

Discourse of Post-Earthquake Heritage Reconstruction: A Case Study of Bhaktapur Municipality

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Abstract

Background: The 2015 Nepal earthquakes caused massive losses of human lives and physical infrastructures as well as cultural heritage. According to the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Report, approximately 2,900 historical, cultural, religious monuments and heritage sites including World Heritage Sites in the Kathmandu Valley were damaged. When the formal reconstruction program began, major heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley including Bhaktapur Durbar Square garnered much attention of national and international stakeholders, donors and heritage activists. However, heritage reconstruction became one of the most contested domains, especially in Bhaktapur Municipality, mainly due to the enforcement of international guidelines in heritage reconstruction.

Research issues/objectives/questions: This paper explores the discourse of post-earthquake heritage reconstruction focusing on how UNESCO World Heritage guidelines, and national laws as well as the involvement of different stakeholders affect heritage reconstruction? Why did Bhaktapur Municipality want to revive the Malla Period architecture through heritage reconstruction?

Methodology: Several months of ethnographic work conducted in several phases in 2018 and 2019 in the Bhaktapur Municipality. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with 59 individuals in communities, government institutions, and stakeholders. This study is a part of our collaborative research partnership, 'Expertise, Labour and Mobility in Nepal's Post-Conflict, Post-Disaster Reconstruction' (funded by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council in collaboration with Social Science Baha and the Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University).

Results: The UNESCO guidelines adopted by the Department of Archaeology seems narrow in defining heritage and capturing people's historical values and cultural identity as well as collective memories associated with heritages, which has led to contestations on heritage reconstruction. Conflicts are also fueled due to the new policies and guidelines introduced by the federal government—Local Government Operation Act 2017, which granted rights to the Municipality for defining their heritage as history and cultural identity and its reconstruction and preservation. Hence, as opposed to the UNESCO guidelines, the Bhaktapur Municipality opted for their own designs to revive Malla Period architectures through heritage reconstruction. Likewise, community preferred user's committee-led reconstruction as this approach ensured deep sense of ownership of their historical and cultural identity, and enhanced transparency and quality reconstruction.

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Introduction

Nepal's post 2015 earthquake heritage reconstruction has raised a discourse about power and legitimacy over defining heritages, authenticity and integrity. The earthquake damaged 2,900 historical, cultural, religious monuments and heritage including World Heritage Sites within the earthquake affected districts (NPC 2015). A total of 116 historical and cultural monuments were damaged in Bhaktapur Municipality alone.² Following the post-earthquake reconstruction, including heritage reconstruction, donors and development partners pledged USD 4.4 billion both as grant and loans in June 2015. Along with the financial aids, geopolitical power relations manifested in the reconstruction of World Heritage Sites within the Kathmandu Valley. International stakeholders viz China, United States, India, Japan, and UNESCO as well as Germany either actively involved in the reconstruction or showed their immense interests in heritages reconstructions (See also Christian 2018). Consequently, heritage reconstruction became one of the most contested domains in the Kathmandu Valley, especially in Bhaktapur, due to the enforcement of UNESCO World Heritage guidelines, engagement of national and international stakeholders, and refusal of foreign assistance³ as well as Bhaktapur Municipality's stands on reviving Malla Period architecture through reconstruction process.⁴

Disputes on heritage reconstruction, however, is not a new phenomenon in Nepal. In the past the country has suffered from several mega-earthquakes but the discourse of heritage reconstruction widely discussed after the 1934 Nepal-Bihar earthquake that occurred end of the Rana regime (1846-1951). Scholars also argue that although Malla Period heritages were preserved and respected by Shah Kings, it experienced frequent threat or even deliberately deteriorated during the Rana regime (Amatya 1983). In the 1934 earthquake, a total of 177 temples, public shelters, and palaces were destroyed in Bhaktapur alone (Rana 1934: 57). Heritages such as old Palace of Bhaktapur, Place of 55 Windows, Krishna Temple were heavily damaged, while Bishnu Temple, Shiva Temple, Bhairab Temple, Barahi Temple and places of the 99 courtyards (Rana 1934: 64-65), the Cyasiling Mandap (eight-cornered pavilion) were completely destroyed (Gutschow and Hagemuller 1991). But the earthquake was remarkable event through which Rana demolished many damaged heritages and rebuilt in a new design on their own interests.

In the post 1934 earthquake reconstruction, many heritages were modified from their original forms, design and cultural relics (Rana 1934, Amatya 1983:34, Gutschow and Hagemuller, 1991, Shrestha 2006). They were reconstructed in a short period of time with limited funding and without careful study (Rana 1934:82). The reconstructed heritages such as the Silu Mahadev (Fasi Dega) Temple, Jagannath Temple, and Place of 55 Windows were modified from their original forms, sizes, and their uses (Rana 1934, Amatya 2007, Gutschow and Hagemuller, 1991, Petti et al 2018, Shrestha 2006); for example, the Palace of 55 Windows

² KII no. 4, 23 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

³ 'German development bank pulls out of heritage rebuilding project,' The Kathmandu Post, April 27, 2018, <https://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-04-27/german-development-bank-pulls-out-of-heritage-rebuilding-project.html>

⁴ Sewa Bhattarai, 'Clash of cultures in Bhaktapur,' Nepali Times, June 1, 2018, <https://www.nepalitimes.com/banner/clash-of-cultures-in-bhaktapur>

was used for Rana's administrative purpose, and later as a museum (Shrestha 2006: 5-6). Only a few damaged heritages properties were reconstructed in their original forms (Joshi and Kaushik 2017).

However, several damaged heritages were demolished and never rebuilt.⁵ The 99 courtyards of the palace converted into garden, where Rana built the Padma High Secondary School in 1946 (Amatya, 2007). The Chyasilin Mandap was initially demolished, but it was rebuilt in 1990 by the West German development agency, Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) under the Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP)⁶ (Gutschow et al. 2016). The Chyasilin Mandap was reconstructed in hybrid architectural designs—replacing four central wooden pillars by steel encased in concrete, which joined with steels trusses in the ceiling— as earthquakes resilient structure (Joshi and Kaushik 2017). However, residents in Bhaktapur including the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party (NMKP)⁷ highly criticized German-led reconstruction as they replaced Malla Period architecture with modern technology and undermining their historical identity (Tiwari 2016, Grieve 2006). Nevertheless, Bhaktapur Durbar Square inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979 and governed under the World Heritage guidelines—western heritage discourse—which has always been confronted by Bhaktapur Municipality and the NMKP (Grieve 2006). When the NMKP came in a power and led the Municipality after the 1990 multiparty democracy, it has been promoting Newari culture, history and architecture through social, educational and political awareness as part of their identity.

The 2015 earthquake has been considered an opportunity through which Bhaktapur Municipality wants to revive Malla Period architecture. Moreover, the federal government—Local Government Operation Act 2017—granted rights to the Municipality to make and implement rules for heritages preservation and reconstruction, counter UNESCO World Heritage guidelines. Given this complexity, this paper explores the discourse of post-earthquake heritage reconstruction focusing on how UNESCO World Heritage guidelines, and national laws as well as the involvement of different stakeholders affect heritage reconstruction? Why does Bhaktapur Municipality want to revive the Malla Period architecture? Based on the ethnographic evidences from reconstruction of Bhaktapur Durbar Square and drawing insights into critical heritage studies, this paper examines how heritage discourse—authenticity, and integrity—shaped overall post-earthquake heritage reconstruction. We use the concept of the 'Authorized Heritage Discourse' (AHD) as an analytical lens to examine the process of heritage reconstruction in Bhaktapur Municipality.

⁵ The Harishankara/Krishna Temple, Puresvara Temple and Tilmadhav Narayan Temple were never rebuilt after the 1934 earthquake.

⁶ Bhaktapur Development Project dates back to the early 1970s. The Project was initiated with an agreement between then His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the West German development agency, Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), and its objective was to renovate and conserve historical cultural monuments in Bhaktapur. As a result, the Germans reconstructed some 187 heritage structures in Bhaktapur between 1974 and 1986, some of which had been damaged by the 1934 earthquake.

⁷ Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party (Nepal Workers' and Peasants' Party), a left-leaning political party, officially formed in 1975. The party has great influence in Bhaktapur's social, political and cultural development. Since it played a crucial role during the land reform movement in the early 1960s, the party is popular in Bhaktapur Municipality.

Heritage Discourse: Post Disaster Heritage Reconstruction

Heritage discourse has been widely discussed in critical heritage studies especially after the publication of the ‘Uses of Heritage’ by Laurajane Smith in 2006. Unlike the conventional understanding of heritages, Smith (2006) introduced Foucauldian discourse of power and knowledge as an analytical tool in heritage studies: what makes heritage or who gives value to it; who defines, and legitimizes heritage and so forth. Furthermore, heritage has been considered as a ‘discourse’ whose meaning is constituted or dominated by the western knowledge, ideology and relations of power, which Smith terms as “Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Smith 2006). Smith argues that “the authorized discourse is a professional discourse that privileges expert values and knowledge about the past and its material manifestations, and dominates and regulates professional heritage practices” (Smith 2006:4). Consequently, the AHD tends to undermine or exclude the consideration of the meaning, values, and the uses of heritages assigned by local ethnic communities (Dew 2017).

Politics, power, and identity are central themes of analysis within the critical heritage studies. Literatures on this subject argues that heritages as a political and contested terrain as they are defined, (mis)interpreted, and legitimized by experts and institutions who are in a position of power (Smith 2017, 2012, 2006, Harrison 2010, Silva and Santos 2012). Heritages are interwoven with identity, historical values and collective memories of certain communities (Brian and Howard 2008, Mwale and Lintonbon 2020). Consequently, heritages practices are negotiations between powerful and subordinate groups establishing their own culture, identity and memories (Smith 2017, Smith 2006, Graham and Howard 2008, Harrison 2010). On the other hand, scholars also argue that heritage discourse is not always dominated by western knowledge and ideology rather constructed by the discourse of internal politics, and power relations among different stakeholders (Harrison 2013, Yan 2015, Zhu 2016).

A body of literature also suggests that post-disaster and post-conflict heritage reconstructions are governed by the Authorized Heritage Discourse (Dew 2017, Rico 2014, 2018,). In post-disaster context, maintaining the authenticity of damaged heritages as per the UNESCO World Heritage guidelines is a main issue of contestation among experts and local communities (Rico 2014: 160, Dew 2017: 1). Hence, some scholars introduce an ‘adoptive reform’ concept within heritage discourse particularly in post-disaster context, which emphasizes on function than physical materiality (Dew 2017). In her case study from Banda Aceh, Indonesia in post 2004 tsunami, Dewi (2017) suggests that during the reconstruction of a Mosque, World Heritage Sites, people were more concerned about the functions and place of the Mosque instead of its original design. Since, the Mosque was rebuilt several times in the past with different designs, connection of people with god through worshipping was a main concern (Dew 2017: 5). Informed by the literatures, this article examines Bhaktapur Municipality’s imagination of post-earthquake heritage reconstruction.

Methodology

This paper is a part of our research partnership “Expertise, Labour and Mobility in Nepal’s Post-Conflict, Post-Disaster Reconstruction: Construction, Finance and Law as Domains of Social Transformation” funded by a Partnership Development Grant from Canada’s Social Science Research Council, and the project is led by Principal Investigator Dr. Sara

Shneiderman of the University of British Columbia. The partnership includes colleagues with backgrounds in anthropology, art history, community and regional planning, development studies, economics, educational studies, engineering, geography, law, political science, policy studies, and religious studies.⁸

For this study, ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in three sites in Bhaktapur, Dhading, and Sindhupalchok districts mainly in two phases in 2018 and 2019. The research team included Bina Limbu, Prakash Chandra Subedi, Manoj Suji and Nabin Rawal, and the fieldwork was conducted collaboratively. The paper presents findings from Bhaktapur. In the first phase, fieldwork in Bhaktapur was carried out in March 2018, and the research team primarily conducted interviews with individuals at the household level. In the second phase, from September to October 2018, the focus was on key local institutions and individuals, such as Bhaktapur Municipality, Heritage Sections, government officials under Department of Archaeology and other stakeholders and organizations. The third phase focused on national level organizations in Kathmandu took place in 2019, and some events were also observed in 2020. The research team conducted formal and informal interviews with 59 individuals and observed reconstruction of cultural heritage sites. Interviews were conducted in Nepali and translated into English by team members for presentation publication.

Heritage Making in Nepal: Department of Archaeology and UNESCO

The Department of Archaeology (DoA) was established in 1953 for overseeing preservation of ancient monuments and cultural heritage sites. Soon after the establishment of the department, the ‘Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956’ was enacted, which clearly defined all ancient monuments in terms of having their importance above one hundred year, and it also bestowed authority to the DoA for heritage conservation, maintenance and its ownership.⁹ Similarly, the government established the Guthi Sansthan in 1964.

Nepal ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1978 and major heritages of the Kathmandu Valley—Kathmandu Durbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Swayambhu Stupa, Baudhanath Stupa, Pashupati temple and Changu Narayan temple and Bhaktapur Durbar Square—listed in the World Heritage List in 1979. Since then UNESCO has been acting as an authoritative body for these heritage conservation (Tiwari 2016). The UNESCO World Heritage Committee also developed an Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention in 1977 with precise criteria for the inscription of the properties on the World Heritage Lists. Recently updated the UNESCO’s Operational Guidelines clearly stipulates the importance of authenticity and integrity of world heritage property and their cultural values in terms of forms, designs, materials, function, and traditions, as well as their management system. In terms of the reconstruction, the guideline has clearly spelled out that "the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances. Reconstruction is acceptable only

⁸ See <https://elmnr.arts.ubc.ca/> for project information.

⁹ Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956. <http://www.doa.gov.np/uploads/files/ancient-monument-preservation-act-2013-1956-ad-e.pdf>

on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture" (UNESCO 2019, 27).¹⁰

In the post 2015 earthquake, in coordination with the DoA, UNESCO involved in post-disaster needs assessment of heritages, and developing guidelines for heritage reconstruction (see also Christian 2018). The heritage guidelines, 'Basic Guidelines on Conservation and Reconstruction of Heritages Damaged by Earthquake, 2016'¹¹ adopted the UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972 and its guidelines to ensure the authenticity of the heritages in pre-earthquake form.¹² According to a DOA official, the DOA are obliged to follow the UNESCO World Heritage mandates as a member state of the UNESCO and its promises to conserve world heritages of Nepal under UNESCO mandates.¹³ In post-earthquake, UNESCO had given pressure to enlist the Kathmandu Valley in danger zone, if the heritages were not built according to UNESCO guidelines. Nevertheless, since the DoA promised to ensure heritage reconstruction under the World Heritage guidelines, UNESCO stepped back from its decision.¹⁴

Heritage Reconstruction in Bhaktapur Municipality

Heritage Section within Bhaktapur Municipality is a responsible for heritage conservation and reconstruction. However, in the absence of local government, a steering committee—'Post-Earthquake Excavation and Preservation Committee'—was established in Bhaktapur Municipality through the initiation of Prem Suwal, the parliamentary member from Bhaktapur. Other members included from local political leaders, mostly from NMKP, heritage experts, engineers from Khwopa Engineering College, Municipality officials, and the Director General of the DoA.¹⁵ The committee involvement was crucial from the rescue to reconstruction of damaged heritages. Initially, there was a growing concern between the DoA and the Municipality about ownership and reconstruction of heritages within Bhaktapur Durbar Square. Both institutions claimed its ownership over heritages within their jurisdiction. However, after the local elections in May 2017 and establishment of local governments, the issues related to ownership and reconstruction were resolved by Bhaktapur Municipality and the DoA with common understanding of which structures were to be built by whom.¹⁶ Nevertheless, approaches of heritage reconstruction adopted by the DoA and

¹⁰ UNESCO: Culture: World Heritage Centre: About World Heritage: The Convention: Operational Guidelines 2019,' UNESCO, accessed November 7, 2019, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

¹¹ Department of Archaeology. 2016. Basic Guidelines on Conservation and Reconstruction of Heritages Damaged by Earthquake, 2016.

http://www.doa.gov.np/downloadfile/FINAL%20APPROVED_CONSERVATION%20GUIDELINES_2072_1467719101.pdf

¹² KII no. 39, 08 August 2019, Kathmandu.

¹³ KII no. 39, 08 August 2019, Kathmandu.

¹⁴ KII no. 39, 08 August 2019, Kathmandu; Damodar Neupane (26 March 2019), Studying Heritage by Parliamentary Committee, Kantipur,

<https://www.kantipurdaily.com/national/2019/03/26/15535729443893812.html>

¹⁵ KII no. 4, 23 September 2018, Bhaktapur; KII no. 39, 18 August 2019, Kathmandu

¹⁶ KII no. 39, 08 August 2019, Kathmandu

Municipality also created a discourse of heritage reconstruction in terms of quality, originality, and authenticity.

User Committee-led Reconstruction

Post-heritage reconstruction is sensitive in terms of maintaining originality and authenticity (Dew 2017), and ensuring quality and transparency. Taking these issues into consideration, people in Bhaktapur preferred *amanat* (user committee) approach¹⁷ in heritage reconstruction. In the 22 Earthquake Safety Day, 16 January 2020, criticizing the contractor-led heritage reconstruction model, Mr. Prem Suwal, a member of parliament, argued that ‘user committee’ is one of the best approaches for heritage reconstruction ensuring quality, and transparency, and all heritages in Bhaktapur Municipality should be built through ‘user committee’.¹⁸ There was a common belief among the interlocutors that the ‘user committees’ were transparent, and have sense of ownership. Consequently, the Kedarnath Temple, Vatsala Devi Temple, Harihar Narayan Temple, and Tribikram Narayan Temple in Durbar Square, among others, were reconstructed through user committee.

On the other hand, the DoA is bound by the Public Procurement Act (2007),¹⁹ which stipulates that construction work valued at more than NPR 500,000 must be granted through a tender process to the lowest bidder and the same rules govern the restoration of ancient temples and buildings. Consequently, Siddhi Laxmi Temple, and Silu Mahadev Temple, National Art Gallery Building, Tawa Sattal, among others, was contracted for its reconstruction. However, contractor-led reconstruction was viewed as profit making that led to a compromise in quality in the reconstruction as they used low-grade materials. Hence, contractor-led reconstructions were also overseeing by NMKP’s cadres.²⁰ The mayor of the Municipality claimed that reconstruction led by the Municipality provided a greater sense of ownership among the community. He further added that contractors tend to make profit and compromise quality as they have no sense of ownership over the heritages.²¹ Emphasizing the role of ‘user committee’ in the 22 Earthquake Safety Day, the mayor said:

We trust local people than contractors. Our heritages are under reconstruction through ‘user committee’ that is formed by people in the community. Heritage reconstruction by local user committee not only ensures traditional originality, quality, and ownership over the heritages, but it also creates employment opportunity for local people.²²

Moreover, the user committee approach reduced the unnecessary costs.²³ In contract system, the Municipality had to allocate an additional 5% of the budget for insurance, 5% for

¹⁷ The ‘User Committee’ was formed consisting members from of political party, cultural and heritage experts, and social leaders. Usually the committee is registered in the Municipality and carries out reconstruction work, the Municipality provided a budget to the committee on instalment basis.

¹⁸ Prem Suwal addressed the 22-earthquake safety day on 16 January 2020 in Bhaktapur Durbar Square.

¹⁹ The Public Procurement Act, 2063 (2007).

<http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/statutes-acts/the-public-procurement-act-2063-2007>

²⁰ KII no. 9, 04 October 2018, Bhaktapur.

²¹ KII no. 8, 30 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

²² Mayor speech in 22 Earthquake Safety Day, 16 January 2020, Bhaktapur Durbar Square.

²³ See also Shakya 2019.

contingency, 15% for overhead and 10% for market inflation, so the cost would increase by more than 40% over the actual construction budget.²⁴

Explaining the procedure of the heritage reconstruction, one of our interlocutors in the Heritage Section stated that the Municipality as a government body had to go through the contract system for public infrastructure, including heritage reconstruction. Before the local election, everything was ruled by the central government/DoA and the multiparty mechanism was existed to negotiate with the DoA, even for heritage reconstruction. But after the federal government and the Local Government Operation Act 2017, the Municipality enacted laws and allowed user committee for heritage reconstruction as opposed to the laws enforced by the DoA.²⁵ In this regard, an interlocutor said:

User committee is allowed to work with a budget up to [NPR] 6,000,000. If the amount exceeded [NPR] 6,000,000, then we had to go through the contract system. But we worked smartly by breaking down the total amount into multiple small amounts.²⁶

Disputes on UNSECO World Heritage Guidelines

Main disputes between the DoA and the Municipality arose in the reconstruction of National Art Museum building (former palace), and Lal Baithak. During Malla Period both buildings were a single building. But one part of the place building, Lal Baithak, was rebuilt by Rana in 1858 in Western Victorian architecture that symbolises Ranas. The Lal Baithak was damaged in the 1934 earthquake but it was renovated in its existing form. But in post 2015 earthquake, the Municipality strongly stood on its decision and wanted to reconstruct the buildings in Malla styles based historical facts and evidences (photos, paintings, and materials). However, according the DoA guidelines and, the UNESCO World Heritage guidelines 2019, National Art Museum building and Lal Baithak must have been rebuilt in its pre-earthquake form—one portion of the building was built in Rana style and another portion in Malla style— which Municipality reluctant to follow (See photo 1).

With purpose of reviving Malla Period heritages through reconstruction, the Municipality conducted a National Workshop, consulted heritage and culture experts, former director of the DoA, professors of Tribhuvan University Institute of Engineering Pulchowk Campus, and Khwopa Engineering College. However, the DoA officials opined that the concerns voiced by the Municipality would only be authentic if there were more research-based evidences of historical architecture, and the Municipality's vision could be considered.²⁷In this regard, the mayor claimed that the Municipality has enough evidence of Malla Period architecture and some materials have been carefully preserved. Hence, the buildings should be rebuilt in the Malla styles.²⁸ The former deputy mayor, representing the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) also stated that UNESCO has undermined the historical and cultural importance of the local communities associated with these heritages.²⁹

²⁴ KII no. 4, 23 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

²⁵ KII no. 4, 23 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

²⁶ KII no. 4, 23 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

²⁷ KII no. 9, 04 October 2018, Bhaktapur.

²⁸ KII no. 8, 30 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

²⁹ KII no. 6, 27 September 2018, Bhaktapur.



Photo 1: The National Art Gallery building. One portion of the building (on the left) is built in Malla Period architecture and other portion (on the right) is on the Rana style inspired by Victorian architecture. Photo-Manoj Suji

With regards to the Municipality concerns about the desire of the Malla Period heritages, the DoA official argued that although the voices of people in Bhaktapur was valid, World Heritages damaged by the 2015 earthquake must reconstruct under the UNESCO World Heritage Conventions and Guidelines that Nepal as member state has signed.³⁰ It means the DoA was informed about the concerns raised by the Municipality and communities but was unable to do anything without complete evidences of the original size, height, external and interior designs, uses and meaning of the Malla Period architecture. Evidences provided by the Municipality in a form of painting and drawing were not accepted by the DoA as they misrepresented the originality of the heritages. Moreover, a DoA official emphasised the heritages rebuilt by Rana have their own cultural, historical and architectural essence and that need to be preserved as Nepal promised to UNESCO.³¹

Since the disputes continued between the DoA and the Municipality for years, it was resolved by a joint meeting among Bhaktapur Municipality, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, and the Department of Archaeology in 24 July, 2018. The meeting decided the National Museum building and Lal Baithak will be reconstructed in Malla Period styles. However, the reconstruction had not been started as the budget was not allocated so far and the delay in documentation process by the DoA.³²

³⁰ KII no. 39, 08 August 2019, Kathmandu.

³¹ KII no. 39, 08 August 2019, Kathmandu.

³² Mayor's speech on the 22 Earthquake Safety Day 2020, Bhaktapur Durbar Square.

Denial of German Aid

The history of German aid to Bhaktapur for heritage reconstruction dates back to the early 1970s. After the 2015 earthquake, the German shown keen interested to reconstruct heritage properties damaged by the earthquake. However, the Municipality refused German's financial assistance and their involvement in heritage reconstruction due to the lesson learned from the past, especially the reconstruction of the Cyasiling Mandap. Residents in Bhaktapur still had memories of being undermined their voices and concerns by Germans during the Bhaktapur Development Project and heritage reconstruction.

Major disagreements between the Municipality and the Germans was the selection of the heritages for reconstruction. The Germans were interested in the reconstruction of the Pujari Math Temple, and Padma and Vidyarthi Niketan Higher Secondary schools, which were built by Rana in *unnansaiya chok* (99 courtyards).³³ As elsewhere mentioned in the paper, the 99 courtyards of the palace were converted in garden and then later schools were built there. As a part of the reconstruction, the Municipality wanted to relocate the schools and revive the Malla period *unnansaiya chok*. Furthermore, the German aid was also viewed as a threat to self-dignity and cultural identity. In the case of aid was accepted the Germans would give 10 million Euros, but the Municipality had to work under German rules, their expertise would be employed in heritage reconstruction, which would demean their *atmasamman* (self-dignity). Hence, the Municipality had no regrets about the rejection of German aid. The mayor then said, "We may take five years to rebuild our heritage. So what? We will be rebuilding it by ourselves at least."³⁴

The mayor claimed that Bhaktapur Municipality had not received any funding from foreign country and development partners, and as of 17 November, 2019 a total of 91 heritages had been completed from internal sources at NPR 254,952,000.³⁵ The main source of internal funding (35 % of the total reconstruction cost) came from the tourist entrance fees in Bhaktapur Durbar Square and private housing tax and a rental tax, and the remaining from other various internal sources but the central government had provided NPR 400 million which covered about 15 % of the total reconstruction cost.³⁶

Conclusion

To summarize, the findings from Bhaktapur suggests that the influence of the Authorised Heritage Discourse is a crucial factor in shaping post-earthquake heritage reconstruction in Nepal. Being a member of the UNESCO World Heritages, the department of Archaeology was obliged to enforce UNESCO guidelines in the World Heritage Sites reconstruction, which undermined the voices of local residents and Bhaktapur Municipality about the traditional originality, identity and collective memories embedded in the heritages. The government tends to follow western universal practices of heritage approaches to maintain its World Heritage designation instead of acknowledging and exploring the traditional

³³ Before the 1934 earthquake, there were a total of 99 courtyards within the Royal Place, but the 1934 earthquake damaged most of them.

³⁴ KII no. 8, 30 September 2018, Bhaktapur.

³⁵ Mayor's speech on the 22 Earthquake Safety Day 2020, Bhaktapur Durbar Square.

³⁶ KII no. 8, 30 September 2018, Bhaktapur; See also Prajapati 2018.

originality of the heritages. In this regard, the concept of universal value of heritages seems to be a problematic in addressing the needs and concerns voiced by local communities.

The Municipality and the NMKP have struggled for long period of time to revive Malla Period architectures that were deliberately deteriorated by Ranas. For instance, During the Bhaktapur Development Project in early 1970s and reconstruction of Cyasiling Mandap, the NMKP and local residents resisted against the centralized government and German development agency due to the losses of historical originality and cultural relics of the Malla Period heritages. However, it was inscribed in World Heritage List. This clearly shows that the heritage is contested and political process that are defined and legitimized by the expert knowledge who are in position of power (Smith 2006). Therefore, universal understanding and values of Heritages, limits our understanding of real heritages and its meaning in historical context.

Heritages making is thus struggle between the subordinated and powerful groups in order to establish their own identity. Similarly, ethnic awareness and identity politics in post-conflict Nepal also interrelated with heritage practices. Flouting the centralized notion of national identity, cultural symbols and festivals, ethnic communities promoted their own culture, festivals, symbols, and locality, which had direct impact on heritage claims and heritage (re) interpretation (Owens 2002, Hangen 2009). The desire of Bhaktapur Municipality to revive Malla Period architecture was not only engendered after the 1990s political changes and the open espousal of one's identity, but also it was perceived as a means of resisting historical centralised power over Bhaktapur's autonomy, culture and heritages.

Heritage reconstruction is sensitive issues because the community's culture, identity and collective memories are embedded in the tangible heritages. In the historical timeframe, heritages and culture of certain groups can be lost due to the unequal power relations and political motives. Hence, there should be a deeper consultations and study during the reconstruction of the national and World Heritage Sites. Similarly, the contract system should be revoked from the heritages reconstruction. The contract system not only compromises the quality of the heritage reconstruction it also deteriorates the cultural essence and originality of the traditional heritages. Since the local knowledge and skills are possessed by the local community members, 'user committee' can be an effective for national and World Heritage reconstruction in terms of ensuring quality, transparency and sense of ownership. Finally, the federalism and local governments are an opportunity in Nepal for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and heritage preservation at the local level. Therefore, the local governments should be granted authority to decide what kinds of approach they follow for heritage reconstruction and conservation mitigation.

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