

A Short Note on Ancient Heritage Edifices after the 2015 Earthquake

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Abstract: The ancient heritage edifices of Nepal have special characteristics both from technical and architectural point of view. They have gone through several cultural and natural upheavals like tribal invasions and earthquakes. In this paper, the attempts of the people to reinstate them, in the past and how it should be done, in the present context have been presented in a seminal way for further detail development, in the future.

Key words: Earthquake, Conservation, Reconstruction, Structures, Ancient-heritage

1. The Heritage

With cultural, religious and useful edifices that were constructed in a time span of almost 1700 years from Lichchhavi to present time we are very rich and dynamic in our heritage [1, p.76]. Although, very often we were not very smart in conserving, preserving and maintaining them, it has been our pride, prestige and privilege to own them. While the pagoda architecture with predominance of linear elements shows its ancientness of it, various other architectures like Shikhara and domes show not only cultural and religious coexistence but also the flexibility, adaptability and resilience of the country as a melting pot for different cultures, religions and nationalities. These harmony, smoothness and beauty of the society were often challenged by various conquerors, usurpers, rulers and earthquakes. However, the society here was so resilient, tolerant and industrious that every time the edifices were razed the people and place revived again like phoenix to be labeled with saying: 'there are more temples and edifices than houses and there are more Gods and Goddesses than the people themselves'. But, not anymore!

In due course of time, the intervention of politics was so severe that the whole city, society and the people were bursting at seams and the edifices disappearing among the houses.

2. The Devastation

Partly as response to and partly as the continuation of what we have been doing, the earthquake once again struck on April 25th, 2015 at about 11:56. The violent banging, swinging, waving and twisting of the earth mass for almost half an hour with intensity of 7.6-7.9 Richter scale have most of the edifices damaged. Some of them were crestfallen (e. g. Shree Jayawageshwari temple at Gaushala) [2, p. 191], some others sheared at outer foundation level (e. g. the Jaisidewal temple at Maru) and some were leveled to the ground (the Kasthamandap at Maru) [2, p. 83]. I talked to my father Mr Hari Raj Joshi, 95 and he was saying that this one was really more violent, shakier and for longer duration than the 1934 one. It was said that even the people then were doubtful about the possibility of the restoration of Shree Mahabouddha temple [2, p. 168] in Patan and were also wondering how the Shree Tulaja Bhawani temple in Katmandu would be restored from everything what was left strewn on the outer foundation of it in 1934. And lo! Shree Mahabouddha temple

was restored and erected exactly as the earlier one, if not better by the then craftspeople. The then Engineer Kishore Narasingh Rana got Shree Tulaja Bhawani temple reassembled, restored and reconstructed in such a way that very often people even forget that it was devastated by the 1934 one. Recently, the Anantapur temple on Shree Swambhunath hillock was twice razed; once by lightning and the second time by fire but with the wonderful people in Katmandu it rose again like phoenix. Now, the Pratappur has given in, to April 25.

3. The Handling

Leaving the job, of taking care of, not losing and misplacing of what the edifices have been turned into, to the professional people like archaeologists and security personnel, it is also time for every one of us to think what to do next, while trying to restore, rehabilitate, repair and renovate them. The two questions to answer are:

- A. Should they only continue to represent, as close as possible, the era when they were constructed, in terms of material, design and architecture?
- B. Should they also have our 'time stamp' on them, in terms of earthquake resistance at the expense of material, design or architecture from the era of original construction?

Whatever it was done with most of the edifices in most of the reconstructions ensued after the 1934 one was a 'yes' to 'A'. An example of a 'yes' to 'B' is relatively recent Shree Unmatta Bharaiv temple at Shree Pashupatinath temple precinct.

The people like to develop physically but they are also interested in capturing their era in the snapshots of the edifices. As these edifices reflect the past era they should continue to do it. If improvements are possible without sacrificing the representation of the era in terms of material, design and architecture, it could be done by:

- A. Regular and proper maintenance and monitoring of the structures of the edifices.
- B. Application of acquired engineering and scientific knowledge and skill (e. g. after research and studies at M Sc program, Structural Engineering, Civil Engineering Department and Department of Architecture in Institute of Engineering, Tribhuvan University) on materials, analysis and design of elements, systems and architecture of that era.

Now it is right time and also high time to apply it, think about it or discuss and decide on it.

References

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