana period, when a new track was opened to



Figure 14: The section of Asan-Indrachowk market street, Kathmandu. Note that the diagonal street and the alignments of the buildings at its two sides are not related to the alignments of the quarters inside. (KVMP 2002)

lead to Bhaktapur from the north of the town, periodic markets were regularly held in Bhudhankhel, a place on the old route to Bhaktapur. Permanent shops on the street were very few in number. Such a street scene without shops is also indicated by the façade form of the ground floor of the extant old houses on the street. These houses have only doors to enter but no continuous openings to allow commercial activities. All houses with continuous openings supported by timber posts are from the early Shah or Rana period with rare exceptions. Further, building a house by the side of the street was not considered safe and respectful and was thought to be easily accessible to thieves and vandals.

Such a street scene appears to have been typical not only of small towns such as Thimi, but also of larger towns like Kathmandu. This is suggested by the shapes of the plots alongside the street from Asan to Indrachowk (Fig 14). In this stretch the plot boundaries facing the street are oblique to the street while clusters in the interior show regular orthogonality. The thin belt of street houses

does not extend to the interior suggesting that the market street never became the guiding principle in the settlement grid. This is an indication of a development sequence from the interior to the street side. Nonetheless, in cities like Kathmandu and Patan development along the street may have happened much earlier compared to the smaller towns.

Bhasavamsavali chronicle notes three types of houses in a city, classified during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla in the 14th century. The three types are, *sahar-ghar*, *sadak-ghar* and *galli-bhitra*.² It may be logical to think that these three types were those built alongside the main street of the town, built alongside the lane and those in the interior of the quarter. By the 14th century, such a pattern of town development could have been possible in the three large towns of the Valley and Sankhu, a trading post on the northeast rim of the Valley.

The development of street life in the urbanism of Kathmandu Valley towns may be illustrated through the case of Thimi.³ The study of inscriptions placed on the walls, plinths, and pedestals of artifacts such as temples, shrines, fountains and *patis* show a distinct pattern of development that corresponds to certain historic periods. In Thimi, leaving aside the two Licchavi inscriptions, the first stone inscription belonging to medieval times dates to 1420 and there are 11 inscriptions spanning the next two hundred years (Fig 15). All these records are from the temples on the main street of the town. Further, these are all built by town officials, such as Duwar, or by members of the royal family. These temples continued to be monumental in the context of Thimi compared to any structure that was to come in the later centuries. Among them are the temples dedicated to Siva in Siva Tole, the Bhavani Shankar temple in the square in front of Layaku, the Laxminaryana temple of Inayalachi. Ganga Rani of the 16th century, whose natal home is thought to be

2 Bhasavamsabali, part 2: p 38.

3 The author along with Gyanamuni Vajracharya and Babukaji Sachhen studied all the available stone inscriptions of Thimi during the survey of the town in 1995 and Shyamsundar Rajbamshi translated them into Nepali. For details see Pant (2002).

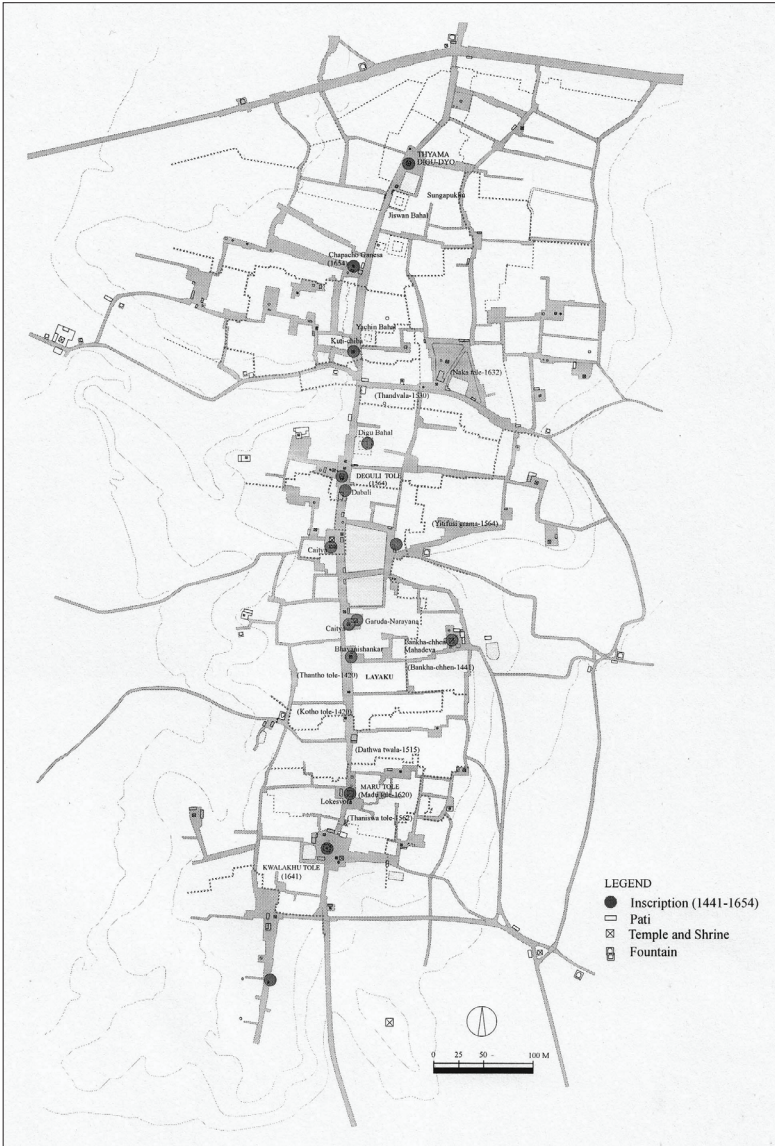


Figure 15: Distribution of Inscriptions of the period between 1421 to 1655.

Thimi, made land donations to Lokesvara and Balkumari, the two pivotal monuments of the town. All these structures belonged to

the town community in general. The shrine of Ganesha, the *tole-devata*, or locality deity, was built by the *tole-nayaka*, or local chief, as illustrated by the record of the Ganesha shrine of Chapacho Tole, dated 1654 CE. Two other monuments existed on the main street by this time. These are the Deguli temple and Thyama Digudyo. Both are ancestral shrines belonging to two *dewali* communities, of which Deguli goes back to the Licchavi period and is the largest constituent of the town's population.

The next phase of building on the street and square is from the mid-17th century to the mid-18th century. This phase is characterised by constructions along secondary streets and lanes, and associated neighbourhood squares. Unlike in the earlier phase, the construction and maintenance record of this period encompasses all the areas of the settlement (Fig 16). The 58 available inscriptions of this hundred-year period are far greater in number than that of the preceding 200 years. Most of the records concern the construction of *patis*, *sattals*, fountains and wells besides, occasionally also, minor shrines. This turn in the focus of construction from temples to other facilities is a change that attends more to the physical and social needs of the resident community of a *tole*. Another important feature is that the building of artifacts is sponsored by individual citizens, and, in some instances, by the *tole* community. In a manner similar to *tole-devata*, there are *patis* known in the inscription as *twa-phala*, the *pati* of the *tole* community. *Patis* began to be built in the earlier temple building period, but their numbers are very small. The obligation to maintain artifacts were vested in the *guthi* members of the clan or were solicited from philanthropic inhabitants of the town.

The construction of the *pati* streamlined the boundaries of the street or square, and gave streets and squares a particular physical configuration and shape. It then served as a sheltered space for the activities of the *tole* and town community. This supported street life and enhanced the streetscape. This is an important stage in the development of urbanism, where the market street had yet to appear.

The third period we can discern from the inscriptional record

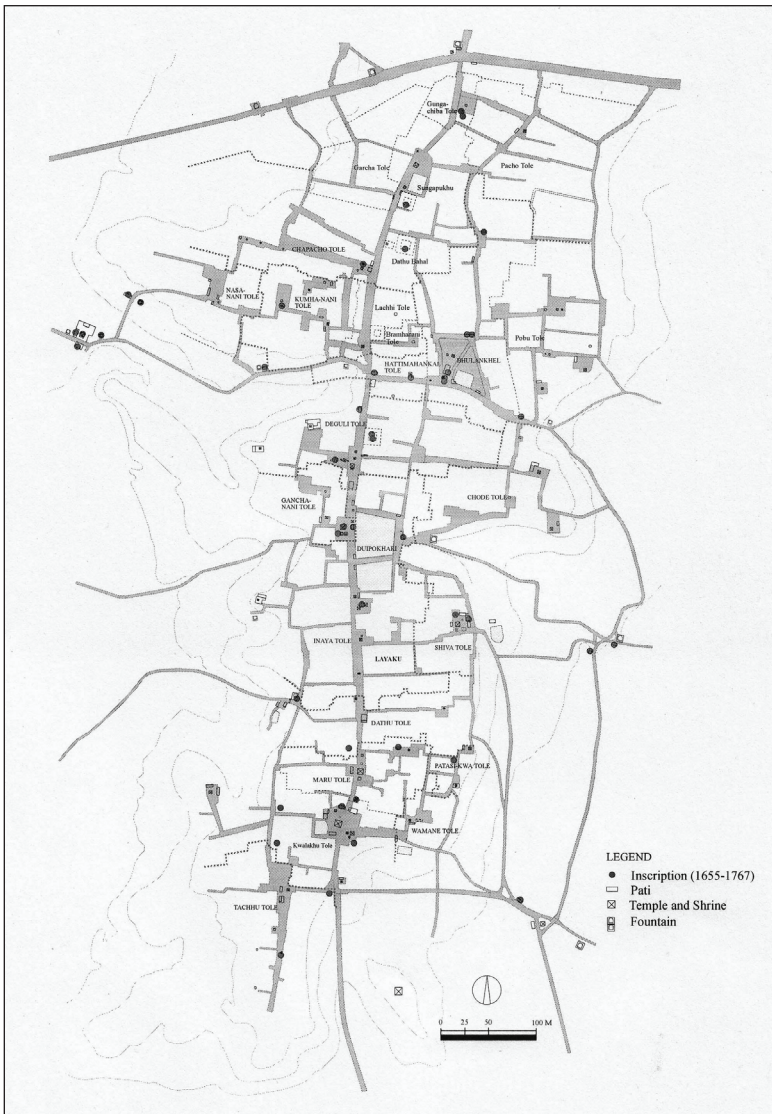


Figure 16: Distribution of inscriptions of the period between 1656-1767 CE. (Pant 2002)

is from 1768 to 1950 CE, the period of the Shah and Rana rulers. For around two hundred years there are only 34 inscriptions, of

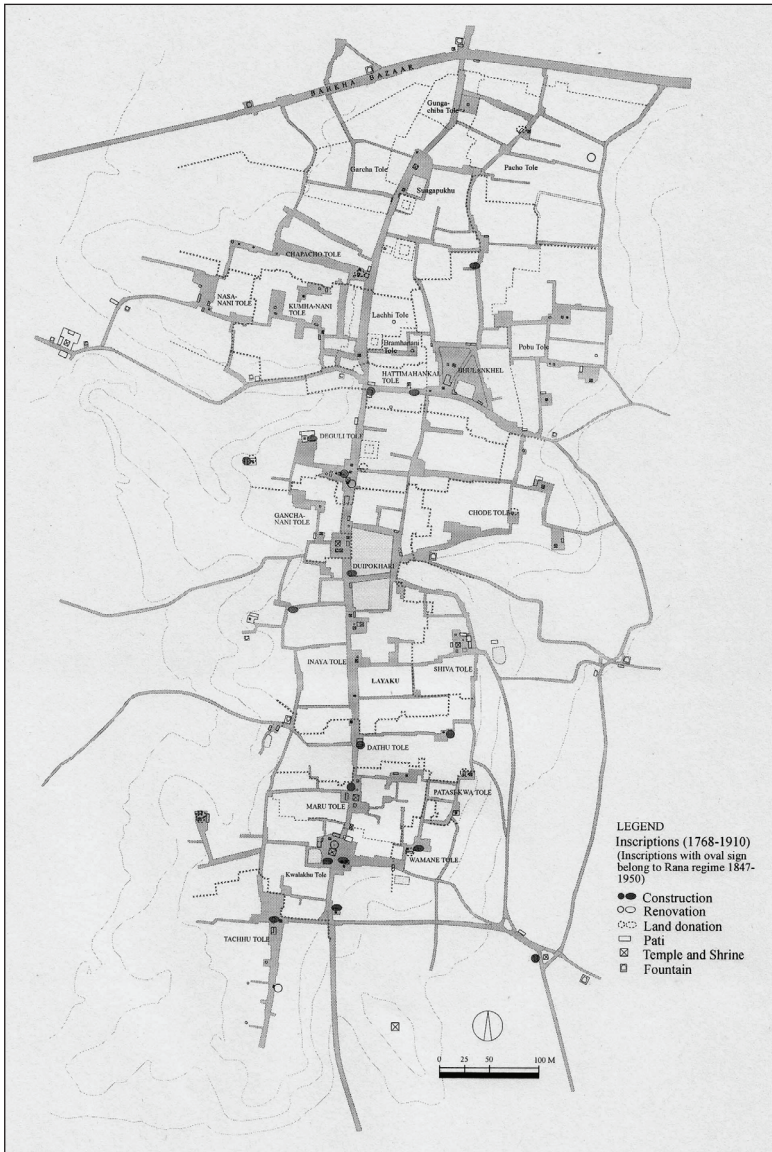


Figure 17: Distribution of inscriptions of the period between 1768-1950 CE. (Pant 2002)

which the greater number deal with maintenance, renovation, and land donations, with a few on new constructions (Fig 17). The

first hundred years of this period record renovation works and land endowments while in the next 50 years are mostly about new constructions. The last 50 years are silent about construction and maintenance of town community works.

Thus, the inscriptions permit us to glimpse the development of street life and community urbanism in the medieval period. This development follows a sequence from temple building to the proliferation of more functional community artifacts, which by the beginning of the Shah period gradually comes to a halt, marking the end of the expansion of traditional Newar urbanism in the Kathmandu Valley.

Conclusion

The structure of open space unveils a number of aspects related to the social and spatial dimensions of the town settlement. While their existence and design fulfil the functional and ritual purpose of the town community, the study of their evolution brings to light the stages in the development of town life. The medieval towns of the Valley continued to expand and develop until the end of the Malla period. The late Malla period shows the town growing towards maturity. The basic social structure was based on clan units. Its spatial form is the *nani*, and the *nani* community shared courtyards in common. This is exclusively a domestic space and was parochial in nature both in spatial and social form. The next unit in the settlement is the *tole*, or neighbourhood. The *tole* is made up of heterogeneous communities and is an urban unit. Facilities in the square of a *tole* are shared in common by the *tole* community and is open for casual use by the town community in general. Though freely accessible to the town community, certain facilities of such squares reserved for the specific use of the *tole* community gives it its neighbourhood character. These squares are symbolic spaces giving identity to the neighbourhood and the town itself. The *bahals* and large open courts in the interior of the neighbourhood quarter complement and, in many instances, replace, the functions of squares and bring a decisive change in the earlier structure of

the town, characterised by a street-square pattern, especially in settlements with a large concentration of Buddhist communities. The ritual hierarchic network of the *bahal* courtyard in such quarters adds a further dimension in the value of open courtyard spaces.

Streets of the traditional towns are also places for open space activities. However, in medieval times, they did not serve much as market streets, especially in the smaller town settlements. The streetscape lined with houses and *patis* is a late Malla period phenomenon in the development of street urbanism. The community and public facilities built alongside the street and in the squares give these spaces a physical shape and a form which constitutes the identity of Newar urbanism.

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Territory, Death and Local Deities in Newar Villages of the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal)*

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Grouping by kinship and grouping by contiguity have long been recognised in anthropological theory as the two main ways of forming a local political community. The classic distinction was put forward by Henry Maine in the mid-nineteenth century (*Ancient Law*, 1861) and can be paraphrased as that between the two principles of 'Blood' and 'Territory'. Though Maine saw kinship or 'blood' as the earlier institution, he also referred to the historical process by which the basis of a community that originally might have been formed through territorial association could come to be recast or reinterpreted in terms of blood relations. As a matter of fact, the general salience of these two principles of land and blood continues to have some application in modern industrial societies. Since the French Revolution of 1789, which brought with it the concept of a liberal and democratic nationalism, France is for instance strongly attached to land rights, *jus loci*, as far as national identity and citizenship are concerned, in contrast to Germany, where blood rights, *jus sanguinis*, are still prevalent. Conversely, tradition-based societies of low economic development sometimes give precedence to locality over kinship.

In a recent article published by the journal *Kailash*, the late anthropologist Graham Clarke (1995) has shown the relevance of these two principles of association for the formation of modern

* A first version of this article was presented at All Souls College, the University of Oxford, on the occasion of the 2000 Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecture. It has been published in my book *Newar Society. City, Village and Periphery*, Lalitpur, Himal Books/Social Science Baha, 2007.

ethnic and national identities in the Himalayas. He stressed in particular the importance of the topography, of bounded local territories, of parallel valley systems, for the understanding of the recent political history of Himalayan countries. Clearly, the topographical fragmentation of that region has acted as a baffle against modern ideas of nationalism and political integration based on a 'same blood' idiom. Mountains hinder communication, and promote enclaves with their local identities that cut across the wider 'tribal' or 'caste' divisions of kin that appear to fuel fundamentalist conflict in the plains. Within its own highland territory, the Himalayan chain still continues to act as a barrier to the integration that may be sought by any such overall nationalist movements as have been seen in the northern Gangetic plain. The larger national identities that exist today in Nepal do not appear to be homogeneous and exclusive in the manner we may associate with a developed nationalism in the West.

Unfortunately, this author did not make any references to the local cultures of the Himalayas. No mention is made, for instance, of the pervading influence of the concept of territory and residence in Tibet; even though ethnographic studies on this country show without ambiguity that kinship bonds are frequently depreciated or over-determined by ties based on territory. In *Lieux de neige et de génévriers* (1989), Pascale Dollfus has demonstrated that the main social units of Ladakhi Tibetan villages were territorial units and that the local society could be called, after Claude Lévi-Strauss (1991), a 'société à maisons', quite different from societies organised primarily by patrilineal kinship groups. In the village she studied, residence clearly overshadows lineality. Similar data have been reported from Central Tibet (D'ing-ri) by Barbara Aziz (1978, ch. 4). Besides, recent researches inspired by the pioneering study of the Tibetologist René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) have revealed the importance of the cult of sacred mountains (associated with a sacred lake) in determining local groupings and in structuring Tibetan village societies as distinctive units. As a matter of fact, territorial units were traditionally self-contained

all over Tibet, with a great deal of local autonomy *vis-à-vis* the central state.

As far South Asia is concerned, it was until recently accounted scientifically incorrect, especially in France, to stress the importance of territory in village organisation. Louis Dumont's theory, set out in *Homo hierarchicus* and other works, emphasises caste links and hierarchy. It was difficult for this influential author to recognise communal relationships based on village ties. He straightforwardly asserted that 'the conception of 'village solidarity' in India seems all too often to be a presupposition imposed upon the facts' (Dumont & Pocock 1957, 27). The main 'social referent' was supposed to be the dominant caste and hierarchy. The concept of territory was thus evicted from anthropological debate. Only Indian colleagues, such as M. N. Srinivas, and anthropologists from the United Kingdom and the USA, rebellious against Dumont's views on caste devoted their time to showing the relevance of 'horizontal links' as against 'vertical links' in India's villages¹.

Recent historical and anthropological studies, such as the one by Nicholas Dirks (1987) on the ethno-history of a little kingdom of South India, or the one by Dennis Hudson (1993) on the Hindu city of Madurai, have unmistakably revealed that such territorial links across the lines of caste are an important element in the sociology of India, and cannot be excluded from the discussion. William Sax, a specialist on Garhwal, has argued that 'throughout India, persons and places are believed to mutually (though of course not exclusively) determine each other' (1991, 74). They are engaged in 'a continuing set of exchanges' (72). According to this anthropologist, many South Asians think of their places of residence as biophysical entities. They believe themselves to be substantially affected by the place where they reside. W. Sax quoted the study of E. V. Daniel on South India, where it is reported that upon migrating to a new village, people often immediately look up for their castemates, not so much to make their acquaintance as to establish whether or not

1 Cf. *India's Villages*, edited by M.N. Srinivas (1955), with contributions, among others, of F.G. Bailey, McKim Marriott, Kathleen Gough and D.G. Mandelbaum.

the local soil is compatible with persons of their nature (1984, 67).

In this paper, I am concerned with the respective role of blood and territoriality among the Newars of Nepal, especially among the Jyāpu (agriculturist) caste of this ethnic group. It must be recalled that Newars form a very complex Himalayan community, inhabiting the Kathmandu Valley since more than two millennia and speaking a Tibeto-Burmese language. They are deeply indianised and are divided into more than thirty castes, from the Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy to the former ‘untouchables’ at the bottom. Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism still coexist in their religious life. The Jyāpu, on which rests mainly my material, are the largest among these castes. They live in rural areas as well as in old urban centres.²

As most of the studies have shown, territory is of utmost importance in Newar society and culture. The Kathmandu Valley was divided during the late medieval period into three autonomous kingdoms, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur and Kathmandu, which fought against each other for centuries and were extremely jealous of their individuality. This political fragmentation and these conflicts have left traces in the religious as well as in the social structure. The Newars are traditionally organised in small territorial units, village or quarter of city, marked by introversion. Even today, people remain strongly attached to their original settlements, even if they have migrated to other places. They usually come back to visit their relatives and friends at the time of the main local festival. Settlements are protected from the dangers outside by a ring of deities, often supplemented in the past by defensive walls. Although they are divided into castes, the inhabitants collectively worship common deities linked to a particular territory, their own individual *ksetra*. Interdependence among the castes, and complementarities of ritual duties during festivals and in the cult of local deities obliterate at least in part the religious hierarchy of the pure and the impure. Obviously, village solidarity within the

2 For a general presentation of the Jyāpu agriculturist caste of the Newars, cf. Toffin (1984), as well as Gellner and Quigley (1995). On Newar religion, see also Toffin (2000).

Kathmandu Valley is not ‘a simple architectural and geographical fact’ as is claimed by Pocock and Dumont (1957, 26) speaking of the Indian subcontinent. The importance of locality is so great in villages as well as in the cities that, as in Tibet, it is territorial ties that determine social relationships, rather than kinship. As will be shown later on, kinship units tend to be absorbed by groups based on residence and by the local ritual associations called *guthi* (from skt. *gosthi*: association), which play a central role in Newar society (Toffin 2005).

The Newar case is of special interest for this collective volume because it links explicitly territory and death. Here, the social links woven around the soil are in close relation with the celebration of mortuary rites. To be more exact, the affiliation of a person to a given territorial unit depends explicitly on his membership in a specific funeral group attached to this territory. It is an original situation compared to the Indian world of castes, where cult of the dead do not create well-delimited social groups and where, with some exceptions, ancestors do not contribute to affirm the cohesion of a kinship group. Only persons who died accidentally or in an unusual way, as well as ascetics and charismatic religious figures, are durably remembered (Blackburn 1983; Tarabout 2001).³ On the other hand, the Newar case is to be compared with the Indian tribal religions, at least partially. As it will be recalled in conclusion, some Indian tribes give to the spirits of the departed a crucial role in social life and establish clear connections between ancestry and territoriality.

I shall focus my presentation on the rural areas of the Kathmandu Valley, which are less known and which admittedly have better preserved old traditions than have the cities. My data derive primarily from Newar peasants, more specifically from Jyāpu villages. They have been mainly collected in two localities (Pyangaon and Theco) where I did intensive fieldwork during the 1970s and 1980s. They are based also on recent materials I collected between

3 For an overview on classical conceptions about ancestorship and the cult of the dead in India, see Dumont (1980) and Malamoud (1982).

1995 and 1999 during a survey of eight of these units. This recent research sheds new light on the social and religious organisation of these communities.

Villages' Space and Kinship Units

Newar villages of the Kathmandu Valley are predominantly inhabited by farmers from the Jyāpu (Maharjan) caste. Some of them, like Pyangaon and Sonaguthi, are entirely single-caste villages. Others, like Thecva or Khokana, consist of a majority of Jyāpu, along with other castes, such as Gathu gardeners, Śrestha traders and peasants, non-agricultural castes of low status (Nāy butchers, Nau barbers) carrying out ritual services for the Newar farmers, and low castes such as the Kau blacksmiths, indispensable for the manufacture and repair of agricultural implements. In a few cases, such as Satungal, the population is divided almost equally between Jyāpu and Śrestha. Generally, the multi-caste structure of the population is marked spatially: nearly every minority caste-group is settled within a concentrated close group or compound area. 'Untouchables' for their part have their quarters towards the edges of the settlement, beyond the pale of 'civilized' society. Their position outside the locality demonstrates that such villages are closed systems within a hierarchically ordered society. Interestingly, these villages are not mixed: no other ethnic groups, such as Indo-Nepali (Parbatiya) or Tamangs, live in them. They are purely Newar. Such homogeneity plays an important role in the cohesion of the locality. Size, too, is a crucial matter in this connection: the populations of these rural localities range from 600 inhabitants up to 5,000.

Let us say a few words about the physical setting and the rural economy of these settlements. Newar villages of the Kathmandu Valley are mostly constructed on high ground and on flat terraces overhanging the valleys by from fifty to one hundred metres. The area around the village is cultivated with dry crops, such as maize, non-irrigated rice, mustard, and various kind of pulses. Irrigated rice is grown in the lowlands during the rainy season, in rotation with wheat in winter. These Newar settlements are quite rich. Their

inhabitants are able to sell an important part of their agricultural products, vegetables as well as rice, to the urban market. The land is very fertile, and yields are traditionally high compared to those of other areas of Nepal or even of other regions of Asia. Recently, the introduction of improved varieties of seed, particularly of rice and wheat, has markedly increased yields. Although agriculture forms the foundation of the local economy, an increasing number of the population have a wage employment outside the village.

The Newar village units of the Kathmandu Valley are characterised by a very concentrated pattern of settlement, very different from the dispersed structure characteristic of the Indo-Nepali (Parbatiya) castes that speak Nepali as their maternal language. The long rows of attached houses of three to four storeys with their tile-covered roofs along well-designed streets give a compactness to the overall layout. Fields and gardens start from the back of the houses and lie all around. With the exception of the broader streets, which are nowadays sometimes covered with asphalt and used by cars and trucks, the lanes are narrow, less than five metres wide. The buildings are constructed either along these axes, with their decorated façades oriented towards them, or perpendicularly to them, behind the streets. As in urban settlements, back extensions towards inner blocks often constitute inner courtyards built around on all sides, to which small covered passages provide public access. Occasionally, streets widen to form small squares that act as the centres of neighbourhoods.

Most of the localities are divided into quarters, *tvah*, known by particular names. These smaller units earlier had organisational and administrative functions, such as collection of taxes and minor cases of justice. They have lost their importance since 1950, but still remain an important element of the village structure, especially in ritual affairs. Their boundaries are nearly always clearly defined in the memories and consciousness of the inhabitants. In addition, all Newar villages are divided into moieties: an upper part, *cue*, and a lower part, *kve*. Their respective positions are fixed by the orientation (upstream/downstream) of the nearest river. As I shown

in an earlier work (Toffin 1996), this dual division is an important aspect of spatial structure and of the mapping of the locality in the inhabitants' eyes. It has no social content, but in most cases entails some ritual implications. Theco's two moieties, for instance, are under the protection of two different tutelary goddesses: Bālkumārī in the upper part and Brahmāyānī in the lower part.

This compact structure is associated with a clear symbolic image of the settlement. As in the former Malla capitals of the Kathmandu Valley (13th to 18th century), such as Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, there is a need to establish a religious centre. This central point is marked off either by a temple dedicated either to a Hindu or a Buddhist deity, or by a small Buddhist *caitya* (the Newar farmers are in principle Buddhist), or by an uncarved stone embodying *Ksetrapāl*, the god protecting the land. *Kîtrapāl* is identified by the villagers with Bhairava. He is worshipped during all communal events, and the blood of animals is occasionally offered to him. The villagers also have a very strong idea of the religious boundaries of their settlement. In contrast with what happens in cities, the ritual boundaries are not made up by a circle of temples dedicated to Astha Mātrikā goddesses and located in the eight directions of space. The village is, however, demarcated from the outside by one or two *pīth* sanctuaries (from the Sanskrit *pītha*), which play a religious role during festivals. Furthermore, the extremities of localities are more often than not characterised by numbers of ritual rubbish dumps, where polluting materials, impure substances and remains of religious feasts are thrown away. These sites, inhabited by supernatural beings of an ambiguous nature, protect the villagers against various evils coming from the outside, especially epidemics. Various rituals related to possession by bad spirits take place there.

The cohesion and the unity of the village are reinforced by the worship of common gods. Generally, each village has its own Ganeś and a Nāsadyah (local god of music) temple. The first deity is worshipped daily by each household, especially by the women, with incense, an oil-lamp, uncooked rice and vermilion paste. Ganeś is

also revered at time of festivals and during life-cycle rituals, such as the rice-feeding ceremony, boys' initiations, and marriage. He drinks local beer and alcohol. Only in the larger rural localities is found more than one Ganeś temple. Nāsadyah for his part is worshipped by all the musicians of the community, drummers, flautists and cymbal-players, as well as by masked dancers where they exist. He is identified by most of the population with Nritināth, the dancing Śiva (Natarāja), and is represented by one or three triangular openings in the wall of the dedicated altar. In some cases, as in Khokana, two temples of Nāsadyah are found in the village, one associated with each side of the village.

Additionally, these villages focus on one (or two) temples of a tutelary deity who ensures their protection and about whom more will be said later. This deity, often associated with the origin of the locality, can be either male or female. In the south of the Valley (in the district of Lalitpur), one can mention: Bālkumārī, Brahmāyānī, Rudrāyānī, Harasiddhi, Bhaila dyah Bhringaresvar Mahādev, Kāleśvar Mahādev, etc. These deities are worshipped at fixed times by the whole village in public festivals, as well as during the life-cycle rites of various families. The priests of the local temples are mainly chosen from the Jyāpu caste. As will be shown, the whole religious life of the settlement revolves around this deity. Similarly, in the case of multi-caste villages, the whole of the locality pays homage to the tutelary god.

It should be noted that most of these rural settlements are ritually enclosed several times a year to mark them off from what lies outside. At the Gathā Muga festival, which falls during the rainy season, for instance, the evil spirits are driven out from the locality at night and offerings are made at the cult sites on the boundaries. Afterwards, each house is barricaded and cut off from all contacts with the outside world. Similarly, in several communities, the space of the village is ritually isolated for a certain period of time. In Theco, the village is completely cut off from the outside during one month every twelve years, at the time of the great festival of the masked dance of the local Nava Durgā. Such ritual enactments,

which are widely distributed in other parts of Nepal, in Assam and in South-East Asia (Macdonald 1975), are of paramount importance for the representation of the local space as a clustered unit.

Jyāpu village society, the main topic of this paper, is divided into small patrilineal lineages four to six generations deep called *khalak*, *bhu* or *kavā*. These units, which are not named, are rather weakly structured. They fall apart as soon as the memory of a common agnatic ancestor has faded, usually after five generations or so. No written genealogies are recorded. Kin-groups are pre-eminently defined in religious terms, and are manifested most clearly at the time of funerals. On the demise of a close agnate (*phuki*) a mourning period of thirteen days is observed. During this time, *phuki* are held to be in a state of pollution. For the death of more distant agnates (*ba phuki* or *jhina phuki*) or married daughters, by contrast, the mourning period is only four days. As a rule, no marriage may take place within these patrilineal kinship units. Cross-cousin marriages are also forbidden.

As with all Newar castes, the other religious attribute of the Jyāpu's lineage is the cult of a common tutelary god called *digu dyah*. Each *kavā* or *khalak* collectively worships this divinity once a year, either in the month of Māgh (January-February), or in the month of Baiśākh (April-May). Members of the kin group gather on that day on open sites located at the edge of the locality and make offerings to the god, represented by a series of uncarved stones. An ornament called *kikaMpā*, which is kept in normal times inside the sacred room of the house of the eldest man of the lineage, is placed on the top of the non-iconic divinity. It has the form of a diadem or of the carved halo bordering divine statues, Hindu as well as Buddhist, and it serves as a symbol of the god. A collective feast including men, and women as well as children, is held on the spot. In some villages, such events still gather together a great number of relatives. In other cases, only a small group of people is present. When a split occurs inside the group, the new lineage orders another ornament from the goldsmith. After transferring the god spirit from one *kikaMpā* to the other, the newly-made ornament is worshipped as lineage

deity. From that moment onward, two different feasts will be held successively in the same sanctuary.

Village endogamy is another important social feature of these Jyāpu localities. In Pyangaon, until recently there was even a ban on marrying a girl from outside, on the pain of being expelled from the community. In other villages, such restrictions are not in force. But, statistically, the rate of endogamous marriages is, or was until quite recently, over 80 per cent in nearly all major Jyāpu settlements. For some scholars, this tendency applies to most of the Newars. Declan Quigley writes, for instance: 'In theory, and still very much in practice, Newars marry Newars not only of their caste but of the local sub-caste. By 'local' I mean usually within half an hour's walk and often much less' (Quigley 1984, 160). The strength of the links between the in-laws is in part responsible for this village endogamy. There are a number of obligations between affinally related persons and households. The marriage ceremonies, for instance, are followed by a series of formal visits between the two sides of the family that put spatial proximity at a premium. Exchanges of gifts and food between the two households are also made during nearly all ceremonies. Moreover, the married daughters are under an obligation to conduct numerous ceremonies in their natal house during funerals. It is thus appropriate for them to marry into a house in close proximity to that of their parents. The introversion of Jyāpu social units also militates in favour of such matrimonial ties. A preference for marriage inside the settlement of course tends to multiply the bonds one has within the village community and to strengthen the unity of the Jyāpu locality.

It is clear from this presentation that these villages are a strong sociological reality and constitute well-defined structural entities. However, they are not totally autonomous or isolated. Administratively, they are attached to wider units of which they form only a part. Economically, they are dependent on nearby markets and on one of the three former Malla capitals (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur). It is in these centres that villagers sell

their foodstuffs and buy what they are not producing themselves. The very land that is cultivated by the farmers is sometimes owned by Śrestha or high Buddhist Newar castes from outside. In the ritual sphere, too, an attribution of self-sufficiency does not correspond with the facts. Most of the villages call upon the services of external high status priests, Buddhist or Hindu, to celebrate certain ceremonies: funeral rites, the consecration of a *stūpa*, the pacification of a house, the initiation of local Tantric officiants, etc. Most of them use the services of castes living outside their own locality. Besides, inhabitants of these Jyāpu villages participate in the main festival of the nearby town and worship its main divinities. The inhabitants of Theco, Pyangaon, Bulu, and Harsiddhi, all located in Lalitpur district, thus pay regular homage to Rāto Matsyendranāth (Būgadyah in Newari). This god holds the same position in relation to his district as village divinities do in relation to their villages. In recent years, the opening up of these peasant communities has been greatly accelerated in all fields, including that of matrimonial alliances with Newar outsiders.

The Role of the Death Groups in the Locality

Kin groups, however, are swallowed and encapsulated in multifunction groups of the *guthi* type. In this concern, the key social grouping is the death association called *sī guthi*, *sanāh guthi*, or *murdā guthi*⁴ in Newari. Such organisations are essential for full and proper integration into the community. To be excluded from one's *sī guthi* is to be excluded from one's lineage and one's caste. Moreover, a Jyāpu peasant who moves to another village or to the nearest urban centre will remain affiliated to his natal death association, at least as long as he keeps regular relations with his natal locality. Socially, this group can be characterised by three main features. First of all, it is a compulsory association: all the Jyāpu members of the village must belong to one such *guthi*. Second, it is based on a fixed and inherited membership: one is affiliated to the *guthi* of one's father

4 These terms are often abbreviated by rural Jyāpu and transformed into *gu*.

and one is not supposed to change *guthi* during his lifetime. To move from one *guthi* to another is traditionally rare, and must be approved by the heads of the two associations. Third, such groupings are mainly residential groups: membership of a *sī guthi* belonging to a village different from the one where one is born or actually lives is unthinkable. In all these respects, the *sī guthi* of village peasants differ from Newar *guthi* of other castes (with few exceptions), formed for various special purposes and operating either in villages or in an urban context. These alternative associations are purely voluntary, and can be changed over the years.

Several traits of these Jyāpu funeral groups merit emphasis. In the first place, membership of *sī guthi* is restricted to males. Women, however, can benefit from the ritual services of the death groups of their husbands at the time of their funerals. Another important point is to be noted: only heads of households may be members (*guthiyār*) of a *guthi*. Consequently, one becomes a member of the association only when a separation happens in the household. A son will thus be considered as a real member only after he separates from his father. In Sonaguthi village, where the number of members of the *sī guthi* is extremely large, the affiliation is formalised only after the death of the father.

Although these groupings are not clans or lineages, they are often made up of kinship units closely related to each other. But, as was stated earlier, genealogical memory is not deep, and members of the group cannot trace their descent to a common ancestor. Furthermore, accidents and conflicts in the history of the families have introduced in a certain number some members who are not agnatically related. The frequent adoption of children from the sister's family in case of no male descent has also changed the agnatic composition of the kin-groups. This is why marriage alliances within the death society are not prohibited as long as they fall outside a *phuki* relationship.

The peasant community of each village is divided into two, three, four, or more *sī guthi*. In several cases, a single primitive association is said to have split over the years into separate groups. In general,

these death associations are not strictly localised, by quarter for example, or only in a loose manner. In some exceptional cases, the whole Jyāpu population of the locality is still affiliated to a single association. In Sonaguthi village, for instance, the single *sī guthi* of the village gathers together a population of over 600 households. Each *guthi* has its own common house in the village, called either *guthi chē*, lit. ‘the house of the *guthi*’, or *capāh*, which designates in principle a ceremonial rest-house. As we shall see later on, this common house is used for the annual feast and various meetings.

Each funeral *guthi* has a common deity who presides over the activities of the group and is worshipped by all the members at least once a year. This supernatural being, called *Sī dyah* in Newari (from New. *sī* death), is kept in normal times in the house of the eldest person of the group, *thakāli*, or in the house of the member in charge of the association for the year. This person worships the *Sī dyah* once a week, in the evening. The *Sī dyah* is represented by a statue, by a mask or by an earthenware vessel vested with strong magical power. It is kept in a concealed place in the attic, and is very much feared by the members of the group. It is associated with cremation, and is frequently identified with Bhairava (=Āju). The patron deity plays an important role in the self-identification of the group. Women are not allowed to touch him. The same is true of children whose first teeth have not yet been shed: these children are considered to be immature, *kaci*.

The principal function of the *sī guthi* is to organise the funerals of its members. It has to oversee the transfer of the corpse to the funeral pyre as well as to take care of the cremation itself. It is also charged with the dispersing the final remains of the body to the four corners of the Kathmandu Valley.

Normally, all the members of the *sī guthi* have to participate in the funeral procession from the house of the deceased to the cremation ground located beside the neighbouring river, generally to the West of the settlement. Even the women follow the procession. One of them, a married daughter of the bereaved family, throws rice and paddy along the route. As soon as the womenfolk reach the

boundaries of the locality, they return to their respective houses. Once at the cremation site, the *guthiyār* as well as the near agnates sprinkle the corpse with water. The pyre is constructed by the members of the association from wood kept in a small store in the village belonging to the *sī guthi*. Finally, in the days following the cremation, both the men and the women of the death group come to present their condolences to the family of the deceased. This ceremony is called *bicāh vanegu* in Newari.

Moreover, the members of the organisation gather together every year, on a fixed date, for various religious ceremonies and a large feast. In Theco, this event takes place during the main festival of the village, on the occasion of Thilā punhī, the full moon of the month of Mansir (November–December). During the four days of the festival, the various *sī guthi* of the locality focus on their respective *guthi*-house. The Sī dyah god of the funeral association is exposed during these days in the common house and is worshipped by the members with sacred water, vermilion paste, oil lamps and incense. In Theco as in some other villages, the tutelary god is housed in a special hut made of bamboo strips and straw temporarily constructed inside the *guthi*-house. The feast takes place in a religious atmosphere, marked by gravity and reserve.⁵

Outsiders cannot attend these meals and are not permitted to watch the proceedings. *Sī guthi* meetings and ritual procedures are the business only of those who are members; others are physically debarred from attending, by erecting a screen or defending the entrance of the *guthi*-house. The death group is hence much more than a way of earning religious merit or an association formed simply for a charitable purpose. It is a secret society, impregnated with sacramental values, which contributes to defining a sense of mystical community. It should be noted that the food taken at these ceremonial meals is first offered to the Sī dyah god of the group. The dishes are thus sacred in many ways. Their consumption in common transforms the assembly into a spiritual

5 For parallels in Newar cities, cf. van den Hoek and Shrestha (1992, 665).

group. Especially significant in these ceremonies is the *sī kāh bhvay* ritual, during which the head of a sacrificed buffalo or goat is divided up and consumed, the various parts going in a prescribed order to the eight most senior members. Given the spiritual values attached to the head of the body (honour, spirit, sacredness) in Newar and Nepali society, such a sharing has a crucial significance beyond mundane issues. As a matter of fact, the mutual affinity felt by those who periodically join in the execution of these rites and feasts is extremely strong. At the same time, the line between the elders and the juniors is strongly demarcated.

Jyāpu death *guthi* play an essential role in social control over the locality. The elders of the association, *thakāli*, are the key figures of the village (the same is true in towns) and the custodians of traditional usage. They have ceremonial privileges such as to be served first at feasts and to wear white turbans on ritual occasions. They are periodically invited by influential members of the community to feasts called *deś bhvay* (from *deś*: locality, and *bhvay*: feast). These *thakāli* are in fact the headmen of the village. They are in a position to expel from the community any person who has had sexual relations with women from impure castes or has married a non-Jyāpu girl. Bad behaviour, breaking caste rules, theft within the village, especially of religious objects, and violence against other members can also be sanctioned by exclusion from the group after a proper meeting. The social and religious status of the concerned person will be deeply affected. Most probably, no other associations in the village will accept him. Nobody will help him to perform funeral rites and to take away the corpse at death. Such excommunication is in fact synonymous with exclusion from one's caste and from one's lineage cult group. Besides, in several villages, the importance of the death societies for the proper integration of individuals into the community is even greater. In Pyangaon, for instance, marriage alliances have to be approved in all cases by the heads of one's funeral group. This is done in the following way. Some weeks after the marriage (minimal) ceremony, a feast is held in the groom's house. The *thakāli* of the various *guthi* of the village are invited. If they refuse to come, the

marriage is not formally approved. As a rule, death groups indicate who are acceptable marriage partners and who are not. They provide an unambiguous marker of caste status.

The Cult of the Tutelary Deity of the Locality

As has been indicated earlier, every Newar village has its own patron deity, belonging either to the Hindu or to the Buddhist pantheon. Such a god carries important values and representations attached to the territory. He is strongly attached to the community, even if he can be worshipped by neighbouring villagers at certain times of the year. It is often said that if an unscrupulous person should try to steal its statue or its ornament, the representation of the god will become abnormally heavy, so that the robber cannot move it. This patron deity is sometimes believed to be the sovereign of the people living around him. For instance, he is taken to be responsible for the general prosperity of the locality. He can also take the life of persons living under his jurisdiction. Moreover, regular offerings to his altar can be seen as a tribute to him. At all events, this type of deity is a living symbol of the settlement and he expresses the identity of its inhabitants. In many ways, he is playing the part of a god of the land, and can be compared to other Bhume types of deities all over Nepal, combining two aspects: one benevolent, the other violent and dreadful.

This tutelary god is housed in a specific temple, often of the Nepali style, with one, two or three storeys. In Jyāpu mono-caste village or village dominated by Jyāpu, priests are chosen from the locality itself and belong to the Jyāpu caste. They receive a Tantric initiation, *dekhā* (from Skt. *dīksā*), to perform their sacerdotal functions. Generally, the offices are hereditary from father to son.

The social and religious life of the community focuses upon this temple.⁶ The deity is worshipped daily by a woman from each

⁶ The preponderant role of these village temples reminds one of the village monastery (*gompa*) of the Sherpa communities of Helambu in Nepal. In his thesis (1980), G. Clarke has demonstrated that such *gompa* play a determining part in the social life of the villages concerned.

household early in the morning according to a fixed religious route that makes the circuit of all the notable gods and sacred sites of the locality. In most cases, women do not enter the temple, but throw the offerings from the outside toward the altar, ringing the outside ceremonial bell, if there is one. The deity also has its annual festival, fixed by the lunar calendar, and this constitutes the 'village festival', *deś jātrā*, or the 'main festival', *mū jātrā*, of the religious calendar. On that occasion, the god is carried by young boys through the streets of the village in a palanquin. He is considered so powerful that he is supposed to cause the death of one villager every year during the festival.

It should be noticed that most of these divinities receive regular animal sacrifice. Blood is shed on the statue or on the stone representing the god as well as on the soil of the locality and on the villagers watching all around the sacrifice. Such practices are supposed to be auspicious for everybody and guarantee continued prosperity to the village. As a rule, it seems that blood, violence, and even in some villages (Theco, Harasiddhi) human sacrifice are periodically required to regenerate the locality, ensure its well-being, and establish a new link between the tutelary god and its inhabitants. Such offerings transform the village's space into a sacrificial ground and legitimise the primacy of the god in the local hierarchy.

Interestingly enough, funeral societies of the Jyāpu villages investigated are also dedicated to the worship of these local deities. As such, they are not only concerned with death and social control, but also with life and the general welfare of the locality. Such a close association between bad sacredness and good sacredness within the same institution is very peculiar to Newar socio-religious organisation. Guthi death societies clearly combine these two opposite fields. In this connection, death groups have a crucial role in the definition of territoriality and play a prominent part in the religious life of the whole village.

Let us take for instance Theco village. In the upper part of the locality, each of the four death group has separate duties towards

the goddess Bālkumārī, who presides over the destinies of this part of the community. The first one offers cooked rice to the goddess every month on the eve of the new moon. The second offers rice-beer on every full moon day. The third presents rice, vermilion paste, incense and flowers on the first day of the lunar month. And the last one takes responsibility for the cult of the Bhairava situated in the upper part of the village⁷. The tasks of watching over the temple, guarding the statues, and cleaning the roofs rotate among the membership according to an age-set division called *puī* in Newari. It is estimated that within each moiety of Theco every inhabitant will have to undertake each such charge (*puī pāhlāh*) at least once in his life.

But this is not the whole story. The death societies composing the locality ensure also the performances of the various rituals of the land god. In Theco village for instance, the funeral societies of the lower part form the Brahmāyānī *guthi*, and the funeral societies of the upper part constitute the Bālkumārī *guthi*. These two expanded associations are funded by rice-fields, held as *rāj* (State) *guthi* and registered in the national corporation in charge of these religious holdings (Guthi Sāmsthān). In 1975, these lands were cultivated by tenants from Theco and neighbouring villages. In addition, each *guthi* owns a common house near the temple of its goddess. To run such estates, the two associations concerned have generated a complex hierarchical structure. The Brahmāyānī *guthi* for instance is headed by a body of twenty-one notables called *thakāli*, who include: the five most senior members of the association, six cooks, six accountants, and six watchmen. Some of these functions rotate among the membership; others are permanent. These twenty-one persons are fed more than twelve times a year with great abundance of food and beer. These meals place the elders of the group in conscious opposition to the younger generation. Furthermore, like all other *guthi* feasts, these gatherings transform the village community into a collective body, separate and distinct from outsiders.

7 In Theco village, this Bhairava is associated with the cult of Bālkumārī.

The festivals of the local deities are also organised by funeral groups. In Khokana, for instance, the festival of the main divinity of the village, Śīkālī, which is celebrated from the third until the seventh day of the bright fortnight of Āśvin (September-October), includes the preparation of nine earthenware jars of rice beer. The three death societies of this Jyāpu village prepare three of these each a few days before the celebration. These pots are sacred (some of them are decorated with a head of Bhairava). The beer, prepared from fermented 'black rice', is said to contain special power, *śakti*. Everybody inside the association has to drink a little of it.

In Theco village, the festivals of Bālkumārī and Brahmāyānī are both held at the same time as the feast of the death societies: between the end of the lunar month of Mansir and the beginning of Pus. This is the main event in the year's calendar. On the first day of the festival, the statues of the two goddesses are carried to their common *pītha* (New.: *piḡā*), a sacred place outside the village proper, towards the south. A Hindu Tantric priest comes at night from the small neighbouring town of Chapagaon to perform a fire-sacrifice in front of the two assembled deities. Next morning, Bālkumārī and Brahmāyānī are taken back to the village and carried in separate palanquins throughout the streets of their respective moieties.

In summary, *sī guthī* groups are much more than death associations. They have multifarious functions embracing many fields of the socio-religious life. They are in fact the keystone of the village structure. More particularly, they establish a connection between the dead and the cult of local divinities. Each male villager is simultaneously bound to a funeral group and to a territorial god. In my opinion, this organic link is a marked characteristic of Newar social structure. Consequently, funerals appear in the traditional Kathmandu Valley as an event constructive of social bonds. Among Jyāpu peasants, as among most of low or medium Newar castes, death is more important than marriage. From the religious point of view, marriage is not a marked ceremony, especially among Jyāpu, and does not entail complex rituals. By contrast, funerals are linked

with extremely complex and long ceremonies that mobilise the bereaved family for months. In this connection, Newars are much more like the other Tibeto-Burman hill groups of Nepal⁸ than the Indo-Nepali and North Indians, where marriage is the great event of the family group, especially among high castes.

Conclusions

Some important conclusions can be drawn from this ethnographic analysis. First, cult units are a crucial element of the Newar social structure. Without a patron god, a group has no legal existence, no legitimacy. A kingdom's capital becomes a political entity through the collective cult of the tutelary deity of the former Malla king, Taleju/Kumārī. A village is transformed into a distinct and cohesive entity through the worship of a tutelary and protective deity. Funeral groups become legitimised through their god of death, Sī dyah. Furthermore, kin groups are defined preferably by reference to a common god, the Digu dyah, worshipped at regular intervals by the patrilineal relatives. Everywhere in the Newar setting, space is identified and validated by the divinities who reside in it: in all cases, territoriality is thought of as a religious space. At every level, sacralisation is a compulsory process by which a group becomes a distinct structural entity. Even Malla royal cities have up to the present been conceptually imagined as religious diagrams (*manḥala*) enclosing a series of Tantric divinities. Identity and separateness derive primarily from common reference to a tutelary deity or to a group of gods attached to a specific spatial unit. Such divinities are a sign of the individuality and of the independence of the local group.

On the other hand, attention has to be drawn to the low structuring power of kinship. Admittedly, the exchange of ritual duties between wife-givers and wife-takers, agnates and affines, is very important in the life-cycle ceremonies. But, on the whole, as has been demonstrated in this paper, Newar descent units do not form corporate groups. They do not constitute the organising framework

8 See also Toffin (1997) for the importance of death and death groups among the Pahari (Pahi) located to the south of the Kathmandu Valley.

of the society. To become influential, they have to be transformed into a religious unit. Now it is widely known to anthropologists all over the world that, in such cases, other types of groupings, such as age classes, secret societies or various voluntary associations tend to become prominent.

Newar death and cremation associations have to be seen in this light. They are the main locus of the society, and are at the foundation of the social system as a whole. At the same time, they clearly have a hybrid character: they are not defined exclusively by either kinship or residence, but by a mixture of the two. For instance, the language of kinship remains important in the *guthi* pattern. Death groups are often thought of in terms of consanguinity: they generally form exogamic groups, they each have a common tutelary god, and most of all, their strong patrilineal inflexion (as the cult units linked with the main local divinity) is akin in spirit to the patrilineality of the kin groups. As a matter of fact, women are barred from all the sacred ceremonials important for the community. Such a prohibition helps incidentally to reproduce social relations of male domination and female subordination. Obviously, peasants' death groups are conceptually recast into kinship idioms.

What about the link between death and territory, so decisive in the cultural repertoire of the Newars, especially of the Jyāpu agriculturist caste? The importance of death in connection with territory is often explained by the presence of ancestors in the earth. The burial of dead persons incorporates a mystical element into the soil. Local units and landscape thus store memory: they are a memorial of the departed relatives and founders. As is widely known, death is a means of cementing of territorial bonds. In French villages, the fact of having dead relatives buried in the local cemetery is an important step toward better integration into the local community. The same can be said of many other European countries. On the other hand, the cult of the deceased is an important element in the construction of a nation's identity. Erecting a memorial to the memory of these dead is an essential part of the representation one village makes of its past. In this perspective, death is a crucial medium through

which a grouping establishes links with the territory it occupies. Accordingly, territory gives a permanency to the ancestors and legitimises the position of the living beings in their present life.

Paradoxically, ancestry is secondary in the Newar idioms attached to territory. The dead are cremated and not buried in the Kathmandu Valley (with some rare exceptions). Their ashes are dispersed in rivers. Suggestively enough, the cult of ancestors is not very developed among the Newars. Ancestors are propitiated only occasionally during *śrāddha* rituals and very rarely further back than the grandfather. They are not granted great importance. The main preoccupation of the relatives is to make the dead disappear or to shuffle them as rapidly as possible into a collective category (Vergati 1995, 19). Even the lineage deity of the Newars, of whom I gave a brief description above, is transformed in a way into a god of the land: he has no name (to the uninitiated) and he establishes primarily a link between the blood relatives paying homage to him and the territory on which they live.⁹

The real ancestors of Newar societies are the living elders, the *thakāli*, of the various *guthi* groupings. These elders, the most senior persons in the group, preside over all religious affairs and are consulted at every critical moment of the life of the group. Everybody pays respect to them and bows down in front of them in token of submission. To reach this position, they have more often than not to undergo a special ritual, *thakāli luiyequ*, which is a kind of consecration. Furthermore, they often wear rings in one ear, a sign that they have undergone another ceremony, the *burā jāko*, celebrated by persons of both genders who have reached the age of 77 years. After this old-age ritual, Newars are considered as quasi-divine and progressively relinquish active control over daily-life subsistence activities. But, once vanished, these respected old persons are rapidly forgotten. They lose their social identity.

9 As a rule, the resemblance between the *pīth* sanctuaries of the tutelary gods of the village (Mātkrikā goddesses for instance) and the sanctuaries of the lineage deities *ḍigu ḍyaḥ* is striking. Cf. G. Toffin (1984) and A. Vergati (1995, 40). Both are established outside the locality and are built with stones of the same shape and with the same decoration.

Newar culture contrasts sharply in this regard with that of other Nepali populations, such as the kinship-dominated Tamang or Gurung hill tribes, where kin groups get their cohesion through the memory of a well-established list of ancestors, and where marriage with a cross-cousin is prescribed. As a matter of fact, it seems that the strength of ancestry in Nepal (as in other countries) is proportional to the strength of the unilineal kin groups. Speaking of Nepali hill tribes, Nick Allen for instance has suggested that: 'As caste society infiltrates the clan-based village of the once territorially segregated tribe, as temporary contractual relationships tend to replace hereditary ones, and as national language displaces the tribal, the cult of the tribal ancestors become more and more peripheral' (1976, 526).

I would argue that the patron gods of the Newars, and more particularly their land gods, are assuming the role played by ancestors in other custom-based societies. Some explicit links exist. Several local divinities are considered, for instance, to be former ancestors. The clearest case is Bhairava, called currently Bhailodyah in Newari, but also Āju, 'grandfather'. A former king of Kathmandu Valley, Yalambara, is said to have been transformed into a god. Similarly, Mātrikā goddesses are called 'Ajimā' in Newari, a title in which the word *aji*, 'grandmother', can be discerned. It seems that ancestors turn rapidly into deities, and that a link between the two is often present. Such merging between collective ancestry and territorial gods is sometimes reported in the studies of Nepali tribal groups, such as the Gurungs and the Tamangs (Strickland 1982; Toffin 1990). Evident parallels can also be drawn with cognatic societies of Tibet and Ladakh, where a similar situation has been described (Dollfus 1989). Such various forms of 'territorial kinship' are important to document. It is to be hoped that further comparative research will be carried out on this topic in order to arrive at a better understanding of Himalayan symbolic representations.

Finally, I want to draw attention to some parallels with tribal groups in India. Among the Santals of north-east India for instance,

the idiom of ancestry is strongly attached to the figure of the local headmen, *nāike* (Carrin-Bouez 1986), representative of the founder of the locality. In most cases, these chiefs are the officiants of the various cults celebrated in the sacred grove of the village - a grove linked with the creation and the mythical history of the territory. As such, they establish a link between the first ancestors of the locality and the present-day situation. Among the Raj Gonds of central India, the deceased members of the clan dwelling in the company of the clan deities form part of a community that remains a unit, even though divided between the line between life and death. As reported by C. Fürer-Haimendorf (1974, 1979), the rite by which the spirit of the dead (*sanal*) is formally introduced to the departed members of his clan is a crucial element of the funeral and memorial ceremonies. Not surprisingly, Raj Gonds ancestral shrines often evolve into cult centres for the clan gods.

Among the Sora of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh on the other hand, the dead are difficult to forget and continue to interfere in the daily life of the villagers long time after their death. As vividly established by Peter Vitebsky (1993), they continue to revert and to transmit their original conditions to others. Both horizontally and vertically, ancestors themselves live in different places of the inhabited house and village. These sites play a prominent role in the making up of the memory of the group, in lineage segmentation and sharing-out inheritance. Other similar cases could be pointed to from amidst the Muria of Andhra Pradesh, Central India. These examples attest to the strength of the link between ancestors and territories in the tribal world, even if this link is materialised through different means. It would be interesting to determine if this observation concerns only the tribal world or the Hindu low castes as well.

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Public Spaces

Between Tradition and Modernity

SHREEMANJARI TAMRAKAR

Introduction

Public spaces have been discussed in very different contexts, such as culture, religion, environment, ecology and so forth. As a consequence, definitions and concepts of public space tend to vary widely according to perspective. In the Kathmandu Valley, traditional public space takes various forms—*pati*, *pauwa*, *dhungedhara*, *pokhari*, *bahal*—which have both functional and aesthetic value. These spaces do not merely beautify the city but also play an integral role in both the routine and ceremonial lives of the residents. Many of these spaces have survived the ravages of Kathmandu's modernity because the city still embraces the celebration of traditional festivals. Nevertheless, despite regular festive usage of these spaces, poor management and encroachment that characterise the new urbanism of Kathmandu have taken their toll, in turn affecting the traditionally integral urbanism that evolved in the Valley. Therefore, besides sustaining their traditional socio-cultural utility, there is an urgent need to protect the old and create new public spaces for the many functions they fulfil: environmental, ecological, social, economic, political and cultural in the contemporary city. Hence, the Interactive Mapping and Archive Project (IMAP) has initiated a dialogue between professionals of various disciplines on the public spaces of Kathmandu. Primarily focusing its research on Basantapur and Patan Durbar Squares as socio-cultural and political heritages, the project delves into the idea, ideal and reality of Kathmandu's public spaces as a whole. Based on its activities, radio programmes, video reports, lectures, this paper argues that because of the ignorance among both planners and inhabitants about their rich

traditional values and modern functions, most of the public spaces in Kathmandu are derelict and on the verge of extinction.

Concept of Public Space

The concept of public space varies according to the context of its use. There is a range of features and elements which when associated with a particular place make it a public space, and this also makes the concept of public space variable. One of the many less tangible, but indispensable, characteristics is reflected in a broad definition which identifies public space as ‘a place accessible to anybody and reflects a notion of basic equality, social freedom of circulation and anonymity’ (Tonnelat 2008). This broad definition, in addition to the above essential criteria, assigns several kinds of social, political, economic, cultural and environmental differences in identity to different spaces, which account for the variability of the concept of ‘public space’.

The Social Value of Public Spaces (Worpole and Knox 2008, 2) highlights ‘high streets, street markets, shopping precincts, community centres, parks, playgrounds, and neighbourhood spaces in residential areas’ as areas for public space studies. There is little doubt that today these are also the active public spaces of the Kathmandu metropolis. In addition to these, the traditional, cultural, religious, and artistic public structures in Kathmandu, built during the Licchavi and Malla periods, like temple squares, *pati*, *sattal*, *dabali*, *baha*, *dhungedhara*, *pokhari*, are also important public arenas created for the regular and occasional use of the general public, and which were, an important part of the inhabitants’ lifestyles. The public spaces of the Valley evoke different functional emphases. Some identify them as an environmental and health necessity that enriches life. Others consider them as active hubs of social, economic and political interaction and exchange. Public spaces with ponds, forests, or gardens are seen to provide ecological benefits, while man-made ponds and similar facilities are regarded as sustainable urban infrastructure. However, regardless of the variation in definitions, public spaces are ultimately recognised by

their vital role in the social life of the community and their role in creating and maintaining a healthy social environment.

Public Space in Kathmandu

Tundikhel is an important public space in Kathmandu. Though its present state belies its potential and contribution to the urban environment, it was at one time one of the biggest parade grounds in South Asia. An open grassy space, it supported and replenished the underground supply of water to the ponds nearby by recharging the water table. Bharat Sharma (2011) calls such public spaces ‘lung of our lungs’ as they are a source of clean air and water. Sudarshan Raj Tiwari (2011) emphasises that an open space is meant for public use and the public must be responsible for it. Such spaces belong to all, with the accompanying freedom to conduct various kinds of activity on them, but he stresses that the freedom of each is restricted by the rights of all to the same space. Since it is held in a trust by every person, individual privilege in the use of the space needs to be balanced with the sense of responsibility for its maintenance for the sake of present and future generations. It is the acknowledgement and recognition of the rights of others to use the same space that makes it a shared public space.

There are many ways in which public spaces are used. Tiwari (2011) ascribes three primary functions of public spaces: economic, social and environmental. According to him, the economic function primarily involves the exchange of goods and services in public spaces. Public space provides a social function by providing people with a place to gather. The environmental function is visible both in the maintenance of a healthy city environment and in the access to and use of these spaces for the physical wellbeing of the people; for example, space for jogging, meditating and other exercises. Despite these multifunctional aspects, he warns of conflicts arising from the emphasis on the economic value of these spaces today. The use of sidewalks by street vendors in Kathmandu is a controversial issue. In Ratna Park, for instance, vendors sell their goods in an unorganised manner on the footpath, hampering the

free movement of pedestrians. He declines to call them encroachers and considers them to be only sharing the space which is public. Tiwari (2011) further explains, 'They would become so when they start blocking the whole pavement, consequently hampering the right of the pedestrians to walk'. Thus, he insists that an activity can be considered wrong only when the right of other users is ignored and hindered by fellow users. To avoid such situations, he suggests that there needs to be a balance in activities. However, there are others who disagree with Tiwari's argument. Along with the green open public spaces, such as Tundikhel and Lainchaur in Kathmandu, there are a significant number of public spaces with historic, traditional and cultural legacies. These have definite socio-cultural purposes and many have traditional public structures. Such public spaces/structures are highly revered and are considered to be the 'face' of Kathmandu.

Kathmandu's identity as a city was known and represented through these sites, which created a welcoming openness. The entrance of every city (Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur) adjoined an open ground with a clear view of the settlement. On them, in various locations, were constructed *patis* and *sattals* that served as a shelter or accommodation for guests and travellers arriving into these cities. These open spaces were symbolic parallels to the living rooms of our homes, where visitors were received and welcomed. The public facilities in that form of space helped in creating a comfortable and accessible social environment for visitors, but today a lot of these public spaces are dilapidated and those that are well-maintained serve purposes other than sheltering passers-by and travellers. Most of these structures are now used for singing *bhajans* (hymns), rearing cattle and setting up small shops, among other uses. Therefore, their importance as facilities for visitors has waned. As a consequence, especially with the proliferation of guest houses and hotels, the prospects for their preservation have diminished proportionately. There are many reasons for the decrepit and neglected state of these public spaces. According to Renchin Yonjan (2011), 'It is precisely the lack

of awareness among the public themselves about their ownership of a space, which is leading to its deterioration'. Moreover, she emphasises the irresponsibility of the bureaucratic system, which ignores and disregards the right of the public to such places.

Regardless of the dilapidated state of public spaces in the Kathmandu Valley, they are still 'an inheritance, anonymous and transmitted by all to all from generation to generation' (Korosec-Serfaty 1990, 290). This is a strong and precise definition of public space that is very relevant in the Nepali context. Nepal's rich heritage has a plethora of structures, from temple squares to *bahals* to ponds, which were made for the aesthetic and socio-cultural purposes. Public structures constructed on open grounds, the automatic inheritance and property of everyone residing in the city, created the rich artistic, cultural and social traditions that make Kathmandu a distinct city. Culturalist Satya Mohan Joshi (2011) defined World Heritage Sites, like Patan Durbar Square as being 'produced through creativity, functioning as active public space today. It belongs to everybody and hence the responsibility of preserving these heritages is to be transferred from one generation to another generation.' By doing so, we would not just be preserving our identity of being rich in art and culture, but also continuing our way of life revolving around them. However, he believes that people are not ready to take up the responsibility to manage these spaces conscientiously because they do not understand their importance and hence allow the disintegration and demolition of public spaces.

Similarly, Yonjan (2011) stresses that in the fight for the rights, which is of highest importance now, the sense of accountability and responsibility towards the city is completely disregarded. 'Today, the meaning of 'democracy' in Nepal is misinterpreted by focusing on rights and ignoring responsibilities,' says Yonjan. It is imperative to evolve from being just a rights holder to becoming a responsible rights holder, and make proper use and preserve these functional public spaces. By doing so, we do not just safeguard the structures but also the social relationships inscribed

in them. Surya Bhakta Sangachhe (2012a) considers public spaces to be social spaces. A place becomes a social space when, he says, 'it is created for social activities and people of every caste, class, sex, and race are welcome at any time of the day. Both individual (washing clothes, drying grain) and social activities (playing locals games, getting together) are catered to equally'. In other words, a physical space cannot directly be considered a social space, even though the space itself encourages public life and enriches the lives of the users; it is always in the process of becoming a social space with the presence of various factors, and one of the factors is the users' harmonious sharing of and coexistence within the space despite differences in individual and social backgrounds. Courtesy, interaction, exchange, understanding and tolerance of each other make it a space for all, and thus, a social space. A mere structure or design is insufficient for its success. It requires the ability to 'facilitate the exchange of ideas, friendships, goods and skills' (Worpole and Knox 2008, 7).

However, sociability is not the only factor that makes a space social space. Access to it is equally important. Although accessibility is often talked about in the context of public spaces, whether, in real terms, the general public enjoys easy access is quite another matter. Despite the legal rights of access and use, the de facto situation leaves a lot to be desired. Human rights professional Bhanu Bhakta Acharya (2011) subscribes to a broader concept of public space. For him 'public spaces are not just parks and temples, but also the government offices and buildings, streets, public transportations, various lanes that people have to go through every minute and every day. Hence, a public space ought to be accessible and amicable simultaneously to each and every person with respect to age, sex and physical ability. Thus, it always has to be measured and evaluated'. However, he adds, in reality these spaces are unable to provide for the comfort of many users, specifically children, the elderly and the physically challenged. Therefore, while creating public space, it is necessary to make it safe, accessible and friendly for all categories of citizens.

Traditional and Modern Use of Public Spaces

‘The scale and arrangement of open space, the distribution of temples and houses and the location of cremation sites and rest houses all indicated an understanding of visual response to settlement design and the importance of social interaction’ (Shrestha 1981, 30). In Shrestha’s (1981) words, the relationship between the people and spaces in Nepal is not an ordinary one. They are not just physical spaces, but entities with significant meaning in the everyday life of the inhabitants. The relationship of these spaces with the lives of the people was co-related through their daily activities and celebrations of religious festivals in them. Some festivals are assigned to particular public spaces after their creation for their commemoration and maintenance, Sithinakha, Gahana Jatra, Nag Panchami and so forth, are a few examples where space predates the festivity, while religious festivals, such as Holi, Machhindranath Jatra, Indra Jatra, Ghode Jatra, have been designated to particular spaces for its initiation/celebration in the city. The active participation of the spectators and devotees at these festivals and processions represents the social/religious nature of the people and the meanings attached to those spaces. ‘Kathmandu of 15th to 17th century’, according to John Sanday (2011), ‘did not need any public space.

It was there!’ Public spaces are certainly not a new phenomenon in the Kathmandu Valley. Traditionally, public spaces were built to fulfil a particular function and possessed their own identity. Reminiscing about Kathmandu brought back good memories for Sanday: ‘There were no cars and all rather nice-looking buildings. I remember my first journey into Kathmandu, into the Valley, and all I remember is little pockets of villages, communities in a very wonderful green scenario, the Valley.’ The beautiful landscape and the greenery of the Valley unfailingly enchanted its visitors, but in addition to that, the element that mesmerised them was its rich culture depicted through artistic creations and rituals.

Architectural structures with intricate details in Kathmandu are found throughout the city. As Eduard F. Sekler (1979) points

out, Nepal is 'studded with historic monuments'. Apart from their immense artistic, aesthetic and decorative value to the city they are also constantly visited and used by tourists and locals alike. The monuments do not exist in isolation; they are constantly utilised and maintained by their users. Joseph L Aranha (1991) argues, '... the physical forms of dwelling and settlements are entwined with religious, cultural and social systems'. Traditionally, the social judgement of the people was based on the good that people did for their fellow citizens. Personal piety lay in the merit accumulated by the deeds done for the benefit of society. Building public structures required for everyday life was considered a virtuous deed. The creation and use of public spaces and structures have social and religious meanings attached.

Grounds as Public Spaces

Traditionally, spaces were bequeathed to the public in the Valley for certain purposes. The Newari term *khya* means green space, and these were left open to honour gods and goddesses. For example, Lagankhya (now Lagankhel) and Jawalakhya (now Jawalakhel) are spaces which still have socio-religious significance (Tiwari 2011) and where religious processions are held. During such times, the city comes to life through spirited performances by the participants, alongside spectators awaiting the event and rejoicing with equal enthusiasm. Sekler (1979) insists that in Nepal 'processions form an integral though intermittent part of urban space use as they have done in western cultures during antiquity and Middle Ages. In Patan, an important procession of several days' duration occurs during the chariot festival of Rato Machhindranath just prior to the onset of the rainy season'. The chariot ride of Machhindranath is perhaps the most significant procession of Kathmandu. It travels through many areas, starting from Pulchowk in Patan to different parts of the city and ends at Jawalakhel. There, in the public open space of Jawalakhel, it ends with the display of a black velvet bejewelled *bhoto*, vest of the deity from the chariot to a mixed crowd of devotees. Lagankhel

and other areas are equally important for the cultural rituals of Machhindranath Jatra. Lagankhel is specially prepared to accommodate the event as many spectators gather there.

Tundikhel is another culturally and religiously significant open space, but unlike the Machhindranath festival spaces, it is a singular space that hosts festivals such as Ghode Jatra, Paancha Re and Gathemangal. Certain Newar families visit this ground to perform particular prayers and use it as *bhwe*, picnic-party, venue after worshipping the goddess, Bhadrakali. Tundikhel as a public place 'is a part of our socialisation process', says Sharma (2011). Many activities bring people from different backgrounds together in Tundikhel. Coming together to exercise, relax and play games creates a cordial relationship with fellow users. Moreover, the space today is a hub of religious and cultural events. The management of such events seems poor as the ground is left uncared for after an event. Situated at the centre of the city, it preserves many memories because of its sense of belongingness for the public. Tundikhel exists today primarily as a green ground, but in the past, it also served to fulfil many important socio-cultural needs of the people though today these are increasingly only historical references and nostalgic recollections. Tundikhel being the biggest public open space, though highly encroached upon and diminished in size today, still is a significant part of the city and the people. It plays the role of playground, resting place, gathering space for friends, a space for new popular and cultural events, such as sermons by various spiritual leaders, Lhosar, the new year of various ethnic groups, concerts, a shelter during disasters, and also a venue for political demonstrations.

Structures as Public Spaces

The Malla kings of Nepal were great patrons of art, and the palace squares are open museums showcasing crafts. The plazas opposite the old royal palaces are areas showcasing the architectural heritage and lifestyle revolving around it, and popular socio-cultural activities and commerce are held there. The commencement of some festivals

is heralded through certain symbolic acts in these squares, and the temples invite devotees on various occasions and create a festive environment. 'The square conformed to the viable image of a public open space by the virtue of concentration of an array of activities in the form of major cultural proceedings like festivals and socio-political gatherings' (Manandhar 2010). Likewise, the *dabali*, a raised platform for public performances, is the venue for various religious and tantric customs, in the form of dance-dramas. Narsingh Naach or Kartik Naach is performed in the evenings during the months of October/November on the streets and the *dabali* of Patan in front of a huge number of spectators. This famous dance-drama is still an eagerly awaited public event. Similarly, there are numerous other dramatic dance forms enacted during festivals like, Indra Jatra, Gai Jatra and Machhindranath Jatra, which use the *dabali* as a platform. A platform occasionally used for performances, Basantapur *dabali*, which today has curio shops on it, is remembered by John Sanday as a lively vegetable market in the 1960s and 1970s (Sanday 2011).

Despite some changes in its functions, the *dabali* is still significant in the lives of the people. The continued maintenance of the *dabali* in Nakabahi, Patan, is attributed to the ritual performance of the Ashtamatrika dance (Chitrakar 2011a). The traditional dance festival of Ashtamatrika,¹ which has a strong religious significance for the Newars, is performed in Patan Durbar Square *dabali* before a large audience. Hence, the space has been of immense value to these residents and is currently well-maintained. In addition to the *dabali*, there are other public spaces in the traditional settlement of the city. At the entrance to Patan is an open ground for the use of travellers and animals. Adjoining it is a temple to start the day with a prayer, and also a well and a tap for public use. *Patis* and *sattals* are single- and double-roofed platforms that served as shelter houses to accommodate visitors to the city. These structures were places for socio-cultural gatherings, an important component of urban life.

1 Introduced in the 17th century by King Srinivas Malla, the dance depicts the characters of the twelve deities (including eight protector goddesses) who once helped overcome obstacles put on the path of the city dwellers by fearsome spirits.

To this day, the locals of the surrounding community, particularly the elderly, use these spaces to relax, converse or sing *bhajans*. However, the condition of many *patis* is deteriorating, some of them even functioning as cattle sheds and shops.

Water Bodies as Public Spaces

Various structures built for collecting water have high aesthetic and religious value for Nepalis. Man-made ponds, dhungedharas, or stone water spouts, and wells were constructed and considered integral to the lifestyle of the traditional settlement in the Valley. These public structures were a source of water for household use, religious purposes and irrigation. Unfortunately, given the current state of these spaces, their erstwhile condition will remain just recollections of old-time residents. Both natural and man-made ponds have been of immense public benefit in the traditional settlements. They embellished the city with their serenity, aside from their more functional roles, and they served as reservoirs to fight fires. Besides the provision of a renewable resource for residents of the town, ponds also have religio-cultural and historical significance. Gahana Pokhari, in Tangal, draws huge crowds of spectators and participants in the symbolic search of ornaments of the Goddess Tuladevi, who is believed to have lost her ornaments while bathing in the pond. This festival is called Gahana Khojne (search for ornaments) Jatra which falls during Chaitra Purnima. The celebration of festivals like Gahana Khojne Jatra and Nag Panchami is not limited to any caste or age group, but draws people together irrespective of their social status. Nag Pokhari, and Nag Daha receive thousands of devotees on the day of worshipping the snake god, after whom these ponds are named. The devotees hold a grand celebration of this festival on the premises of these ponds.

Likewise, one of the most beautiful but almost inaccessible ponds of Kathmandu, Rani Pokhari, is opened for the public on the auspicious occasion of Bhai Tika (brother's day) in October/November. People eagerly await the day to enter this historic site and enjoy its ambience, and the Krishna temple at the centre is

also an attraction here. The ponds of Kathmandu are not just for the collection of water but are precious possessions of the city. Matatirtha (mata: mother, tirtha: pilgrimage) Pokhari is a sacred pond visited by people on Mother's Day, to bathe and commemorate their deceased mothers. Lagankhel Pokhari is an important venue for conducting rituals after the successful completion of Machhindranath Jatra in Patan. At this site, a pair of sparrows is set free to send a message to heaven about the completion of the festival, and for the message to reach below the earth a pair of fish is released in Lagankhel Pokhari. Despite the continuance of such traditional practices, unfortunately, many public ponds, such as Lagankhel Pokhari itself and Rani Pokhari, are either on the verge of being encroached upon or are deteriorating.

As with the ponds, the *dhungedharas* of the Valley, besides being useful public assets, also have strong social and religious functions. Ponds provided continuous water supply during the dry season through stone spouts. These works of engineering were linked through an elaborate, yet sustainable, underground water system. The *dhungedhara* is a public space with significant public utility as, 'prior to the late 17th century, before the introduction of piped water in 1896, the *Dhara* was an important source of drinking water in the Kathmandu Valley' (Pradhan 1990) and building a stone spout earned customary social merit. 'The King, community and commoner were keenly associated in constructing such *Dharas* in the valley as offering of water to God is considered as the great meritorious act' (Pradhan 1990). Until today, the 'water of the right side of the Manga Hiti of Patan is used for daily ritual worship of the Krishna temple whereas the water of left side of the same *Dhara* is used for reviving Hiranya Kashyap, the victim of Narshing Avtar in the Kartik Naach, which is performed at the Patan Durbar Square every year in the month of Kartik' (Pradhan 1990). Along with the significance of the water in various rituals, the belief that religious merit is gained by visiting them draws people to *dhungedharas*. Occasions are especially organised at certain *dhungedharas*; *Bais* (22) *dhara* in Balaju holds a fete during

the month of Chaitra Purnima (April), and every twelve years a similar celebration is held in Godavari Naudhara, which attracts huge crowds. The gathering of people at these locations adds to their public character, and this could be one of the reasons why they are maintained. Sithi Nakha is a festival celebrated by the Newars when the wells and stone spouts are cleaned just before the onset of the monsoon to ensure clean water for the upcoming year. This is a long-standing tradition in the Newar community. The shortage of piped water supply in most houses makes these public assets very important to many city residents.

Impact on Public Spaces

A city alters over time in design and structure as the needs of its increasing population changes. Traditionally Kathmandu was a city of pedestrians, and people remember walking miles to their destinations. People's memories of the old city have fewer buildings and a countable number of vehicles, a flowing Bagmati, clean drinking water in Dhobi Khola and Tukucha Khola, a vast area of green grass in Tundikhel, open spaces, public life in the *bahals*, *patis*, *dabalis*, *pauwas*, *sattals*, and *nanis*. However, it was from the 1960s and 1970s that the dwindling of open spaces began in Kathmandu and brought about changes to the face of the Valley. With modernisation and urbanisation, Kathmandu faced unprecedented challenges. Tall buildings were built everywhere, numerous shopping malls mushroomed in the city and a large number of shops and restaurants opened. John Sanday's phrase, 'buy and build' describes the process aptly. People bought land and built buildings for housing or commercial purposes without proper regard for urban-planning guidelines. In this process of continuous unplanned and illegal construction, the public spaces of Kathmandu bore the brunt. Despite the existing acts, regulations and policies in place, there is a major lack of public consciousness and purposeful state-led implementation in safeguarding and maintaining public spaces.

A clear and definite understanding of public space is still lacking

at the governmental level. The term public space has not been specified in the legislation and policies of conservation. Public utility spaces are classified under the categories of heritage or natural environment and the initiation of heritage management is within the ambit of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956, together with the Department of Archaeology. Gradually, with urban growth, the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority Act 1988 and Town Development Act 1988 were introduced for the use and conservation planning of natural and cultural heritages. The Local Self Governance Act 1988 specified the rights and responsibility of the ward- to district-level offices, stating work and duties in the maintenance of properties of public benefit, like ponds, wells, monasteries and *patis* in their jurisdiction. The Local Administration Act 1971 empowers the Chief District Officer to protect public and government land from encroachment and issue orders for demolition of unauthorised construction. The Land (Survey and Measurement) Act 1961, the Land Act 1964 and the Land Revenue Act 1977 empower officials at the district level to update records of public and government land to protect them from encroachment. There are acts, policies and regulations for safeguarding and maintaining existing spaces, but the concerned institutions are unable to implement them effectively. Part of the problem is that the term 'public spaces' is not even mentioned, the focus being on cultural heritage and natural resources. Specifying the function of public spaces is imperative in order to create order in its utility, which is missing today (Sangachhe 2012b). Moreover, in the process of mapping land, the government has failed to categorise them into *guthi* land, individual land and government land, creating the kind of confusion that leads to haphazard management (Sangachhe 2012b).

Regardless of the limitations with regard to public spaces in the existing acts, if the state undertook a leading role in the strict implementation of the existing policies, public spaces could still be preserved and the encroachment and misuse of such spaces can definitely be brought to a halt. However, Kathmandu already

has an example of encroachment of public space by the state. Tundikhel was once a long stretch of land from Rani Pokhari in the north to Dasharath Rangashala in the south, but over the years it was segmented into Ratna Park, Khula Manch and Tundikhel. Disregarding its social and cultural significance, the military has taken over a large area of Tundikhel, making it inaccessible to the general public today. A part of it has the army headquarters and the other is used for army parade practices and displays on various occasions, such as Ghode Jatra and National Day. The area taken over by the army is well secured with barbed wire, while the small portion left for the general public, used for playing, jogging, religious activities and recreational events, however, lacks institutional ownership. Responsibility for this significant space is neglected and shunned by institutions and individuals alike. Today there are rumours about converting this space into a massive public parking lot, which is indeed the biggest threat to the city.

Chhauni is another example of encroachment on public open space by the army (Sangachhe 2012b). The army barrack and museum are located on the route to Swayambhu. Initially a public space, especially used for grazing cattle, it was later used by the army to conduct training. This initial temporary use of the space ultimately led to its permanent possession by the army and so another massive public space was lost. Likewise, Kamal Pokhari is a current case of encroachment on public space by a state institution. Nepali Police has built a station on the bank of the pond facing the main road, blocking its view completely to passers-by and restricting free access to it. The pond itself is barely maintained, so a pond which was named after the lotus (*kamal*) has lost its erstwhile value. Such examples of state institutions taking over public spaces, limiting access and creating barriers prove the insensitivity and lack of responsibility and accountability towards the public, and involves a breach of trust between the citizens and state institutions.

With state institutions setting such a bad example the general public is not far behind. The increasing population and the change

in the use of some spaces have ruined their original meaning and significance. Traditional spaces, like the *dabali* and the temple squares of Kathmandu, are filled today with street vendors selling plastic slippers, clothes, utensils among other goods. The *bahals* are used as parking lots by various clubs and the Metropolitan City office to generate money. Such economic activities on traditional public spaces are changing their function and demeaning them. The lack of understanding of the functions of public space is a major reason why both the state and the public have allowed them to reach such a pitiable state (Chitrakar 2011b). Lagankhel Pokhari, a culturally significant space for the Newars once a year during Machhindranath Jatra, is ignored by the locals the rest of the year. Ikha Pokhari in Chhetrapati has dried up. Ponds in Dhobighat have playgrounds on them and Lainchaur Pokhari houses the building of the Nepal Scouts. A planned city, unlike Kathmandu, seeks to increase the number of public spaces. The minimum requirement of public space per person in a city is internationally deemed to be 6 sq. m/capita (Sangachhe 2012b). Therefore, in a well-planned city, as the population grows, the area set aside as public space also increases. In Kathmandu the situation is just the reverse, with public space diminishing as the population increases. A park in front of Nandi Ratri School in Naxal was obliterated overnight by the joint effort of Metropolitan Traffic Police Division (MTPD) and Kathmandu Valley Town Development Implementation Committee (KVTDIC) in the process of street expansion. The park was a children's playground year-round, except when it hosted a fair on Nag Panchami. The consent of the local community was not obtained before covering the area with an asphalt road.

Kamal Pokhari in Patan was planned to be replaced by a city hall by the Lalitpur Municipality with the support of the government with the financial support of the Indian embassy (Joshi 2011). However, the attempt failed after the locals protested and asserted in court its cultural significance. Saving Kamal Pokhari from encroachment is one of the positive instances where community action has succeeded. To strengthen this effort, there are institutional establishments

working for the same cause. The declaration of seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Kathmandu Valley has helped these places retain their traditional importance by binding people through strict rules and regulations. Likewise, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) is an attempt to safeguard the threatened architectural heritage of the Valley. Aitihāsik Dhungedhara Sanrakshyan Samiti and We are the One (WATO) are two of the several community-level initiatives which have made a major difference in saving and creating public spaces in the city. Cooperation by the state would boost such efforts by non-governmental institutions and communities to protect public spaces.

The Need for Public Spaces

Today, Kathmandu is in need of public open spaces more than at any other time in its history. Rapid urbanisation, increasing population, as well as the proliferation of buildings and vehicles have changed the nature, appearance and life of the city. The traditional public life of the old settlement is limited to particular areas of the Valley. Although the face of the city is changing, the need and demand for public spaces is growing with varying additional functions.

Environmental and Ecological Functions

The potential of green open spaces to mitigate the adverse effects of pollution make them indispensable for the safe future of an urbanising city. Trees and greenery filter pollutants and recycle the air. In Kathmandu, people have grown up playing in these open spaces which were not just playgrounds but spaces of local and global environmental relevance. For example, the green ground cover in Tundikhel recharged the aquifer and cooled the air. Unfortunately, there has been a significant increase in concrete surfacing in and around Tundikhel, leading to a rapid rise in the ambient temperature. Green spaces and lakes are the habitat of a variety of birds, fish, animals and other organisms. Taudaha Lake in south Kathmandu is a popular public space and home to local bird species and flocks of migrant water fowls during the winter

seasons. 'Taudaha wetland is one of the principal habitats for water fowl. It is also a very important transit centre for migratory birds on their way from Siberia to India, whose number in winter season exceeds two hundred. They often lay over here for a couple of days before they resume their journey to India. The seasonal influx of migrants has served to increase the biodiversity of the wetland'.²

Social Contact and Communication

Public spaces facilitate social contact and communication between people, whether it is economic, cultural or political. Informal economic activities in such places attract people and encourage interactions. Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square is a very good example of a space with a measurable economic value and has encouraged small-scale entrepreneurship. Such activities bring in people from various backgrounds and revitalise the neighbourhood. The square houses vegetable markets, curio stalls and flower shops which operate at allotted times in the morning and evening, which enhances the public-ness of the space. The acceptance and allocation of multiple activities makes a physical space a social one. People get involved in social interactions, gain social recognition, nurture new relationships and all of this creates strong social solidarity in a society through such mediums. Socio-cultural festivals and processions organised in specific public spaces vividly showcase such characteristics. There is mutual acceptance of performers and spectators about each other's presence and involvement in such activities, which strengthens the relationship between people and, therefore, establishes social harmony.

Open spaces such as the community park in Gyaneswor play an important role in deepening social ties. A group of young residents changed the deteriorating face of their locality by converting a dumping site into an active recreational park. The park is constructed with proper planning for accessibility and flexibility to

² <http://www.spinybabbler.org/taudaha/wetlands.php>

its users, and serves as a retreat for the old, a playground for the young and a venue for various social gatherings of the locality. It receives visitors from other parts of Kathmandu in search of a place to escape the chaos and disturbances. Since the whole community contributed to building this park under WATO's leadership, they developed a stronger bond among them from participating in the project. Moreover, the neighbourhood is much more secure with the presence of a park in a previously abandoned space used for social malpractices. Along with social and economic functions, gatherings with political agendas are held in public spaces. Basantapur, Khula Manch and the public spaces in the streets of Kathmandu host political mass gatherings, demonstrations, protests and celebrations. In addition, public open spaces are a refuge in this seismic zone, as during the 1934 earthquake in Kathmandu.

Conclusion

Public spaces in traditional settlements were used for grazing cattle, recreation, sports, and religious ceremonies and processions. Similarly, structures like *dhungedhara*, *pati*, *sattal*, *bahal* served the daily needs of the community. These spaces and structures did not just fulfil basic needs, but more importantly, nurtured a public culture by bringing people together and establishing and maintaining a strong sense of community. The sudden influx of people into the Kathmandu Valley over the past few decades has certainly brought changes and challenges. One of the major impacts has been on public spaces. They have been encroached, neglected and degraded due to the lack of understanding of the historical traditions and contemporary needs of the inhabitants. In addition, definite acts, policies and regulations that concentrate on public spaces are yet to be formulated. On the other hand, although acts, policies and regulations for safeguarding and maintaining heritage sites are in place, they are not very effectively implemented or enforced. Urban planning and architectural experts complain of the inability of the state to introduce and execute master plans for the city. The rapid transformation of Kathmandu and the deteriorating

conditions of its public spaces is a warning to planners and inhabitants of how a perfectly planned city can turn into a chaotic sprawl without any identity.

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Traditional Open Spaces of the Valley

A Search for Multi-Cultural Urbanism

SUDARSHAN RAJ TIWARI

The Sanskrit terms for architectural cornices of buildings in *nagara*, or towns, such as *kapota* (rolling/overhanging cornice) and *kapotapali* (cyma-eave-type cornice), designate the potential end users; *kapota*, meaning pigeon, dove or any grey urban bird. This purposive concern with a building detail expressly for the creation of a proper living environment for an apparently peripheral citizen



Figure 1: Birds of Patan Durbar Square – Lifestyle designed to suit the environment.

of the town, the bird, seems to be more than literally addressed through the centuries by architects and is substantially evident in the continued 'urban ways' of these 'urban' birds themselves to this day. What is more, the urban ways of these flocks of birds in traditional towns is to be seen not just in places like Patan Durbar Square or the old towns of the urban east, but is quite widespread even in the public spaces of western towns of mediaeval heritage. Indeed, in impressionist photo-images of towns, the central spaces often show flocks of birds in hurried flight or shuffling in a blur across the camera lens. This, in fact, is a dominant theme in the portrayal of urban life as popular as the theme of solitary figures absorbed in pensive thought on a bench by a tree-lined park pathway. However, these romantic and artistic portrayals should be giving the urban planner some other message: how the image of the town today is being perceived and presented more as the antithesis of the town, urban life, and urbanism. After all, a functioning urban space needs to be seen as being successful, populated, and full of a community of urban people. Great towns must be places of joyous 'community' life partaken by a variegated society of people with diverse activities and patterns of living a cultured life. Today's planning and development of urban centres seems to somehow push urbanism out of its public spaces and even reduce streets to simple tracks for channelling utilities.

It is an irony that few modern towns are appreciated as places for urban living whether from the perspective of planning or design of spaces, despite the significant increase in professional knowledge and understanding of urban planning over the past century. This glaringly poor evaluation of urban planning in modern times is in sharp contrast to the contemporary appreciation of past towns and urban spaces. This is perhaps not just a simple case of nostalgia for past heritage and the long ago, and cannot simply be consigned to labels such as 'tourist behaviour' or 'escapist urbanism'. Spaces and entities of modern towns need to be as meaningful and sustainable, socially and culturally, as they need to be efficient and sufficient as productive conglomerates of economic activity, enterprises,

support and services. The dynamic and continuously varied and varying modes and mixes of socio-cultural interaction of an urban society makes physical planning and spatial design inputs of any kind static, while the socio-cultural sustainability of physical spaces and networks can at best be short-lived. This conflict between the character of the urban socio-cultural processes and physical planning inputs appears to have been somewhat more successfully dealt with in past urban development patterns through different means aimed at greater socio-cultural sustainability. One such success appears to have been physical provisions that demanded and precipitated dynamic participation in adaptation and adjustment by the changing urban society over time.

Observation of urban objects, spaces, and networks of the traditional town can be quite illuminating in this regard and offers potential approaches to actually planning towns, spaces, and networks so that 'creative extra provisions and possibilities' may be provided to enable residents of the town to 'design their life', as it were, to suit their changing styles and needs and create a dynamic, humanist urbanism. As a matter of fact, it is this built-in suitability for the future that makes a traditional town plan and designs sustainable in terms of adapting to the ever-changing urban life. This paper looks at some aspects of public spaces and the spatial network of the traditional towns of the Kathmandu Valley with a view to drawing lessons for planners and urban developers, particularly in building and planning for the social and cultural sustainability of towns.

Learning from history and historical situations is not given due space in modern urban planning curricula, and the expected learning outcomes are often defined at the level of novel descriptions and scientific justification. Thus, even though planning as a profession is still young in the modern period and its academic discipline is still developing, it seems to be already time for planners and urbanists to make conscious and specific effort not to be overwhelmed by the 'terror of modernist moralism' in planning and making cities. One knowledge-based approach of rearming planning could be to

reconsider 'the how and whys of' planning and design of traditional towns, particularly the way their spaces and networks are designed and managed for a changing multicultural heterogeneity of urban living, so that towns for our own times will also be able to provide the base for contented urban life now and also continue to do so in its own un-forecasted future. Actually, the problem of modern urban planning lies more in dealing with the social consequences of the run-away heterogeneity of contemporary urban society. As a theory, we can state that the planning and design approach that incorporates managing the dynamic socio-cultural heterogeneity does not have any need for forecasting the future, whether quantitatively or qualitatively, for planning purposes. Historical experience suggests unequivocally that urban social heterogeneity is best planned as an 'unexpected quantity'. Managing heterogeneity itself should provide the most sustainable way of developing lasting urban forms and spaces with the potential for adjusting to dynamic urbanism for all futures. Heterogeneity of residents, their thoughts, faiths and activities, their different ways of rest and recreation is the main challenge to the planner and designer of urban space. In such a case, it would not be unnatural that most of us find our towns unsatisfactory, or we find ourselves not fitting into the space. However, it is also as true, if we look into the traditional town and its design philosophy/approaches, that heterogeneity and density of these elements and the way they combine and interact with each other for particular social, economic, and environmental intents have created for us the variety of urban forms from one culture to another.

The traditional towns of the Kathmandu Valley have had their own long history and a period of more than fifteen centuries of sustained development and continuous use is proof of its sustainability and built-in character that must have offered manageability and adaptability for the dynamic heterogeneity of urban living that the early valley towns went through in their past futures. Indeed, it is this long period of sustained urbanism lived out continuously in the 'same' physical space that make these towns specimens worthy of

study to understand their planning characteristics. The high level of sustainability achieved by the traditional towns appear to have been a result of some conceptual positions that may have a direct and innate relationship with the overall aspect of heterogeneous social behaviour, which essentially is differentiating and divisive in itself. The idea of bounding social behaviour in economic orbits through specialisation of work and their further bounding in a spatial sense by designating land and spaces for the physical senses appears to have been used in the overall planning of the town itself. The idea of bounding heterogeneity together through some homogenising parameters and using them to create a unified and cooperative setting for settlement has been applied to neighbourhoods, streets, and other component spaces of progressively decreasing heterogeneities. Such intent, detail, and character of context can be observed in the planning of neighbourhood areas and sets the nature and mix of expected public and private behaviour in public spaces. A sort of applied socio-cultural framework or rules of public action that precipitate a behaviour pattern and compatible and moderated actions, that deals with heterogeneity through the design of networks and intersections (public squares) and creates a hierarchy of spaces that may diversify or amalgamate over time.

The Bounding Inter-dependence of Heterogeneity

The town, for most cultures, is a bounded area where passages cross to cause a dynamic convergence—of people, ideas, activities, and services. The convergence of heterogeneity of urban citizens naturally demands understanding, acceptance, cultivation and nurturing of mutual interdependence and the rules of living together bind them together in some form of a whole entity. The early Egyptian ideographic symbol for the word ‘town’—a composition of a circle enclosing a cross—was almost literal. And there is little difference in this perception of urban form between east and west—Nepali towns from the Malla period were not only literally and ritually bounded but were also built physically bounded.

It seems it is this bounding (together of people in

inter-dependencies and the security of a cultural framework) that forms the ‘problem of planning’ of urban settlement as a place of convergence and crossing of passages, of people, of ideas, of transport, and the like.

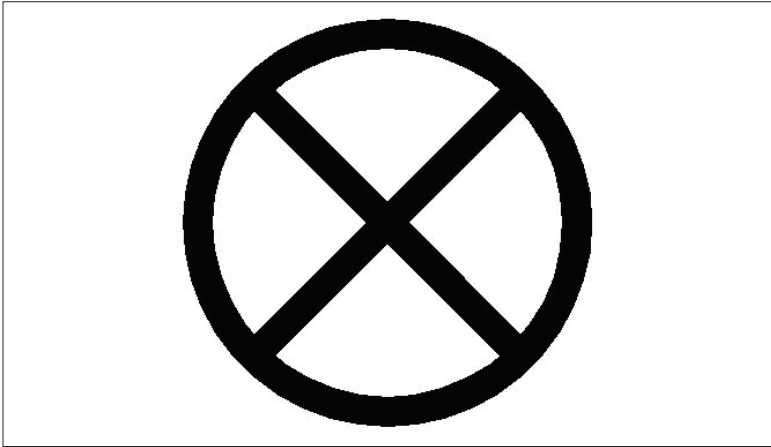
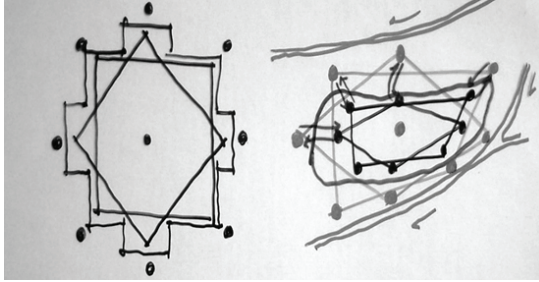


Figure 2: Town – A bounded settlement at the crossroads of people, ideas, activities, and services.

It is usual for the modern planner trained in the global/western knowledge base to think of the city as a pattern formed by patches of land interlinked by strings and networks of services. The idea of the commercial and business city is so dominated by economic concerns that the town has almost become a conglomerate of enterprises, a network of real estates as it were, and we tend to forget altogether that the idea behind networking in the first place was to create of defined forum for living with socio-cultural interdependencies demanded by the heterogeneous characteristics of an urban population. It is possibly because of this economy-dominated approach to the development of the contemporary town that the socio-cultural function of the town has become a peripheral concern and urban society is fragmented and mired in conflict. The urban poor are an example of this social fragmentation rather than an ‘economically’ defined quantity or group. Traditional town plans show that the bounding together of urban society is

Rural-Urban Interdependence : Resources and Gains-sharing



Perimeter Goddesses: Yantra – Ecology – Economy: Bounded Growth

Figure 3: Yantra of Bhaktapur town – Culturally-bounded settlement with interspersed homogenising contexts

primarily achieved through socio-cultural approaches, and the environmental and economic homogenising approaches come to be applied as supplements rather than as alternates.

Historical Asian cities, particularly those belonging to the periods dominated by Hindu/Buddhist philosophies, were always conceived of as bounded entities because the image of the cosmos, after which the cities were patterned, had a set of perimeter gods and goddesses, whose location spatially defined a physical boundary. Since it would be taboo for the residents to build outside of it, a town's general tendency to expand and break its boundary was stemmed as its religious bearing acted as a deterrent. It can be observed that the historical towns of Kathmandu were always situated on the less irrigated higher lands, called *tar*; and the perimeter gods, apparently placed to portray the cosmic image and made sacrosanct by virtue of the same, are actually located such as to keep irrigable agricultural land outside the settlement limits. The utility of bounding was so clearly mundane that the town, although based on strictly geometrically patterned mandala or yantra, actually shows a boundary outline that follows the contours of the site rather than the geometry of the pattern. It appears that the bounded town concept of ancient Asia, idealised though it may have been as a picture of the cosmos (Fig 3 shows the idealised diagram of Bhaktapur, the original capital town of the Malla), helped them

avoid its expansion into its hinterland and thence protected its economic base. The basic principle that a settlement should not expand outwards and engulf its own economic base is as good today as it was then, and an appropriately bounded town with a similarly distinct and protected hinterland would go a long way towards sustainability.

From an administrative point of view, bounded areas are also more amenable to application of authority and responsibility. It is also clear that the idea of bounding applied to the urban settlement excludes and puts everything else on the 'outside'—the hinterland or rural area. Modern understanding of urban sustainability in terms of resources has shown us that the primary condition of urban unsustainability results from overexploitation of resources, exclusive exploitation, and the consequent deprivation of the rural area and lack of commensurate return of benefits or other inputs back to the hinterland. The ecological imbalance triggered by the over-exploitation of the 'pine' by the 'dune', the local terms for the outside and the inside, as well as waste, poverty, and disparities in sharing the gains of development, have often dominated debates on environment and urban development in recent decades. The urban system can hardly be as closed physically as the idiographic symbol in figure 2 tends to show, as it draws much of its material and energy resources from areas beyond its administrative boundaries and fundamentally, its economy is dependent on the hinterland.

Without this base, there can be no city, and the fact that a city cannot sustain itself in isolation is axiomatic. The application of the ideology of sustainability in urban contexts, thus, should not be construed as urban self-sustainability. Sustainable urban development (SUD) should aim at distributive justice and access safety in a spatially extended area that includes the hinterland and expects the play of action and results in the urban-rural continuum. Urban sustainability demands direct recognition and nurturing of the urban-rural continuum. Such hinterlands were small and clearly demarcated at the beginning, based on the relevance of their primary resources to the city's needs. In the course of

its history, with the successive growth of trading, industrial, commercial, communication, and information cities, the hinterland has continuously expanded and become a mass of rarified and diffuse footprints. As cities draw energy and materials from such diffuse rural settings, densify them and consume in a concentrated setting, threshold capacities get exceeded causing unsustainability. It may also bring unsustainability in other ways. From the pattern of historical urban development, it can be observed that the extension of the hinterland is not just a function of the nature of the dominant activity in the city, such as trading, industry, commerce, information etc., but also a result of the development of transportation and communication systems and technologies that linked it and other systems around. The more diffuse and extended a hinterland becomes, the city's sustainability could decline with increased demands for inputs of transport and communications between it and its supporting footprint area.

Similar localised dependencies in the historical cities of Nepal appear to have led them to develop interacting activities that not only sought participation of both the dwellers of the city and the hinterland in preserving and maintaining the resource that supported the city, but also to continuously remind the city dweller of the dependency and its demands. The use of festivals and ritual mediation of planning and growth of urban centres has made them famed for many festivals that seemingly enact the ritual play of the life of gods that are interspersed in the city in the pattern of the cosmos. However, if we look deeper and analyse the component activities, we find that several festivals are played out in annual/seasonal or other cycles, not just inside the town but in a wider region including the town and villages in its hinterland. In the guise of religious activities, these festivals reaffirm and reinforce community actions suited to preserving and maintaining the resources and ecology of the region. The festive region is more an area with a dispersal of ecological/economic resources rather than a collection of religious spots. These festivals appear to be designed as the loci of managing and sustaining urban-rural dependencies

through citizen participation. They are given a garb of religious activity seemingly more to invoke the faith of the believers and affect a predetermined pattern of social behaviour than to cause religious merit. In effect, they extended the sustainability of the urban system. They also succeeded in maintaining, over several generations, citizen awareness about the ecology, renewal, maintenance, and upkeep expected from them, and the pattern of division of responsibilities between the citizen, social groups, and institutions of both the town and the region. These have greatly helped in maintaining harmony and cooperation between the city and its hinterland, while sustaining urban systems through source protection and conservation.

Homogenous Neighbourhoods, Heterogeneous Nation-towns

Studies of the growth of towns in early human history show that as heterogeneity grew with the in-migration of diverse cultural groups, the larger community compartmentalised into smaller ones seeking social association with others much like themselves, in order to augment security and share facilities and environmental amenities. This was the rationale and the blueprint for the neighbourhood as a spatial sub-division in the town. Overtime, particularly after the medieval period, neighbourhoods also began to exhibit 'negative' grouping characteristics indicating class and status distinctions, prejudice, and economic marginalisation. Indeed, the attention of the modern western world was drawn to the problems of heterogeneous society primarily as the social inequality, intolerance and injustice building up in the American cities along with its economic disparities took a political dimension with the rise of the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King. Essentially, its character in origin was bi-racial (e.g., black and white) in the early American context. The segregation of passengers on public buses or of children going to school by the colour of their skin were some of the first infamous ways designed to 'culturally' deal with the problem of disharmony in a society with just a two-way split. The problem of social disharmony, socio-cultural isolation, and

political non-integration faced in European and American cities and societies of the 1970s was 'multicultural' in nature and there were many more communities to be dealt with such as Indo-Pakistan, Sub-Saharan, Mexican etc. In more recent times, additional lines of bi-polar division on the grounds of religious faith (e.g., Islamic immigrants) has emerged in richer western societies.

The problems of non-integration of heterogeneous groups in urban societies ultimately take a cultural dimension as the multiplicity of issues involve social, religious, and economic discontent and discord even if the specific predominant grievance may be different to begin with. The urban poor as a group is new as well as age-old at the same time. Whereas sustainability requires building a sense of community with the future generations, the increase in unassimilated heterogeneity and social fragmentation has led to the erosion of community behaviour within the present generation, and is most evident in the character of contemporary neighbourliness. Such fragmentation is seen not just between different cultural groups, but also within the same groups. It appears that as options and capacities for individual communication through globalised communication and information networks increase and offer the reach to form specialised 'virtual communities', the urban social environment faces a reduced spatially characterised or place specific community behaviour and the breaking of bonds even within mono-cultural groups. Unless this loss of community spirit is moderated, the urban social environment will become increasingly unsustainable. Historical urban societies show that they had a better control of the problems of heterogeneity and achieved greater success in community building than what we have been able to do in our time. The very understanding of an urban society living sociably in a 'civil' way at the crossroads of many cultures recognises the town as a multi-cultural entity with built-in heterogeneity. This acceptance of heterogeneity as an innate urban character seems to have led the historical towns (and the planners that were) to develop different ways of bringing about full integration or creation of pockets of partial homogeneity that can

serve as effective models for integrating societies and developing tolerance in contemporary contexts. The neighbourhood, whether created around common economic activity, social status, or interest or just simply tied around some social facility, was one such idea applied in historical towns to create spatial patches of homogeneity.

Heterogeneous societies require socially comprehensible and usable homogenising inputs even just to create an environment of living together as a community and it is virtually impossible to create such an understanding and inputs for the whole social and spatial spectrum. Also, when heterogeneity is constituted by differing cultural groups, each with its own understanding of a good civic way of living, inputs that can create homogeneity will demand a time frame of implementation as slow and long as the culture forming process itself, which follows the cycle of experience, moderation, and assimilation. Traditional urban cultures appear to have moved in this fashion. Lesser objectives of living together in a civic setting may also be to seek harmony through moderated homogeneity, precipitating public behaviour, respectful and tolerant of differences, or even through partial assimilation of patterns-in-nearness in a multi-cultural mass. We may just be seeking modest but achievable and manageable levels of social and cultural sustainability.

Creating acceptance and tolerance between groups is a natural first step towards addressing the problem of divergence and diversity. The segregation of commuters in different schools or public buses seen early in American towns caused further cultural estrangement. For the purpose of creating cultural tolerance, it may be necessary to segregate stronger differences and build tolerance by bringing groups together through cultural activities whose differences are perceived to be moderate or diffuse. Also, it is important that socio-cultural tolerance is sought to be built through networks and public spaces of a town so that harmony in urban life is created in multiple avenues and squares in concert. Researchers and experts in cultural responses of multi-cultural societies have shown that gradations of cultural tolerances lie in

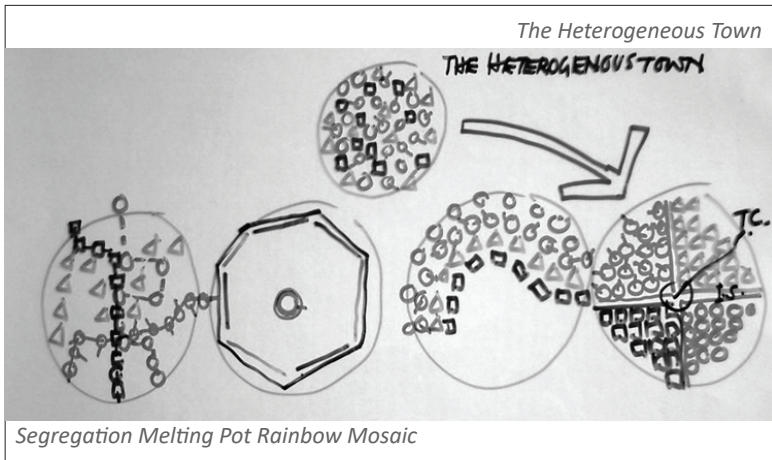


Figure 4: Creating social cohesion in a multicultural society

various shades between segregation and amalgamation, and have accordingly sketched various possible models for sustainability of cultural diversity within multi-cultural societies. An adaptation in spatial pattern of one such set of assimilation scenarios is shown in the figure 4 (inspired by Agt and Walker's gradations of cultural tolerances). The organisation and planning of Malla period towns show that they were sectored into 24 *toles*, which were socio-economic neighbourhoods formed by residents from the same family profession. It seems that the idea of such planning was to reduce overall heterogeneity into pockets of homogeneity so that interaction of a community nature could happen in each pocket.

It is interesting to note that Kathmandu Valley towns were not divided into religious neighbourhoods and since there was a religious mix within neighbourhoods, no *tole* used monuments belonging to either religion as a focus, exhibiting a conscious effort at religious neutrality. Similar sensitivity towards religion and objective orientation towards community interaction may be seen in the use of wells to supply water within the *tole* and stone water conduits between *toles*. Such patterns in the historical towns of the Kathmandu Valley suggest that through the creation of a 'mosaic scenario,' it may be possible to sustain a multi-cultural or

heterogeneous urban society provided that interactions are sought and provisions for it provided, socially as well as spatially, within as well as between groups, through designated spatial elements along networks, crossings and other 'boundary conditions' of the mosaic tiles.

The Public Social Space

Today's living activities in traditional town-space show the community of birds to have been more successful in coming to peace in town spaces with the changing times than the human society which developed it. Huge flocks of pigeons roost under the overhanging roofs of the temples at Patan Durbar Square. In fact, they have made it so near a natural habitat that disposal of their droppings has taken the dimension of a recurrent operational problem for the managers of public buildings and spaces there. A closer review reveals that the birds are making use of all forms and spaces, not just the shaded ledges under the roof or *kapotapali* alone. It is as though the users had made a thorough assessment of the usefulness and adaptability of the elements of provision and shades of environmental conditions generated by the diurnal and seasonal changes of sun, air, and rain exposure, for their various needs of living and designed their life to suit the context. Of course, these scenes are discussed here not to argue that the social life of birds and the complexity of their activities in an urban setting have much in common with human society, or that they have faced as fast and drastic a change and solved and saved their urbanism. Rather, the continuing use of urban central spaces of towns by the gray birds, and the way they are able to make a joyous living can be telling to urban residents that adaptation and adjustment of life and living to available spaces and provisions is as important in creating a continuous meaningful community life as having well planned or custom-designed networks and spaces in the first place.

The study of the social spaces and social hierarchical character of the traditional Malla towns shows them as places demanding a balanced expression and execution of the private and the community

directed pattern of behaviour in a graded way. If we make a ‘privacy and communality’ gradient along a line starting from a house within a traditional neighbourhood (*tole*) and extending to the city centre, we find interesting patterns. Elements that expect an individual citizen to behave in varying communal shades and intensities were interspersed in the town which created a transition and mingling of complexities as one moves along the street from the ‘home’, through the neighbourhood to market squares and on to the town/nation centre. In the following paragraphs, we explore a few of such elements, such as *pikhalakhu*, *dabali*, sacred pits, power stones or temples etc. We see such deliberateness in their placement in town spaces and networks that they appear more as planned inputs than as the output of the cultural assimilation process itself.

The Power Stones on the Pathway: Pedestrian Traffic Circle?

Lane separation by mode of transport or the speed of the vehicle in the management of linear movement or traffic roundabouts and lights for ordering managed priority in changing directions of movement of vehicular traffic at crossings and intersections have become almost universal in modern day automobile dominated towns. Road and transport services have dominated the urban network so much in the past century that managing and streamlining heterogeneous machine movement has become the key ‘harmonising or homogenising’ action at the network level. Such technical and functional standardisation has made the network in a town a simple service artery and planners and citizen alike have forgotten its contextual position in the broad socio-spatial framework of an urban settlement. Indeed, the two major urban developments of the last century that can be directly associated with the loss of humanness and sociability in urban life are high-rise multi-floor buildings and the linearly-incremental and horizontally distancing network-services—both technologically determined.

Observation of historical towns and their network ‘spaces’ reveals that urban heterogeneity is better managed in the realm of pedestrian movement and on a grounded natural plane. It

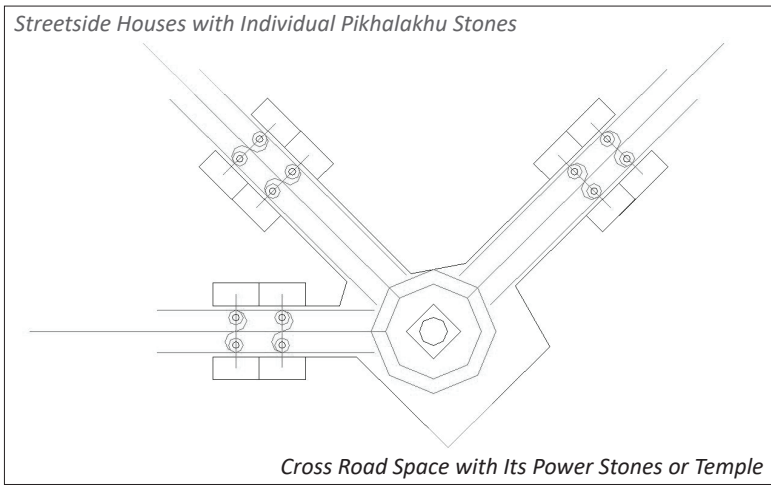


Figure 5: Streamlining movement on streets - Pikhalkhu and power stones on crossroads

is important to see that towns in all civilisations, other than the present one, were 'pedestrian' in extent and the nature and scale of the network space was determined with three to four-floor buildings and these are not chance happenings. Philosophically too, we need to view the street as a stream of divergent thoughts (rather than as a stream of machines with divergent speeds and characters) and spaces as the intersections of these thoughts and these are the roots of cultural divergence and expression of heterogeneous social behaviour. If we take the individual residence of a citizen as the basic homogeneous unit, the first interface point between two or more of these units could be the base space for the expression of heterogeneity. Indeed, we find the traditional towns of Kathmandu placing elements to create the context of harmonising in as immediate a location as the intersection of the line of exit from the front door of the house and the street it sits beside. The *pikhalkhu* stone that marks the exit of individual houses also seems to tone up the individual behaviour to a community compatible mode. In a way the ingestion of heterogeneity by the homogeneous units begins at the doorstep on the first street. The old core of Kathmandu

is characterised as much by the squares at its numerous path-crossings as by the streets themselves.

These crossings and the way the elements of public behavioural guidance are disposed there make the *chowk*, with its invariable assortment of venerated stones and images, seem like a Malla pedestrian equivalent of the single level traffic roundabout with its universal three colour lights guiding the rational vehicle driver in modern day street crossings. All these sacred stones, whether in front of the main door of a house or at a street intersection (Fig 5), all induce a clockwise ‘circumambulatory’ movement of the pedestrian at each point along the path, where a change of direction of movement is to take place. Much like the roundabout moderating the many steering wheels crossing at the same junction, the series of points demanding circumambulatory movements strung along pathways created several roundabouts for thoughts or zones of neutral thoughts on the stream of thoughts. The street as much as its crossings had become a string of spaces for moderating thoughts going in divergent directions; the neutral directionality of a circular movement seems to have been compounded with a pause to provide for a possibility of creative harmony between the divergent ideas.

Characteristics and Challenges of the Public Spaces of Kathmandu Valley Towns

We have stated above how civilisations tend to locate and develop towns at crossings—crossing of roads, economic activities, societies, traditions, cultures, ideas, thoughts etc. Towns are, thus, characterised by heterogeneity (multiplicity), diversity (socio-economic difference and distance) and density (intensity) of all constituent entities and civilisations seek urban comfort in living in these conditions. While the town starts with social heterogeneity and the processes of assimilation to begin with, the concentration and diversity of economic activities takes over to generate stronger heterogeneities. The town continues on this cyclical journey of developing and assimilating heterogeneities continually for its being. It is important to understand that this ‘comfort’ that we



Figure 6: A street-side symbol

seek is not just in a physically networked space as provisioned by structures such as apartment blocks, offices, entertainment houses, seats in parks and infrastructure such as roads, pipes, and cables but as much in the social and cultural expressions and engagements, their causation and enabling. If we see urban spaces as spaces structured by buildings made for partaking of life within them, (and there has been 7000 years of such history behind urban history), the complexity of urban living is expressed nowhere in the town more than in its public spaces—more so if the civilisation is built around outdoor community living, as in the Kathmandu Valley. In the public urban spaces of communities that spend a good amount of life outdoors lie the genetics of urbanism. Urban spaces may be seen from different perspectives such as physical architectural, physical environmental, economic, and socio-cultural. This discussion predominantly focuses on it as a space for socio-cultural action/play, where socio-cultural cognition and expression of socio-cultural knowledge and values (symbols, meanings, and rules of play) take place.

Sociologists tell us that the family is the basic unit of social

formation among humans. The realm of interaction of a family (usually a group extending to one, two or three generations and coalescing around a male or a female) is private space. On the other hand, it is the socially more distant people who come together in public space. It takes more than one individual to make a society and to make social use of public space. In the urban public space, the two would differ socially as well as otherwise (e.g., patterns of economic activity and earning level, livelihood, and leisure). A

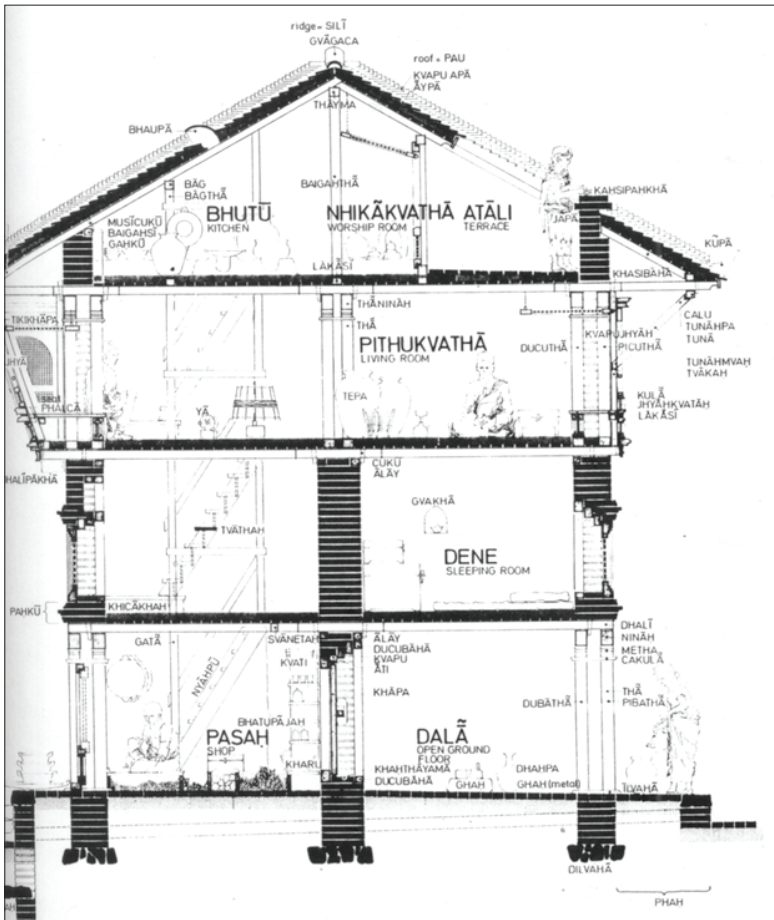


Figure 7: Sanjhya window and dalan: Linking family to the immediate neighbourhood.

society seeks to manage situations of heightened heterogeneity, diversity, and density for comfort by forming groups so that homogeneity is created through social redefinitions. Such groups are guided into coherent interactions in public spaces through symbols and practices (that make the body of accretions called culture), which are recognised from within but may not be felt or accessed from without. With the cultural mechanism that can provide a number of 'hidden' symbols, different groups may draw different meanings and use the same space with a sense of intimacy without at the same time intruding into each other's cultural realm. Depending upon where we stand in such scales, a differing sense of ownership, belongingness, and usage builds. A combined measure of such aspects can be seen as an index of the public-ness of an urban space. It is in this public-ness that we read the larger definition and expression of urbanism.

The urbanism of the Newar of the Kathmandu Valley is a direct derivative of its organising system (division and structure) of society, space, and festive activities, all of which seek social ease, harmony, and the maintenance of identity in the context of heterogeneity, diversity and density.

Social organisation: The Newar is well known for the love of society and community living, even prompting Sylvain Levi (1905, 248) *, the French orientalist to remark that 'the outstanding trait in the character of the Newar is his liking for society. A Newar never lives in isolation, whether in town or village he likes to lodge..., in several storied houses, even if this means living in cramped conditions'. Starting with the joint family (*bhochhi*) as the closest unit of socialisation among blood relations, the Newar expresses his larger socialisation extents progressively in the scale of clan (*bhochhi*, *thahpin*, *syapin*, *fuki*) in a mono-caste situation and in the scale of neighbourhood, city, nation, the Valley and the 'Nepal Mandala' in a multi-caste and multi-religious context (Saiva, Shakta and Vaisnava Hinduism along with Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism) and the interactive interrelations between these socio-cultural groups. The expanding social organisation and its hierarchy created an elaborate

chain of urban spaces, also hierarchical and used in tandem. The living space overlooking the street and the court, the semi-open *dalan* and the court, the street and the *pikhalakhu* stone in unison expound the linkage of the family to its immediate neighbourhood. Such spatial detail guides social behaviour and ensures compliance at the same time. The socialising intent of the *pikhalakhu* stone and the religious character of street crossings have been discussed above in some detail.

Past streets in Kathmandu Valley towns and squares are remarkable examples of socio-cultural civility—a novel mix of graded public-ness on the one hand and territorial identity, ownership, and patronage on the other. The social organisation of the Newar community at the extended family level and the cohesive neighbourhood they created appears to have led to the development of inclusiveness towards other neighbourhoods. During the Malla period, concerted efforts at keeping social harmony appears to have been made through the creation of work based homogeneous neighbourhoods and places, the reorganisation of society in effect keeping the work-based social unit to manageable size (e.g., Jayasthiti increased the labour-based division of society (cf *astadasa prakritin* of the pre-Licchavi society to 64/84 *jaat* depending upon which *vamsavali* you read, Wright (1877) or believe in the 84 occupational castes of the Newars). The size of the neighbourhood could have aimed at about 2000 to 5000 by the 16th century. Comparing this with the present population of about 100,000 and with far greater social and economic heterogeneity, one can gauge the difficulty in harmonising social relations. The pace of new social groups coming in and breaking the social set up of the original population have multiplied the feeling of exclusion and intrusion. Accelerating economic disparities add to the loss of harmony and have created new demands on public spaces. And it has been in public urban spaces that the disharmonies have surfaced due to the competition for a share of space.

The joint family system meant that the Newar derived his individuality from the clan group (and not the group deriving its



Figure 8: Commercialisation of the crossing: Association giving way to dissociation.

characteristics as an aggregation of individualities) as an institution. Such a concept applied socio-spatially led to the fixing of the Newar to a site and space with little mobility at the level of the smallest social unit. Indeed, this immobility made the Newar nurse and develop the immediate streets and squares into remarkable socio-cultural places of immense community value. Growing commercialisation is now challenging this association, and coupled with increasing ethnic heterogeneity in the locality, these spaces are now evolving into dissociating spaces.

Land/space organisation: The *guthi* system has played a signal part in institutionalising the social formation of Newars and linking/bonding the society to land, spaces and acts of assembly and socialisation. Likewise, the dominant role of the farming community (of Maharjans and other farming castes) in framing and guiding religious life and festivities in the town needs to

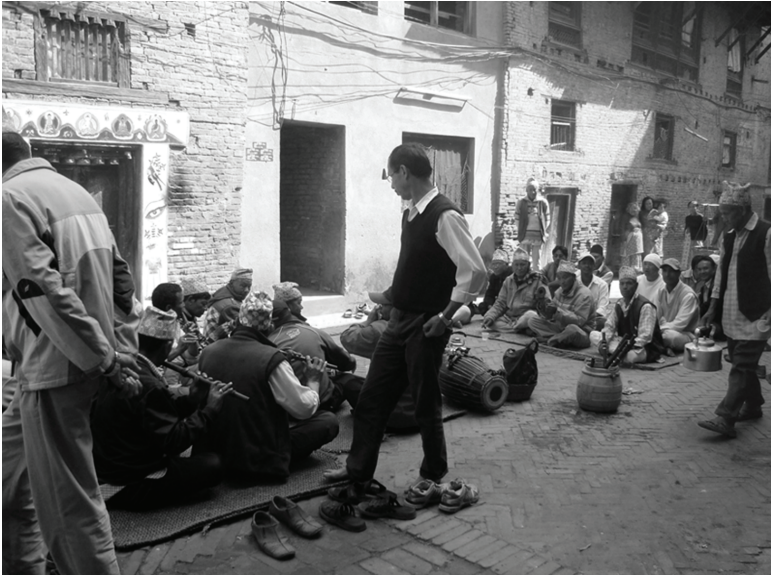


Figure 9: Musical groups gather to renew their neighbourhood.

be noted here. Both have a strong connection with agricultural land and a system of sharing the crops to finance social/cultural activities. Most *guthis* operate at the clan/family level (cf. *swajana guthi* of Lichchhavi inscriptions) and a number of them are strung together to affect a neighbourhood or market level group and to undertake wider activities. The *guthi* worked to a seasonal schedule with a self-generating and self-coordinating agenda, thus assuring the initiation and completion of the assigned function in time and to self-sought perfection. The finance comes (used to come) out of land in trusts and the crops from it.

A number of overlapping social neighbourhoods, associated with other kin, castes, *guthi* or musical troupes, make the town a complex socio-cultural space demanding appropriate cognizance from its citizen. Symbolic markers located in space with appropriate community spaces about it help define social group boundaries as well as renew relations. The *chhwasa*, the neighbourhood Ganesh, *digudyo* etc. are some such markers with community 'owned' spaces

that link urban land and people. The lack of such cognizance leads to self-exclusion and slows assimilation of new entrants or groups. Both the symbolism and cultural norms of interaction with the 'owners' of the space inhibit inter-culturation of the new entrant to begin with. To help in this, traditional users can initiate socialisation of the new comers through inclusive overtures.

Cultural set-up/mediating in time and space: The 'private' urban spaces of the family courtyard reach out through narrow lanes to the neighbourhood 'public' space, and closer still, to the *pati* (loggia on the ground to enjoy the street and the square if you like) or to the well and about it, its female social space. We may like to observe how cultural norms change as the individual moves around and past such markers as *pikhalakhu* and the *chhwasah* and a graded publicness and an idea of shared space is spun. I have always wondered why the culture of going round these stones became so important (blinded by Hindu *pradakshina* or enlightened by a homogenising interlude?). Often a high street would link the neighbourhood squares (there appear to have been just 24 *toles* in the optimum Malla capital city, one for the palace and the administrative elite and 23 for other trades¹). The role of the local tutelary (Ganesh, Nasadyo or even Bhimsen in towns with dominant commerce) in defining and delineating the *tole* spatially is as significant as the role of caste or kin in defining the social unit. The central neighbourhood places defined by the ever-present performance stage (*dabali*) and concomitant spaces and other building infrastructure (*pati*, *chapa* and *sattal*) are linked to the city level urban spaces (such as the market squares of Ason or Nyatapola²) and the palace square that is hierarchically at the national level. Shifting political power bases did lead some national spaces to downgrade into city spaces (like Datatraya square in Tachapal³ *tole*). The difficult working

1 The 32 toles of Kathmandu noted by Holle, Toffin, and Rimal (1993) are rather symbolic and a reflection of a very late idea in the idealisation of towns.

2 In the very late Malla period, Bhupatindra Malla even upgraded this into a national space through construction and elaboration of ritual linkage with the durbar square, the national space.

3 Literally, the neighbourhood of the tavachapad, the large *chapa*, which was only for

<i>Bhochhi</i>	<i>Pikhalakhu</i>	<i>Pati</i>	<i>Tu</i>	1
<i>Thapin</i>	<i>Chhwasah</i>	<i>Sattal</i>	<i>Hiti</i>	2
<i>Syaipi</i>	<i>Ganesh</i>	<i>Chapad</i>	<i>Pukhu</i>	3
<i>Fuki</i>	<i>Digudyo</i>	-	<i>Ghat</i>	4
Town	Radhakrishna Charnarayan	<i>tavachapad</i>		5
Valley	Charnarayan Charganesh			6

relationship between the brother nations of the Malla even led to the concentration of Valley characteristics in the palace square—as the kings were not able to visit their Valley level gods due to blockades by bad brothers, the temples of the Valley spirits had to come to the palace square to ease the mundane crisis. In Bhaktapur Durbar Square even the *Chardham* was symbolically precipitated through the four temples of Jagannath, Ramesvara, Kedarnath and Badrinath located at the southwest corner of the square.

Linking the social groups with the spaces, cultural practices enable renewal and bringing into action of the relationship at different levels. Activities that are held on the basis of a daily cycle, a fortnightly cycle, monthly cycle, yearly cycle, four-yearly cycle, or twelve-yearly cycle relive family, clan, neighbourhood or national relations and inter-relations again and again to maintain the urban spirit which is to live harmoniously in the context of heterogeneity, diversity, and density. Until recently, we could have found living cultural activities and festivities (clearly designed to relive the intended relationships) and consequent urbanism scrupulously maintained by the traditional population. The following matrix presents a classification of social, spatial, symbolic, and functional units or ideas dispersed in the traditional town (but they are probably not exactly parallel).

The wide extent and popularity of festivals (*jatra*) in urban life is indicative of socialisation characteristics as much as, if not more than, its religiosity. Sharma (see Chapter 8 in this volume) writes

the royal household to begin with. Tripura palace of Anandadeva was located to the north of this space. (tava= big, tavachapad= feasting building for big family rather than big feasting building)



Figure 10: The chiefs offer *chiura* soaked in *dahi*

that *jatras* actively bring together the people, individuals, and community groups, of an area, a neighbourhood, a node, a courtyard, and a house through the network of gods and goddesses, small and big, to socialise and remain socialised. The network of *guthis* keeps the activity going. Here a number of *guthis* come together to get a string of things and rituals done so that the festival as a whole is celebrated. Each of the *guthi*, small or large, is entrusted with one activity in a cycle and is built out of one family or clan. The festival itself may be seen as a multi-clan and multi-activity chain—a clear indicator of development of multi-cultural traits.

Here we look at the case of the chariot *jatra* of Tunaldevi. On the day of the festival the chariot is taken to the pond, we find a number of musical groups activating themselves first (drawn from Maharjan, Dongol and Prajapati but not mixed in earlier days), then the chariots lifters are lined up (drawn from two groups originally as the different coloured caps indicated but now all revellers may join in) and is led by the priest (Karmacharya), next the leadership of the society (ready with *chiura* soaked in *dahi*) gathers at Bhimnani Dablai as the chariot leaves Hadigaun for the pond, then the chamar/umbrella/lights group align and the people form a chain to draw the stay clothes of the chariot in unison as it is pulled in into the pond. The largest defined group appears as a unit of 32 active participants in this segment of the festival.

The following spatial order can be discerned as we consider all the three organising aspects, social, spatial, and cultural:

Mono-cultural space of the first order:

- The family and clan space, the courtyard of the *bhochi* and the *thapin*, mono-cultural space of the first order
- The house, the *pikhalakhu*, the 'point of departure' and the first street, the stream of the similar thoughts

Mono-cultural Space of the Second Order:

- The well and the second crossing, the *chhwasha* (*kshetrapal*)
- The neighbourhood square, the space of the *thapin* or *syapin* well, the Ganesh, the third crossing

Multicultural space of the first order:

The crossing, the temple and the conduit pit, the multicultural space of the first order, the crossing of the 'second order' streets, the streams of 'four' dissimilar thoughts, going round for a concurrence

Multicultural space of the second order:

The market square and the crossing of the high street

Multicultural space of the third order:

The durbar square, the multicultural space of the third order (city/national), the highest of the high street with myriads (24?) dissimilar thoughts, expressions retained, and spaces linked but sectioned, arraying

Changes and Challenges: At a time when virtual cyber spaces have become almost as real as physical public space and as the more successful of society spend more time indoors (American life, the ultimate in western living, which most of the contemporary world has made its destination, is already 90 percent indoors), why is it still worth while for us to take up the issue of public urban spaces? What direction do we think the usage of public urban space will go in such circumstances and expectations?

Several things are happening in the towns of the Kathmandu Valley. All the three characteristics of urbanisation, i.e., heterogeneity, diversity, and density have intensified over the decades in Kathmandu Valley towns. They are all growing and intensifying and bursting at the seams of the residential localities, open spaces, and transport corridors, to name the key urban contexts. The population of Kathmandu town has grown from about 250,000 in 1980 to over 1 million in a span of 30 years, most of the growth consisting of immigrants from other ethnicities and cultures of Nepal, almost all of them traditionally non-urban in nature. The density of Kathmandu metropolis today is in excess of 21,000 persons per km². It is also the fastest growing city in Nepal at 4 per cent annual growth of population over 2001-2011. While this growth was happening, not only were no new open spaces added, but even the traditional ones are shrinking through misuse and building. This reduction of public spaces in streets and squares is a result of the encroachment, not so much by the poor, but more by the thoughtlessness of the public institutions entrusted to look after the public good, including public spaces. If we look around Pulchowk Stupa or Tundikhel, we can see the most conspicuous examples. Outside the traditional urban cores, there has been no provision of open spaces for urban interaction and the new urban suburbs are nothing more than socio-cultural deserts.

While the official statistics show a falling trend of urban poverty and they may claim the indiscipline of poor migrants as the main cause of encroachment of public squares and streets for marginal informal economic gains by vendors, their growing

but self-regulated presence in streets and squares say otherwise. Growing poverty in the urban areas of Kathmandu is more evident in the traditional public spaces. The official statistics on urban poverty and encroachment of streets by informal vendors aside, the general overcrowding of public open spaces may also be seen as a measure of dwindling access of the poor to private spaces for living and leisure. Though empirical studies are yet to bear this out, I still speculate that this is true of other Nepali towns with large diversities in population. What additional demands on the public space are created by society when private space (in housing) is in short supply?

Another important change that is happening is the breakdown of the traditional organisation and structure of society, particularly in the economically successful clans and neighbourhoods of the Newars. Also, as the heterogeneity continues to build up socially (in a normal urban growth scenario, it is economic activities and building disparities that fuel diversity and abet heterogeneity) in Kathmandu due to in-migration and as less of the traditional owners/users assert their territorial culture, we find a generally unmanaged 'privatisation' of the public spaces. The occupation of others (since the incursion happens first in the 'multicultural space', which is easy to enter as the claim to use of space is more easily made in such spaces) is particularly evident in high streets, market squares and even durbar squares, which have been subjected to wanton commercialisation. The cultural symbols and values have all but lost their meanings and the spaces have turned into something not much more than a second rate economic and environmental space. For quite a few users, the surviving environmental characteristics comes as a boon in an otherwise 'space-less' city.

The increase in socio-cultural diversities, particularly in the last decade, both in pace and scale, in the ever-decreasing public space of the traditional core has had its impact in virtually wiping out the socio-cultural characteristics and possibilities of the public urban spaces of the Kathmandu Valley and turning them into plain environmental or economic spaces as stated in the

previous paragraph. Although the situation is not as bad in mono-cultural spaces, the crumbling structure of the original society has nevertheless taken a large toll by turning them into places devoid of identity and people willing to exercise socio-cultural care. Studies have shown that 75 per cent of the migrants have traversed medium to large social distances. A consequence of this large socio-economic difference between migrants and locals is the limited ability of migrants to integrate with the local population well.

How are the original society, the new society, and the public space coping with each other? Very little efforts at social group formation, local spatial attachment in neighbourhoods and the setting up of agreed ways of sharing (cultural processes to exercise/renew the society) are to be seen coming from either the traditional or the new groups. What is there in these public urban spaces that may save the loss of society from perceived exclusion or intrusion? It must be that those very age-old principles of urbanism alone can bring about integration and long-lasting socio-cultural relationships. At least we have an illustrated model of urbanism in Kathmandu Valley's past that still offers possibilities on carrying the obtuse present into a meaningful future.

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Open Space in Nepal Mandala

A Personal Quest for Theatre

ABHI SUBEDI

It has been decided that many houses, including government durbars, will be made smaller than they previously were. However, some people who have a great love of making big houses are making even larger houses now. Of the three cities, this trend is mostly noticed in Patan but such trends should not be considered good. To add more stories to buildings without broadening the streets is only inviting greater risks during possible future earthquakes. Though the earthquake has unfortunately resulted in a great deal of damage to the country, it has also given us an opportunity to create greater open spaces by utilising the existing knowledge of health science that Japan has revealed to the world. Bihar also appears to be following the Japanese method. Since in the cities here some houses have collapsed, some are still intact, and several others may be made usable by restoration work, it will not be wise to demolish all of them to widen roads. In Kathmandu an arrangement has been made to construct a large wide street from Basantapur to Tundikhel. (Rana [1934] 1994, 153)

Preview

This paper is a non-architect's poetic, theatrical, and, to some extent, philosophically inclined discussion about public space in Nepal Mandala. The first section is a discussion about how public space is interpreted in general, and the second section is my experience of public space. However, on the whole, the paper is more about the cultural spaces, streets, and houses than a specialist's discussion of city planning and disaster-management strategies, which is beyond my knowledge and training. My perception of public space in the Nepal Mandala is based on my physical encounters, participation,

and intensely realised experiences of being in the space, not using the experience for a data-based analysis, but to acquire sources and inspiration to write about the *poiésis* of the space, which Martin Heidegger says is more powerful than *praxis* in enabling the confrontation of unfolding technology (Heidegger 1978a). I have frequented some places more than others, and I have visited these spaces alone under the sun, moon, and stars, in hot and cold seasons, during the autumnal light and in the rain. I have walked through them with theatre workers and directors who have performed my plays and written about them and with a filmmaker who made a documentary based on my 'Kathmandu Odyssey'.¹ Covenant of humans and urban space was the mantra.

Fear and Form

The above extract comes from an interesting and important historical text, which was published after the extremely devastating earthquake of 1934, and should be read again today. This caution and suggestion to people concerning house construction, indicating a tension between (re)construction and retention of the old forms, and a call to keep wider and healthy spaces reflects the post-earthquake traumatic knowledge. The many important seminars, given mainly by architects and others about open spaces, appear to me to be the continuation of the above extract, a continuum of the disaster memory and the trauma. I have listened to these Nepali architects giving visual presentations about public spaces of the Kathmandu Valley. The themes are caution regarding receding spaces, cities expanding without plans, encroachments, and very importantly a traumatic imagination of a possible earthquake that might hit the cities where there will be no open spaces for people to run for safety. The talk given by Surya Bhakta Sangachhe, a brilliant architect, at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, to cite one, was the

1 References are based on author's plays *Dreams of Peach Blossom* (2001) and its Nepali version *Aaruka Phoolka Sapana*, and Ghimire's and Rijal's *Chiriekaa Saanjharu* (2011) or *Bruised Evenings* in English and Shekhar Kharel's *Kathmandu Odyssey* (2003). Now available on the site <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/10135>.

culmination of that vision (Sangachhe 2012). His excellent analysis was well supported by data, and his interpretation was convincing. In that sense, Brahma Shumsher's apocalyptic vision and solutions continue to dominate the concept of space and possible solutions to problems arising out of the loss or narrowing of the public places in the Kathmandu metropolis. The same livid earth that rumbled under Brahma Shumsher's feet lies under ours today. We live precariously in a volatile zone, according to the seismographer's trauma narrative.

The space discourse in Kathmandu, therefore, is largely a fear discourse, a sharing of a vision of helplessness. The most important vision of catastrophe is that of a strong earthquake similar to that of 1934. Sangachhe's warning that there would be no place to go for safety, let alone live, clash with the poetic values that are perhaps founded upon the brilliant, creative formations of space, architecture, and arts. The fear discourse indicates a compulsive departure from the *poiésis* of open space and construction. We should start discussions about public space from this very meeting point of the opposite perspectives, but which are not unrelated because the question of preservation arises out of the recognition of the creativity of construction and management of public places.

When I read studies by western scholars, architects, and archaeologists, and their excellent and meticulous descriptions of architectural sites, I see that it is not simply a question of methodology but a question of the study of the ontology of space, which is mainly urban-based in its methods, modes, and interpretations. I see two modes in operation in the discussions of space in Nepal. One is entirely fact-based, which states, 'Do not say anything if you cannot support it with evidence'. The other approach argues that even if there are no codified references, you can build up your argument on the bases of spaces: *jatras*, festivals, idols, travelling deities, songs, cymbals, flowers tucked over your ears, frenzy, chariots, moments that you feel when you crawl up the Machhindranath chariots under the stars, amazing simultaneity of the rains and chariot processions, the Harisidhhi dance, Jyapu ritual movements for the umpteenth

time in the ancient town of Handigaun, and Newar octogenarian elders, thin yet powerful, swinging their frail bodies in dances representing one deity each and slowly collapsing in Thecho temple space before our wonder-struck admiring eyes,² reminding one of the dance of the great Japanese dancer Kazuo Ohno (1906–2010), guru of a dance form known as Butoh, who said in his 96th year, ‘I wish to dance the dance of wild grass to the utmost of my heart’ (Ohno 2002, 7). You can interpret each one of these movements on its own, but both approaches converge on one common ground. The receding public spaces, the neglect of the cultural sites, the degeneration of the spaces, the loss of the covenant among sculpture, architectonics, humans, earth, sky and deities, the latter four which form what Martin Heidegger calls the four-fold, are the common grounds of discussions for all the architects and scholars who see great significance in these elements.³ The Nepal Mandala cities being the capital urbanity and the most desired place to go to have become the loci of open-space discussions. Space discussions, thus, have contingencies of happenings and solutions; however, even Nepali architects are divided between aesthetic- and pragmatic-oriented approaches to space.

Some Interpretations and Visions

Nepali public space debates that interest me, and I guess many other interpreters, is a melange of physical space and poetic perceptions. I have read some of the works by native and foreign researchers and experts with great interest, but I have had to be very selective. I have read only what I needed for the purpose of my own quest. I initially read a book about Hanuman Dhoka written by a very

2 Gautam Maharjan is a member of Thecho cultural guthi group. He has also written a thesis for MPhil Degree in English submitted to Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. This deals with the interesting aspects of groups of Newars, mainly rituals related to living, abandoned, and dying. While doing so, some of the author’s convictions and hypotheses regarding the space and architectural perception about the Nepal Mandala towns reflected significantly in the experiences of peripheral small town.

3 Author has kept in young scholars and theatre persons who have engaged in these areas in his mind. Shiva Rijal’s works and reviews regarding architecture, open space along with his act of bringing architects together for discussion is an example.

fine scholar and historian, Gautama Vajra Vajracharya (1977). This historical book shows how history, art, culture, and power as well as the structure of a space can continue to exist as the locus of creative study. Vajracharya's strength lies not in listing but in creating the confluence of sky, earth, mortals, and deities (discussed later), and above all in establishing the power of the people over authority, a subject that has always been the theme of my plays. Architect and writer Sudarshan Raj Tiwari evokes the Heideggerian *poiésis* in his Handigaun space description. I want to cite a paragraph that brings space, culture, people, and time together:

Born as I was, here in Handigaun, my life should centre on it, too. My world may be physically wider than that of Asta Bahadur Khadgi, my family helper, but ritually and conceptually both are the same. The cyclic cultural practices of the Jyapu of Handigaun demonstrate that the orbit of their physical world extends as far as Bansbari in north Kathmandu. All these worlds have the same centre and are complete on their own, but at the same time they support the existence of each other, like microcosms within microcosms. (Tiwari 2002, 6)

Tiwari says the ancient space called Handigaun that he has written about 'relates to the orbit of the Jyapu'. In Tiwari's other writings, especially in his 2001 book, *The Ancient Settlements of the Kathmandu Valley*, the question of space is given very important treatment, where I have met with similar anthropomorphic architectonic and space interpretations as presented in his well-known 2002 book, *The Brick and the Bull*. Tiwari traces the history of bricks in constructions sites at different times in Nepali history from the '1st century BC to 10th century AD'.⁴

The concepts of space and brick are bound by space itself. Kapila Vatsyayan says:

From concepts of space in brick, stone, and mortar, we move out to

4 Tiwari's journal articles and papers about space, historicity, and the current state can be accessed at www.kailashkut.com.

the open space of nature. While man made buildings, monumental or modest, to enclose space and create space for meditation, he also recognises the importance of natural space as sacred. The identification of groves and holy forests as sacred is known to all parts of the world. (Vatsyayan 1991, xx)

The movement from brick to nature and vice versa is an ongoing process, reflecting the dynamism of human culture. The movement is anthropomorphic, implying that the concept of space is a human construction. Each human action utilises *techno*, Heidegger says, to bring forth the poetics. Space construction is a process of bringing forth, of revealing, which is possible through the *techno* or *techne* in Heideggerian parlance. ‘Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing’, (Heidegger 1978a, 221) akin to ‘the bursting of a blossom into bloom’ (Heidegger 1978a, 220). Kapila Vatsyayan and Tiwari’s ‘bricks’ represent that very human action of bringing forth the poetic creation. However, agreeing that archaeological and architectonic structures are important processes, Vatsyayan states, that a distance between the people, their everydayness and their perennial relations to earth, stars, and the elements will render those very structures invalid. She says, ‘Several monuments—Sanchi, Borobudur, Angkor Wat, Brahadeeswara, and Pashupatinath—were all built for use by people. Once people enter into it in a temporal annual calendar, then it becomes the domain of intangible cultural heritage. ...or they are to be lived and lived with the well-structured trajectory of people’s participation that monument on a daily, monthly, and annual basis’.⁵

A study concerning intangible cultural heritage started by UNESCO has drawn attention to one other problematic relation among the triumvirate; open space, structured space, and kinaesthetic cultural traditions. In Nepal, this study has just started (UNESCO 2007). I

5 Kapila Vatsyayan, ‘Views on Folklore’, letter written to Tulasi Diwasa, President of the Nepali Folklore Society, as a message to the Fourth International Folklore Congress held in Nepal from 17-19 August 2012. This letter is published in the NFS Bulletin, August 2012.

believe architects, city planners, UNESCO, and folklorists should work simultaneously to address the interesting and challenging question of space studies, planning and preservation and encoding of cultural formations. It all boils down to saying that the space is never devoid of human actions and responses and utility. However, people can save what they have brought forth, not always to use, but also to enjoy and enrich themselves from the renewal of the covenant, which they perform by the folkloristic cycles of celebrations and performances. Space construction, therefore, as most of the contributors to the tome titled *Concepts of Space* edited by Kapila Vatsyayan (1991) agree is a process of revealing.

One other work that has impressed me and revealed a relationship between structure, people, and the *poiésis* is Mary Slusser's two-volume *Nepal Mandala* in which she links trade, art, structure, and space management. What strikes me most about her contribution to space studies in this book is her perception of Newar space. I find her following observation about people and structure closer to what I have been searching for—farmers or the ordinary people who made the architectural structures and created spaces for their own use. This tremendous melange of form and life, simplicity and consummate art is what has always inspired me to look for motifs for my plays. Mary Slusser says:

[...] buildings that are devoted to the gods are shared by men. The temples' colonnade porches serve as places to rest and gossip, to buy and sell to dry a bit of laundry, have a haircut, cook a meal, or to shelter overnight. Their tiered plinths provide bleachers for viewing spectacles in the squares, and are sometimes stages for them. Even the inner sanctum of some temples, normally reserved to the deity's image and its attendants, is invaded for secular purposes, serving on occasion as storeroom, workshop, or indigent's shelter. The one-time monastery buildings are also the common property of God and man in which, in a modern reversal of roles man now enjoys the lion's share. (Slusser [1982] 1998, 128)

I believe the sharing of space through structure is a very important perception in space studies in Nepal. I have always sought to establish this in my plays about the Nepal Mandala. I find the Newar space poetics philosophically very eloquent. The Heideggerian four-fold concept can be seen in any one place. In Basantapur Hanuman Dhoka, I have contemplated on the four-fold drama of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. ‘By the primal oneness the four—earth and sky, divinities and mortals—belong together in one Earth is blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal. [...] The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night ... the drifting clouds and the blue depth of the ether’ while the divinities ‘are the beckoning messengers of the godhead’ and the mortals so called because they can die’ (Heidegger 1978b, 246-274). Mortals dwell in that they save the earth. The dwelling is sharing, poetic dwelling, and responsible constructions, which implies that humans save the earth. The ferocious image of Aakash Bhairab at Hanuman Dhoka represents the sky but dwells on the earth and offers *wasa*, or alcohol, to the mortals. The entire space brings all four elements together. Reena Patra links the Heideggerian four-fold concept of dwelling and building with the ancient Indian architectural knowledge called *Vaastu Shastra*. She says:

The common view between Heidegger and *Vaastu Shastra* is that the architecture connects our inner vision with the outer world. In *Vaastu Shastra* we have seen that the *Vaastu–Purusha–Mandala* had been so universal that it is applied to an altar, a temple, a house, a city or the entire cosmos (Patra 2006, 213; italics in the original).

I have never read anything about the *Vaastu Shastra* influence on the Newar architects. I am actively seeking sources that can provide this information. Neils Gutschow’s monumental study of Newar architecture is published in three volumes (Gutschow 2011).

This is the result of this dedicated and learned historian, architect, and researcher's long study of the architecture of the Nepal Mandala. These volumes are valuable studies, though because of the size and price they are not easily accessible. Young academic and space studies researcher Shiva Rijal says the following about this book:

Prof. Gutschow, a German architect and scholar, makes a critical study of the general assumptions and sweeping remarks made over the architectures and urban spaces of the Valley. He critiques the developmental approaches that the concerned authorities in the past had taken towards the urbanisation of the Valley from the 1930s onwards. He points out that even the approaches taken and put forward by the donor institutions and their experts regarding the future trails of the urbanisation in the Valley in the 1960s and 1970s was more romantic than practical. (Rijal 2012)

Gutschow's massive study and the illustrated description of the architectonics and space show an entire history of this land. Only the language is different. These three volumes show time, stillness and dynamics, style and anxiety, *poiésis* and *praxis* of the consummate civilisation of a land. Gutschow does not make cartography; he does not judge or prescribe a pattern; he does not show a patronising attitude. He only shows, or 'brings forth', to use the Heideggerian term again, what was/is there with us. This work is the greatest epic of Newar architecture written so far. However, reviewing works is not the subject of this essay. Many other important studies have been conducted (UNESCO 1997).⁶ Among them, a historical sketchbook of an English doctor highlights many aspects of the

6 Bharat Sharma's PhD thesis submitted to Tribhuvan University has dealt with space studies. Like his earlier works, it is hoped that this research will also contribute in introducing new concepts and methodologies in space and architecture in Nepal Mandala. A German publication *Images of a Century: The Changing Townscapes of the Kathmandu Valley* by Andreas Proksch, re-published in Nepal by GTZ in 1995, also portrays changes in spatial dimensions of the Nepal Mandala cities, architectonics, and power structure.

spatial transformation in the Kathmandu Valley. Henry Ambrose Oldfield, a surgeon at the British Residency in Kathmandu from 1850 to 1863, has published very revealing sketches and landscape paintings. Motifs of his paintings are multiple, from still life to landscapes, Buddhist crowns, shoes, and bolts among others. It also showcases art, architecture, and cultural paintings that show artistic carvings, Thapathali palace, famous temples, monasteries, *caitya*, landscape paintings—snowy mountains, villages, plateaus, rivers, temples from distant perspectives, and finally trails that led to the battlefield with well-equipped soldiers marching to fight in the Nepal-Tibet war of 1855. Most of these paintings are included in his book *Sketches of Nepal*. Satya Mohan Joshi (1993, 3) believes his paintings are executed after careful observation of the motifs. Oldfield's paintings and sketches show first the wide spaces in Kathmandu and, also importantly, the landscape and geographical character of the land, which has played an important role in transforming the space of the Nepal Mandala cities in course of time. This is the subject of my discussion below when I put my own personal journey and my exploration of the space in the Kathmandu metropolis. These are other fascinating pictures that have given me clues to understanding how land and people, architectonics and cityscape are changing. There are many other such works, which have been documented and digitalised by researchers, and are also available in books and magazines. I have only mentioned works here that have inspired me and helped in my very personal quest of performative *poiésis* on space.

Archival and dynamic perceptions of the monuments and spaces generate interesting tensions because the whole question of interpreting intangible culture in relation to space studies is based on these very problematics. However, new-generation interpreters, non-architect scholars, and activists see the archival formations as inspiring forms. A dyad of the new generation with the old structures and the surviving custodians will reveal important matters in this regard. Shiva Rijal, one such researcher after studying Vikramshil Mahavihara of Thamel, draws the following conclusions:

I think this vihara is:

- representative of strong socio-architectural forces of the past,
- an important memory of the cities of the valley,
- an important source of inspiration for the cities in the valley to carve out their new architectural and urban politics (Rijal 2011, 118).

I want to look briefly at some of the universal views about space studies before moving on to my own perception of city space, its dynamics and relevance, its *poiésis* for a theatre seeker, and a *flâneur*.

The discourse about public space in the Nepal Mandala differs from similar discourses relating to western cities in a number of ways. Goheen (1998) shows how public space became devalued in the modern city. By citing Richard Sennett's works, he provides an argument about public space and the geography of the modern city. Goheen and Schmidt and Nemeth (2010) represent the view that spaces that emerged in the 19th century gave the public room for free activities, but the existence of the public came to an end because of the emergence of the private individual. Theorists in Europe believed that the bourgeoisie of Habermas took over the public (Goheen 1998, 481). Goheen cites Richard Sennett's views, especially those from *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation* (1994), to discuss the dichotomy between the private and public. The modern city falsified that people share a common interest. As a consequence of the 19th century preference for the private comfort, 'public space empty space, a space of abstract freedom but no enduring human connection' (Sennett 1994, cited in Goheen 1998, 482) emerged. His argument is that the 19th century 'diminished the intensity and meaningfulness of being in public'; uniform dress and codes made people indistinguishable as a result of which people adopted 'a more passive demeanour' and showed less sociability. That resulted in the lack of self-confidence about the concept of the public sphere. A passive but a highly visible *flâneur* emerged. We should also link the discussions about the public

places called *adda* in the 19th and early 20th century Calcutta. The Calcutta experience shows the confused side of the western city discourse about space. The emergence of the bourgeoisie and the loss of public identity, and the emergence of the passive *flâneur* may sound like linear discourse about public space in the West.

Speaking about the Calcutta experience, in an introduction to her analysis of public places, especially the concept of performance in public ‘informal social gathering of the *baithak-khana* or *adda*, the theatre public speaking’ that had a ‘great significance in the nineteenth-century Bengali society’, architect and academic Swati Chattopadhyay says the following. Her remarks put the question of public space studies in post-colonial cities in a different order than we have accepted so far:

The obvious lesson here for students of colonial urbanism is that not all colonial cities suffered Calcutta’s fate, because colonial modernisation did not operate everywhere similarly, and the absence of modernist apartheid à la Rabat (namely in terms of physical planning) had an even more adverse impact on Calcutta. What troubles Calcutta, then, we are led to infer, is not its un-modernity, but its modernity gone astray. Calcutta, subjected to modernisation efforts by the British, and failing to live up to not just the economic promise but the architectural and perceptual promise as well, proved that something was different, even exceptional. ...I want to take up the question of modernity that haunts our perception of Calcutta and prevents us from exploring the historical process by which Calcutta came so readily to serve as a metaphor of urban disaster. (Chattopadhyay 2005, 3).

Dipesh Chakrabarty’s concept of ‘provincialising Europe’ in the case of urbanisation and spatial discourses may be relevant to repeat here, especially in the context of the urban disaster of Calcutta as pointed out by Chattopadhyay. He makes the following remarks about Calcutta:

Because *adda* is now perceived to be a dying practice, Calcutta has

seen a series of self-conscious efforts in recent times to collect and preserve memories and descriptions of Bengali *addas* of the last hundred years or so. The internet carries several chat networks for Bengalis of both West Bengal and Bangladesh, which are, designated *addas*. (Chakrabarty 2000, 181).

The Calcutta experience and the quest for memories lead us back to examine the Kathmandu space question and public memory. The relation of public memory and spatial structure is probably of the most unique order in the Nepal Mandala. I will return to this shortly. Firstly, the Calcutta connections: the Calcutta experience of melange and confusion did not have a direct impact here even though the Nepal Mandala cities, especially Kathmandu, had strong links with Calcutta. Some of the important city links were established at various levels. I would think the concept of bringing theatre out of the ritual spaces and executing paintings different in styles than those that were part of the traditional structure and space became possible with the first training of Nepali theatre workers and painters. ‘Some theatre practitioners like Dumber Shumsher Rana and Manik Man Tuladhar, who were trained in Calcutta in 1893 and 1900 respectively, introduced techniques and methods of performance as well as a selection of texts that were written in Hindi replete with Urdu and Persian words. The stories were often melodramatic, sentimental, and entertaining, and the theatre was colourful, and creating verisimilitude in stories and acting was the main goal of the performance. Scenography was elaborate and graphic’ (Subedi 2006, 36). Their theatre was different from the traditional ritual theatre that was performed on *dabu* or *dabali*, the raised open theatre space in important courtyards of Kathmandu, including very importantly that of Hanuman Dhoka. However, they made a melange of their theatre with the Gaijatra festival for two reasons. One was that their audience were the same as those of the ritual theatre. Second, they were allowed to perform only during this occasion, but their Parsi theatre was moved to the palaces of the Ranas. Only through the theatre do we enter the interiority of

the neo-baroque buildings, and there is a long story behind this practice (Subedi 2006, 36). The concept of space is strongly linked with performativity and so is the importance of the street as theatre and the relationship of *jatras* with architectonic spaces. The next change, though it may appear small, came with the training of Chandra Man Maskey in western style art in Calcutta in 1918. Taking paintings from the traditional walls and enclosures had an impact on the use of public spaces for art. These instances were some of the Calcutta connections.

I would like to take up two problematics just discussed above. First is memory and space. The collective memory, if I may use this expression, of the denizens of the Nepal Mandala, is the source of the sustenance of the continuity of spatial structures. The Calcutta confusion and the failure of the western experiment in the context of the 'production of space', to use Lefebvre's expression, did not occur here. The long tradition of space planning that is part of the overall archaeological, sculptural, and architectonic structure has kept the space structure in wonderfully fine shape in the Nepal Mandala. The Nepal Mandala cities and towns maintain a geographical and ecological link with the hills and mountain regions outside them. The supply of flora and fauna, tobacco, herbals, and minerals from outside Kathmandu continues even today despite the modern transportation facilities. Old shops in Asan, Kilagal, and Indrachowk still stock these items. Geographical and ecological links with outlying spaces, the trade routes and space justification were a reality. A mutual production of space, a city with ancient and medieval history is still usable. Unlike the emergence of the private individual in the west, the communities in the Nepal Mandala maintained a strong social structure and community bondage.

The second is cultural heritage. When we talk about open space and space production, we reach nowhere if we ignore the power of the strong social ethos and merger of the private with the public by means of cultural heritage, but the 'only-denizens' phenomenon changed. People from outside came here because the Nepal Mandala was the capital space of the country, but the Nepal Mandala city

dwellers lost no intensity; they recognised and adopted the ways of visibility. The actors who came to the city of Kathmandu sought ways of being visible; they empowered themselves *qua* power and created a new condition of being here, a natural process that we can also see in other Asian metropolises. The city's cultural visuals were foregrounded, spaces highlighted, as the denizens and artists gathered this change in craftsman's exercises and redefined one's cultural public spheres in tandem with a mixed public. Today, discourses about big city space have some universal relevance, whether they are made in the west or in our part of the world. The problems like the loss of the public spaces, unplanned growth of cities, loss of public importance, degeneration of creative heritage, and the sheer effect of capitalism and globalisation are common phenomena, but we are more adversely affected by the influences. Our losses could be multiple; first, we might lose the great cultural heritage of space management and the combination of art and space. Second, we may crowd our cities with kitsch culture and mindlessly creating a jungle of monstrosities. Therefore, the Calcutta urban disaster as explained by the Bengali scholars could be our problem today, only the modes of the situation will be different; and other factors may be working in the same manner.

After the above discussions, I would like to look back at my own quest for space as performance. I would like to see all the discussions in the light of my experience as a playwright and for years a *flâneur* in the Nepal Mandala. I believe in narration and evocation of memory for better understanding such questions as space and human connections. Without resorting to data and establishing a frame of reference, I would like to put my experience in the following section, and end by putting together the two modes of approach taken in the paper.

Genesis of Quest

The term 'open space' evokes a sense of dialectics, a tension between nature and nurture, between speech and ecriture, and the term architectonics opens up a panoply of images that still threaten

to destabilise my sense of space and me. Born and brought up in the countryside in eastern Nepal, to me, open space has become an archetype of boundless expanse of earth and sky. To me, I must confess, my sense of open space was overtaken by a visuality of construction that entails the semantics of borders, lines, planning, purposeful distribution of spatial locations for the interest of the dwellers and the visitors. When I landed in Kathmandu to follow graduate studies in western literature, especially English, at university, I felt the spatial reality of Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur, Dhulikhel, Panauti, Kirtipur, and other old construction sites of the Nepal valley or the Nepal Mandala. To me, the architectonics of the Nepal Mandala was a new reality, a maze, an awe, a loving construction imagery, a city—the largest I had seen in my life—and system or plan, a visible purpose and pragmatism; the function of it all, however, was opaque to me. But on the whole, the Nepal Mandala was a constructed space that had attracted youths from the western world, who came here in waves in the 1960s and early 1970s. They were variously addressed as flower children of the west or hippies or deserters of the Vietnam War. Their sense of open space was different from that of mine. They were in search of narrower, old, and unpolluted spaces that existed between constructions and openness. But once they landed here, their search was focussed on open spaces to roam around freely in unique and theatrical *modus vivendi*, and they stayed in small, albeit dingy, rooms and corridors in the yet-neglected sections of Kathmandu households. The houses here made with aesthetic, personal, and introvert reasons opened their spare rooms to these space seekers, these pioneering tourists who, though not properly dressed or fed and with little money, did make an important intervention in the concept of the open space in the Nepal Mandala. They utilised the sparsely populated open spaces in Kathmandu to move around freely. My commonality was that they too were attracted by the Nepal Mandala space; they wrote songs about it and sang them. Cat Stevens, who reportedly visited Nepal in the 1960s and stayed in a hotel located in Asan, the heart of old Kathmandu town, sang of Kathmandu in these words:

Kathmandu, I will soon be seeing you
And your strange bewildering time
Will hold me down...
Slow night treat me right
Until I go
Be nice to know...

Kathmandu's 'strange' and 'bewildering' times were spatial to them. They were strongly so for me. They were made of space, construction, and urbanisation. My mother told me, it took 15 days to reach here for official work, pilgrimage, and to see the big city of Nepal. They reported about this city in poems and oral narratives. A cousin poet of mine named Pahalman composed a poem about Kathmandu nearly a century ago in these words:

Hills around
Big flat space in middle
A city that wakes up
In the tingling sounds of cycles
Where animals roam freely
I'll describe this city in *sawai*
Minutely, oh listener!

These are the perceptions of the outsider. The poet's vision of an open space in the constructed city a century ago speaks of a story of the encounter between the people of this land and their capital city. They were the other because the Rana rulers who concentrated their entire activities in the Nepal Mandala created this sense of exclusiveness. They issued visas to the countrymen from the Madhes and looked askance at the hill people who lingered here long enough to be picked up by their spies. That was a tension between constructed and open space in this country. The magic of the Nepal Mandala awed the others, the outsiders. This alterity that was created by the rulers between the people of this country at large and that of the capital became the most dominant psyche

and power structure in the country. The others always kept the Nepal Mandala outrageously, lovingly, and with a sense of sublime in their minds and narrated stories to their progenies. I grew up feeding on these stories of magic realism of the Nepal Mandala. In the course of time, people poured here for education, to get the benefits of civilisation, to fulfil deep-seated desires to avail themselves of the opportunities given by the Nepal Mandala. That force, that sense of rush, that desire to invade creatively became the most dominant impulse of internal migration.

People from all over the country rushed here. They did not come with a plan of construction but with a desire to claim space and become denizens of this place. That is why they did not have the sense of a subtle architectonic perspective. I learned from conversations and narratives that many who came here were not awed by the lovely, grand, subtle, and aesthetically satisfying, simple and profound art of the built spaces, but with a sense of carving out their own spaces in the outer rims of the old cities that have tantric and mythic constructions. A sense of alterity was reinforced by this pattern of settlement, but there was a difference. Those who came here with a rage of being here, with a sense of settling kept this as a driving energy towards creating a whole way of life. They came via and *qua* politics and power because Kathmandu is the capital city and politicians converge here. The open spaces of Kathmandu, or of the Nepal Mandala, for that matter, became built-up areas. Different waves of political formations created different architectural forms of the city known ostensibly as Panchayat-time Kathmandu section, multi-party Kathmandu section, and republican section of the city implying that money made by people in power was used in constructing buildings in this particular section of the Valley. Today's public anxiety about open space or public space arose as a result of the fast burgeoning of the city area. That old rage to come, to settle, and dispel the mystery of the Nepal Mandala remains in the heart of the many who came here, rightfully to their capital, the seat of power and opportunities. So any talk of open space that ignores

this matter will miss the point and will not be able to develop new plans for the management of the open spaces in this particular part of Nepal. Many other towns all over this country have been transformed into plan-less cities.

The psyche of rushing to the power-centre that is the Nepal Mandala worked and is also at work in the case of the outer cities, but my focus is only on the Nepal Mandala, the urbanisation and loss of public space here. Power deals between the autocrats have always taken place here, and the king's palace in common parlance was called *maathi* or higher up. After the dissolution of the higher up, political forces have struggled to create a *maathi*. The power hierarchy created architectural constructs which showed the impact of the Indic mega royal locations and the impact of the European foregrounding of mega structures in the forms of palaces, castles, baroque buildings, and structures of a similar nature. The melange of the European palatial buildings and the royal courts of Hindu and Muslim kings of South Asia became visible in the Rana palaces, the largest being Singha Durbar, constructed in the early decades of the 20th century, which is said to be modelled after the Palace of Versailles in France. Architecturally, these big buildings created gaps between the common people and the rulers. The big palaces of Kathmandu built by the Ranas were closed spaces. The wider space outside was a field of action, a conquered land *basundharaa*, or the feminine earth, that is ruled or is seducible, or *vogyaa*, by the brave, or *veera*, which in Sanskrit is canonised as the relationship between the king and the earth as *veera vogyaa basundharaa*. Public space, thus, remained as seduced space by dictators or by smaller macho bullies who came in different aggressive avatars to occupy the land of the Nepal Mandala. The public space in the Nepal Mandala was the total sum of land constructed around old palaces, temples, public places in old city areas, and the vast stretches of land. But the palatial locations, and the constructions of the cultural spaces, did not create the gap between people and their rulers as in the case of the Rana rulers who created their enclaves in big chunks of

farmland, or *guthi* land, which is land belonging to and maintained for a certain god or temple. As the rulers emerged from the big Asian baroque-style buildings, the public waited for them, to greet them or to familiarise them with their problems. Towards the early 20th century, the picture of the Kathmandu city in the public mind outside the Nepal Mandala was very simple. There were big Rana palaces outside old Newar towns and the old exquisitely built temple spaces and Malla palaces, and there was vast open land full of bushes. About a century ago, my cousin, poet Pahalman, hiding in one of these bushes, which must have been growing in today's built-up area of the Kathmandu, was waiting to meet the Rana second-in-command emerging from Tangal Durbar to express his grievances. His verse that I remember from my childhood sounds more authentic to me today than any textual and pictorial history of Kathmandu that I have on my shelves; the century-old photographs and Oldfield's paintings corroborate this account. Moreover, his verse shows the gap between the common mass outside and the Nepal Mandala space, which was a constructed location and which perennially received the attention, care, and facilities from the rulers. He composed the following poem:

The Lord lived then in Tangal Durbar...
 Hiding behind the bushes
 Such thoughts course through me
 Oh, if I survive this day
 I'll live on this earth
 For a long time to come

Since my cousin composed the above poem, things have changed radically. But the poet would have seen some if not all of the same spaces that he saw then if he were to come today. The earthquake of 1934 did change Kathmandu. The *naya sadak*, or New Road or *Juddha Sadak*, was made after Pahalman returned home, but when I came here, I found the urban picture very different from what he had described so many years ago. However, the underlying sense of

awe was the same. I guess I had inherited that story of being beaten by the space here from him. When I came here, I could not stay without being pulled around by the constructed spaces, multiple deities, stone and metal sculptures, struts with erotic carvings, cobbled streets, courtyards inhabited by both human beings, nimble deities, ferocious Bhairaba and Kali divinities, freely roaming bulls, myriad pigeons flying over the tiled roofs and settling down to pick up food grains strewn around by ritual performers, devotees, visitors, and most importantly by farmers who return to use space outside the old big temples and durbars. In my efforts to interpret the phenomenon, I read various sources and talked to people who could tell me about these spaces. In this context, I recall the Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi's concept of gradual architectural construction of meaning. He explained:

This gradual evolution of meaning clarifies a no less 'natural' genesis. In this case, it was a behavioural model before it ever became an architectural one. A crowd spontaneously assembles, 'faces', 'huddles together' when someone feels the need to express himself with words, gestures or sounds. The way in which the group congregates is either a circle, when the action entails gestures, or a semicircle when it is important to listen to two opposing factions. (Portoghesi 2000, 369-70)

The farmers built spaces out of 'behavioural model' for themselves when they constructed the space. That means the very concept of space emanated from the very philosophy of dwelling that Martin Heidegger describes so well.

The exclusiveness created by the Rana rule (1846-1951) was a violently imposed culture of victory, but they were not the first conquerors of the Nepal Mandala. There were waves of people coming and going in this part of Nepal. Some victories facilitated constructions; others ignored them. Still others used the very concept of construction as a way of accentuating the structure of power. Such waves and such dynastic layers created the imbrications of power

over space. That process continues even to this day in various forms.

My first quest for theatre started in Basantapur Hanuman Dhoka, a location where I could get the best view of the overwhelming images, houses, and cobbled streets. I was a stranger, a young university graduate who had come to acquire higher education. Kathmandu, the first large city I had seen in my life, struck me as an awe-inspiring phenomenon. I felt then I was experiencing a tension between the nativeness, interiority and exteriority in that constructed space. The space embodies qualities that interiorise the constructed forms. A conqueror of territories, spaces in the length and breadth of this land, Bahadur Shah, the youngest son of the first Gorkha king of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1742-1774), had probably experienced the problem very well. When this well-known expansionist hero came to Hanuman Dhoka, he must have faced the same challenge as I did. My imagination of open space and sky was calm and simple, but I guess the imagination of this conqueror must have been turbulent. He would not have known where to start looking from. He must have been awed by the power of the interiority of this space. He probably did not know how to look at it, so he built a Shiva-Parvati temple here, and most importantly, placed Shiva and Parvati, or the half-woman or *ardhanarishwora* Shiva deity, at the window of the temple looking outside. He carved out a niche for himself in Nepali style in the interiority of this microcosm and placed himself metaphorically there and became a perennial audience, an onlooker of the *jatras* and the Heideggerian four-fold drama happening at the theatre of the Hanuman Dhoka cosmos. Nowhere have I seen such an architectural solution of the exteriority interiority tension than in this imago devised by this expansionist commander for himself. I was awed by the out-looking deity, and felt I too was an outsider perennially looking into the interiority of the Newar space. Without the mega stake of Bahadur Shah, a humble villager, I feel I have become the *ardhanarishwora* of Hanuman Dhoka, always looking in and out of the consummate space.

That tension between the interiority and exteriority assumed more meaning to me in due course of time. I walked and walked

through all the metropolitan spaces here. I was not looking for a final answer, a final space inside or outside the constructed spaces. I was drawn more and more by the performativity of the culture, ancient skies settling over tiled imbrications of roofs, gully, precincts of temples, old palaces, open and wide courtyards, old houses with roofs caving in, regular, seasonal performances, and a mystique and indefinable cosmogonic relationship between the built spaces and houses. That was a shapeless shape. To me, there was a game of sun and storm, time, and space. I wrote:

Sky spread its storm
Into the open palms
Of gods in the city
And descended upon it
I sat like the shattered sun
In your dooryard
I came to the city
Lost like a minuscule sky
In the lanes,
Crept out of my own
Lanes of memories
And broke into a dawn
Under the collapsing roofs
Of the houses of the gods. (Subedi 1996, 23)

That was my encounter of a city and its built and open spaces that always became poetic, theatrical, and artistic to me. My focus was the older, the 'yesterday' imprinted on everything that was there. Even to this day, I have not seen such a unique people and space relationship, such covenant that is maintained through centuries, through cycles of seasons, life and death, moments of ecstasy and pain encountered in the repetitions of dialogue with earth, sky, weather, and stars. A dance, for example, should be open to the sky. This self-sufficiency, I would not say complacency, this covenant with the space was gradually intervened by the rush, a modern

energy, a journey from spaces without boundaries and, of course, the natural calamities.

My quest for theatre and performativity in the old Nepal Mandala Newar towns has continued since then. The search for space that was poetic and the strange imbrication of tangible and intangible took me to Bhaktapur city, which was introduced to me in my early college days by Siddhicharan Shrestha in 1961, an eminent poet of Nepali and Newari languages. The first space that he introduced to me was the Bhaktapur Durbar and its periphery. He showed me the marks of bullets when the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah attacked the palace in 1768. I could never find them afterwards. The story of the palace guard was more amorphous but very important. His narration was poetic. He said, 'Women get married inside; they leave here crying bitterly; they dance and sing, drink and laugh. They fade slowly. That happens only occasionally. We see that others do not. When we tell these stories to people, they laugh. They do not believe us'. I interpreted this story as the most eloquent narration of what the space has always meant to the denizens and to the Nepali state that highlights this mytho-poetic tale to attract metropolitan tourists. To me, that was perhaps a challenge to move in time and space into the realms of experience of the people. UNESCO calls that intangible heritage. I treat the question of space as poetics, kinaesthetic human action and energy. I have earlier treated the subject of intangibility as an important part of the space by overlaying my own theatrical experience, the liminoid experience.

I entered that liminoid part of performativity through a third text, a drama, a textual repertoire that could be dismissed or accepted, and which by virtue of being an exteriority in the cultural discourse of an ancient Newar town of Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley was more of an interpretation of the intangibility rather than a meticulous study of the culture. It was a study of the creative impact of a performative culture, the source of which is not only the originary of the Bhaktapur cultural location but also of similar forms elsewhere. The Bhaktapur culture of performativity that is kinaesthetic in nature, but also petrified in

courtyards, impels my poet character to caution everybody across time and space:

Oh, listen to the sound of water
In the dry lake
Listen, to the rustle of wind
On the trees that only stand in shadows
As memories on the treeless backyards
Time here is silhouette
He speaks of this time in the language of no words. (Subedi 2001, 6)

We speak the language of no words when we formalise space discourses. Architects, historians, archaeologists have been speaking about built and open spaces, but to me, another way of talking about space is transforming the space into poetic energy as the Newars did precisely. Lefebvre (2004, 31) cautions, 'But look at those trees, those lawns and those groves. To your eyes they situate themselves in a permanence, in a spatial simultaneity, in a coexistence. But look harder and longer. This simultaneity, up to a certain point, is only apparent: a surface, a spectacle. Go deeper, dig beneath the surface, listen attentively instead of simply looking, of reflecting the effects of a mirror'.

The tension between the guard's stories and the non-existence of the vibrancy that they saw is precisely the character of the liminoid mode of the intangible performance culture. Memories do play a role, but half-heartedly believed stories have space in culture that challenge the onlookers and visitors to look through the fog into the paradox of the transience and continuity of human life within a cultural mode. I want to bring in the argument of Dragana Rusalić here. In a Belgrade publication of the ethnography, she sums up a very interesting experience (Rusalić 2009). She considers intangible cultural heritage as a very complex subject, but she thinks by the same token it is also very simple. Immaterial heritage, she says, 'basically means those things we tend not to see, or to touch, but the things that we may feel. And it certainly includes memory'

(Rusalić 2009, 7). She rightly says that as the way of memorising is done without physical presence, the memories become a system of knowledge. She does not see intangible as opposite of tangible. She believes intangible 'provides the meaning for the tangible'. She says that when we talk of a building, we do not talk about 'its bricks and walls, stones and marble, wood and concrete, doors and windows, we actually talk about the meanings that are embedded in the building and that symbolise it (Rusalić 2009, 8).

Discovering and rediscovering 'what we already have' is the greatest essence of quest in intangible culture (Rusalić 2009, 12). My quest was precisely that. I was trying to discover what I felt, a great silent yet strong dialogue between what is and what is not there; a silent dialogue between the guards of palaces and me who is seeking to understand the power behind the intangible. I was outside and inside a form of intangibility that was fluid. Though it is said in canonical description (in the thirty-second session of the UNESCO on intangible heritage): 'This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity' (cited in Leimgruber 2010), my entry into this world paradoxically revealed nothing and also everything at the same time. I was watching while remaining on the fringe, the entire process like the guard at the liminal location. Liminality and entry into the process are related concepts. The fixed location of a culture is both an impediment to expansion as well as its character. To cite Leimgruber again, 'It is in the very nature of intangible culture to remain undetermined by fixed location'. But such fixity, if limited to rigidity, could have counterproductive results. Leimgruber adds, 'Without denying the importance that space has in shaping cultural practices, it can be said that culture lives via social processes that, while indeed playing out in physical space, extend far beyond that range by encompassing embodied, verbal, visual, and virtual interactions' (Leimgruber 2010, 169).

My location was different. I was divided between the native and near-native identities. I was a trespassing insider. I was standing with what Giaccardi and Palen (2008, 283) call a ‘sense of place’ that was ‘shaped through the interaction of a number of physical and social agencies, over and over again’. Such rounds must have taken place inside the community, in the fixed locations. But the intangible culture was transmitted to me through the agencies that fired my emotions, through the gestures, the dancing modes, the architectural forms saturated with performative energy crying out from the angles, twists, images, and kinetic forms. The main character in the play, the allegory of the bride that the guard at the liminal mode said left crying becomes my focus. I enter the intangible space when she leaves like the unpolluted pristine river currents of the Bagmati, an originary that guides us even today. She says to the lachrymose girls, the poor inconsolable mates of her:

Listen, girls!
 Let’s stay where we are carved out—
 I’m carved out in words and memories
 So I’ll go as river
 You are all carved on stones and wood
 You stay here under the sun cover
 The artist’s bereaved lover adds to that-
 ‘But we all meet at the confluence of tears!’ (Subedi 2001, 75)

I perceived that confluence, that liminoid zone as my target, a space where I saw the confluence of tears, forms, and sun-carved figurines. Someone doing a study of the performance process would see that ‘physical incorporation’ is central to such processes as gendering—both in and outside ritual contexts’ (Graham 2001). According to Dawson Munjeri (2009, 143), ‘The character and continuity are bound up with the corporeality of community’. The bodies of the women who are ‘all carved on stones and wood’ and so should ‘stay here under the sun cover’ are bound up like this. Munjeri further comments, ‘the body has to be “inscribed” within

a certain society and culture which has been shaped by these processes (relationships) and which itself simultaneously creates social and cultural processes' (Munjeri 2009, 143).

Conclusion

The search for open space, thus, can take place at various levels. The concerned government agencies, municipalities, and politicians discuss open space as a problem and solution. A *flâneur's* anxieties for performance space can be a dream, but the creation of theatre within a confined location or the city itself, its streets and destinations of rituals and trajectories, amphitheatres, gardens, courtyards, and temple yards are equally important open spaces that are culturally identified and located.

I find it appropriate here to allude to the anxiety of the East Europeans about reconstructions, restorations of or erasing public spaces in the post-political times. We too in Nepal did change a lot, but I would like to cite what they have to say before concluding my own argument. Karen Kipphoff says this of the change:

As the political, social, and cultural developments of the twentieth century unfolded, these spaces and their monuments were in some cases destroyed, in others neglected, forgotten, altered, or redefined. New concepts of power and ways of displaying it emerged. In consequence, different models of how these societies should present themselves were inserted into the public sphere. In fact, architecture and urban planning today still offer considerable potential in meeting the pressing need for erasing, rewriting, and overwriting history with new material that is deemed more suitable for the present. (Kipphoff 2007, 86)

We have also changed in Nepal. Among our confusions, issues concerning space management and the use of buildings and cultural spaces are perhaps the strongest change. We have no problems with the old Malla houses, as they automatically become museums; they have easily passed the UNESCO heritage test. But with the newer

spaces and buildings we are undecided. After the fall of the House of Gorkha in 2008, the Narayanhiti Royal Palace was converted into a museum. The erstwhile palace is a very badly managed nondescript museum today. The Rana palaces have served as offices housing ministries and banks. The land they occupy can make a difference in space management. This ambivalence about history and monuments, and structured and open spaces, is the central problematic in space discussions in Nepal. As warned by Brahma Shumsher, quoted at the start of this essay, fear and post-traumatic psyche continues to haunt us. That is a very natural fear as we live in an earthquake-prone zone and the cities are not well-constructed. Today we live with the vision of apocalypse, with a pride of possessing great arts and monuments and murky perceptions of urban structures. The compromise of power and history, art and urbanity remain our main concerns. In my Kathmandu odyssey, I am not sure if I found what I wanted, but I believe in the philosophy we dwell because we preserve. I believe continuing space preservation discourse, honouring structures and art, working with a sense of human and ecological well-being, creating pressure on the power actors are our four-fold goals, and this process should be pushed with all the energy, talent and means of the stakeholders and *flâneurs* alike.

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Bhedasingh

A Public Open Space in Kathmandu

BHARAT SHARMA

Introduction

The 1950s mark a watershed in Nepali political, economic, and demographic history. In 1952-54, there were only 10 urban areas in Nepal, although classification did not follow the global definition. The only criterion applied during that period was a population in excess of 5000. Now the number of urban centres, known as *nagarपालिकास*, is close to 100. Today, the urban population is above 15 per cent of the total population. Relative to its total population, the number and distribution of open spaces in urban Kathmandu was quite considerable. It was well above 10 per cent of the Valley as early aerial maps of the Kathmandu Valley show. However, since the 1970s, open spaces have been declining at the rate of about 5 per cent per decade as aerial maps from the 1970s through the 1990s indicate. Encroachment of public open spaces for various reasons by various people, including the public sector, continues unabated. The public open spaces of the medieval towns of the Kathmandu Valley depict very unique and intrinsic features, not only physically but also socially. Architect and researcher Sudarshan Raj Tiwari (1989) points out the design aspect of these open spaces, amongst them, notably, the pedestrian scale of community spaces that were well-distributed in the towns. Street-scale open spaces for various urban activities helped to fix social uses and values (see Chapter 2).

The various scales, sizes, and geometries, from the street scale to the courtyard scale, the urban nodes, point squares, market squares and durbar squares were deliberate aspects of an urban public conception signifying and expressing different scales of relationships and activities. They were dynamic and functional social spaces that connected distinct social activities to different time

cycles. These public open spaces are tangible residues of the past in the perception of living towns and can be interpreted as 'cultural' time signatures. Rob Krier (1979, 22-23) identifies street squares and building blocks as the geometrically typified morphological elements of urban space. Maurice Halbwachs ([1950]1980) argues that collective memory is noted in concrete social experiences and associated with temporal and spatial frameworks. Similarly, M. Christine Boyer (1996, 211) postulates that memories are social entities which are recalled by time and place and by the ideas that stimulate images in patterns of thoughts in collective settings. It is indeed the case that the historic public spaces of Kathmandu are vivid expressions of the collective life and memory of a well-defined society and polity.

The heritage of Kathmandu's open spaces, be they *gauchar*, *tundikhel*, or *chaur*, *bahal*, *bahil*, courtyard, nodal points, or squares, points to the fact that long before Nepal's academically trained urban planners, the people of the city were keenly aware of the indivisible relationship between human life and nature, and clearly believed that survival and health are contingent upon an understanding of nature and her processes. The open space pattern in Kathmandu in the past not only catered to the many needs of human beings but also simultaneously took care of livestock and pastureland. The evolution and development of open space in urban Kathmandu has a historical logic rooted in various scales of need, including the psychological needs of individuals, families, and social groups. The physical urban form reflected both social needs as well as the hierarchy of the social values. Using the example of Bhedasingh, I will illustrate these deliberate aspects of the traditional design of public open spaces. Bhedasingh is a unique and significant nodal-point intersection whose unique morphology is constituted by its well-defined spatial aspects, form, location, size, and layout. It is located at the intersection of Indrachowk-Thahity, north-south street and Machindra Bahal-Naradevi, east-west street.

The influence zone of this nodal point, at about 200 feet by 200 feet in size, is modest. The bonding structures in all four

cardinal directions are mixed-use buildings about four storeys high. Bhedasingh holds a very special place in the study of nodal-point open spaces involving timeseries analysis from the medieval period onwards. Over time, the physical characteristics and built-up environment around the nodal point and functional aspects of this open space have gradually changed due to socio-political, demographic, and economic factors. This essay will outline the morphology of this nodal point and its role in safeguarding the urban environment of the period. The parameters used are: physical, social, environmental, and behavioural, whose specific attributes form the basis for the research; the traditional morphology of the nodal-point open space and its role in the life of the confluent *toles* or settlements adjoining it, whose intersecting streets constituted mandatory open spaces. It served primarily as a locality square. Locality here is to be understood differently from the idea of the neighbourhood prevalent in Western urban planning. Likewise, the street in traditional Kathmandu is more than just a transport artery, being also an open space for 'activity'. Bhedasingh's socio-cultural and economic dimensions are typical and representative of a nodalpoint open space at the physical and social levels.

Typology

Typology, simply put, is the classification of a group of objects, characterised by the same formal structure. It is neither a spatial diagram nor a list of objects; it is fundamentally based on the grouping of objects by certain inherent 'structural similarities' that they share. The typology of the bonding surfaces of buildings (architectural bonding) basically deals with architectural structures that bond a place and involves their spatial aspects, incorporating form, location, size, and layout. The Bhedasingh nodal point's influence perimeter is aligned to the cardinal directions and possesses the character of vernacular architectural in terms of facades, material, fenestration, and skyline. The four-storied buildings act as the bonding facades of the streets. The interaction with the streets takes place through the doors and

windows, which provide visual as well as physical communication while maintaining interval and privacy to the interior space and its activities. This establishes a balance between the private and public domains through harmonious interfacing. The width of the street and the height of bonding surfaces have both scientific as well as psychological ratios. At a height-to-width ratio of 1:1, an enclosure with an optimum angle for light and heat from the sun is created.¹ Reinhard's (1982) *Town of Kirtipur* focuses on festivals and rituals and tries to explore the meaning of such enclosures. He argues that it is through the social rituals, pertaining to the 'rites of passage and movement' that the nodal points of the city, symbolised by certain interlinked urban artefacts and spaces, that the hierarchy of urban structures, such as houses, neighbourhoods, and quarters, are revealed in their different orders and relationships. Bhedasingh adheres to this conception of urban space, as its setting and physical attributes as a 'built environment' has both secular and religious connotations.

Size

For a nodal-point public space, Bhedasingh has a very intimate physical size and scale. Anthropometrically, it is built to a comfortable human scale and is neither agoraphobic nor claustrophobic, as the layout has a simple geometry. There is a liberal space segment on north-eastern part and its south-eastern part has a very prominent Shiva temple on a high-tiered pedestal. On the eastern side of the temple, there is a permanent pottery square serving social needs. The size of the total open public space is commensurate with the bonding structures around it. Psychologically, the space is intimate and congenial for people involved in different kind of activities, such as buying, selling, talking etc., and also for congregations watching *jatras* or religious events. Size has to be proportionate in scale with the volume of activities. The sense of aesthetics and belongingness is lost in negative spaces, which are like lost spaces.

¹ See Mohan Pant (Rolamba 16 No 2) for a more detailed account of peoples' participation in building and the manifestations of urban structure.

Pattern Matching

A Pattern Language (Alexander et al 1977) illustrates the range of scales at which urban design operates with patterns being ordered in terms of scale, beginning with patterns of interior design. They further stress that no pattern is an ‘isolated entity’, as each pattern can exist in the world only to the extent that it is supported by other patterns and the large pattern it is embedded in. In the context of pattern matching, it is essential to observe the relationship between buildings and streets, squares and other spaces which make up the public domain, the relationship of one part of town with the other parts and the pattern of movement and activities. In essence, it is the complex relationship between all the elements of built and un-built space. Observing the Bhedasingh node, it is clear that in the traditional towns of Kathmandu, ‘the art of making place for the people was given due consideration’. It includes how places worked and mattered in terms of the community’s social character. It is evident that the Bhedasingh node establishes a connection between people and the places around it, between the movement of people and the form of the built fabric. Bhedasingh has the following distinctive attributes as a nodal point:

- Distinct identity,
- Continuity and enclosure as a place where public and private spaces are clearly identified,
- Intimate and attractive outdoor area,
- Easy to get to and move through,
- High legibility as a place which has a clear image and is easy to understand,
- Highly adaptable in its functional use over time, and
- Very high diversity as a place that offers a variety of choices.

All these attributes give it a dynamic character in the context of urban design. Furthermore, it seems to be pretty close to Kevin Lynch’s (1960) ‘image concept’, where the performance dimensions of a place are expressed in terms of:

- Vitality, meaning a place that supports functions that fulfil biological requirements,
- Sense, indicating the degree to which a place can be clearly perceived,
- Fit, that is, the degree to which the form and capacity of space match the patterns of behaviour of the people involved,
- Access, the ability to reach other persons and activities, and
- Control, the regulatory system in the place.

Texture and Colour

The texture and colour of the bonding surfaces and facades are those of traditional building materials like brick and timber, completely devoid of cement plaster finish. The surface finish of the buildings is harmonious and subtle. Sunlight falling on the surfaces highlights the textural quality in conjunction with protruding window motifs and designs. The shadow cast by the window frames, eaves, and brackets create very interesting patterns of light and shadow.

Time Cycle and Frame

The mood of the built environment and the activities therein changes with the change in the hours of the day because of the changes in the nature of activities in the morning, afternoon, and evening. In the morning, the intersection is a small market square dominated by vegetable vendors and buyers and people with religious offerings going around temples. The ambience of the space is socio-religious order. As the day progresses, the nature of commercial activities changes and so do the kinds of merchandise.

Layout and Land Use

From a settlement planning point of view, Bhedasingh's layout is very interesting. The visual corridors framed by the streets in all four cardinal directions have dramatic urban views. More importantly, the layout allows for very efficient land use. The mixed-land use prevalent there blends very well with the way of life of the people. Commercial-cum-residential use of the houses on either side of

streets makes the space lively. The layout does not follow a rigid grid-iron pattern seen in many modern western cities.

Access

The confluent accesses from different cardinal directions to this nodal point have an element of surprise. Both the north-south and east-west access points have a socio-religious foci and elements of expectations that make the nodal point very dynamic visually as well as psychologically. The living quality of the access culminates in the node. Entry points to this public place are simple and more or less axial with no corner points and without diagonal or skewed entries.

Social Parameters

Observation of the social parameters consist of sub-parameters, such as:

- i. Social use,
- ii. Social territory and boundary,
- iii. Community use,
- iv. Public use,
- v. Relationship between private, semi-private, and public use around the nodal point,
- vi. Religious and cultural landmarks around the nodal point,
- vii. Use factors in different situations like:
 - a.) Standing
 - b.) Sitting and walking
- viii. Norms of behaviour, and
- ix. Social gradient.

The observation protocol for this study included all the above sub-parameters of the main parameters.

Social Use

The main factor which changes a geographical space into a place is the inclusiveness of the social hub in its spatial dimension. In

fact, the main contrivance of ‘place-making’ is through the social dimension, which generates activities around a nodal point. It is the socio-religious use of this space which crystallised it into a ‘living environment’. From sunrise to sunset, the place becomes vibrant due to its social activities. It is not only a physical nodal point but also a ‘social nodal point’. This nodal point is also a ceremonial religious route, which highlights its importance. The temple square in the southeast corner and the open space in the northeast corner serve as social congregation points and provide it with an interactive character. People need interactive spaces and Bhedasingh offers them exactly that. Hence, this open space renders social service and helps to maintain cohesiveness.

Social Territory and Boundary

The concept of inside–outside is most easily understood in terms of territoriality. The people living around this nodal point are predominantly Newar, but they are not homogeneously of the same clan and religion. In the settlement pattern, they have their distinct caste-based congregation or clan-based agglomeration with a defined territory and boundary but that territorial boundary breaks to form a common homogeneous place in the form of a community nodal point shared by all without any barrier. Such an organisation of space into sub-divisions fulfils peoples’ need to have a sense of identity based on territory, and yet the boundaries of that sub-division fluidly disappear to become composite community space.

Sense of a Place

A sense of place implies that people experience something beyond the physical or sensory properties of a place. They feel an attachment to the spirit of a place (Jackson 1994). Phenomenology plays a key role so do the psychological and experiential aspects in the realisation of a sense of place. The concept ‘sense of space’ emphasises the ‘sense of belongingness’ or emotional attachment. The ordered layout of Bhedasingh, with its hierarchy of patterns and the character, of the relationship between interior and exterior

space and its functional use aspects give it a well-defined sense of vitality that promotes a sense of place among its residents.

Community and Public Use of a Place

In a broader sense, the meaning of community use is very close to the meaning of public use and domain. Access to public use is unobstructed and the place has a public belongingness and ownership in use. Obviously, the urban design of a public place has to be very much contextual. Bhedasingh is essentially a public open space and categorically has public uses. Semi-private and private domains open to it as extended space. There is compatibility, spatial and social fluidity without any conflict.

Religious and Cultural Landmarks

Socio-religious and cultural artefacts are of immense social value for any society. They weave the cohesive fabric of the society. They are cultural landmarks and are treasured as heritage and identity and are the focus of the community through collective acts of creation, worship, and maintenance. Bhedasingh has inherited many artefacts in all cardinal directions and in close proximity. Seto Machhindranath in the east, Naradevi in the west, Akash Bhairab in the south, and Ikha Narayan in the north are pronounced cultural landmarks surrounding it as the fixed co-ordinates of a larger society of which its residents are a part. These temples have a tremendous positive impact on the socialisation of Bhedasingh node. They help the interactive process of the community around and outside the node.

Use Factors

The spatial use factors in Bhedasingh vary according to the time of the day. In the early morning, this node is primarily taken up by vegetable vendors, but there are other goods also for sale. The pottery corner in the southeast corner is also quite vibrant. As the sun moves westward, the social pattern and lifestyle, including food, changes and accordingly the square also changes function. Other

kinds of merchandise are also on sale. In the morning hours, the nodal point looks like a market square, but as the day progresses, the ground floor stores in the houses open up with all sorts of merchandise for sale. This nodal space provides the ambience for people to congregate, including those who are not involved in any transaction but who come to socialise. Some standing, some sitting on temple steps, and some walking about, each group of people has its own distinct area and privacy without any intrusion. Hence, it reveals an amazing public-private balance in the way it promotes intercourse and protects privacy at the same time.

Norms of Behaviour

Social perceptions and norms exercise a certain code of behaviour for individuals using the place for different objectives. The gathering of people here is regulated by unwritten social norms that are spontaneously followed and hardly breached. The social control system works in a very implicit way and helps people make use of this public space.

Social and Economic Gradient

Bhedasingh also serves as an indicator of the social and economic gradient. This is well-depicted by the nature, characteristics, and their gradient in ascending or descending order, as the hierarchy of open spaces are followed. It gyrates from the lowest order to highest order, for example, the kinetic movement from the simple peripheral public square to the durbar square. The tempo goes on increasing or decreasing as the situation determines.

Environmental Parameters

Though an environment in totality is inclusive of its physical, socio-cultural, biological, and chemical dimensions, only the physical environment, consisting of air, light (sun), water, earth, and sky, basically the *pancha tatwa*, are studied under the environmental parameter. The environmental role of open spaces is to safeguard urban ecology. Essentially, these open spaces of various type and

sizes serve to propagate a 'pro-life' environment. The five elements of cosmology, as quoted in the *Atharvaveda*, namely *jal*, *thal*, *nava*, *agni*, and *vayu* (water, earth, sky, fire, and air) have an intrinsic relationship with the environmental parameters. However, instead of covering all the *pancha tatwa*, the focus is obviously the grates which pertains most to human health in an urban environment. The sun and light play a huge role in safeguarding the health of the people. In *Vaastushastra*, the concept of *kendrasthal* or *brahmasthal* is also guided by environmental concerns, and based on that, various open spaces have been placed in Bhedasingh. It is very clear that the spatial composition of the place has been dictated, as in many other such spaces in the old cities of Kathmandu in the past, with a view to letting in sunlight. Both the south and partly the east have unobstructed angles for the sun. The air flow from the eastern and southern direction is adequate for both indoors and the outdoors. The open nodal square and *lachchi* in the northeast segment of the node allows people to bask in the sun. Due to the favourable sun angle, the square and street surface is well lit and the building facades catch the sun's rays.

The hard landscape of the square and streets with open joints allows rainwater to permeate through and find its way to the soft landscape in private properties (backyards). This allows the natural cycle to operate without barriers and recharge the ground water. The grey and green relationship was ecologically well-balanced and a harmonious relationship prevails between public and private spaces. The surface water run-off either gets soaked through or is drained to retention ponds. The strong social and environmental aspect of the *lachchi* in Bhedasingh is that it is placed for the right orientation for maximum exposure to sunlight. From an environmental point of view, this is an excellent example of 'place-making' that serves social and environmental purposes. It can be categorically stated that Bhedasingh is socially as well as environmentally a very dynamic and vibrant enclave.

Behavioural Parameter

Psychologically, the socio-physical setting of a place exerts behavioural influences on people by generating an atmosphere that prompts attitudes responsive to the setting. The causes of the influence are due to the following factors:

- I. Cultural impact,
- II. Cultural landscape of the society,
- III. Culturally shaped places and societal art of place-making,
- IV. Behavioural reflexes and responses vis-a-vis event happenings,
- V. Variables and attributes of a place,
- VI. Societal norms and thresholds,
- VII. Spatial cognitive congruence imparting behavioural variables, and
- VIII. Psychosis subject to environmental setting of a place.

Open spaces of various natures and scales in the traditional urban context can be explored and observed as independent variables, and once constituted, they affect people in various ways, socially and behaviourally. It is known that the spatial configurations, consisting of solids and voids, either communicate a desirable way for individuals or groups to locate themselves in a place or traverse through them, and as a result, desirable conditions for personal encounters and norms of behaviour are exercised spontaneously. The observation of a place reveals its multi-dimensional performance. The taxonomy of Bhedasingh seems to involve the followings:

- I. Functional aspects: Does the place satisfy the synergy of activities of the community?
- II. Social aspects: Does the place provide desirable ways for individuals to place themselves in the space and move through with desirable patterns of place?
- III. Top-centric: Is the place visible and legible?

- IV. Affective: Which psychological aspect affects the behavioural aspect, what 'emotional state, does it evoke (e.g., solemnity, coldness, warmth, formality, informality)?

Bhedasingh very clearly provides the above behavioural impacts due its cultural landscape and morphological construct.

Bhedasingh underlines the importance of planning to scale while simultaneously keeping in mind all the variables—social, institutional, and environmental—that are essential for sustaining a healthy urban life. However, these old prototypes are rapidly being destroyed in contemporary Kathmandu, whose modernising impulses show little concern for far-sighted long-term sustainability. The very principles and institutions on which settlements were created are being undermined. In traditional Kathmandu, uniquely, most of the open spaces were created through endowments by individuals or *guthis*. These open spaces in the past were comfortably proportioned to the population. However, over the past three decades, the scenario has dramatically changed and the absorption of open spaces for various trivial and self-centred reasons, driven by private profit or government need, has been the major accelerating factor to create urban blight.

Globally, public space devoted for urban recreational purposes range from 3 to 10 acres per 1000 population. On top of that, 10 per cent of the gross city area is reserved for future need for public space. Quite often, it is argued that the components of open spaces, including wetlands, should be within the range of 20 to 25 per cent of urban 'area' to make living conditions comfortable and conducive. However, with the speed at which space is being consumed in the Kathmandu Valley to create buildings unsuitable for the environment and recreating a city unsuitable for healthy people, globally accepted ratios for sustainable urban living are being discarded. Clearly, we have two very distinct scenarios of open space systems. The one from the past which was organic to society is being rapidly displaced by the other which has been ushered in during the last three decades—driven by individuals, corporations,

and governments with scarcely any thought towards long term sustainability. This is the challenge of urban planning today.

The so-called successful planning tool of land-pooling being practiced for urban development these days should increase the percentage of open spaces in the planning practices, instead of the usual 4 per cent being allocated for the purpose. The scale of urban building activity has increased dramatically, especially in the last 10 years. We must learn from our past to protect the fragile urban environment. There are no longer any simple technical solutions; rather the whole process should adopt an eco-centric social planning approach where public open spaces are put on the highest agenda.

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Public Spaces in Today's Metropolitan Structure

BIRESH SHAH

One of the most common comments that one comes across in Kathmandu to describe the despondency over the present condition of urban development is 'there is no planning' or 'planning *bhayena*'. It may come as a surprise for many to know that the Kathmandu Valley is one of the most frequently planned cities in South Asia (at least on paper). Since the early 1960s, several master plans have been prepared.¹ There are many reasons why these plans were not implemented effectively. However, given the nature of the land market and the phenomenon of urbanisation in the last few decades in the Valley, it became almost impossible to implement most conventionally developed plans. The landholding mosaic of the Valley, made complex by thousands of years of continuous habitation and a specific socio-political history of urban evolution, does not lend itself easily to the stipulations of modern urban planning, which has been developed from a very forceful tradition of city-building in the West.

Urbanisation is a natural outcome of modern development policies and globalisation. Less than 20 per cent of Nepal's almost 30 million population live in urban areas today. However, as the population of the world transforms towards a primarily urban world, this low percentage of urban population creates huge pressures on existing urban centres. Extreme pressure of urbanisation exerted upon principal urban centres like the Kathmandu Valley, in a

1 Nirmal Acharya in his Master of Science in Urban Planning thesis at Tribhuvan University has recorded that between the 1960s and 2000 almost three dozen studies and plans were prepared in the field of urban planning, urban infrastructure development, and urban heritage conservation. These plans were prepared by experts from around the world in collaboration with local experts, and sponsored by every major international aid agency.

predominantly non-urban nation, cannot be fully anticipated in urban master plans. It, therefore, becomes especially challenging to establish a legible urban structure for the rapidly expanding metropolis. In the development of a city, urbanplanning interventions seek to define and establish the interests of the larger urban community parallel to private actions. This is primarily achieved through strengthening the role of the public domain in the city, which is vital for a healthy city life. This agenda becomes especially challenging in a city like Kathmandu.

It is recorded that small settlements emerged on high ground in the Kathmandu Valley almost two millennia ago. The architecture and urban form of the Kathmandu Valley that developed from 13th to 18th centuries marks the high point in the civilisation of the Valley. The Valley, which was divided into three city-states in this period, is the capital region of Nepal today and its principal metropolis. An original architectural language in fired clay bricks and wood evolved in the Valley, which has been the subject of much attention in the past few decades of scholars and conservationists from around the world. The building types during this period of development largely remained residential and religious. Building forms and urban space were very closely knitted into the urban fabric. The urban form was regulated by a matrix of an elaborate system of urban spaces and corresponding rituals. The urban structure, which developed during this period, consisted of a hierarchy of principal and secondary cities, and satellite settlements. In the traditional urban structure, the fixing of town boundaries and demarcating the built-up area of the town from the surrounding region of agricultural landscape was particularly significant. This was achieved by the positioning of shrines of the *Ashtamatrikas*, the eight mother goddesses, and other deities and their corresponding rituals.

Much has been researched and written about the highly sophisticated urban space system present in the physical fabric of the Malla period cities of the Kathmandu Valley. Many scholars, including Sudarshan Raj Tiwari and Niels Gutschow, have written

extensively about the fabric of these historic cities in the Valley. The durbar squares, the many city squares, the *bahals*, the *chowks* in cities like Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur, Thimi, and Kirtipur are testament to this distinctive typology of traditional urban space and its effortless weaving with the built-form and socio-cultural life patterns that give the traditional urban form such distinction.

The scale, nature, and speed of urban development in the past decades has coalesced the entire Valley into one continuous urban conurbation. The nature of the urban development of the past decades has rendered the contemporary metropolis devoid of any comprehensible physical/spatial structure. However, with the public sites available to us today, it is entirely possible to develop a contemporary public space typology, which can be the basis of a new structure. A comprehensible urban structure of the metropolis is of substantial significance for the citizen to understand his/her city and be in a position to usefully participate in city-building.

Properly thought-out and developed public spaces are significant in many ways. These spaces in neighbourhoods become the extensions of limited space of the private domain and provide spaces for many shared activities of the surrounding community. They become places to meet, to host social events, to provide sites for socio-cultural infrastructure, to launch public campaigns, to manage natural disasters. City-life is about building a complex matrix of interactions, which creates scale, diversity, innovations, and opportunities. Well-developed public spaces in the city support this aspect of the city, apart from imparting 'space multiplier' effect to the private space.

Since the pattern of landholdings in the Kathmandu Valley makes it difficult to significantly influence land-use and what gets built on private land, it is the publicly owned land that provides us with the opportunity to implement planned interventions for the benefit of the city and its citizens. Based on the range of public-owned sites observed in the city, it is possible to propose a typology of seven categories of public spaces of the city.

City District Centres

This category consists of large publicly-owned land parcels distributed in different parts of the city, both within and outside the Ring Road. This category refers to the several large parcels of land existing as public space used historically for a variety of purposes or acquired by the government in the past decades for specific purposes. A number of these sites are in key locations of the city, and their original use has transformed today. Since a certain amount of uncertainty exists regarding their future use, such sites are suitable for a variety of purposes where large sites are needed. Such land parcels are typically large and sometimes contested by a variety of groups (private and public) for contemporary use.

Although these sites have a variety of institutional ownership and vary in sizes, the one common aspect is that they are all publicly owned. Some of these sites are the Tinkune plot, the Katunje field, Narayanchaur, and Siphanchaur. This category also includes large land areas created and developed by the government over the past decades, which seemed to have outlived their original purpose and are very likely to come up for new development in the near future, such as National Trading Limited at Teku, Sajha Yatayat at Pulchowk, Nepal Scouts headquarters at Lainchaur, Bhrikuti Mandap, and Bal Mandir compound in Naxal.

This type of sites offers us the opportunity to develop a variety of civic amenities that contribute to the socio-cultural infrastructure of the city which has been grossly deficient. Too often than not, such sites get leased by the authorities to private developers for commercial development in the name of public-private partnerships. Since these are publicly-owned large plots of land, they offer the only opportunity to put in place important amenities that the city urgently requires to become a healthy liveable place. These amenities could include urban parks, children's play area, libraries, community centres, cultural centres, health centres, museums, and educational facilities.²

² Some of the most frequently used facilities in the city like the City Hall, Nepal Academy complex, Bhrikuti Mandap, Rastriya Naach Ghar were developed in the

Ring Road Nodes

As the city grows significantly beyond the Ring Road towards the foothills, the new sub-cities outside the Ring Road have led to the emergence of points of convergences at the Ring Road, which have evolved into important urban nodes in the new metropolitan structure. These spaces offer significant potential to be planned and developed into major urban places of the new city. Such places may also be emerging beyond the Ring Road, where the development has penetrated deep into the Valley.

These 'type' of spaces are already functioning urban nodes, where a variety of patterns of activity can be discerned. These nodes provide the interface between the central city bounded by the Ring Road and the sub-cities growing beyond, such as Kalanki, Balkhu, Sitapaila, Bhainsepati, Imadol-Gwarko, Gatthaghar, Bansbaari-Budhanilkantha, and Dhapasi.

These are highly active sites with complex flows of activities, and they should be mapped carefully to derive a detailed programme for their development. Activities which shape these sites range from vehicular traffic flows to transport interchange, retail sales, and a variety of other exchange activities. These places require a detailed study, which can form the basis of discussions for envisioning their future form. A lot of energy is palpable in these sites, which can be shaped spatially along with new amenities for the future to create unique urban spaces for the evolving metropolis.

Neighbourhood Centres

In new neighbourhoods outside the three old cities of the Kathmandu Valley, certain strategic public sites of reasonable size have become nodes for these neighbourhoods. These are leftover *parti* plots³ in strategic locations in neighbourhoods such as Rastra Bank Chowk in Baluwatar, Bhatbhateni, Maharajganj, and Babar Mahal. These have

early 1970s. Since then, the city has exponentially grown in terms of population as well as spatially, without any significant addition to the socio-cultural infrastructure.

3 Land parcels which for many reasons have remained outside any individual's ownership and are now owned by the state. Traditionally these spaces were also shared spaces used by local communities.

been the most susceptible to encroachments by local institutions and also by local user groups trying to ‘protect’ them by fencing.

These sites are leftover spaces from the past as public land (*parti jagga*), usually in the vicinity of a palace compound or some institutional complex. As the urban development around these sites intensified to form new neighbourhoods, several activities related to the evolving neighbourhoods have converged here imparting a new identity to these sites. For a long time, these sites have remained very public, used as taxi-stands and school bus-stops, space for public gatherings during specific events, by vendors, for essential shopping, and for post offices. However, as the city has not been able to create new sites for various essential purposes, such sites have also been occupied by community halls, public schools, and ward offices. These constructions have been built on the available open space at these sites. The constructed edifices have then been surrounded by new boundary walls to further diminish the amount of open space. Rastra Bank Chowk in Baluwatar, which has evolved as an important urban node in the new city, is a good illustration of this transformation.⁴

In recent years, neighbourhood ‘user groups’ have built boundary

4 Rastra Bank Chowk in Baluwatar is a good example of this transformation. Originally, the chowk consisted of two sites divided by the main road and by topography on two levels. The eastern higher site consists of a large pipal tree, several religious shrines, a small school building, and open space. The lower western site was largely used as taxi parking, as a terminus for micro-buses, school buses, the electric-powered three-wheeler tempos. It had a large round chautara under a khari tree (subsequently cut down) and a post office in the guard house of the gatehouse of the erstwhile Rana palace. The spaces were open sites and hosted a variety of uses throughout the day. Eventually, a variety of shops emerged in the surrounding private compounds, and the places acquired the characteristics of a neighbourhood centre.

In the last decade, the eastern site has been almost completely built over and walled. The ward office built its office building and created its own compound. The school subsequently walled a large part of the site and built new extension structures to accommodate its ever-expanding needs. The remaining space has been walled as a community hall. Subsequently, a local users’ group launched a campaign to save the western site from encroachments. Through donations made by the local community, they have built a new garden in this space, which is fenced now with a new gate. The garden is open to citizens on a predetermined schedule. While all these actions are well-intentioned, and each serves a definite public use, the ‘public’ nature of the space has changed significantly.

walls in the remaining spaces to ward off illegal encroachments from surrounding properties. Some of these bounded areas have been developed as 'pretty gardens', which are opened on specific times of the day. Northeast of Bhatbhateni temple is a large public space which for decades was an open space used by the public in a variety of ways throughout the day and throughout the year. About a decade ago, in the name of improvement, the space was fenced with a fancy boundary wall, and a formal garden was laid out within. The garden looks beautiful, but it can only be accessed when the gate is opened at particular times of the day.

With these actions, the public nature of a number of these sites has disappeared. This has also resulted from a lack of urban space related guidelines at the KMC (Kathmandu Metropolitan City office). However, these areas still have a lot of potential for future development.

Cultural Sites

These are sites attached to religious edifices or have historical associations with the city, such as Dhumbarahi, Mhyepi, Tunal Devi, Sorakhutte, Gahanapokhari, the several *dhobi chauras*, or open grasslands for traditions washer caste to dry clothes, the many *dhungedharas*, or stone spouts, and the *pokharis* or ponds. The spaces in this category exist in many sizes and possess a variety of characteristics. Since the Valley has been continuously developed and inhabited for over two millennia, such sites are spread all over the valley floor.

As the contemporary metropolis spreads throughout the Valley floor, these sites (especially the ones outside the limits of the traditional historical settlements) have acquired the position of important nodes in the new neighbourhoods. Apart from meeting some functional needs, these sites also lend identity to these new neighbourhoods. The common factor is that they have a historical association with the city, with specific deities, and cultural practices, historical events. A number of these sites have also been subjected to encroachments, as the city fills up around them. The challenge

is to develop these sites for contemporary public usage, while conserving their essential historical/cultural characteristics. Some of the historical forested sites can also be included in this category, such as Raniban and Bansbari.

Tole Corners

These are points of convergence or a widening in the roads in the new neighbourhoods, little residual spaces in the tightly built new neighbourhoods, which offer the possibility of a shopping node, parking area, shrine, waste collection, bus stop, taxi stand. Properly planned, they can have significant value in the quality of life in the neighbourhoods. Since most of contemporary Kathmandu does not possess a grid-iron layout⁵, the organic geometry of roads and their varying widths establishes a variety of such incidental sites at intersections and turnings of roads. These spaces are seen in almost all new neighbourhoods.

Besides the five types of public spaces, available in the city today, as described above, the following two categories of public spaces also have the potential to transform the character of our metropolis, if appropriately considered.

Riverfronts

The river system is one of the main reasons why civilisation flourished in the Valley in the first place. The riverfront offers continuous public space along its edges in the new city, and its conservation and maintenance promise an improved ecology of the city and a healthy environment for the citizens. Over the decades, the relationship of the riverfront with the city has undergone major transformation.

Initially, the riverfronts were developed as significant religious sites set at a close proximity but away from the city. Subsequently, as the city grew on the farming areas around the city cores, the riverfront developed into concentrations of marginal communities

⁵ The geometry of street pattern in a city where roads are laid out in strictly perpendicular directions at fixed intervals.

and several marginalised activities such as garbage collection and sorting. Subsequently, a number of squatter settlements emerged. In the past decades, the role of the riverfront has also transformed to become intra-city connectors with the construction of vehicular roads along the banks. The riverfront already hosts a variety of public activities due to the religious complexes, availability of public space, accessibility from dense urban areas. Properly developing the riverfronts as public space for the city should be a natural next step.

Streetscapes

As the various parts of the city physically densify, road frontages change to host a range of activities, imparting the qualities of a street. As these streets develop, it is important to define the characteristics of desired streetscapes for different stretches of existing city roads. In recent times, the city landscape has been dominated by the intensive road widening undertaken by the government. However, this endeavour seems to be primarily focused towards increasing the road surface area in the city to facilitate the flow of vehicular traffic. The functional and visual character of roads, as they transform into streets can be meaningfully influenced to give the city a more memorable image.

Even today, when most roads lack any street characteristics and do not possess any definite image, the most imaginable streetscapes like New Road, Durbar Marg, and Mangal Bazaar are the streetscapes through which we understand the form of the city. The architecture and urban design of buildings forming the edge of the road, the characteristics of footpaths, tree plantation, signage, lighting, the installation of utility services (drainage, water supply, electrical supply, and telecommunications supply lines) all contribute to the street's character, which is essential in imparting visual and spatial legibility to any city.

The categories of public spaces in today's Kathmandu need not be limited to the categories described above to demonstrate the possibility of a latent public space typology. The identification, documentation, study, design, and development of this proposed

typology of public spaces offers an opportunity for community groups, urban planners, architects, administrators, elected municipal officials, scholars and (most importantly) citizens to work together to understand, imagine, and develop a crucial aspect of the city.

One of the critical tasks in achieving this is establishing a rigorous process of designing and planning for these public spaces. In the recent past, very often we have seen that even with the best intentions to improve the public space, the actual project constructed comes across as shabby and casually thought out. The constructed space, therefore, fails to acquire any value for the society and the city in the long term. An effective design process needs to be set in place, which is based on optimisation of space, experiential qualities of the space, accurate programming of requirements, detailed documentation of the site, intensive engagement with the communities and user groups, setting standards of aesthetics and construction to be achieved, involving high-quality craftsmanship and development of viable financing strategies. The design vision for each site needs to emerge as a synthesis of all these elements. We must also refer once again to the design and planning of great public spaces of our historic cities, like the Patan Durbar Square, Dattatreya Square, and the Kathmandu Durbar Square to fathom what it takes to establish an effective design process for achieving contemporary public space of similar quality.

A project proposal developed nearly 15 years ago by the author and three architect colleagues that sought to articulate public spaces in the new parts of the city is worth illustrating here. The group prepared a proposal on improvements to a variety of public spaces in the city, called the Urban Space Improvement Initiatives. In this proposal, 11 sites in city were identified for a pilot project.⁶ The main objective of the proposal was to focus on building a

⁶ The 11 sites selected in the city were: Chabahil Ring Road intersection, Koteswor Ring Road node, Kalanki Ring Road intersection, Balaju Ring Road intersection, Sorahkhutte, Maharajganj Chowk, Rastra Bank Chowk in Baluwatar, Bishalnagar, Handigaun and Bhatbhateni chowks, Babar Mahal intersection, Teku-Kalimati streetscape, Baneshwor city district.

strong civic character in the newly developing areas of the city, parallel to the extensive efforts in improvements and conservation being undertaken in the historic urban cores. The project aimed at developing more effective methods of planning, which were customised and required the collaboration of municipal authorities, communities, many government agencies, and corporate houses.

The group prepared preliminary documentations of these sites and made concept sketches of possible improvements of each site along with tentative cost estimates. The proposal was then presented to KMC for consideration. The group also proposed a process by which the KMC could implement the project.⁷ As a project focused on learning about city development through action on the ground, it was hoped that the experience from this project could be developed into a set of guidelines for public spaces in the city by the KMC, encompassing documentation, design, implementation, financing, participation, and management. The main strength of the proposal lay in the detailed observation of each site with an open mind and the dialogues with local interest groups. A series of dialogues with KMC were held to take this idea further. However, due to KMC's preoccupation with other development works that were ongoing, the project did not progress any further. Since then, a number of these places have been fenced and closed in the name of preventing encroachments or have been taken over by schools, clubs, and ward offices. Some of the more visible examples are Rastra Bank Chowk in Baluwatar and Bhatbhateni Chowk described above.

7 The proposed implementation process required detailed documentation of each site in terms of spatial dimensions, topography, functions, uses, activities, visual characteristics, environmental conditions, form characteristics among others. It was proposed that based on the documentation, a detailed programme for each site would be prepared first with KMC and the respective ward offices. Conceptual design proposal would then be prepared to discuss with interest groups from the neighbourhood. The premise was that KMC would help formulate a local users' committee for each site. After the discussion of the conceptual plans with the community (user groups), detailed design scheme would be prepared with designs, views, cost estimates, and other details. Based on these discussions, the final scheme would be prepared with a detailed financing and construction strategy. The site, which showed the most potential, could be implemented as a pilot by KMC to test out the whole effort.

The emphasis on preserving the ‘public nature’ of spaces in the city is critically important in bringing about a healthy socio-cultural transformation in the city. One of the important considerations, in this regard, can be creating means through which campuses in the city owned by government institutions be made more publicly accessible. Not only can this effort make space in important locations in the city accessible for public use, it can also transform public perception about institutions and their roles in the lives of citizens. From a public perception dominated today by speculation in property values and profit-making in urban property, steps need to be taken to shift the focus to investing into and engaging with the city. It is important to create an environment that encourages a culture of giving back to the city rather than just profiting from it.

The above typology of open spaces offers the opportunity to start a campaign to map these spaces in detail in terms of topographical and environmental characteristics, use patterns, and future potentials, jointly by all concerned stakeholders. The objective should be to develop a contemporary urban culture around consciousness of public places in the city. Getting involved in learning about public space in one’s city, studying in detail, discussing possibilities and building public consensus can also be effective urban planning in the context of Kathmandu. Hopefully, such efforts can contribute towards the building of a vibrant new culture which is deeply interested in the city, its wellbeing, and development.

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This article was written a decade ago. Since then Kathmandu Valley metropolis has grown further and some Sites mentioned in the article have transformed significantly due to a variety of design/planning interventions. However, the ideas and concept presented in this article to establish a contemporary typology of public spaces for the Metropolis still offer significant possibilities.

The Open Spaces of Kathmandu Valley

A Cultural Landscape Perspective

PRATYUSH SHANKAR

Background

The landscape of a place, which consists of the physical settings like landform, vegetation, and water features, is the context of the existence of all material culture including cities and their architecture. According to John B. Jackson (1994), the idea of landscape as a physical setting or a picturesque scene is a 16th century phenomenon when certain Dutch painters and English writers began representing the aesthetics of the land. The notion that landscape is only a physical surface setting has since been challenged by many scholars. The idea of landscape that is formed or perceived as a result of the interplay between the earlier natural environment and human activities is what is of interest to us in understanding the material spatial culture of a place.

The narrative around the Himalayas and its cities gives us an interesting insight into the perception of its landscapes. In most Hindu epics, the Himalayas are often described as the abode of the gods, a land far removed from worldly existence—pure, sacred, and disconnected. This cultural idea of the Himalayas can be understood in some specific ways here. It seems the geographical space of the Himalayas is almost considered to be an antithesis to the very idea of a material city—a place not for humans but for the gods, which is not polluted by humans and disconnected from the flows of the world. The Himalayan space of habitation is considered to be one with nature, forests, springs, and rivers. The idea of the Himalayas in the subcontinent is an important one for defining the plains themselves. The Himalayas is seen to protect and nourish the

plain below, both physically and culturally, but at the same time represent the inversion of the worldly ways, and a retreat for the ascetic, asylum for the wanderer and the renouncer.

Western folklore often associated the idea of 'lost' and exotic 'Shangri-La' to the region of the Himalayas and Tibet (Waldman 1999), comparable to 'Garden of Eden', where all wishes come true and people are immortal. This again is a complete antithesis to the material and mortal world we inhabit. The idea of a city in the Himalayas seems to connote a contrast with those of the other places. There is definitely an idea of purity and uniqueness associated with these settlements in popular culture. The Kathmandu Valley has been perceived to be an extremely special geographic entity, rich in resources with a favourable climate and a hotbed of culture over a long period of time. Whelpton (2005) describes the legends associated around the formation of the Kathmandu Valley, its claim to historicity dating back to Licchavi period settlements and the fact that it has absorbed a variety of ethnicities from both the plains below and the high mountains above lends it a unique status, more like the plains amidst mountains.

The Idea of Landscape in the Himalayas and the Kathmandu Valley

Material culture like architecture and public spaces are perceived to exist in a particular landscape context. However, the essay takes the premise that the landscape of an area (region or immediate surrounding) where the city exists is not only a background setting but rather a fundamental factor in shaping the culture of the place including material culture (Schama 1995). This has been elaborated through illustrations of the cities of the Kathmandu Valley. To understand the uniqueness of the settlements in the Himalayas, it is important to first understand the landscape of its existence. The hills, and especially the Himalayan mountains, have a unique physical landscape condition that first needs to be understood in order to further decipher the cities and its public places. The Himalayas range runs east to west (about 2400 km), and the basic

formation of the ranges is such that it feeds the major river systems of South Asia. The rivers that start from the glacier of the melting snow at the higher altitude spent millennia carving the valleys and ridges of contemporary Nepal. The formation is one of the most important features that has had a profound and continual impact on subsequent human activities and settlements. Almost all settlements in Nepal exist in valleys of rivers or streams.

Cities of Valleys

The landscape of the area in and around the cities in the hills is extremely different and unique. There is no concept of infinite resources as in the plains, where the idea of infinity or the world beyond the horizon is to be explored, plundered, and occupied. In the hills, the natural resources are rich but limited; the physical world has a defined limit. The city acts as the repository of the surplus of the region of valleys, and hence the river and the valleys become domains that are to be respected, understood, and worked with. There is hardly any possibility for different landscape interpretations. Water gushes from the higher to lower level, and brings mud and rocks during the monsoon. Humans can only walk where the land is gentle enough to not toss them off their feet; crops can only grow in terraces possible only on certain slopes; the winter months are harsh as there is no firewood and food, so communities must store in advance; and it takes days to travel from one valley to another and the water tastes different there; the mountains are of different colours; the river paths are not the same and yet it feels the same, but also distinctively different.

More importantly, the surplus of one valley cannot be physically brought to another valley; it can only go down to other settlements in the same valley. It has also been acknowledged that the political economy of the Himalayas should be perceived as unique. Therefore, the city in a mountain is bound to a valley and a river, and the valley both protects and restricts the cities. The world beyond cannot be captured but the only way it can be understood is through trade. Often the settlements lie on the dry ridges, commanding a view of

both sides of the valley. These settlements are on firmer ground that is not prone to landslide, and flat ground can be used for common activities.

From Fig 1 showing the smaller settlements in the Kathmandu Valley and Fig 2 showing the position of Patan town, it is clear that there is a specific attitude towards the placement of the settlements with respect to the protruded ridges. So how does the unique geography impact the way material and other cultures are shaped over a period of time, and more importantly, can it influence the nature of public open spaces? The valley as a geographical entity becomes the container that at the surface seems pretty self-contained and physically well-defined. Unlike the plains, a valley system has extremely strong landscape references. The landscape of the Himalayas is unique in each space with specific site circumstances. The situation of the valley, the contours, the water, and the vegetation together seems to form a strong and unique condition. It is not generic like the plains; rather, it is specific to the place. Therefore, the spatial expression (architecture, public spaces) has to be sited extremely well; it has to be sure and specific

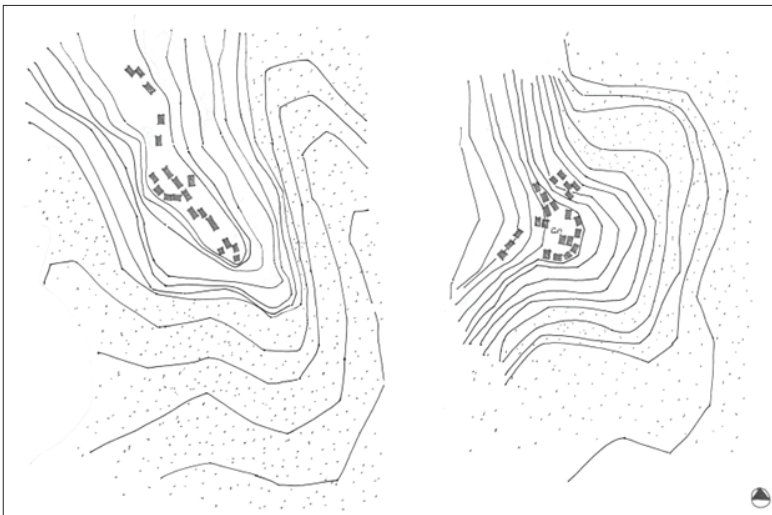


Figure 1: Settlements on Ridges

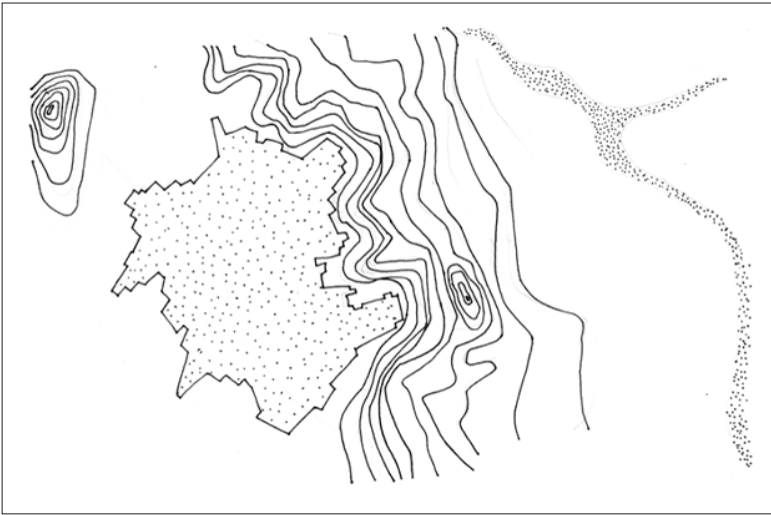


Figure 2: Patan on the Ridge

and it is a direct response to the immediate context. The cities of the plains, however, at a very generic level have also been the part of larger kingdoms or geographically spread-out civilisations. The spatial attitude then responds more to the larger civilisational symbols that are common across geographies with a purpose of transcending both time and space.

The architectural expression of the Kathmandu Valley seems to demonstrate this directness and surety of the typical Himalayan settlements and at the same instance carries immense symbolism that point towards larger civilisational aspirations more like the ones in the plains. This is discussed in detail in subsequent sections. The larger idea of the immediate landscape in terms of flows of water, slopes of land, and connection of agrarian communities with natural conditions seems to influence the idea of built and consequently also the open spaces. This collides with the larger civilisational aspirations that were projected during the medieval period (15th-18th century) under the Malla dynasty, which was supported by the surplus that came from the rich agricultural practices. The context of landscape of both the hill-valley phenomenon and the

landsurplus economy resulted in the unique settlement built-form in the Kathmandu Valley.

Spatial Mental Constructs: Orientation and Direction

The formation of a valley is a direct result of the flow of water from higher to lower altitudes. The flow of the river from high glaciers to the plains below is the first and amongst the strongest physical reality that needs to be acknowledged in the landscape. The fact that one is always near flowing water that is making its way from higher to lower ground is a fundamental reality that cannot be denied in a valley, and also in its cities or the surrounding landscape. The human constructs of both orientation (locating oneself) and direction then becomes the function of the flow of water. The direction of the flow of the river tells a very important story. It locates us as we realise the higher slopes above and the lower ones below, giving a sense of direction and hence orientation. Unlike the plains where the sun and the horizon play an important role in orienting the human mind, in the hills it is the flow of the water that helps us read the landscape, thereby creating a strong physical sense of direction.

The valley, with its higher and lower areas, becomes a kind of container that creates a spatial realm that is partially isolated from adjacent valleys. The natural connection of the valley will be either to the higher passes and the 'land beyond' or lower down to the plains. This is where the role of the routes that connect the cities of the valley to the plains below and others beyond the high passes becomes important. The valley touches areas of lower altitude and subsequently connects with the plains and the many worlds there. The myths and legends of a place are often restricted to a particular valley and do not necessarily extend to adjacent valleys. However, the Kathmandu Valley seems to thrive on the duality of the hills and the plains. The Valley is home to myths and practices that are unique to the place, but at the same time reach a level of refinement and symbolism that they travel across space and time. Does the specific landscape condition, which results in certain kinds of mental constructs of orientation and space, lead to spatial

constructs that are specific or generic? And more importantly, does the spatial expressions of these cities rely more on physical and legible expressions or are they more abstract and non-legible ones?

Looking at many Himalayan cities, it is very clear that the expressions of architecture and public places emerge very clearly and are physically direct. It seems that the idea of the 'universal' in terms of knowledge systems, religious symbolism, and ritual is less pronounced in the Himalayas in general than in the plains, but the Kathmandu Valley settlements are a hybrid lot, demonstrating the characteristics of both the typical Himalayas and also the plains. The connectedness with the physical space is much stronger, but at the same time it shows strong non-physical ideas of the city, like a complex of knowledge, religious, and transcendental ideas that are shared in a city. For example, an overriding mythological-religious existence of a city, or a city that justifies its existence to the elaborate knowledge domains that are shared like crafts, science, or traditional engineering apart from the direct reference to the immediate physical context. An examination of the main public spaces of Kathmandu Valley cities (composed of grounds, markets, and palaces) leads to some very interesting findings and corroborates the idea of legible and strong physical spatial expressions along with the ones that are more complex and more symbolic. The open space in the form of durbar square with the palace in a kind of binary opposition seems to be a generic response in most Himalayan cities and can be seen in many examples. But the development of certain architectural typologies, such as tiered pagoda temples, *hitis* (water fountains), house typology and *patis* (roadside public resting sheds), is indicative of a much more generic and typological response that became the hallmark of the civilisation.

The Human Constructs: Routes, Grounds, and Markets

Trade routes hold a very special place in the perception of the Himalayan region and its cities. Due to the physical isolation of cities in the Himalayas, trade routes become the tenacious connection with the world outside. Downstream trade routes act as collectors,

bringing with them various traders from the plains and different regional influences, and towards the north beyond the high passes, they connect the valley to the world beyond the Himalayas (Tibet) or to the highway of the world (the Silk Route). The cities often have a road that passes through to these trade routes as a reminder to the connection with the world beyond. The city sees itself lying on a route. This perception is further reinforced by the presence of open grounds in the city that are occupied by traders and their animals and now perhaps replaced by trucks. In towns that have arisen on ideas of trade, the physical fabric displays and symbolises these connections with the outer world much more prominently, such as the market and the open spaces right in the centre of the town in cities like Leh, Chamba, and Mandi in the Indian Himalayas and Patan and Kathmandu in Nepal.

These markets are very different from the ones that are in other parts of the town. They are not specialised, but rather are full of the 'exotics' from different lands: Chinese goods from Tibet, *masalas* from south India, or DVD players from Southeast Asia. The market and the open ground together give a feel of temporariness with loose definition of spaces, allowing for flexible interpretations—informal markets by visiting traders, space to organise goods, and ground for fairs. The open ground in the centre of the city, along with the market, is an important symbol of the connection of the city with a very different world outside and far away. Trade also brings about new ideas into cities with the presence of strangers, marriages outside the caste domain, or settlers from different lands. The Mangal Bazaar area in Patan, with the durbar square and the palace beside it, has perhaps much more history to the place in the form of an open ground and market which were then transformed to its present form. Mary Slusser (in Slusser, Vajracharya, and Fuller 2005) suggests a much more ancient origin of the place that dates back to the Licchavi period. It is not surprising that this area has always been the heart of the city. The same preferred site then perhaps became the one where the palace is sited.

The landscape setting of such places, which form the centre of



Figure 3: The Durbar Square and Palace in Patan

the town, require further examination. According to a study of Patan town, it is clear that the place where the palace is sited along with the open space in front is actually the junction where the trade route (connection with the world beyond) meets the local movement system (immediate connections that are mediated mainly through water) (Fig 3). The place where these two disparate systems of movement meet is often the place where in many medieval cities the palace complex building sits adjacent to the open ground. In most of the well-formed cities in the Himalayas, and which is also true for Patan, the palace and the open ground together complete the idea of the open public place. It is the place where the man-made (palace, markets) meet the natural (streets and community spaces) systems. The institutions of the market and of the administration and politics (symbolised through the palace) are the ones that signify humans will to create a city that signifies the aspiration of a society in a given time. This is also the place where the rest of the city structure that is governed more by the flow of water (explained in detail in the next section) meets the man-made institutions. The durbar square of the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley can be

seen as the meeting of these two disparate systems that finally make a city (Fig 5) with a straight road meeting the durbar square (the connection with the outside world). All the other movement roads are the ones that are mostly dictated by the flow of water.



Figure 5: The valleys (blue) and ridges (red) in Patan

The Secularisation of the Open Space

The prominent position of the palace, as viewed from the open space, is an important gesture to not only reinforce the idea of power but also create a contemporary idea of a secular public life. The very idea of a city is often symbolised through such spaces. The presence of the palace buildings, which symbolises the idea of a centralised system (administration and politics) that is over-arching and which also helps in stitching various identities of region and ethnicity, is an important condition in the imagination of a city. The palaces and the allied institutions like administration, temples, and water tanks become non-communal gestures that support the idea of a secular space. The presence of temples notwithstanding, the character of

most of such spaces often symbolises secular ideas of the place. The idea of a city that is built through human will and constructs emerges very strongly in such a space through its inclusive cosmopolitical nature on the one hand and material legibility of its open space and public buildings on the other.

The civic space in the centre of the city is open to all, irrespective of class, caste, or ethnicity. The combination of state's secular functions and the open market areas give cosmopolitan characteristics to the area. Often the religious structures in the centre, like temples and shrines by virtue of their positioning with open space all around, became very much part of the profane public space and of the civic life of the city. Even though the original purpose of the temples that were built at durbar squares in the three cities was an act of appeasement to the gods by the king and the queen, the very configuration as small structures that are open on all sides like an island in the sea without claim to a larger land or compound points towards a general public use of these structures. The plinths around the temples help in making the space more profane and open. It is for this very reason that durbar squares cannot be appropriated by anyone as even today the city continues to find contemporary relevance and meanings for the space. The durbar squares of the Kathmandu Valley still function as very important public places today. The feel, or rather the symbolic identity of the city, seems to emerge from these spaces. The fact that the palace was built in a particular fashion was to also maintain the hegemony of the state, but at the same time the overall impact of space with the palace, other secular structures, temples, open space, and the market create an idea of the city centre that transcends time and dynasties.

These creations in space of architecture and public open space give the idea of a city. It is not surprising that the same spaces today hold immense relevance due to their timeless qualities and importance for the city. Even though the immediate geographical connection of these parts with the world beyond are now much weaker, the durbar squares of the Kathmandu Valley still carry with them memories of these connections. We need to view these spaces

of immense humanistic and societal importance as indicative of the connection of the communities with the fundamental realities of land and water rather than through the lens of specific history and politics.

The Palace and Its Relationship with Open Space

The palace building carries immense symbolism and meanings in all cultures. It is often viewed as an ideal space representing the notion of living 'on top of the world' in the lap of luxury, almost a dream but never a reality for most. Apart from a palace being perceived to be the space of aspiration, it also played an important citylevel function; it is the space that holds history and memories of time, the stuff that helps in building the unified idea of the place or civilisation. A palace building always connotes a larger idea of the city apart from it being the indicator of the power relationship of the place, in terms of the articulation of the ruler and ruled. It is a memory stick of the city, carrying with it histories of the past and also indicating the aspirations for the future. Such buildings are often indicative of the human will to create space against all natural odds.

It is surprising how direct, sure, and immediate the transmission of this idea is in the architecture of the palace and other allied public buildings in many Himalayan cities. Most of these building directly sit on the main open ground of the city centre, with a long wall with few openings creating the boundary of the open space. This is true for many cities in the Himalayas and also for the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley. It is an expression of surety and direct codes without any mediation of either other kind of open space or ancillary structures between the public open ground and the palace buildings. This is the single-most important reason why most Himalayan cities of historic value have the most-powerful city centre space. The space is marked by a palace and series of other public buildings on one line and open space on the other side. The markets and houses then come beyond the open space on any of the three sides.

This configuration of palace, open space, market, and housing is one that seems to be governed by few simple rules for making space:

- Long edges of the palace to face the public open space
- The inner courts of the palace are hidden from view and are for private functions
- Constant linear interaction with the public open space while organising other functions such as courts, water fountains, and administrative offices.

The strong public architecture carries local and contextual symbols, but refined to a level in terms of its articulation and tectonics (evident in craft and construction traditions) to transcend time. The immediacy or directness of the architectural expression is also indicative of the context of the states in the Kathmandu Valley which were geographically bound to the space of the valley and the flow of the water, and the glaciers above tenaciously connected by the trade routes to the world beyond. These are spaces of cities that are not necessarily in isolation from the world, but perhaps bound to their landscape more than any other cities of the plains—the trade route and open space always an acknowledgement of the precarious connection with the world beyond. The palace and its allied architecture that offer an un-mediated opportunity for public life indicative of the unique sense of identity of the region bound by the landscape of the valleys and its river. The overall mix of market, open space, and palace buildings together give us a sense of it being an administered city with human institutions of trade, commerce, and an egalitarian society which allows the flow of new ideas and people.

The cities of the Kathmandu Valley carry with them the same attitude towards public buildings, palaces, and open spaces but also, between the 13th and 18th centuries, created architectural typologies, construction techniques, and embellishment styles that almost became like symbols that carried far in time and also in spaces around the Nepal Himalayas. The cities of the Kathmandu

Valley created such universal symbolism in not only architecture but also engineering, visual, and performing arts, and in some sense embody the attitude of both the typical hill settlements in terms of its immediacy and directness of public places and also complex symbolism in the built-form associated with cities of large civilisations in the plains. The fact that the site of the palace complex was always located at the cusp of the natural and man-made flows of water shows how a 'city' in the medieval sense was a combination of the adherence to certain natural systems and harsh one-time man-made acts of spatial change by means of the creation of new roads within cities, open grounds, and palace complexes. Together these two disparate attitudes created a kind of structure where various expressions of material culture took place and led to a complete city.

Balance with Nature: The Circulation of Water and Community Places

The open spaces of the durbar squares of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan are just one kind of public open space in the city. But a city is not made complete by a strong centre alone, but requires spaces of everyday living, like the small shrines, steps around a water body, water fountains, temples, and other structures. How do we understand these spaces of the community? They were surely not built in one go but have incrementally grown over a long period of time. However, they do demonstrate a structural similarity that points towards a certain set of relationships that appears to be important.

There seems to be a relationship between the circulation of water and the movement pattern of people in most areas of the hills. Pedestrian trails often run parallel to water systems, gently negotiating the contours. A study of settlements around Kathmandu Valley revealed a pattern that was usually observed as an extension of the core of the cities or as connectors between two settlements (Fig 4). These were generally linear strips like the development of houses with a road in between and, more often than not, they were

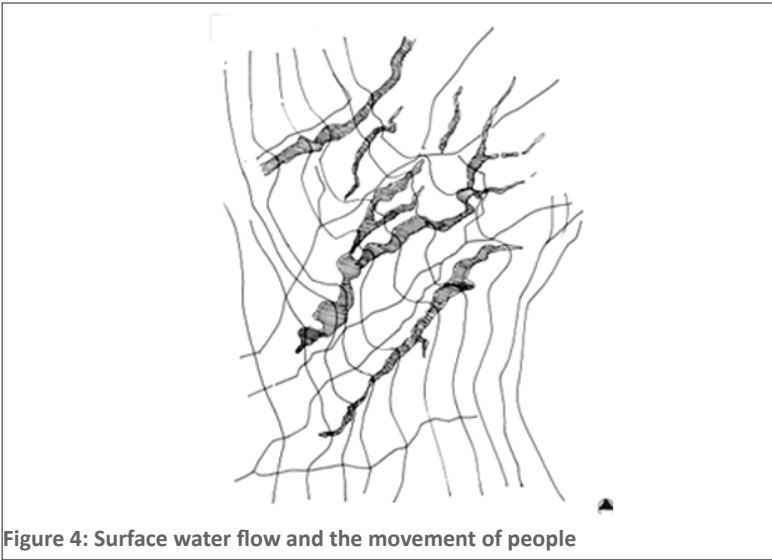


Figure 4: Surface water flow and the movement of people

parallel to water streams moving from a higher to a lower level. Since such settlements are linear, there is a limit to their growth. But what is most interesting in these settlements is the idea of the front, which is the public face of the built-form and the back, which is personal, private and negotiates with the natural condition of land sloping towards the water source. This negotiation of the back of the built fabric is in the form of private yards, agriculture fields, and orchards. The conditions are important for a conceptual understanding as linear strips of the built-form that positions itself on the cusp of the two very distinct realms of nature on one side and man-made movement corridor on the other. This seems to be a very common phenomenon in many hill valley conditions, but a very important one for understanding larger towns that expanded to cover such linear strips¹. If we were to look for similar characteristics in Patan, it becomes difficult to read the historic

1 Most old cities like Patan would have outgrown their original core and would have engulfed both neighbouring hamlets and any such linear extensions. The historical description by Mary Shepherd Slusser about the growth and origin of Patan corroborates such outgrowth.

patterns of either the movement of water or roads in a densely packed fabric. To understand the role of water (both surface and underground), a contour slope analysis was carried out on the topography of Patan town (Fig 5). The red lines indicate ridges and with blue ones indicating the valleys and flow of surface water during the monsoon period.

Further correlation of this water movement with the settlement and existing road condition leads to interesting results. Most of the roads towards the north and eastern sides of the sloping part outside the core run parallel to the water streams that were identified through the slope analysis. It is very clear that the movement routes are a direct response to the topographical condition on the eastern edge of the town as all of them run parallel to the Valley conditions that are formed parallel to the movement of surface water. This is the typical negotiation of the surface water stream that we have observed in many other smaller settlements in the Valley. This is one of the important systems that influence the form of the city as it guides the space that gets organised around these movement axes and also form the backbone of the important and primordial physical and physiological link of man with agriculture (Fig 6).

This community public realm (short connections) forms the backbone to hold the key communal elements and functions of the city at a more immediate basis. This is the 'social space'² that communities create, nurture, and mould for their own self (Lefebvre, 1992), a very intimate and communally responsive feature that emerges from the attitude of the community towards their landscape and agriculture. It has qualities of immediacy and a close connection with daily life and perhaps rituals of the people of Patan. It conveys a message of reverence to the source of life, its acknowledgement, and a pact to maintain a balance with the forces of nature. This is the other public realm and in direct contrast to the one that is created in the centre of the city through the open ground and some key institutions of power and trade. This realm

2 Using Lefebvre's (The Production of Space, 1992) concept of social space.

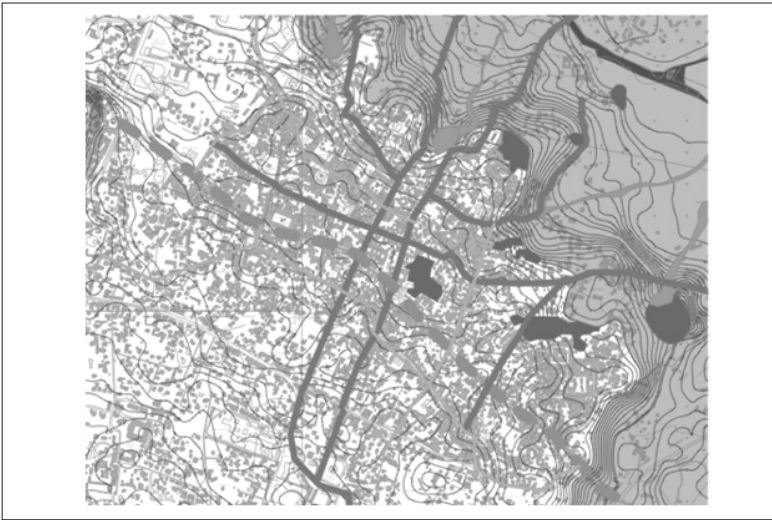


Figure 6: Two different structuring systems, Patan

is more domestic, closely associated with the ritual traditions of the community, and often the symbolism is coded, only revealing to the community itself. Small temples, shrines with open spaces, places to rest and sit, places of washing and drying are the ones that are formed in such a realm. These are the spaces that essentially emerge from the rhythm of an agrarian community (Subedi 2006). The relationship of the communities with the world outside or the periphery of the city is another issue that can help us understand the idea of public open spaces. The role of rituals for marking old boundaries of the city and also the extent of the city has been well documented for cities, especially the city of Bhaktapur by the works of Niels Gutschow (see his three-volume 2011 *Architecture of the Newars: A History of Building Typologies and Details in Nepal*).

The Meeting of Human and Natural Realms

It is also observed that places where natural surface water flow within the city intersects with man-made community institutions like markets, monasteries, and temples ultimately have immense public importance. The expression around water streams takes a

very interesting form in the Kathmandu Valley region. The *pipal* tree and a small shrine are often found to be around the lowest point of the ground slopes at the place from where the water is received from upstream and then goes down to the fields (Fig 7). This gesture of marking space through worship of the *pipal* tree and installing a shrine has immense cultural significance as the space is invoked through the use of religious symbols and rituals. The public nature of the space is further emphasised by a small plinth below the tree that supports community activities and many idols of worship around the tree trunk. The water, plinth, tree, and the religious artefacts together attach a certain meaning over a period of time. This is perhaps the beginnings of place-making that acknowledges certain landscape conditions and will have to be accounted for while studying public places and temple complexes in old cities.

In Patan, such public places become larger than life in terms of both size and elaboration by their gestures of water structures and architecture. This can be observed in the Kumbheshwar temple complex that has a five-tiered building with three water fountain

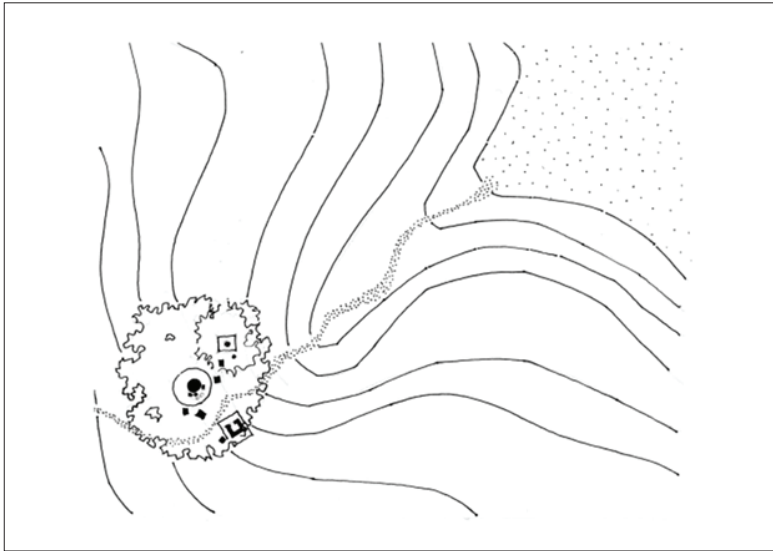


Figure 7: The *pipal* tree, water, and temple



Figure 8: Kumbheshwar temple at Patan

ponds and a large open space around it (Fig 8). But the origin of the complex seems to have been in the invocation of the place itself. The position of the large *pipal* tree behind the water pond along with the topographical condition of the area suggests very humble origins of the place much like many such shrines around the town. The temple complex is on a special landscape zone, at the point where contours turn and surface water channels are formed³. The large *pipal* tree with a small shrine forms the backdrop to the five-storied temple structure. It is not surprising that water fountains (*hitis*) and water ponds form important parts of the whole experience of the temple complex. This is an interesting example of a public place that celebrates water as it flows from higher slopes of the city towards the river according to a level of importance to the water structure by its architecture (and embellishments). Additionally, these water fountains are actually pauses in an elaborate system of urban water conduits that are channelled along natural slopes for community use. But they no longer remain utility structures

³ A contour and slope analysis has been carried out to understand the nature of surface water flow and its relationship with the temple complex.

and are revered by their elaboration, presence of religious shrines in the fountains, and positioning around sacred trees and temples. Again, the issue of 'place-making' around natural elements of water and trees is fundamental in this part of the world and that is what perhaps draws people over time. Therefore, the site of many temple complexes is perhaps more important due to its landscape configuration and it is the place that was sanctified first.

Conclusions

The Kathmandu Valley cities are structured around ideas of nature and its relationship with human endeavours. This also influences the nature of open spaces, The character of the opens spaces in the Kathmandu Valley cities can be explained as follows.

The lager existential connection and human aspirations

The expressions of architecture and public open spaces seem to exhibit a legible and clear language in the heart of the city. This seems to emerge from the very specific and limited nature of the landscape of the Kathmandu Valley itself. The idea of the public architecture and public spaces of the cities in the Himalayas embodies the sense of this cultural landscape by being more physically legible and sure in its expression, and at the same time relying on universal symbolism and typological devices for communication. This public place is formed on the route that connects with the other worlds entering the city and meets the large open ground with clear and strong expressions of public architecture. This gesture of a public place through open grounds and buildings is also the one that embodies the idea of a city, of a human construct, signifying the position and connection of the city with the world at large. It is one of existential importance.

The balance with nature

The other public realm is formed by spaces formed along the flow of water, with the network of streets, small shrines, water points, and temples. These structures occur mainly on the sloping ground

of the city, as it meets the river below. The position of the city at higher grounds results in the parallel valleys of surface drains running to the river becoming the place where these community-level activities and public places occur. These community open spaces around these structures are almost primordial in their origin as they signify the traditional connection of humans with elements of nature: water, soil, and vegetation. It portrays a fine balance between humans and nature and is often symbolised through complex symbolism and rituals.

The meeting of human and natural constructs

The places or spots where the man-made constructs of streets and buildings meet the natural landscape condition that are prominent, like the turning of the contours and thick patches of vegetation, become the place where many public open places are formed. Often temple complexes around small open clearings, with tanks, are to be found in such areas. These become larger community-level public places and signify the meeting of the human and the natural construct in the city.

Most public open space in the Kathmandu Valley seem to fall into the above three categories. The only exception being the multiple connected courtyards in housing clusters in the Valley. It will be worthwhile that the re-imagination of these public open spaces takes into account the fact that these open spaces in their present form are as important as the architecture itself and embody centuries of interaction of communities with elements of the landscape. This interaction is structural in nature, emerging from the fundamental understanding of water flows of an urban agrarian society and cultural aspirations of the city at large.

But the contemporary attitude to these open spaces needs to change. It cannot only rely on preserving the symbols alone while the structure that supported the system have somewhat disappeared as there cannot be a radical transformation of these spaces thereby ignoring and erasing the collective memories of the city. The attitude to these spaces must be more broad-based,

maybe a place that is seen as being as important as the architectural artefacts around, holding with it the memories of not only the state and its patrons but collective aspirations of societies of the past and its rootedness in its context. These spaces need to be seen not only as one that serves utilitarian functions of recreation or movement but rather as symbols of larger meanings for the city.

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All photographs by the author

All sketches by the author

Plans have incorporated CAD drawings as a base layer. Source: Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC)

Aerial pictures using Google Maps

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From Palace to Open Space

Redefining Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square and Urbanisms in Kathmandu

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Introduction

Any effort at carving out grand narratives about the genesis of a space like the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square is bound to be partial. We may know a few things about the occasions and contexts when the monuments were constructed or brought into the Durbar Square but a great many things are missing—especially about the commoner artisans and their *sadhana*, or creative contemplations, over the heritage of the architecture they had inherited and passed on to their children. Similarly, it is equally difficult to separate the activities happening inside the area from the ones outside Durbar Square. Many visitors to the office of the Kathmandu District Police, located in the northwest corner of the Square area, happen to be there because some awful events keep on happening in Kathmandu District. Moreover, several spaces in the Square remain barred to the general public. The offices of the army, the police, and museum often give one an impression that the Square is as much official as it is a public open space. But the very fact is that Kathmandu city received its name from the space called Kasthamandap, or Marusattal, often mystified as the building constructed out of the wood of a single huge tree no later than the 14th century, an architectural creation offered to pacify deities as well as for the general population to use it as public space. This makes us realise that there exists a strong and a deep meaningful relationship between open spaces, the Square, its architecture, and the general public in Kathmandu city.

A great many social and political changes have taken place since Kasthamandap was constructed, but in the post-2006 social and

political context, especially after Nepal was declared a republic in 2008, there is a need to redraw the mainstream cultural history that valorises the relationship between architectural heritages with the monarchies of the past. The challenge for the people is that the Square and the cultural and the architectural world it evokes belong to them now. Therefore, what are we going to do with them now in the developmental contexts when public open spaces are being encroached upon by individuals and remain neglected? How are we going to create awareness about the significance of the public open spaces among the general public, make political parties include public open spaces *vis-à-vis* urbanisms on their agendas, and establish as fact that it is also the people, not only the kings and religions, who have always provided the architectural heritage sites of the Valley great performative dynamics? Finally, how are we going to manage public open spaces in the context of multiculturalism and globalisation, since people from a wider range of cultural faiths and practices are going to share the public open spaces in the days to come? Therefore, Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square as a public open space possesses a bundle of problematics to current stakeholders or the urban designers.

Open vs Closed Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square

The Malla kings and queens, according to the corpus of research works cited at different sections of this paper, used this space as a theatre for exhibiting their status and faiths as well as to influence the fellow kings from the neighbouring kingdoms of the Valley and the commoners. Importantly, the Malla rulers lived and ruled over a country, no matter how small it was, with commoner artisans who had nurtured the great heritage of architecture and knew how to create 'poetry' out of the space and building materials. During the course of history, the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar became the biggest palace in the Valley. It contained 60 important monuments and 35 courtyards (Vajracharya 1977). Above all, the current Durbar Square functioned as the nucleus of the city during the Malla period. Evoking this historically important side of the Hanuman Dhoka

Durbar Square, researchers write, ‘Growth of the city with Hanuman Dhoka as the nucleus, and growth of urban city life; (b) momentous development of art and architecture, based on the contemporary religious principles/schools and secular life...’ (Shrestha et al 1986, 31) are two fundamental contributions to the Valley’s civilisation. No matter how religious and great lovers of the performance cultures, the Malla kings and queens and other royalties never thought that the space they loved and were so proud of would one day be open to the general public to visit. History everywhere tells us that palaces do not become public open spaces overnight. Much depends on the people who occupy the palace as a source of power, and much also depends on the political awareness of the people.

The Nepali historian Mahesh C Regmi uses two architectural terms ‘the thatched huts of the peasantry’ and ‘the stucco palaces of rajas, *birta*-owners, and *jagirdars*’ as the metaphors of the ‘economic and psychological gulf’ (M.C. Regmi 1999) that disconnected the rulers from the ruled in the pasts, especially during the 19th century in Nepal. Rulers lived inside the huge palaces whereas commoners felt left out physically as well as architecturally. Moreover, commoners were not allowed to visit the Valley, let alone palaces that the Ranas owned from 1846 to 1951. The Rana oligarchs ‘tightened the night curfew and enforced control of movement’ (Gutschow 2011, 792). There used to be a curfew at night from 1846 to 1951, and visitors needed special documents to enter the Kathmandu Valley. Therefore, the public open spaces, like the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square in Kathmandu of today has passed through several political and social transformations before it became available to the general public whose ancestors had played important roles in the making of this nation and its cultures. The Square shares similar predicaments which the built public open spaces of the European nations had to go through as they also developed ‘not directly from utopian ideals about the good and ordered society’ but from a ‘heterotopic uncertainty’ (Hetherington 1997, 54). The uncertainty of power that the Malla and the Shah Kings and queens and the Ranas lived by, partly as a result of their ignorance and confusion and partly

because of people's aspirations for liberal societies, gradually paved the way for the Square to become a space for the general people to visit and experience the ambience without any cost.

The area covered by the Durbar Square is so big that historians and researchers divide the area into various sections. Jagadish Chandra Regmi (1991) divides it into seven: 'i) courtyards within the royal palace complex, ii) important temples within the complex, iii) important temples and other objects outside the complex, iv) western sector, v) Kasthamandap Area, vi) Makhan Tole section, and vii) southern side' (J. C. Regmi 1991). *Nepal: A Guide to the Art and Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley* (Hutt 1994) divides the Durbar Square into two: southern section and northern section, and the Hanuman Dhoka into two: section closed for foreign visitors and the one open to them. Historians have divided it into almost four dozen monument sites. Similarly, Vajracharya (1977), UNESCO and official documents and leaflets provided by governmental offices define the entire area in terms of over three dozen monuments and heritage sites.

Based on the public open space characteristics of Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, this essay divides the area into two: the open space that includes the museum and the closed space. In the open space outside the palace, people can come and go anytime. Inside the museum and the closed spaces, the visitors miss the ambience created by the architecture, sculptures, woodcarvings that are abundant in the square. The Durbar Square area is, at its best, manifestation in the open spaces that are always available to the general public. Even the temples and the buildings located inside the palace compound speak to the visitors sitting in the open space. The roofs of the tiered temples situated inside the barred space in the palace provide a majestic visual and spiritual aura to the visitors in the open space section of the square. It is to them that the palaces speak with their closed doors and windows, balconies, walls, and so on in the most architecturally and visually rich language. There are several courtyards inside the palace and they too evoke the rich heritage of architecture, but since they are visited by fewer people

compared to the thousands of visitors who march into the open spaces outside, they remain less shared. Similarly, the Bhairavas, both the black one and the white one, in their cosmic yell create metaphysical thunder, as it were, for the visitors. This close and spiritual connectivity that the people share in the open space part of the Square is missing in the closed spaces. Importantly, the myriad forms of objects which people come across in the open space part of the square evoke the saga of the efforts that the people in this corner of the world have spent creating and playing with the metaphysics and life through carving arts and divine forms out of stone and wood and so on. On the contrary, the museum inside the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar complex provides what Walter Benjamin calls the 'controlled thirst for the past' whereas the images and architectural forms outside it form a 'psychic force' (quoted in Boyer 1994). Moreover, even the small markets around the vicinity of the Square sell a variety of items essential in conducting life-crises rituals and people from around the city march into this area to buy them.

The museum occupies a significant area inside the palace premises. However, the struts and woodcarvings, the walls and the architectural beauties of the palace buildings, and tiered temples can be observed from outside in the public open space. These become much more soothing to their eyes than the photos and other material goods and objects, which belong to the Shah kings, especially Birendra, his father and grandfather, on show in the museum. The personal observation of the author is that the staff employed in the museum do not exhibit professionalism. They form of a chorus, as it were, and are often heard talking to each other loudly. The ambience of the museum does not convey to the visitors that it is a serious and important place. The historical context when museum culture developed in Europe was different. It is believed that the museum developed in the cultural context when the understanding of the non-western parts of the world was at its height during the colonial period. Such processes of exoticisation and museumisation of the arts and people of the non-western parts

of the world has become a subject of museumisation. John Urry (2002) argues that in the media or post-information technological contexts, the museum changes its significance. In the context of political and cultural contexts out of which the museum cultures developed, we can say that the staff observed in their usual behaviour in the Hanuman Dhoka Museum ironically evoke the monarchs and their family members who probably did not bother much about common people's aspirations, but kept on making noise and having fun behind the closed palaces.

Similarly, the birth chart, known as the *china*, of King Mahendra kept in the museum has now become the metaphor of the life that Mahendra lived personally and the political culture he had tried to create. Political scientists believe that Mahendra's ideology, implanted in the 1960 *coup d'état* that toppled the first-ever democratic government of this country, functioned as a crucial force to bring the end of the monarchy in Nepal. Mahendra did not live to see the people's uprising as he died in 1972. However, his son Gyanendra who tried to act out the persona of his father, dissolving the parliamentary democratic system, inadvertently brought about the end of monarchy in Nepal in 2008. Therefore, the relationship between the birth chart of Mahendra as a museum piece and the general public becomes a thing of irony itself. But it does not mean to say that as the days of kings, dictators, and autocrats are gone, peace and order will be restored in this country, thereby in public open spaces too. The reason is that in the context of globalisation and multicultural social and cultural contexts, such spaces are 'bound to contain a certain element of disorder and tension, and that this is part of the rich mix that makes public space eternally varied and fascinating' (Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond 2008, 200). Public spaces, since they are the mirrors or theatres of the social and political contexts that societies at a broader level go through, bear not only the aspirations and euphoria of the people but also their confusion and frustration. The open spaces in the cities become 'theatre of citizenship' (Yuval-Davis 2003, 322). And, it is here people learn to bear each other, remain polite to

each other, and important do rehearse the roles, which one got to perform every day in the heterogeneous multicultural societies of the twenty first century. Therefore, the history of the Square will keep on unfolding.

Visitors at the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square

Though constructed over a long period of time, almost a millennium now, projections of many architectural and spatial units carved out between them, and above all their ambience, all provide a coherent formation to Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square. Several dozen monuments do not distract the visitor's mind. They, instead, draw their attention to the common poetic threads, which combine them. Maintaining a coherence among myriads of images, which, Subedi (2001) says, 'scamper' along with the line of the 'wooden cosmos', is the major force that provides a 'sensation of being in another world, complete in itself, a sensation which would largely have been lost had the buildings been widely spaced or scattered' (Stiller 1975, 3). So much so the architectural wonder and cityscape that the Square evokes reflect the saga of attempts by common artisans in the domain of maintaining a balance between the built environment, nature, and people: 'Temple roofs, like folded hands, lift the eye up and up until the roof merges with the blue sky and the infinity beyond' (Stiller 1975, 6). Similarly, J. C. Regmi (1991) writes that the 'wood carvings' in the 'supporting beams' and 'the elongated entrances' of the temples reflect the depths of reverence on wood, stone, and brick that the artisans, the common folk, held. The rich art of playing with space and architecture is reflected in the square, and also in the Kathmandu Valley. Critics and historians of Nepali architecture believe that a city square 'filled almost completely with pagodas, like that before the palace in Kathmandu, is a total environment of actively integrated, like forms' (Bernier 1979, 32) and the architectural units standing in the precinct of the square 'punctuate the city skyline', 'dominate the surrounding buildings' and evoke a 'single artistic theme' (Bernier 1979, 31). Bernier observed this in the early 1970s when new technologies

and constructing materials, which were to bring about complete change in Kathmandu cityscape by the beginning of the 1980s, were not readily available, and consequently, the pace and process of urbanisation then was very slow.

The Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square is proof that Newar artisans have given continuity to a great *parampara*, or tradition, of architecture and crafts that have played with space for eons in the Kathmandu Valley. Regarding this very intangible power embedded in the tangible heritage of the Newars, 'the ability of each succeeding generation of local craftsmen to use their traditional crafts within the limits imposed on them by nature, economics, and society and, within those limits, to produce quality works has blended the disparate buildings, regardless of their respective ages, into one' (Stiller 1976, 3) has been noted. Much cannot be said about the genesis of the architecture, which the Newars have nurtured for ages, but it is believed that the builders, the common folk artisans who built the buildings and monuments in the 17th century, were 'deliberately perpetuating earlier styles' (Sanday 2011,). This means that the architectural heritage of the Valley, represented by the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, offers itself to a performative interpretation, not as things of the past but importantly as the repertoire for ones to create new forms of architecture for new social, cultural, and developmental contexts. Thus, the skill and craft of playing with building materials, which Newar artisans possess and have given continuity to, are as important as the temples, palaces, and other monuments which the visitor encounters in the Square. So much so, the 40 palaces of the Rana rulers, all built in the Asian neo-classical styles in the second half of their 104yearlong regime (1846-1951) are something foreign to the traditional architecture of the land. Niels Gutschow, a German architect who has observed the urban developments in the Kathmandu Valley since the 1970s, writes that the 'place' as well as 'local craftsmanship' held by the Newars have presented the 'architectural production of the Valley' an 'unbroken cultural' order even during the autocratic political and social times which were not favourable for the common people (Gutschow 2011).

The Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square is wide, open, friendly, and beautiful, and it offers great many civilisational and artistic assets to the land. The narrow lanes of Asan and Indrachowk in the east of the square are full of temples historically and culturally important and remain crowded throughout the day. Asan retains a vibrancy throughout the day with a pleasant chaos of shoppers, vendors, and passers-by and comprises of six narrow roadways and significant ancient monuments. The same can also be said about several other lanes, which spread out from the square area. The narrow road that links Naradevi in the north and the Square, though overcrowded with vehicles, offers several houses and temples which evoke the cultural and architectural memories of the city. The road and the area that links Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square with Bhimsensthan in the west also remains overcrowded with noisy traffic. New Road in the east remains polluted and noisy throughout the day. But as visitors manage to enter the Square passing through these narrow and overcrowded lanes, they find it offering them an atmosphere that is more attuned with the calm mind and soul of the people. Here in the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square things are open. It offers people enough space to sit, roam around, see, and get lost, and realise the artistic potentialities that people here have lived by. Here, people are found happily and pensively watching a world-class architectural and cityscape, and they realise the power of its creators, the commoners. In this area, four-wheelers, except those that belong to the District Police Office, the Nepali Army, and other governmental offices, are not allowed to pass in the afternoon. House owners around the Square, as a matter of law, are requested to respect this architectural and cultural site while constructing or renovating their houses. Though authorities have failed to convince, motivate, and reward, and work together with local residents to create cityscapes attuned with the ones evoked by the square, they remain important co-actors that the government needs to work with in the future in order to manage, protect, and promote the architectural and cultural values embedded in the Square.

The open spaces in Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square look very

dramatic and scenic in the afternoon during the winter season. Visitors at such hours of the day happen to form a chorus as they are seen changing their locations almost every hour. Locations that the visitors come to occupy in the open space part of the Square naturally provide multiple dimensions to the space. The Basantapur *dabali* and the particular parts of the Square occupied by curio shops remain busy throughout the day. Corners, even the stone- and brickpaved floor, the few benches, plinths of the temples, the raised platform called *dabu*, and temple yards become sites where visitors happily occupy to bask in the sun. Tourists are normally seen sitting and taking photographs from the upper layers of the plinths of the temples, which stand just opposite Gaddi Baithak, a palace in white and built in the Asian neo-classical style in 1908. They probably want to have a wider view over the cityscape created by the Square. Their cameras focus on the cityscape evoked by the traditional architecture of the land. Many tourists occupy the area inside and around the Kumarighar, the sacred house where the Kumari, the 'living goddess', resides. They look as if they are there to find out the mysteries and sacredness that this house, the institution, and the power persona the Kumari exudes and possesses. Lovers can be seen sitting at the corners of temples and do not want to get noticed, but are seen occasionally looking at architectural creations soothing to their moods. Many of them encircle shrines and temples probably vowing to live together forever. Commoners, mainly sunbathers, occupy the Basantapur *dabali* in the early afternoon. They can be seen scattered everywhere on the *dabali*. In the late afternoon, they shift to occupy the front part of the Shiva Parvati temple and sit in the innumerable plinths of the Maiju Dewal temple in front of the Gaddi Baithak palace in the late afternoon. I believe that this space is tied with the sun and comes to its best use in the mid-winter. Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond (2008) comment that the people's response to this space reveals that pleasant comfort is the 'prerequisite of successful public spaces' and the comfort comes from the combination of the sun and the built space in the Square.

During the afternoons of the summer season, the five metal

benches standing on the Basantapur *dabali*, in contrast, remain virtually empty. But the ephemeral shadow cast by the tiered temples, balconies, and the walls of the palaces and other buildings become the most occupied spaces. Here too, the primeval relationship between the sun, the people, and this corner of the earth gets evoked in a very live form. In rainy afternoons, people crowd themselves in some sheltered spaces and look at the rare and mesmerising scenes evoked by the rain that comes to play with the tiered temples and roofs of the palaces and other buildings, and transforms the architectural ambience of the areas into rich visual forms. Other occasions when different spaces in the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square area come to the best transformations are the times when festivals and *jatras* and cultural and artistic performances come to take place here. The occasional musical performances, which take place in the Square, mainly on the *dabali* in front of the Shiva Parvati temple in the evening, draw an audience in the thousands. The rotating lights from the stage not only transform the performers and their performances but also the surrounding architectural ambience. The audience, who occupy the surrounding areas, especially the different plinths of the temples, create a scene that is worth watching. During such cultural and artistic occasions, the taxis, rickshaws, and twowheelers are pushed further away from the square area, as people completely take over the space.

Even a small *dabu* in front of the doors of Kumarighar becomes a site for multiple things to take place simultaneously. A few middle-aged women, including a mother, can be seen giving an oil massage to her newly born baby. Another corner of *dabu* becomes a site where a porter puts down his load and gathers energy for a moment or two. At the next corner of the *dabu* stand a few boys from the Madhesi community, who are talking about the odd jobs they are not satisfied with and planning to quit very soon. The western corner of the *dabu* is broken and waiting to be renovated. Though much cannot be said about this particular scene that I came across one fine afternoon in the winter, I think with three corners occupied by people and the last one in need of renovation, this *dabu*,

a micro unit within the Square, evokes its multiple faces and facets.

It is believed that sacred objects, such as monuments and palaces, do speak to us. Lefebvre writes that architecturally and historically important sites like palaces ‘speak in their own way, sending out a message. The Palace screams, yells, louder than the cars. It screams, ‘Down with the past! Long the live the modern! Down with the history, I’ve swallowed it, digested it and brought it back up...’ (Lefebvre 2007, 32). The Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, I believe, too speaks with myriad voices to the visitors. To commoners, it speaks with a warm and hospitable gesture. It warms and cools down their bodies in the winter and the summer. To urban designers as well as the politicians, it asks ‘to understand time cycles and the time management of activities in space’ and ‘notice for example, its changing rhythms and pulses – now busy, now quiet – and the different people using the space more women at some times, more men at others’ (Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond 2008, 193-94). Unlike the open spaces in Europe where ‘twice as many people walk in the city centre in the summer as in the winter’ (Gehl and Gemzoe 1996, quoted in Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond 2008, 194), the Durbar Square draws a larger flow of visitors during winter. Evoking this natural side of the public open spaces, critics view that ‘every social space has a history, one invariably grounded in nature, in natural conditions that are at once primordial and unique in the sense that they are always and everywhere endowed with specific characteristics (site, climate, etc.)’ (Lefebvre 1991, 110). To researchers, the Square asks to concentrate on the cycles of the season and the cultures and explore the connectivity between people and the cosmos experienced in this corner of the earth.

It tells the historian that the Newar kings, the Shah Kings, and the Ranas, the conglomeration of the power personas, who in greater and lesser extent, impacted the architectural ambience of the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square area, are gone. It tells them to record the changes that have taken place in the city and realise the cityscape of the Valley had started to change, especially after the 1880s when the Rana prime ministers from Bir Shamsher onwards

started to construct palaces, emulating the ones the British Empire had popularised in India, for themselves and their progenies. The 40 palaces, which the Rana rulers constructed ‘completely adopted neoclassical design standards complete with porticos, monumental arcades with fluted columns bearing black coloured Corinthian (or Ionic) capitals’ (Gutschow 2011). The Durbar Square asks researchers to look into the hundreds of policies which the government could not promulgate. And it asks them to realise that the Square is tied up with each and every major political and economic development in the country.

Moreover, it calls upon the researchers to look not only into the history of the palaces and the country, but also into things that continue to happen around it. The historical events, which have paved the way for this country to become a federal republic, have brought new roles and responsibilities for the people. Time has come for us to realise that things that happen around Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square on a daily basis today are as important as the ones that happened in the past. For this, the Square asks us to recognise the behaviour of the people, not only that of the ethnic Newars of the Valley, but also that of the other cultural communities in the country.

During January afternoons, the presence of the people belonging to Madhesi and other ethnic communities, besides the Newars, is very significant. Their presence is important, especially at a time when the issues about identity politics form the central part of mainstream politics. They come here for a rest, to bask in the sun. They come to share the space. A single bench or plinth or a corner of a *dabu* sometimes becomes a mosaic of people. It is here that they realise that the cold is cruel to all in Kathmandu. Among other things, the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square area as an open space evokes an important reality that there is a great relationship between the sun and the open spaces in Kathmandu. Moreover, Newars and the people living in the cold alleys and clustered houses around the Square take this place as part of their lives. It is argued that the much closer the space remains connected to the elements

of our lives, the greater it remains dear to us. The Square reveals to us that the sun and the urban settlements in the Kathmandu Valley have formed a symbiotic relationship for generations. The cycle of the seasons embodied in the movement of the moon and the earth creates some waves of cultural festivals, dances, and rituals. It is on such occasions that we become familiar not only with the historical network of the human settlements in the Valley, but also with the mosaic of people connected by similar faiths and fates. Evoking the cultural aspects of the cities of the Valley, architect Sudarshan Raj Tiwari writes:

Whether demons prowl the streets, giving the gods a reason to come out of their temples to save humans, or whether the gods just need to renew their relationships with celestial relatives through a regular visit, whatever the theme or reason, festivals come into play. They are grand occasions and whole settlements come alive with them. Whatever the reason for a festival is, almost all of them are place- rather than caste-specific. In this sense, festivals links places in a town or village and make visible the existing social structures as well as how it was built up from the past. (Tiwari 2006, 10)

Importantly, many public open spaces in Kathmandu come in most use during such cultural events. The square becomes an epic theatre on such occasions. It becomes a site not only for the general public and tourists, but also the president of the new republic.

Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square down the History Lane

Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square meant different things to rulers of different times. Much is not known about the Licchavi and pre-Licchavi kings, but with the Malla kings, the site became a theatre of reaching towards the cosmos as well as all over their country and beyond. For the Rana rulers, it was a site of the massacre that paved the way for them to rule over the country for 104 years. Hidden in the corridors of history and the palace in the Hanuman Dhoka

Durbar Square, they used this space secretly as a site to carve out political power of a bigger scale during a crucial moment in the history of this country. After they acquired power, they deserted the palace as if escaping from the guilt of the actions committed in this space. They moved to palaces constructed in the Asian neo-classical style. As a matter of guilt, they never wanted to associate the loci of power with this centre. This could be one of the reasons why the Shah Kings, who were given limited political power by the Rana oligarch and resided at the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar, were moved to the new palace later known as Narayanhiti Durbar, now the Narayanhiti Palace Museum. The Shah Kings kept on using this place as a site of memories and historical significance. For them, all major and serious rituals had to take place in the palace here. They used this site for coronation ceremonies and rituals. For the president of the Federal Republic of Nepal, it is still a site where he or she, as the head of the state, visits to renew every year ritual power by obtaining blessings from the living goddess, the Kumari. The government, for the last four decades, has tried to preserve it as a World Heritage Site and a space to draw tourists from across the globe.

On the other hand, the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square as a public open space lives through the reality of the public open spaces in the Valley shrinking day by day. The population in the Valley is increasing at an alarming rate. This is complicated by the encroachment on public land. According to the census, Kathmandu is the most populated city of the country as it recorded the highest population growth rate in the past decade of 60.93 per cent and a population density of 4408/sq. km. The population of Kathmandu city currently stands at 1.74 million. Meanwhile, the famous Rawal Commission in 1996 reported that almost about 1800 *ropanis* (one ropani equals 5476 square feet) of public land in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City alone was found missing. Of the total missing land, only 400 *ropanis* have been recovered so far (Joshi 2011). This indicates the dire need of public spaces that the people here are going to have access to in the days to come.

As per the Urban Development Implementation Act 1977, the roads in the cities in the Valley are supposed to be widened, but only in November 2011 did the government show a readiness to implement the Act. According to the Department of Roads, any construction within the breadth of 50, 62, 22, and 14 meters from the main highways, ring roads, main roads and sub-roads respectively is illegal and the widening will follow this standard. This hopefully will spur the search for the 'lost' public lands. Slum dwellers, landless people, known as *sukumbasi* in Nepali, who have occupied the banks of the Bagmati River, have been officially notified to vacate the area. Political parties are in a dilemma whether to save their vote banks or the riverbanks of this ancient Valley. The Supreme Court, meanwhile, has asked the government to manage or allocate land for the real landless people before they are made to move from their current locations. The High-level Bagmati Civilisation Integrated Development Committee, with support from the government of India, is very hopeful in executing this ambitious mega project of turning the banks of the Bagmati river into great green belts amidst this noise and confusion of politics and bureaucracy and urban overpopulation of the Kathmandu Valley.

The *bahas*, the *hitis*, or water spouts, and temple yards around Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square area were the first type of human-built public space of the Newars. In the past, they remained open spaces for the members of the families belonging to a single caste and clan. The richer the Newar community, the greater and more magnificent was the *baha* and other forms of spaces. In due course of time, their families multiplied, and many of them started to move to other places. With the pace of political and cultural transformation, people belonging to the non-Newar communities also started to live in these areas. In the past, individual families were responsible for managing and maintaining the open spaces. Now, with the quality of developmental and the nature of anthropological changes taking place in the urban settlements, the question has risen of whether Newars alone are responsible for managing the spaces, such as temples, temple yards, *bahas*, etc. Though landscapes and the

anthropological features of the Valley have changed, open spaces, especially the culturally and religiously important sites, have come to function as a uniting force of people, both Newars and non-Newars. Therefore, the purpose and significance of such open spaces have not come to an end, but entered new social and cultural contexts. However, public awareness of the power of connectivity inherent in the public open space and their role in creating heterogeneous societies today has become a critical issue. Surya Bhakta Sangachhe (2012), a senior Newar and very renowned architect of the country, says that since it is public space and belongs to almost everyone, it needs to be defined as spaces for all and the methodologies of maintenance need to be carved out accordingly. In the IMAP lecture organised as part of the research project, he further argues that the importance of public open space such as the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square area should also be realised in the developmental context of the present situation. There are altogether 9435 *ropanis* of open spaces currently available in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC). Out of this area, only 5569.4 *ropanis* are usable. The government has allocated some 83 open spaces for post-earthquake emergency use. The law says even the government is not allowed to construct any buildings in such areas. He further mentions that 8000-10,000 new houses are constructed in the KMC every year alone.

Not only historical and religious events, but also several political and cultural events happening today are providing new meanings and political dimensions to the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square. As a 'contentious space' where people come to make 'claims', 'condemn, oppose, resist, demand, beseech, support and rewards' (Tilly 2008), the Square has become popular in civil society discourses in Nepal in recent years. Political programmes are taking place in the Square and have started to gain media attention. Though the authorities concerned, such as the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Heritage Conservation Programme, local clubs, and others, do not allow the general public to organise cultural and artistic activities, the major political parties seem to be exempt from this. It is in this political and

developmental context that Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square that the subject my study belongs to. I believe that the Square shares a similar fate that we are tied to and wants us to be redefined in its live form.

Managing and Producing the Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square: A Conclusion

It is very difficult to manage public open spaces as much of it depends on many aspects of politics, economics, and culture. Critics who have studied various public open spaces across the globe put forward 'four interlinked dimensions' with regard to 'public space management'. They are: 'the coordination of interventions, the regulation of uses and conflicts between uses, the definition and deployment of maintenance routines, and investment in public spaces and their services' (Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond 2008, 65). This indicates that there should be a strong creative authority watching the spaces and kinaesthesia generated by people throughout the year. Like human geographies, public open spaces do not remain the same. That is why managing public open spaces in the context of globalisation and a multicultural neighbourhood demands that concerned authorities invent methodologies to manage such spaces. Critics see the place as bearing public memories, which comes in the form that 'both shapes and is shaped by our attempts to address it' (Scott 2004, 148). Therefore, much depends on the vision of authorities involved in the management of the public open spaces. Moreover, we live through a time when memories of a great many important subjects, ranging from places to indigenous knowledge, are quickly disappearing, and there is an urgency of evoking the memories of the place and the people. Benjamin says, 'For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' (Benjamin 1968, 255). This also indicates that we need to live up to the impulses of life that the public open spaces, like the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, evoke in new social and cultural contexts. And, while doing so, we should be cautious enough not to turn blind supporters but remain as those who resist by performing

the roles of creative dreamers ready to invent new forms from the achievements of the past.

Managing open spaces like Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square is an open-ended process. It demands that we keep on inventing methods as it is 'naïve to consider any design proposal, intervention or action as producing or end state or finite solution' (Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond 2008, 208). However, in the meantime, we should realise that every attempt made at managing public open space should evoke and address the question of humanity, as it is only the democratic approach of addressing social and cultural issues that is going to help humanity flourish. That is why it is believed that by remaining open to the people of all types, one can retain the spirit of the age and that of history. Evoking a similar spirit in the management of public open spaces, it is argued, the 'notion of passing on the heritage brings us back, ultimately, to the irreversible nature of the human condition. As we are prevented from going backward in order to return what we have been entrusted with or to make amends for any wrongdoing, we may have committed, we must therefore rely on an alterity that escape us namely, humanity' (Jerome 2001, 110). Thus, every attempt made at managing public open spaces such as the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square should be based on efforts to give continuity to humanity.

A 'strong local leadership' can become a 'key determinant of success' (Carmona, Megalhaes, and Hammond 2008, 132) in the domain of management of the public open spaces though it is a common experience everywhere that no single social actor can claim to have all the solutions for the policy problems. We agree that the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square as a 'product' must guide us to 'reproduce and expound the process of production' (Lefebvre 1991, 36). Evoking a similar need about the public open spaces from the Valley, Sudarshan Raj Tiwari argues that our love and interest over the public spaces created in the past should not be taken as mere nostalgia and tourism-driven interests. Such spaces are important from the healthy city life that we need them at every cost (Tiwari 2006). He argues that the very fact that Kathmandu has 'over a

fifteen-century-long history of urbanisation' and its public spaces are still 'functioning' and remain public and culture friendly is a proof that our *paramparik* philosophy of urbanisation is a great thing to emulate, and learn from (Tiwari 2006, 79). Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square as an open space is both a messenger as well as message. As a messenger, it tells about the kinds of changes, which have taken place in the demography and cityscape of the Valley. As the message, it wants us to read and observe it closely and invent spaces of this nature. Moreover, Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square cannot escape from the contemporary socio-economic and political context. It will never be a utopia but will keep on functioning by accommodating both coherency and incoherency; it will remain turbulent but will also continue to provide peaceful moments to its visitors.

We cannot escape the reality of capitalist societies that as 'commercial and technological determinism of capitalist societies are too powerful to be seriously modified by any notion of design' (Canniffe 2006, 1). But there is still a need for engagement of the creative minds that can turn the culturally and practically important spaces like Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square into a formation of the mainstream urban development. The Square, therefore, demands of urban designers to define it as a form of urban space. It tells them to 'elevate the value of visual memories in our urban environment beyond the criterion of commodification' (Lim 2008, 117). Above all, saving open spaces such as that evoked by the Square is needed to protect and create 'a diversity of spaces and places in the city: places loaded with visual stimulation, but also places of quiet contemplation, uncontaminated by commerce, where the deafening noise of the city can be kept out so that we can listen to the 'noise of stars' or the wind or water, and the voice (s) within ourselves' (Sandercock 1998, 406).

To conclude, Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, as a public open space, is very much functional and aesthetically grand. Above all, it forms a strong component of the civilisational values, not only that of the past but also of the present and the future. Metaphysics, as well as histories, that Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square evokes are important, but equally important are the activities of the

people who come to gather here. The visitors whom we encounter in the public open space of the Square not only feel the creative sway of the pasts and the aesthetic power of the space, but they also live through the moments of the present, which on its part is inseparable from the politics and socio-economic and urban development of this country. It is the visitors who bring stories to this place and act out their personal moments for which Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square becomes a stage. It is these people's activities and aspirations which need to be seriously studied. The author believes that the authorities concerned with the management of Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square should try to understand the deeply primal as well as putative forces that bring people to this place on a daily basis. Their manners of experiencing the ambience and power of this space can function as important clues for the urban designers to acquire a comprehensively creative sense of public open space in the Kathmandu Valley, and act out their visions accordingly. But while doing this, one should also realise that the spaces like Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square are deeply rooted into the nature and the cultures that people have experienced and nurtured through time immemorial. They should not be defined in the form of grand projects but should be treated as creative energy that should be injected, and this should necessarily form part of the overall developments and lifestyles of the people. Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square grew or developed in this form through centuries and remains rooted into the lifestyles of the people. The lesson one can draw in this regard is that public open spaces instead of becoming the results of grand projects, investments and mega plans of epic proportions should grow at a slow pace, unit by unit, at par with the need and aspirations of the people who create space, lend it dynamism, and live with it.

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60 Years of Heritage Management

Initiatives of the State and Non-state Actors

RAMESH RAI

Background

Nepal opened to the outside world after the political transformation of 1951. It was at this time that Nepal became part of the capitalist world, according to Ghanshyam Bhusal (2058 BS), although Chaitanya Mishra (2062 BS) argues that this process began in 1885. The political transformation did not just usher in open capitalism in Nepal, but also a liberal attitude that raised awareness in society. The partial political 'freedom' after 1951 also intensified migration of Nepalis to different places within the country and at different levels in society.

From 1846 to 1951, the rulers strictly controlled migration into the Kathmandu Valley. However, after 1951 the urban expansion of Kathmandu and Lalitpur gained speed and ended the social principles established for natural organisation (Tiwari 1999). Shrestha (1991) states that historical, political, economic, and demographic factors are responsible for ruining the original cultural character of the Valley, specifically of Patan. Patan began to experience changes only after the end of the Rana regime when Nepal was opened to the world. The change was slow initially but the increasing impact of rapid social and economic influence of the outer world ultimately led to haphazard modernisation (Shrestha 1991).

The structure of the Valley before 1951 was a result of cultural unification of 2000 years. With the downfall of the Rana regime, the ensuing cultural change was so powerful that the culture which had been preserved for 15 centuries took less than four decades to be destroyed (Tiwari 2049 BS). The nature, speed, and level of housing settlement in the Valley led to the disintegration of the city's religion and culture. Besides, the physical expansion of Kathmandu,

Patan, and Bhaktapur resulted in a massive influx of people (Tiwari 2049 BS). According to Tiwari, it was the political change of 1951 that led to uncontrolled growth in population and this intensified the use of heritage resources and ignored conservation.

Until the 1950s, there was not much change in the appearance of the Kathmandu Valley, which means the grandeur of the Malleria urban architecture of the city was unharmed and preserved (Shakya 2053 BS). However, the foundations of the architecture in the Valley, which had been preserved for centuries, gradually started weakening. After 1951, the haphazard modernisation was supported by the state, and it neglected the need to conserve the original architecture of the Valley (Shakya 2053 BS). Shrestha, Tiwari, and Shakya all argue that there was a change in housing patterns in the Valley after 1951, increasing the pressure on the use of cultural heritage and open spaces were occupied. Hence, the year 1951 is considered a standard point for beginning of the study of settlement and heritage in the Valley. This research, therefore, concentrates on the policies, programmes, and initiatives of the state in cultural heritage conservation since that year.

Introduction

The main issue this review raises is the consideration of the durbar squares as cultural heritage sites for their conservation more than as 'public spaces'. Although conservation is an important aspect, the durbar squares have not been acknowledged as 'public spaces' within the perspective of conservation and hence the 'utility and creativity' of the durbar squares has been downplayed. Since the conservation policy of the state has been able to address only the physical structures, it has been unable to connect the community with conservation and the protection of cultural heritage has become a burden. Therefore, if conservation is understood as a form of management, heritage and the local community are part of the same system. Thus, in this paper, the initiatives made at the state and non-state levels are analysed on the basis of the practice of management. Patan Durbar Square is taken as an example to

discuss and analyse the practice and initiatives of 60 years of heritage management.

Although the involvement of the state and non-state organisations in the management of heritage sites after 1951 has been widely discussed, this review explores how these heritage sites as ‘public spaces’ are related to public ‘utility and creativity’. The various sections of this paper present initiatives made by the state, non-state organisations, and citizens for the management of ‘public spaces’. The paper discusses the historical heritage areas of the Kathmandu Valley in three aspects: management of ‘public spaces’, utility, and creativity. It also presents, describes, and analyses the past and present state of Kathmandu’s urban ‘public spaces’.

The second section of the paper addresses the theoretical debate on public space; it describes the general understanding of ‘heritage management’ and analysis. The third section discusses the uses of the durbar areas by the people based on historical evidence and gives a detailed description of the usage of the durbar area as a ‘public space’ by the local community. Discussion on the established institutions, policies, and programmes of the state for heritage conservation over three time periods follows in the fourth section. The first stage is from 1951 to 1960, the second is the 30 years of Panchayat rule, and the third stage is a description of the attempts and activities after the advent of democracy in 1990, and comprises of the various initiatives made by the state. The fifth section elaborates the efforts at state and non-state levels focussing on Patan Durbar Square. The sixth section is a discussion of the ways people use and utilise the open spaces of the durbar areas. Finally, a conclusion is drawn on the basis of the arguments, information, and analysis in the paper.

Understanding of Public Space and Management

There have been very few debates and discussions on public spaces in Nepal. The Nagar Panchayat Act of 1950 (Nagar Panchayat Act 2007 BS) did not use the terminology ‘public space’, but some of the provisions had public spaces under the jurisdiction of the Nagar

Panchayat or municipality. Drafted on in 9 April 1950, Section 34 of the Act states the duties of Nagar Panchayat; and Section 34 (i) of the Act mentions the management of religious boarding houses, rest houses, and such new construction within its area as its responsibility. According to Section 39, the Nagar Panchayat has to arrange for a museum, zoo, art gallery, library, rest houses, public toilets, and other monuments within its area. Simultaneously, there is a provision for constructing or maintaining ponds, pools, wells, embankments, irrigation canals, park, gardens, and playgrounds. The Act accepts that open spaces are important for the inhabitants of the city and envisages its management to be the duty of the Nagar Panchayat. This Act is the first example of the state's initiative in the creation or management of open spaces.

Before discussing the concept of open space or public space, it is imperative to clarify the meaning of 'place' or 'space'. Space, first of all, is a natural location, a piece of real estate, and, simultaneously a free entity and a mental/psychological expression. 'Space' is of two kinds: a site for geographical action and a site with the possibility for social action (Carless 2009). In the process of studying the principles of community or local governance in colonial north India, Sandria B. Freitag (1991) called significantly important and symbolic activities as 'public arenas'. Revolutionary or disruptive and cultural activities produce a 'communal' identity and it is in public space that people gather for this. Cultural and non-cultural (violent) activities are conducted in public spaces (van der Veer 1996). According to van der Veer, the utilisation of public spaces and the result it creates are extensive.

The Japanese term *machizukuri* translates literally as either 'community development', 'neighbourhood-building', or 'town-making'. It is used to describe an extraordinarily wide variety of activities from economic development initiatives to traditional top-down cityplanning to urban renewal projects and voluntary social welfare projects. If we look at only one endeavour, it is under *machizukuri* that the idea of 'civic space' develops, which are of two kinds: physical and conceptual. Physical civic space

consists of neighbourhood parks, community centres, temporary transformations of vacant land, buildings by communities and artists, shared meeting spaces, community galleries, and office spaces for civil society organisations. Conceptual civic spaces include the space created by new community organisations and events, a new insistence on community consultation, negotiation over permitted development within existing neighbourhoods, an assertion of shared rights over neighbourhood landscapes, heritages both tangible and intangible, and the creation of new shared activities, and an understanding of shared spaces (Sorensen et al 2009). Location, community, and tradition are three primary bases to understand public spaces.

A clear conceptualisation of ‘public space’ is lacking at both state and non-state levels in Nepal. There is also an inter-generational difference in the understanding of ‘public space’, where a 70-year-old inhabitant of Kathmandu considers the premises of Sankata Temple, Tundikhel, Ratna Park, and the Bagmati river to be ‘public spaces’ as he remembers playing in these spaces while growing up; whereas the current generation regards Mangal Bazaar and Kathmandu Mall as ‘public spaces’ (Tiwari 2011) because they meet their friends in those places. Any space which has public usage and ownership is called a ‘public space’ and it may also have economic, social, and environmental usage (Tiwari 2011). However, none of the state’s legal documents, policies, or programmes has defined this terminology so far.

‘Preservation’ is defined as ‘...the work such as enclosing, covering, repairing, cleaning, etc., done to keep the monument in its original form’ in the Ancient Monument Preservation Act of 1956 (Prachin Smarak Samrakshan Ain 2013 BS). The strategy for urban cultural heritage preservation also constitutes developmental activity. The issue of development is always raised in relation to conservation in Nepal (Bjonness 1998). After 50 years of using the term ‘preservation’, the state, in the Integrated Management Framework introduced the word ‘management’ in 2007 (Department of Archaeology and World Heritage Centre with UNESCO-Kathmandu Office 2007a). Thereafter,

the state prepared a separate plan for the World Heritage Sites of the Kathmandu Valley under the concept of ‘management’ going beyond the idea of ‘conservation’.

Two aspects are understood within the concept of management: first is preservation and second is utilisation. Public spaces would be incomplete if they are just conserved and not utilised. Likewise, if they are just used without being conserved, they would soon be destroyed. Therefore, it is necessary to take conservation and utilisation simultaneously. The Integrated Management Framework has successfully incorporated the lifestyle of the local community, protection, and economic viability of the World Heritage Sites. To describe the aspect of conservation and utility together this study uses the term ‘management’.

The management of public heritage requires an inter-relationship between the stakeholders, rights holders, and duty holders. The duty lies with the state, and the national and international communities are its rights holders. The duty should be to provide social and economic freedom, and the rights ought to connect heritage conservation with the community’s livelihood. The term ‘heritage management’ applied in this study indicates the relationship between these three parties.

Understanding ‘management’ at the Non-state Level

Heritage conservation is understood in two ways at the non-state level. The first is that conservation has gone into the hands of foreigners and raises the questions when Nepalis will be involved in it; the second perspective puts emphasis on the conservation activities conducted thus far, rather than on the institutions involved in the process. Therefore, whether a heritage site has been conserved or not is not the main question. Instead, the main focus is how the plan for its utilisation was prepared and whether the local community was involved in the preparation or not because utilisation of the spaces itself is culture, and concept of conservation begins with the way people use the space. Thus,

conservation of a space is related to ideas and traditions¹.

In 1986, a book titled *Conserving Cultural Heritage: A Challenge*, featuring a collection of the best essays in a national essay writing competition organised by Nepal Cultural and Environmental Heritage Conservation Society, was published. The book has 15 essays contributed by teachers, professors, and other social leaders. The collection suggests that local institutions should play the central role in heritage conservation even in the socio-political environment of that time. The essays call for development of a relationship with international organisations for financial and technical support as well as exchange of ideas in heritage conservation. These were positive aspects of the essays. However, the essays did not raise the issue of the impact of an autocratic and closed political system of the time on heritage conservation.

Public Use of Durbar Square

Who owns the durbar squares? The people do not have a clear answer to this question. Four durbars in the Kathmandu Valley, namely Narayanhiti, Nirmal Niwas, Nagarjun, and Patan Durbar, are under the king's possession (Thapa 2064 BS). In the book, journalist Surya Thapa (2064 BS), quoting Surya Bahadur Oli, who was a section officer at the Ministry of Land Reform and later became zonal commissioner, writes: 'The forests and new durbars registered in the name of the king and the royal family are not family inheritances. After the referendum (of 1980), it was imperiously registered in the names of the king and the royal family claiming that the people had approved of the Panchayat system in the referendum' (Thapa 2064 BS, 42).

Although the issue of ownership of the palaces is highly disputed, there is no disagreement on the public usage of the durbar areas. Different documents have claimed the durbar areas were either open or restricted to the public in different eras. However, it can be confirmed that Patan Durbar area was always open for public use.

1 Based on the ideas raised in a group discussion, organised by Interactive Mapping and Archive Project (IMAP), at Yala Maya Kendra on 9 December 2011.

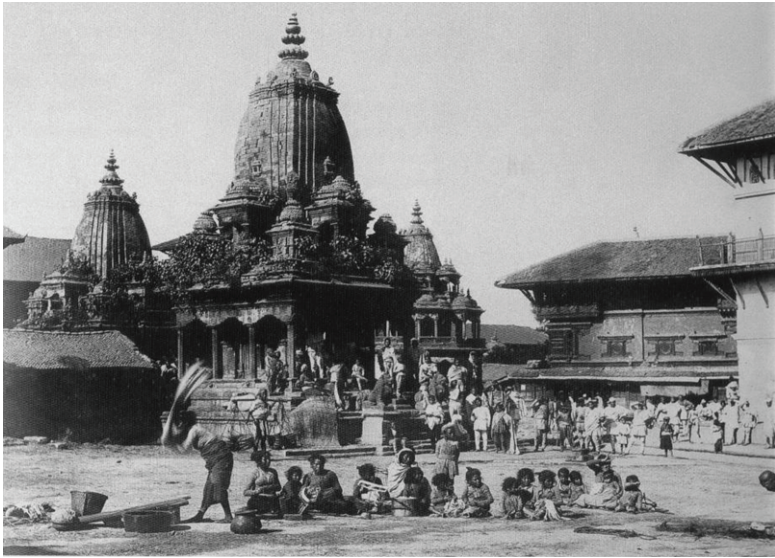


Figure 1: A photograph by Kurt Bayek in 1899 from Gotz Haggmuller's (2003) book, *Patan Museum*.



Figure 2: A lithograph of a photo taken by Gustave Le Bon in 1885 from Gotz Haggmuller's (2003) book, *Patan Museum*.

The pictures below depict the absence of restrictions on entry and use of the darbar area by the local community (Figs 1 and 2).

During the reign of Chandra Shumsher, Bhadgaon and Patan used to host to army parades at seven o'clock in the morning during the summer and nine o'clock in the winter. Barracks with facilities were built in Bhadgaon and Patan, and 200 soldiers were placed in each of them. However, the barrack in Patan was south of the palace at Lagankhel, near the Ashoka Stupa (Landon 2007 [1928]). Even today, the army guards the Kathmandu and Bhaktapur durbar areas but this is not the case for Patan durbar. This explains that in the absence of soldiers in Patan Durbar area historically the lack of restrictions preventing the local community from using the area. Perhaps, this is why many statues have been stolen from Patan Durbar area (Shrestha 1991).

The terms 'durbar' and 'durbar area' are used in two different ways; a durbar implies the building(s) and the *chowk*, or quadrangle, between the buildings while the durbar area is the open area outside the palace or filled with religious and cultural structures for its use. The durbar area was not always limited to activities related to the exchange of goods and labour. There are many pictures, copper inscriptions, inscriptions, myths, and stories which narrate the rituals and celebrations in memory of ancestors in this area (Sekler et al 1977). History tells us of the public usage of the durbar area and this usage still exists today. But there is definitely a difference in the degree and nature of the use.

State-controlled Management

The central role in heritage conservation and use is played by the state through laws, policies, and management. After 1951, although Nepal became partially open to the world, the changing political scenario in the subsequent years sidelined the issues of heritage conservation. The initiatives for heritage management over 60 years (since 1951) can be divided into three parts: first is the transitional period (1951 to 1960), second is the 30 years of Panchayat (1960 to 1990), and the third is the years of democracy (after 1990). There has been considerable amount of work during all three periods.

Transitional Period (1950 to 1960)

This period is said to be the longest state of political transition in Nepali history. The political transformation of 1951 was the beginning of Nepal's journey to becoming an open society.² However, the kind of political system could not be decided on for 10 years. The precarious political situation, temporary government, issues of legitimacy of the government, etc., led to politics being the focus for everyone, ignoring the need for other social changes. Nevertheless, two significant contributions in heritage management were made, which can be considered milestones in this field. They are: a) the establishment of the Department of Archaeology, and b) the enactment and promulgation of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act.

Establishment of the Department of Archaeology (1953)

The Department of Archaeology was established in 1953 and is the principal organisation which studies and conserves heritages. The department has more or less four duties: conservation and maintenance of archaeological sites, information management of ancient monuments of national significance, and management of museums. It monitors the archaeological works conducted throughout the country on the basis of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956. It is the primary government institution of Nepal to protect and conserve the ancient monuments and archaeological objects/sites.

The department has been under six different ministries. From 1953 to 1981, it was within the Ministry of Education, from 1981 to 1996 it came under the Ministry of Education and Culture. It was under the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture from 1996 to 2001, and from 2001 to 2009 it was within the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. It was under the Ministry of Culture and State Restructuring from 2009 to 2010, and from 2010 it has

2 Although the political development of 1951 is known as a revolution, this paper will mention it as political transformation as it is not political in nature. The People's Movement of 1990 is also called political transformation here.

been within the Ministry of Federal Affairs, Constituent Assembly, Parliamentary Affairs and Culture. The Department of Archaeology has its objectives as follows:

- Protect and preserve monuments and archaeological sites,
- Conduct archaeological exploration and carry out archaeological excavation and publish reports,
- Collect and research on archaeological objects and publish reports,
- Establish and manage the museums,
- Preserve and manage World Heritage Sites,
- Prepare and publish a list of cultural heritages,
- Control the illicit export and import of cultural and archaeological objects,
- Provide technical and financial assistance to the local people and agencies for monument conservation,
- Raise awareness for the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage,
- Publish the journal of the Department of Archaeology, *Ancient Nepal*.

The Department of Archaeology holds an enormous responsibility in protecting archaeological sites and cultural heritage, enhancing conservation programmes, monitoring such activities, raising awareness, researching and excavating, publishing, and providing technical support. The credit and blame for complete and incomplete works, which were done under its leadership over 60 years fall on the department. The provisions of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act have helped make the activities of the department organised and comprehensive (Department of Archaeology n.d.).

Ancient Monument Preservation Act [Prachin Smarak Samrakshan Ain] 2013 BS [1956]

In the preservation of Nepal's ancient archaeological objects and sites, the Ancient Monument Preservation Act, 2013 BS is considered a milestone. It was established for heritage preservation despite the

political uncertainty at the time of its enactment. There are many provisions for heritage conservation in the Act. It has provisions for preserving culturally significant buildings, cities, or areas taking into consideration the historical, artistic, scientific, and aesthetic value of heritages (Nepal 2004).

The preamble of the Act states the need for ‘preservation of ancient monuments and control in trading of archaeological objects and excavation of the place of ancient monuments; acquiring and preserving historical or artistic objects related to ancient monument and archaeology ...’ (Prachin Smarak Samrakshan Ain 2013 BS). Besides preservation of the existing ancient monuments and archaeological objects, the Act raises three important aspects—excavation or exploration, acquisition, and conservation of monuments.

‘Ancient Monument’ and ‘Archaeological Objects’ have been defined for the first time by this Act, and it has clearly distinguished between their importance and utility.

2 (a) ‘Ancient Monument’ means temple, monument, house, shrine, monastery, stupa, bihar, etc. that are important from the perspective of history, arts, science, architectonics or art of masonry and more than are hundred years old. And the word also means the site of the monument as well as the adjoining human settlement or place and remnant of ancient human settlement, relics of ancient monument, cave, etc. that have specific value from the national or international point of view irrespective of its attachment with settlements or places.

2 (b) ‘Archaeological Object’ means the object made and used by human being in pre-historic period or handwritten genealogy, handwritten manuscript, golden inscription, copper inscription, stone inscription, wooden inscription, *bhojapatra* (document written on the bark of Himalayan birch), *tadapatra* (document written on the leaf or bark of palmyra/palm tree), paper, coin, house where important events have occurred or historically important personality has resided and their belongs, and houses

or portion of the house made with stone, wood, soil, ivory, bone, glass, cloth, paper, or metal, which are attractively scribed and things used in the house, scribed or inscribed idol and temple of god or goddess, Buddhist cenotaph statue, thanka. It also includes images of animal, birds and any movable or immovable objects, which depict the history of a country, and objects as prescribed by the Government of Nepal by a notification in the Nepal Gazette from time to time.

Although the 'Ancient Monuments' are intricately connected to social, cultural, and religious lives of people, the Act has neither associated 'Ancient Monuments' with social life nor has it proposed conservation by relating it to the people.

The provision to announce a preserved monument zone is given in Section 3 of the Act. Clause 1 of Section 3 states: 'His Majesty's of Nepal, if it wishes to declare any place or area where any monument is located to be as preserved monument area, shall display a notice at the place'. It sets out the provision for the government to announce conservation areas and if the state wishes to, there is a possibility to work according to the definitions of an ancient monument and archaeological site. Clause (6) of Section 3 states: 'Anyone who, on his/her own land within the Preserved Monument Area, is willing to construct a new house or building or to repair, alter or reconstruct a house or building so as to make changes on its original shape, shall have to construct, repair, alter or reconstruct it in the matching the style of the area and in consonance with the standard prescribed by the Department of Archaeology'.

Sub-section (7) of Section 3 states: 'If a person has submitted to the Municipality the drawing of a house or a building to be constructed, repaired, altered, or reconstructed within the Preserved Monument Area, the Municipality shall, before giving its consent on the drawing under the prevailing laws, have to take approval of the Department of Archaeology on such drawing.'

Sub-section (8) of Section 3 states: 'While constructing, repairing, altering or reconstructing the house or building in the

Preserved Monument Area, if the construction, repair, alteration or reconstruction is not done in accordance with the approved drawing, the Department of Archaeology may issue an order to stop such work'. The prescriptions in sub-sections 6, 7 and 8 support the safeguarding of ancientness and archaeological importance of conserved areas.

The fifth amendment of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act in 1995 categorised ancient monuments in terms of ownership and importance. On the basis of ownership, there are public ancient monuments and private ancient monuments, which are further divided in terms of international, national, and local importance. The ownership and responsibility for preservation, maintenance, and renovation of public ancient monuments is given to the Department of Archaeology; whereas conservation, maintenance, and renovation of private ancient monuments are the responsibility of the person as well as the department. The conservation of ancient monument areas and archaeological areas of national and international significance are the responsibility of the department. Therefore, the Act places complete responsibility on the state for the conservation of the ancient monument sites and archaeological objects. The department is designated as the nodal body in terms of conservation.

The Act has made two other important arrangements. According to the first provision, for the preservation of ancient monuments, if the government of Nepal deems it necessary to control the work of digging a tunnel or using explosives around the site of an ancient monument, it may do so through a notification published in the Nepal Gazette. The second provision is a restriction on the transfer, transaction, export, or collection of ancient monuments and archaeological objects. This is a legal arrangement to consider the field of conservation in a new way.

These two important initiatives made in the transitional period were together an organised beginning in the area of heritage conservation. With the establishment of the Department of Archaeology, the state had a nodal body for cultural heritage

conservation which also led such efforts. Similarly, the Act streamlined the activities of the state by providing a direction to work on heritage preservation. Provisions in the Act, and seven subsequent amendments, opened more avenues towards conservation work. The fifth amendment in 1995 certainly brought a new beginning. Even though the Act provided a legal basis for conservation, regulations were prepared only in 1990. The delay in the enactment of regulations explains the passivity in implementation of the law.

Thirty Years of Panchayat (1960 to 1990)

The democratically elected government was dismissed in 1960. A partyless political system under King Mahendra, called 'Panchayat democracy' suspended numerous civil rights. Political parties were banned. All these events had a significant impact on various areas and levels of the state, and cultural heritage conservation was one of them. One example was the delay in issuing regulations for Ancient Monument Preservation. It was prepared almost 33 years after the introduction of the Act. The 30 years of Panchayat can be understood in four contexts: the formulation of the Act or Regulations, heritage survey, inclusion on the World Heritage List, and formulation of master plans.

Formulation of Acts and Regulations

Five supplementary Acts were enacted in the 30 years of Panchayat regime. Although these Acts included certain provisions for heritage management, they were not specifically promulgated for heritage management. Local Administration Act 1971, Guthi Corporation Act 1976, Lumbini Development Trust Act 1985, Kathmandu Valley Development Authority Act 1988, and Town Development Act 1988 were in some way or another related to heritage management.

Local Administration Act (Sthaniya Prashasan Ain) 2028 BS [1971]: The Act directs integration and amendment of laws related to local administration in accordance with a decentralised

administration for peace and stability. Section 10 (a) of the Act governs the record-keeping of public property, while sub-section 1 of Section 10 (a) places the responsibility on the office of the Chief District Officer to prepare records of all public lands, inns, rest-houses, parks, ponds, wells, pastures, drains, etc., identified through cadastral survey maps, royal seals, *khadga nishana* orders, copper and stone inscriptions, or other similar inscriptions and to send a copy each of the record to the Land Revenue Office and the District Development Committee office. This provision of the Act had indeed played a significant role in protecting and creating a cultural heritage archive.

Guthi Corporation Act [Guthi Sansthan Ain] 2033 BS [1976]:

The Act divides *guthi* into four categories: trusts, state trusts, *chhut guthi*, and personal trusts. Section 2(c) of the Guthi Corporation Act defines *guthi* to include and means a *guthi* (trust) endowed by any philanthropist, through relinquishment of his or her title to a movable or immovable property or any other income-yielding property or fund, for the operation of any shrine or festival, worship or feast of any god, goddess or for the construction, operation, or maintenance of a temple, shrine, rest house, shelter, inn. By prioritising the religious and cultural continuation of ancient monuments and archaeological objects/sites, the Act focuses on the management of the functioning trusts. Although the Act does not directly relate to cultural heritage conservation, the provision of sub-section 6(b) of Section 17 is, to a certain extent, associated with heritage conservation.

Lumbini Development Trust Act [Lumbini Bikas Kos Ain] 2042 BS [1985]:

The Preamble of the Act states the objective of the Act is ‘to present the commitment of the Government of Nepal to project the goal and ideal of development of Lumbini more effectively before the world community, and to operate the Lumbini Development Plan in a more coordinated and smooth manner...’ The Act was enacted to facilitate an integrated management of historically and

archaeologically significant sites in Lumbini, Tilaurakot, Gotihawa, Niglihawa, Devdaha, and Ramgram. It specifically takes into consideration these ancient sites related to the birth of Buddha. It is an attempt at autonomous exercises of heritage conservation and can be considered as a good beginning indeed.

Kathmandu Valley Development Authority Act [Kathmandu Upatyaka Bikas Pradhikaran Ain] 2045 BS [1988]: This Act was specifically established with the goal of managing the Kathmandu Valley, taking into account the increasing population and its uncontrolled urbanisation. However, there are a few provisions of the Act, which reflect the policy on heritage preservation taken by the state. Sub-section 1.3 of Section 6 states its goals as ‘introducing and implementing required project for proper development and renovation of religious, cultural, and historical heritages being under the prevailing laws related to ancient monuments’. Section 8 provides the authority to regulate, control, and prohibit activities; and sub-section 1.1 of the same section provides for the ‘use and consumption of natural heritage, archaeological, religious, historical places...’ The Act also ensures that pre-existing laws concerning heritage conservation are followed.

The Act was amended twice after its endorsement and publication on 16 November 1988. However, it was only on 26 March 2012 that the state established the Authority as per the notice published in the Nepal Gazette. Simultaneously, with this decision the three town development committees within the Kathmandu Valley were annulled (Nagarik Dainik 2069 BS). The-then government had been unable to get the support and approval of political parties and local communities for widening the roads of Kathmandu through the town development committee. The government finally formed the authority more powerful than the town development committees with the government’s readiness to widen the roads.

Town Development Act [Nagar Bikas Ain] 2045 BS [1988]: The government published two Acts within a year, which were of a

similar nature: the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority Act and the Town Development Act. The Acts were endorsed and published on 16 November 1988, and stressed the need to manage the growing population and urbanisation. One has provision for formation a powerful authority and the other for the establishment of town development committees. These two Acts are mutually exclusive.

The subject of heritage conservation is mentioned similarly in these two Acts. For instance, Section 9 of the Town Development Act 2045 BS has a provision to regulate, control, and prohibit activities. Sub-section 9.1.1 specifies the ‘utilisation and use of agriculture land, natural heritage, flora, forest, fauna, archaeological, religious and historical sites as well as cultivated and barren land and immovable property’. Further, defining the work, duty, and rights of the committee in Section 11, sub-section 1.3 calls ‘to prepare necessary project and to implement it in town planning area for proper development and conservation of religious, cultural and historical heritage remaining within the prevailing laws of Nepal on ancient monument’. These prescriptions have close parallels with the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority Act. Therefore, from the perspective of heritage preservation, both are complementary but not the principal legal mechanisms.

Ancient Monument Preservation Rules [Prachin Smarak Samrakshan Niyamawali] 2046 BS [1990]: It was after 33 years of the enactment of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act that the Ancient Monument Preservation Rules were introduced. The Act was published on 12 November 1956 in the Nepal Gazette, after it was endorsed on 31 October. However, the Rules were published only on 2 April 1990 in the Nepal Gazette. Since activities related to heritage took place as per the desire/directive of the royal palace and the chief archaeological officer had to follow its orders, the Act could not be optimally implemented and there did not seem to be a need for specific regulations. However, the regulations were ultimately enacted after the completion of a primary survey of cultural

heritage in 1988 since there arose a difficulty in categorising cultural heritage sites and collecting information regarding preservation.³

The Rules has been amended four times and it has four critical provisions. It conceptualised the formation of a technical committee, an ancient monument preservation committee, an ancient monuments survey and classification committee, and an ancient monuments conservation fund for heritage conservation. Each of the committees and the fund have separate objectives.

Clause 2 of the Rules provides guidelines for the formation of a technical committee. Sub-clause 2.1.1 states there is provision for the formation of a technical committee ‘to advise the Department on the design and standard of the house to be constructed in the land under private ownership within the Protected Monument Zone’. Sub-clause 2.3 has the provision for the formation of an Ancient Monuments Preservation Committee in order to survey and classify the ancient monuments based on ownership and importance. Clause 3 calls for the formation of an ancient monuments conservation committee. The Ancient Monuments Conservation Committee is formed to assist in the conservation of the monuments in every conservation area. Sub-clause 4.10 of the Rules has provision for the formation of an Ancient Monument Preservation Fund for the ancient monuments that are historically and artistically significant.

The Rules has clear provisions for the formation of the committees and the fund and their duties, responsibilities, and authority. It has facilitated the implementation of all aspects of the Act, including building standards, the description of archaeological objects, and permission for the exploration of archaeological objects.

Initial Survey of Cultural Heritage

With the support of UNESCO, the cultural heritages of the Kathmandu Valley were surveyed in 1975 (Amatya 2058 BS). The state initiated an Initial Survey of Cultural Heritages from 1984-85 to

³ Based on a conversation with Suresh Suras Shrestha, official at the Department of Archaeology, on 28 April 2012.

1988-89, with the aim of collecting primary information on cultural heritages throughout the country. The then Director General of the Department of Archaeology Punya Prasad Niraula, elaborating on the reasons for the survey, writes in the first part of the report of the first cultural heritage survey:

Various historical places and monuments like shrines, temples, monasteries, stupas and other religious places, traditions like procession, festivals and dances should be surveyed and studied for their conservation and promotion. This campaign was started from 1984/85. (Department of Archaeology 2042 BS)

This survey was only a list of cultural heritages and did not have detailed descriptions of the heritage sites. This has been mentioned in the introduction to the three-volume report by Niraula. In the remaining five volumes, the introduction is by Safalya Amatya, and in the introduction of the eighth volume, he has indicated the goals and limitations of the initial survey:

... as mentioned in the initial section, this report is a result of an initial survey which provides only the name and a short description of cultural heritages. However, I believe that this can raise interest for a detailed study and help the researcher. (Department of Archaeology 2046 BS)

The report published in eight volumes has short descriptions of and introduction to cultural heritages of 72 districts. The first volume covers nine districts, the second 10 districts, and the rest of the six volumes cover 14, 7, 5, 10, 8, and 9 districts respectively. This was the biggest survey conducted under the leadership of the government of Nepal where cultural heritages of Nepal were listed and categorised. This had two distinct impacts. The first impact is related to the study and research of the heritage sites, and the second is the increase of local and national interest in heritage conservation.

Enlistment in the World Heritage List

Seven cultural heritage sites of the Kathmandu Valley were included on the World Heritage List in November 1979. The Valley is considered a unique model on the World Heritage List. The small area of the Valley constitutes seven world heritages, and among them are three durbar squares: Basantapur Durbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, and Bhaktapur Durbar Square; two Buddhist stupas, Swayambhu and Baudhdhanath; and the Hindu temples, Pashupatinath and Changunarayan. Besides these seven, the city is rich in numerous other heritage sites, which are models of historic and unrivalled art. Kathmandu is thus known throughout the world as a heritage city.

According to the survey conducted in 1975, Kathmandu has 888 monuments of international importance. Among those, 94 are considered extremely valuable, 159 are classified in the first-class category, 243 in the second-class category, and 392 in the third-class category. Of those, 362 monuments are located in Kathmandu, 298 in Patan, 62 in Bhaktapur, and 166 are outside the three cities (Amatya 2058 BS). The findings of the survey informed the world and UNESCO about Nepal's historical cultural heritage and was instrumental in the state and UNESCO gaining support for the enlistment of the sites on the World Heritage List.

In August 1978, Nepal signed the charter for cultural and natural heritage conservation. With the support from UNESCO, the state introduced a nomination paper to register the 'Kathmandu Valley' as a heritage site by including seven monuments, monument areas and the buildings within the monument areas (Amatya 2058 BS), and in October 1979, Nepal's application was accepted during a meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Cairo.⁴

With the state as a party, it has been stated that the seven conserved monument zones of the Kathmandu Valley are of

4 Although seven heritages of Kathmandu were enlisted on the World Heritage List, the government of Nepal did not establish any office related to it. In 1997-98, 'World Heritage Unit' was formed within the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. Two years later, in 1999-2000 the same unit was placed in the World Heritage Division under the Department of Archaeology.

outstanding universal value:

[All seven sites have their own] legends in the Kathmandu valley. As Buddhism and Hinduism developed and changed over the centuries throughout Asia, Nepal profited from its unique position between Tibet, China and India. Nepal underwent religious reformation from 5th century AD onwards, but their strongest creative contribution can be dated to the era from AD 1500 to 1800. (ICOMOS 2006, 78)

A nomination paper was registered with the Nepali state as the party in the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO along with an account of the seven sites. Nomination of the Kathmandu Valley along with its source was based on three criteria:

Firstly, they are unique and extremely rare; secondly, they represent a unique artistic and aesthetic achievement and are masterpieces of the creative genius; and thirdly, they are characteristic examples of a significant traditional style of architecture that has become vulnerable to irreversible socio-cultural and economic change. The Kathmandu Valley is the centre of a dynamic and developing country, but also a country deeply rooted in its great cultural heritage and committed to the noble task of preserving it for the benefit of all mankind. (ICOMOS 2006, 78)

Besides the enlisted monuments on the World Heritage List, there are many other important monuments in the Valley, and for their management there should be integration between the laws of the state and attempts of non-governmental organisations. Although some laws enacted by the state during the 30 years of Panchayat are concerned with the management of heritage sites, there were attempts to allow the presence of non-governmental organisations.

Master Plan for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage in Kathmandu Valley 1977

At the request of the Department of Archaeology on behalf of the government of Nepal in 1975, UNESCO sent an intra-departmental team of eight members under E.F. Sekler's leadership to Nepal. It had two objectives of long-term and immediate implementation. One to help the government of Nepal to preserve cultural heritages and two to prepare a masterplan for the conservation of cultural heritage (Sekler 2000). This project conducted a survey and analysed the condition of heritage sites of the Kathmandu Valley. The analysis was done from a financial and tourism perspective, which is an important aspect for the management of the heritage. Physical development, the condition of infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, and the existing legal provisions, etc., were the bases of the analysis. It provided general and specific suggestions.

Among general suggestions are participatory and awareness programmes, promotion of creative skills, information on the benefits and drawbacks of tourism, the management of ancient buildings for tourism, and following the conservation inventory for documentation. It also suggests changing the name of the Department of Archaeology to Department of Cultural Heritage and expanding its scope, and the need to introduce the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act to achieve legal protection (Sekler 2000). Detailed and specific suggestions are related to the heritage, heritage area and conserved areas. It also consists of suggestion to publish descriptions of monuments and monument zones, to establish rules regarding building codes (including their heights) in the main cities. Implementation of the procedures of building construction in conserved areas, introduction of programmes related to emergency rehabilitation and renovation of buildings, and finally, initiation of necessary procedures for the removal or acquisition of private buildings in the process of conservation (Sekler 2000).

In the 30 years of Panchayat regime, some concern was shown towards heritage preservation with indirect provisions in five

statutes. The formulation of Ancient Monument Preservation Rules for the implementation of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act was a positive development. Although the Act and Rules were not remarkable, it was in that period that the seven monuments of Nepal were enlisted on the World Heritage List. This indeed is the biggest and a special achievement of the Panchayat period in Nepal in the context of heritage conservation. Similarly, international non-governmental organisations and United Nations bodies such as UNESCO did productive work on conservation of heritage sites. The state, on its part, created a conducive environment and gave the required support for these organisations, which resulted in the formation of numerous plans and projects for heritage management.

Years of Democracy (After 1990)

The protests that brought about change in the political system after 1990 is called the People's Movement to denote its national significance. The People's Movement has become a popular terminology among Nepali citizens as the change has contributed to establishing citizens' rights and democratic beliefs. Many dreams of the society were spread in the name of democracy, but there was a lack of discussions on whether democracy could be the basis for citizens' livelihoods. It is appropriate to study the efforts in heritage management by linking them with their contribution to people's livelihoods. In this regard four statutes, one set of guidelines, one working procedure, and one Integrated Management Framework enacted after 1990 are discussed further.

Acts

Municipality Act [Nagarpalika Ain] 2048 BS [1992]: Section 15 of the Municipality Act 2048 BS discusses the work, duty, and authority of the municipality. Sub-section 1(d) of the Section 15 gives a municipality the authority over drinking water, flood control, resolution of conserved areas to protect natural and cultural heritage, and 1€ directs it for the proper use and conservation of the water in rivers, rivulets, wells, ponds, lakes, and stone spouts.

Sub-section 1(n) gives the responsibility to the municipality for environment conservation, preservation of archaeological and cultural objects.

Pashupati Area Development Trust Act [Pashupati Kshatra Bikas Kos Ain] 2044 BS [1987]: The preamble states that ‘it is expedient to make provisions relating to the Pashupati Area Development Trust, in order to safeguard, maintain and develop the Lord Pashupatinath area and maintain the decency and convenience of the general people’. It is clear from the preamble that the Act envisages the protection, maintenance, and development of Pashupatinath heritage. Sub-section 1.3 of Section 6 states that the aim of the Act is to ‘maintain, protect and promote objects or sites of ancient, historical, religious, cultural and national importance and natural heritages in the Pashupati area’. Of its five objectives, the rest of the objectives are not concerned with heritage conservation. Section 8 of the Act provides for formation of Pashupati Area Development Governing Council, which has the authority to work on conservation and development of cultural and natural heritages in the Pashupati area.

Greater Janakpur Area Development Council Act [Brihattar Janakpur Kshatra Bikas Parishad Ain] 2055 BS [1998]: The preamble of this Act clearly states that its objectives are to safeguard, maintain and develop places with religious, historical, and archaeological importance. Among the Council’s five objectives, Sub-section 5(b) provides for the protection and management of sites of religious, historical, and archaeological importance within the Greater Janakpur Area. Sub-section 5(c) is directly related to heritage preservation as it states that the objective is to identify, explore, and conduct research on shrines, temples, lakes, ponds (*sarobars*) or other sites of ancient, historical, religious, cultural, and archaeological importance within the Greater Janakpur Area.

Sub-section 13.1 of the Act states that the Council may, from time to time, regulate, control, or prohibit certain matters related

to conservation as required by publishing a public notice. It can also identify, explore, and conduct research on temples, lakes, or other sites of natural, historical, religious, cultural, and archaeological importance. Although the arrangement of this sub-section seems to clash with the objectives of the Act, the provision of regulation is an important aspect.

Local Self-Governance Act [Sthaniya Swayatta Shasan Ain] 2055 BS [1999]: This Act was formulated with the aim of making the local bodies responsible and accountable, and also to encourage the utmost participation of the general public in governance through local institutions. It has specified the rights and responsibility from the ward to district levels for conservation of natural and cultural heritages.

Section 25 of the Act defines the functions, duties, and powers of the ward committee, under the village development committee (VDC). Sub-section 25(c) has the provision that it assists the VDC in keeping an inventory and protecting the population, houses, land, rest houses, shelters, inns, holy places (like temples, shrines, mosques, monasteries, *madrasas*, etc.), barren land, ponds, lakes, wells, deep water, taps, etc., and other similar religious and cultural places of public importance within the ward.

Section 93 defines the function, duty, and power of the ward committee in a municipality. Sub-section 93(a) has a provision for it to assist the municipality in keeping an inventory and protecting the population, houses, land, rest houses, shelters, inns, temples, shrines, hermitages, monasteries, mosques, *madrasas*, holy places, barren land, ponds, wells, lakes, deep water, canals, taps, stone water taps, etc., within the ward. Section 96 mentions the function, duty, and authority of the municipality, and sub-section 96(e) is about the functions of the municipality in relation to culture. Sub-section 96(e)1 makes a provision for preparing an inventory of the culturally and religiously important places within the municipality area, and also maintaining, protecting, and promoting them. Sub-section 96(e)2 mentions the protection, promotion and use of

archaeological objects, languages, religion, and culture within the municipal area.

Section 189 of the Act defines the functions, duties, and powers of the district development committee (DDC), and sub-section 189(l) discusses its three functions related to language and culture. Sub-section 189 (l)1 mentions keeping records of culturally and religiously important places within the district; preserving and promoting them by having them maintained as part of the DDC's functions, duties, and powers. Likewise, sub-section 189 (l)3 states that the committee shall promote and use and cause to be preserved, promoted, and used, the archaeological objects, languages, religion, art, and culture within the district. Overall, this Act attempts to fully involve local people through the local institutions in conservation efforts.

Other Provisions

The Standards and Guidelines related to Construction in the Conserved Monument Areas of the Kathmandu Valley 2048 BS (with amendment) [Kathmandu Upatyaka Samrakshit Smarak Ghosit Kshatrama Hune Nirman Sambandhi Mapdanda eham Nirdeshika—2048 BS (Samsodhansahit)]⁵: The Standard and Guidelines was established with the objective ‘...to maintain the historical and artistic environment of the areas, so as to preserve the traditional style and cultural heritage. To retain the ancient, original, and pure environment, this standard has been created for buildings to be built in those areas’ (Department of Archaeology 2054 BS). The arrangements made by the Guidelines help in maintaining the traditional style of the conserved areas.

Clause (1) of the Guidelines states that these standard and guidelines is followed in Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Changunarayan Area, Swayambhu Area, and Baudhdhanath Area. Clause (4) of the Guidelines makes provisions for the standards and guidelines for

5 Sub-section 8.1 of the Standard for Conservation and Construction, 2007, which is concerned with Patan Durbar Conserved Monuments, has annulled this Guidelines (Department of Archaeology 2064b BS).

buildings to be built in the conserved monument zone. Subclause 2(a) of Clause (4) emphasises that the height of the houses should be a maximum of 35 feet. However, if a new house is near a historically and artistically significant monument, the building has to be shorter than the monument. Besides maintaining the traditional style, it also gives priority to the security of heritages.

The Guidelines has clear guidelines for a building's walls, windows, doors, roof, balcony, cornices, pavements, and terraces. Besides this, it specifies that reinforced concrete cement (RCC) and steel-frames cannot be used in the construction of buildings, and encroachment of archived and existing courtyards is not allowed. It explains the traditional Nepali style as:

Traditional Nepali style means the pavements of the house, cornice, eaves, roof, clearly seen brick walls, wooden windows, tile roof, paint of the house matching the colour of the woods, plaster on brick wall. (Department of Archaeology 2054 BS)

The most important aspect of this Guidelines is its contribution in maintaining the historicity and originality of a conserved area. Directives on the limitations of the height of a building, its style and building material are explicitly given. It defines the traditional Nepali style. Therefore, this Guidelines is an important step taken by the state.

Ancient Monument Preservation Procedure [Prachin Smarak Samrakshan Karyabidhi] 2064 BS [2007]: The Procedure have been introduced with the aim of removing theoretical and practical confusion in ancient monuments conservation and reduce mistakes in conservation, maintaining the originality, sensitivity, and authenticity of ancient monuments. The Procedure are divided into 11 sections and draw attention to subjects which are practiced but not yet defined. The last page includes provisions regarding renovation and preservation in the Ancient Monument Preservation Act. The procedure mainly concentrates on the

theories, processes, and technologies related to conservation of ancient monuments.

The second part of the Procedure defines the terminology which is commonly used, and related to preservation, for example, renovation, safeguarding, prevention, rehabilitation, reconstruction, strengthening, etc. The basic principles of heritage conservation are mentioned in the third section, and the fourth section consists of the general work procedures to be followed in preservation. The fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth specify the type of walls, mud plaster, *lakansi*, windows/doors and pillars to be used, and the way to use them. The tenth section defines the renovation work which is possible only with the permission of the Department of Archaeology, and the final section has a sample of the proposed archaeological record form.

The basic principle of preservation is the main aspect of the Procedure. The five principles are clearly mentioned in the third section: a) in the process of preservation, there should not be any sort of duplication or falsification that competes with the original; b) the preservation process should not change the original look of the object or the structure; c) while doing the preservation work, if possible the same old material should be used as far as possible and if not the new material should have similar properties and be of similar nature; d) the original form and process should be affected minimally; e) the materials used during conservation should be able to be removed if necessary; while doing so, it should not impact the originality. The objective of this part of the procedure is the protection of the monuments from any kind of harm while being conserved and its preservation for the future generations (Department of Archaeology 2064a BS). Thus, this procedure mainly concentrates on, and describes, the term 'renovation'.

Integrated Management Framework [Ekikrit Byabasthapan Samrachana] 2064 BS [2007]: The seven monument sites of the Kathmandu Valley were listed as one heritage on the World Heritage List in 1979. Twenty-four years later, in 2003, the heritage

site(s) was listed as endangered due to unmanaged development and decline of traditional local heritage. The state cooperated at different levels with various concerned stakeholder organisations and international associations to address this issue. As a result, a methodologically integrated management plan was prepared in cooperation with the Department of Archaeology, local institutions, and site managers (Acharya 2007).

This document was adopted with the state as a party and is the basic document for integrated management for conservation. It defines the procedure and strategy to protect heritage of universal value by reforming the existing institutional, legal, and economic systems. A management handbook and implementation plans were also made for every heritage site along with the Integrated Management Framework.

The Framework consists more or less three aspects: first is the solution of problems and objectives, second is the integrated management structure, and third the implementation aspect. This document was prepared by the state to manage World Heritage Sites of the Kathmandu Valley; and, it also defines the implementation process of Integrated Management Plan. The primary aim of this plan is to safeguard the universal and local value of the World Heritage Sites, keeping in mind the lifestyle, security, and financial well-being of the local community (Department of Archaeology 2064b BS). The most significant aspect of this paper is linking the livelihoods of, protection of, and economic viability for local communities within the heritage sites with the heritage conservation campaign.

The Framework considers the institutional, legal, and financial structures as important in the plan of heritage management. The Department of Archaeology is the central institutional body for conservation of World Heritage Sites, which is followed in position by the local body, area manager, and the monument area respectively. The Framework stresses on the need for clarification in statutes directly and indirectly related to heritage conservation and removal in contradictions in the rules and regulations

them. Similarly, in regard to economic structure, it calls for the preparation of an integrated financial plan to include all resources and assistance. The Framework calls on the state for the creation of institutional, legal, and financial structures for implementation.

The institutional, legal, and financial structures are the central focus of the Acts and other documents related to conservation of the post-1990 democratic period. It has also defined the goals and processes of renovation and preservation work. The political openness did not just impact the institutions related to heritage conservation, but also encouraged community's participation. The Local Self-Governance Act and Integrated Management Framework allows the local community to participate in conservation and link the community's living standards to the heritage around them.

Management Practices in the Patan Durbar Area

This section includes state- and non-state-level endeavours, focused on Patan Durbar area. Various standards, plans, and programmes related to preservation were established and implemented by the state. The state established its presence through an office in the durbar area. Although complete responsibility of the durbar area is of the state, sufficient attention has not been paid for its upkeep. In addition, non-state institutions armed with the required resources and skills are also involved in the management of the durbar area.

Presence of the State

As a representative of the state, the Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation is based in the Patan Durbar area. Besides this, the Patan Museum and Central Cultural Heritage Conservation Laboratory also symbolise the presence of the state. Patan Museum is an autonomous institution formed under a separate Patan Sangrahalaya Bikas Samiti (Gathan) Adesh, 2053 BS [Development Committee (Formation) Order 1996]. The basis for Patan Museum is the National Museum of Metalcraft. In order to maintain the fame

of Patan for its metalcraft the National Museum of Metalcraft had been established.⁶

The National Museum of Metalcraft was established in 1962 and was opened to the public in 1969. Although it was established as a museum, it was not based on the principles of a museum. Various statues and culturally significant objects were placed in the windows of the palace without any information on the religious and cultural significance of the objects on display. This was later moved to the Chaukoth Durbar, and in 1982, with the Austrian government's support and permission from the government of Nepal, the museum was closed to the public for further work on its management.

The National Museum of Metalcraft is one of the divisions under the Department of Archaeology. At present, there are 14 employees in the museum who are under the Patan Museum Development Committee, and among them, eight are assistants and office assistants and the rest are junior clerks. While the government of Nepal provides the salary for the employees, the Development Committee takes care of their other facilities. The employees have not been merged into the Development Committee yet due to some problems in the procedure. However, although there are employees paid as staff of the National Museum of Metalcraft, this museum is now merged with the Patan Museum Development Committee.⁷

Patan Museum: Patan Museum Development Committee was established in 1996 under Patan Museum Development Committee (Formation) Order, 2053 BS. The Development Committee Formation Order was published as a notice from the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in the Nepal Gazette on 27 May, 1996, and after a year,

6 Based on a conversation with Suresh Suras Shrestha and Shyam Sundar Rajbangshi of the Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office on 30 November 2010.

7 Mary Shepherd completed selecting and describing the objects for presentation in three years. The internal decoration for the creation and presentation of the objects, which was based on Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, took 14 years to be completed. According to the notice of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in 1997, the National Museum of Metalcraft was merged with the new entity.

the Museum was opened to the public. The Committee has seven members where the chairperson is the secretary of the Ministry and the vice-chairperson is the director general of the Department of Archaeology. The member-secretary is the executive director of Patan Museum. Three of the members, one of which is a woman, are art and culture experts. The executive officer of Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City office is an ex-officio member of the Committee.

Section 3 of the Patan Museum Development Committee (Formation) Order, 2053 BS outlines the formation process of the committee. Clause 2 of Section 3 has a provision for the formation of a committee of nine members, with the deputy director general of the Department of Archaeology as the chairperson. However, under the first amendment of this provision in 2007, a joint secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation was to be the chairperson of a seven-person committee. Again, in the second amendment in 2010, the secretary of the Ministry of Federal Affairs, Constituent Assembly, Parliamentary Affairs and Culture is the chairperson of the Committee. The executive director of Patan Museum is the member secretary in this seven-member committee. Some particulars of the Museum are:

- The Austrian government provided financial and technical support in the construction of the Museum (1983-1997).
- A lay person can roam around the Museum independently, and be informed of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.
- Patan Museum is unique in its display system. The lighting and caption are a specialised kind (Hagmuller 2003). The light and mirror give the visitor a complete view of the displayed object.
- There are 200 objects on display and another 900 culturally significant objects are in storage.
- The Museum has certain sources of income for its sustainability. A cafe inside the museum pays a rent of NPR 65,000 per month. Likewise, shops, publications, and tickets are other sources of income. The Museum also has a

guest studio, which can be rented by national or international artists for their use. Kathmandu Contemporary Art

- Centre is a private gallery inside the museum, which also pays a rent.

Patan Sub-metropolitan City started to charge tourists Rs 200 from the year 2000. (Kantipur Daily 2056a, 2056b BS). The Museum bore the brunt of this charge and, therefore, the two organisations do not have a cordial relationship. Since then, the Museum tried to carry out some activities for its sustainability but the Sub-metropolitan City did not show any interest. Since the Museum is an autonomous institution, there can be no interference for its daily and periodic activities from Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City. But the uneasy relationship shared between the two hinders any jointly conducted activity. Patan Museum is run with the resources it generates at present.

Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office: The Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office is the only authoritative representative of the state in the Patan Durbar area. It looks after the ancient monuments and archaeological sites and objects throughout Patan and not just the durbar area and also monitors the various preservation activities taking place in Patan. Specifically, this office promotes, conserves, and takes care of ancient monuments and archaeological objects which are more than a century old.⁸ It also produces a quarterly progress report after monitoring and evaluating the work of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust on Patan Durbar restoration.

The Presence of the Non-state Actors

Since UNESCO entered Nepal in the 1970s, various national and international organisations have contributed to Nepal's heritage conservation sector. This sub-section discusses some of the attempts and activities of the non-state organisations. It tries to

⁸ Based on a talk with the Shyam Sundar Rajbangsi and Dhruva Adhikari of the Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office on 30 November 2010.

assess the ways in which such practices have contributed to the management of the Patan Durbar area. It elaborates on the activities of three national or local non-governmental organisations and one international non-governmental organisation that are active in Patan Durbar Square.

Patan Durbar Area Improvement Committee: The government of Nepal was looking after the area inside the Durbar but the local community of Patan had various questions regarding the responsible institution/person for the area outside it. During these uncertain times, from 2000, the Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City Office started charging entrance fees to tourists. This decision, taken by the Sub-metropolitan City Office, made the local people realise the importance of their involvement and hence proposed to use the revenue for conservation of the heritage and open space outside the Durbar area. Further, a need was realised for the formation of a high-powered committee to lead this campaign. Under the leadership of Padamlal Maharjan, an official of the Sub-municipality office, Patan Durbar Area Improvement Committee as an informal institution was established on 5 July, 2009,⁹ in which 17 organisations came to be associated (governmental, non-governmental, and communal).

Despite being an informal organisation, it is recognised at the community level. Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City Office, Department of Archaeology, Lalitpur Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office, and the police office of Mangal Bazaar are government offices with representatives on this committee. Likewise, national and international non-governmental organisations are also members. Lalitpur Federation of Commerce and Industry, Lalitpur Handicraft Association, Three Star Club, Patan Tourism Development Organisation, and Lalitpur Youth Club are national organisations and Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust is the international organisation involved in this committee. The

⁹ The organisation is not registered with any governmental body but is present as the most powerful unit playing an active and significant role in every decision concerned with Patan Durbar area. Hence, it is called informal.

community organisations which are members of this committee are Buddhist Bihar Association, Jyapu Samaj, Mangal Tole Improvement Committee, Ha Kha: Tole Improvement Committee, Haugal Tole Improvement Committee, Mahapal Tole Improvement Committee, and Layaku Manka Committee.¹⁰

The Committee started its campaign with two activities: cleaning the area and the providing security in the area. On the first day of every month, a local group, *aama samuha* (mothers' group), leads a cleaning campaign, and for security, Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City Office has appointed municipal police. The Committee is equally active in constructing physical infrastructure; a solar light project was executed under its leadership. It began with six solar lights, but with the budget of NPR 5 million Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City allocated for the fiscal year 2010/11, it helped install 200 more solar lights at six entry points to the Durbar area—Pulchowk, Lagankhel, Balkumari, Gwarko, Patan Dhoka, Kumbheshwar, and Mangal Bazaar.

D-ROPE: Destination Root of People on Earth (D-ROPE) has been managing Thantha Chen Batika or Krishna Uddyan in the Patan Durbar area. Under its Green Project and with a slogan 'Social Initiative with Cultural and Historical Importance', spaces which were previously dumping sites were renovated and converted into gardens which have helped keep a part of the durbar area clean and beautiful.¹¹

Children for Green New Nepal: The organisation is running a project called Patan Durbar Square Flower Project, in which school and college students are encouraged to participate as volunteers with the slogan of 'Beautifying the City, Creating Green Future'

10 Based on a conversation with Babu Raja Bajracharya, chairperson of Patan Durbar Area Improvement Committee, on 2 March 2012.

11 Based on a conversation with Ravi Darshandhari, a member of the organisation, on 30 June 2011.

to clean the area. The Flower Project of this organisation was initiated with the aim of keeping the Patan Durbar area clean and concentrates on the stone spouts within it. 'Together for Better Environment' is the motto for the environment project.¹²

Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust: On 9 April 1990, while Nepalis were celebrating the re-establishment of a multi-party democratic system, far away from Kathmandu, in Massachusetts, United States, an organisation named Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust was being set up. Under the leadership of E.F. Sekler, this international initiative by W.B. Dickerman, M.K. Doyle, and E.G. Theophyle of Harvard University had two broad goals. The first was to contribute towards undertaking projects and strategy preparation for development, management, and coordination of conservation of heritage of the Kathmandu Valley for future generations from around the world. The second objective was to encourage the participation of the citizens of the United States and the world in preserving the culture of the Kathmandu Valley (Sekler 2000).

The Trust started its work in 1991 with a small budget (USD 2800). By the late 1990s, it had spent USD 336,000 on 14 different projects with most of the projects concentrated in Patan. The Trust has continued to be active in renovation of Patan Durbar. The Trust's ambitious Restoration of the Patan Royal Palace Complex is reaching its final stage. Though the project started its work from 2007, preparation and seeking financial resources started much earlier. Since the Trust does not have a regular source of income, there is a tradition of seeking contributions for its work.

The ongoing project of the Trust is concentrated on Mul Chowk and Sundari Chowk of Patan Durbar. It has completed work on the pond in Bhandarkhal. The Trust, which has invested more than NPR 60 million in different projects, concentrates only on one project at a time. Permission is taken from the state before undertaking any

¹² Based on a talk with Bijaya Prajapati, a member of the organisation, on 21 August 2011.

project and the director general of the Department of Archaeology is the chairperson of the working committee for the project. Besides this, the Office for Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision monitors and evaluates projects, which further helps in transparency and sensitivity of the preservation activities. Building restoration is the main activity of the current project.¹³

National NGOs are focused on conservation and utilisation of heritage and open spaces outside the palace, whereas international organisations are active inside the palace. Although the government of Nepal should have been responsible for the area within the palace due to its cultural and archaeological significance and sensitivity, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust is a body of experts and has been working in heritage conservation for a long time. Therefore, it does not really matter whether it is working outside or inside the palace.¹⁴

The role of the state body or office in heritage conservation is limited to being an administrative unit. At the non-state level, the role of national non-governmental organisations is focussed on public open spaces than heritage conservation but time has not yet come for an evaluation of their achievements. The only international organisation active in Patan Durbar area is Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust. It has been given the responsibility of the palace's restoration due to its long contribution to the conservation sector, its loyalty towards heritage conservation, experience in the field of conservation, the ability to harness resources, and the trust it has earned gained through its public image makes.

Planning and Managerial Initiation

Patan Durbar area is an ancient monument listed as a World Heritage Site in 1979. Patan Durbar Conserved Area was announced on 30 July 1984 as per Section 3(1) of the Ancient Monument

13 Based on a conversation with Rohit Ranjitkar, Nepal Programme Director, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.

14 Based on a conversation with Rohit Ranjitkar, Nepal Programme Director, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.

Preservation Act 2013 BS (Amended) to preserve it as per the standards of the World Heritage (Amatya 2058 BS and Department of Archaeology 2064b BS). Important monuments within the area which were missed in the previous announcement were included in a new notice published in the Nepal Gazette on 9 April 1997, abrogating the old notice as per suggestion made by UNESCO in 1993, and as proposed by the Patan Conservation and Development Plan (Amatya 2058 BS) (Fig 3)

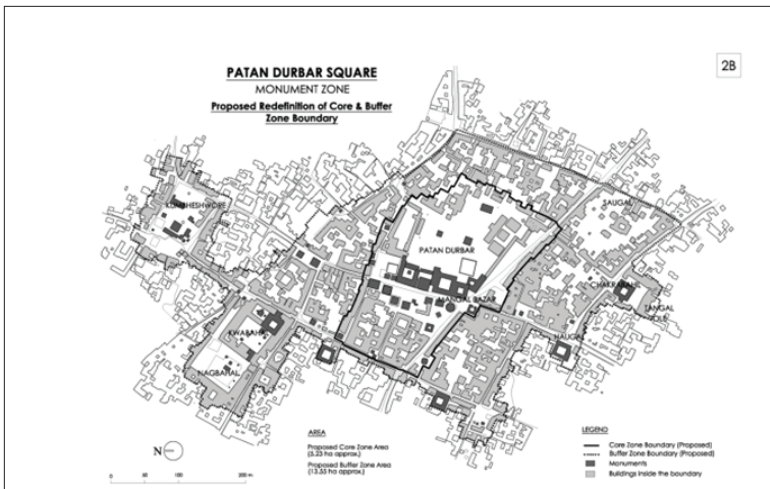


Figure 3: Patan Conserved Area
(Source: Kathmandu Valley (Nepal) No 121 Rev.)

There are various important monuments within the Patan Durbar Conservation Area. Kisi Chowk, Keshavnarayan Chowk, Nasal Chowk, Mul Chowk, Sundari Chowk, Dwimaju Chowk are the main squares within the Durbar. Krishna Mandir, Harishankar Mandir, Narayan Mandir, Narasingha Mandir, Uma Maheswor Mandir, Garudnarayan Mandir, Ikhalkhu Ganesh Mandir, Hakha: Ganesh Mandir, Shiva Mandir, Kwalkhu Ganesh Mandir, Swathanarayan Mandir, Ardha Nariswari Mandir, Patuko Mandir, Manikumar Ganesh Mandir, Bhimsen Mandir, Bishwanath, Charnarayan, Jagannath, Vaman Avatar, Ikhalkhu Bhairava, Tichhuganesh

temples are the main temples which are built in the shikhara and pagoda style. Nag Bahal, Hiranyavarna Mahavihar, Manimandap Mahavihar, Jeenavarna Mahavihar, Haugal Bahal, Jom Bahal, Jwaha Bahi, Jyawahil are a few significant *bahals* and monasteries. Among the stone spouts in Patan, Nag Bahal Hiti, Mani Hiti, Laxminarayan Hiti, Jaldroni Dhungedhara are the prominent ones. Bhandarkhal, Kamal Pokhari, Thulo Ghanta, Muchhe Aagan and rest houses such as Manimandal, Lampaati are important monuments in Patan (Amatya 2058 BS). It is for the management of the scattered ancient monuments and objects and areas with archaeological value that the Standards for Conservation and Construction in Patan Durbar Conserved Monument Area 2007 has been formulated.

Standards for Conservation and Construction in Patan Durbar Conserved Monument Area 2064 BS [2007]: It was formulated for activities on preservation and construction specifically in the Patan Durbar Conserved Monument Area. It is stated clearly in the preamble that the main aim of implementing the Standards is to preserve the ancient and other monuments in the conservation area:

... the DOA has introduced and implemented this Standards for the purpose of Sub-section (6) of Section (3) in the Act, which was for the conservation and management of historical and architectural environment of Patan Durbar Conserved Area, and for preservation of ancient monuments and other heritages (Department of Archaeology 2064b BS).

This Standards was implemented from 6 August 2007 and constitutes four aspects. First is the standards for the conservation and maintenance of listed buildings; the second deals with the construction of buildings on empty spaces and renovation of unlisted buildings. The third is for buildings which need modification, and the fourth is about other constructions related to development works (Department of Archaeology 2064b BS).

Handbook for the Management of Patan Durbar Square Monument Zone 2064 BS [Patan Durbar Square Smarak Kshatra Bybasthapan Laghu-pustika/Bidhi Pustika]: The Handbook was produced as a result of a joint effort of the government of Nepal and the World Heritage Centre as a handbook for the integrated management structure (Department of Archaeology and World Heritage Centre with UNESCO-Kathmandu Office 2007b). It constitutes the rules for the management of Patan Durbar Conserved Monument Zone.¹⁵ Along with the definitions and description of the Monument Zone, it also provides details of the institutional, legal, and financial structure for the management of the Zone. The Handbook is to be used for daily management and annual review and revision of implementation plan of the Zone. The Handbook has to be reviewed and revised at least once in five years (Department of Archaeology and World Heritage Centre with UNESCO-Kathmandu Office 2007b).

The Handbook raises the issue of the need to connect the management aim and strategy with the living standard, security, and economic utility/feasibility of the community residing within World Heritage Sites. This is the latest important conception of heritage management. This Handbook has proposed four strategies to achieve the goals of management: integrated management, institutional structure, legal structure, and economic structure.

The integrated management of monuments is emphasised within the Integrated Management Framework. It raises the need to follow common rules for preservation and also create an environment of support through a coordinating working committee. There is a provision where the institutional structure is to establish an integrated management plan after identifying a manager who is given the rights to coordinate, inspect, assess, and implement the plans. The legal structure is to hand over the rights to the manager and create legal provisions in accordance with the monument

15 World Heritage Division (Department of Archaeology), Monument Conservation and Durbar Supervision Office, and Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan Office are the area managers of Patan Durbar Conserved Monument Zone.

area, and also specify the implementation process. Moreover, it points out the need to establish a separate strategy to deal with preservation and renovation projects. There is also a requirement for a mechanism that controls the administrative expenses for managing the economic structures.

The Handbook includes the work plan for the first five years; however, it does not have a detailed description of the workplan. It accepts the implementation of an Integration Management Plan as a plan cycle of five years, and according to the first five-year chart, the first Integrated Management Plan would be initiated in July 2007 and end in July 2012. A complete review should be done after the completion period and necessary revisions made.

The initial support for conservation of Patan Durbar area was provided by the Austrian government. E.F. Sekler submitted a proposal for Urbanistic Conservation of Patan (Lalitpur) Durbar Square as a Monument Zone to the government of Nepal in 1980, for which he was given financial support of USD 46,000 from the Austrian government. The museum located in Keshavnarayan Chowk of Patan Durbar Square is a result of this particular aid. Thus begun, Patan Durbar area has received governmental and non-governmental support in different stages and forms and this and this is continuing.

Citizen Involvement

The famous Krishna Mandir was built by Siddhi Narsingh Malla, the King of Patan, in 1636 (Amatya 2058 BS). During the inauguration of this temple in 1637, the priest was kept in the temple premises for 40 days by the king and was given 100 gold coins everyday (Levi 2007). After the construction of the Krishna Mandir, for a long time it was not used for public gatherings. Even until 1957, it was not well-known among the people outside Patan. It was after King Mahendra's visit in the same year on Krishnashtami, with the coverage by the news on the radio and Gorkhapatra Daily, it became known to the rest of the country. People who lived outside Patan started visiting to worship in the temple (Acharya 2068 BS). Today, the tradition of the king to construct a structure and start a

particular tradition has changed, but the general public has started the creation and utilisation of such public spaces.

There are numerous examples of citizen involvement which has contributed in publicising and promoting the use of durbar squares and their cultural importance among the public. Machhindranath Jatra and various other traditional festivals are celebrated here. Lately, people have been celebrating Teej in this square, which is a result of the migration of people to the capital in the liberal political environment. Until the 1970s, a limited number of women would gather in Kumbheshwar and Krishna Mandir, but today, hundreds of women gather here to sing Teej songs and dance throughout the day.¹⁶

Patan Durbar area is experiencing an increasing use and presence of citizens, and street plays, cultural programmes, civil society assemblies, etc., are frequent activities which are seen here. Among such events, Kathmandu Literary Festival was organised from 16 to 18 September 2011. It was held inside the Patan Museum within Keshavnarayan Chowk. When asked for a reason for selecting Patan Durbar Square as their venue, one of the organisers of this event said:

This is the best example among the ancient monuments. As citizens, we have the right to use it and this will contribute in its conservation. Durbar area is a different kind of heritage, and so, we thought of using it in a distinct way. There was a possibility to hold a soft event here, and more importantly, we liked this place so it was chosen as the venue. The participants liked the location as well.¹⁷

Programmes organised within the monument zone contribute to heritage conservation and the daily livelihoods of the local community. Organising events like the Kathmandu Literary Festival is not just an example of the interest in the use of the spaces, but

16 Based on a conversation with Babu Raja Bajracharya, 2 March 2012.

17 Pranab Man Singh, telephone conversation, 27 April 2012.

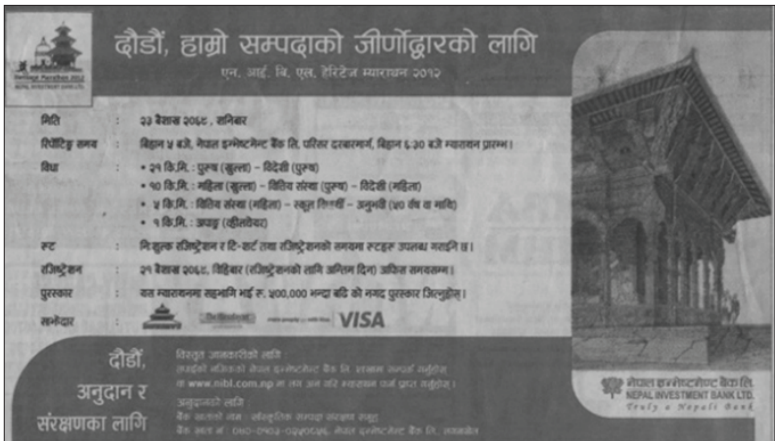


Figure 4: From Kantipur daily (2069 BS)

more importantly, an exercise of their right to use public spaces. Moreover, organising programmes spread the message that public spaces can be used for creative purposes. Of late, citizens’ concern for heritage conservation is seen to have risen. The advertisement for the campaign, ‘Let’s Run for Renovation of Our Heritage’, published in the Kantipur daily is another example of the people’s concern (Fig 4).

Conclusion

If the Acts are to be fully implemented, cultural heritages can be conserved (Nepal 2004). Existing Acts are not effective for cultural conservation (Raj 2053 BS). The former conclusion was made by Bhim Nepal on the basis of seven Acts and one Regulation, while the latter is Yogesh Raj’s judgement based on two Acts and one set of standards. Three things can be said based on the study of 11 Acts, survey reports, regulations, master plans, standards and guidelines, workplans, integrated framework, and procedure book, and institutional study. First, the durbar areas are not accepted as ‘public spaces’ in any of the policies or programmes of the state. There is no clarity in the idea of ‘public space’ on the state and non-state levels, and everybody follows their individual understanding

of the term. However, historically, durbar areas have always been used by the public.

Second, the state started building institutional structures and providing a legal framework for the conservation of ancient monuments in the 1950s. Institutions like the Department of Archaeology and fundamental policies like the Ancient Monument Preservation Act were introduced during the period of political transition from 1951 to 1960. However, the necessary regulations for the implementation of that particular Act took 33 years to be introduced, which shows extreme indifference of the state towards heritage conservation. The only remarkable achievement during the 30 years of Panchayat was the recognition of seven heritage sites in Kathmandu as World Heritage Sites. Besides this, some issues of heritage conservation were attempted to be included in other statutes. In the democratic era (post-1990), there was little work towards heritage conservation, but there was a rise in interest on this subject, and the perception shifted from 'conservation' to 'management'. Of the three time periods, the first dealt with the preparation of structures, the second was concerned with attempts towards conservation, and the third tried connecting conservation with users. Therefore, it can be considered a positive development when it is seen through a chronological lens.

Third, since the army never entered Patan Durbar area, the palace area was always open to the local community. The state played a positive role in the recognition of Patan Durbar area as a World Heritage Site in 1979. All state- and non-state-level endeavours in Patan Durbar area is aimed at tourists. Although the locals are actively participating in the maintenance of Patan durbar area, it is not yet understood and claimed as a public space at the level of non-state institutions and the general public.

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