

Inscriptional Evidence on the Preservation of Monuments in Nepal

Dr. N. R. Banerjee

(continued)

Literary Evidence on repairs to Images

The Nepal Rashtriya Pustakalaya at Kathmandu has in its possession a manuscript called **Pratishthalakshnasarasamuchchaya**, written by one Vainochana, who was son of king Dharmapala and grandson of king Gopala. Thus he was a seion of the Pala dynasty of Bengal and had probably been led to travel to Nepal and take up residence in the country. He was academically a pupil of Isanasiva and a grand pupil of Vimalasiva. He was a devotee of Siva by faith and pursuit.

The oldest manuscript in the possession of the Rashtriya pustakalaya is dated 288 N.S. which works out to A. D. 1167. There are six other copies of the manuscript in Nepal. Three of these have no date, and the other three are dated to 755 N.S., 765 N.S. and 1952 V.S., respectively. The text has been published by the Department of Archaeology in two volumes and a book of illustrations of images contained

in the text.⁷³

This can be treated as a basic text on the subject produced in Nepal but awaits to be correlated to the immense architectural and iconographical wealth of Nepal. This by itself would be an interesting subject of work, the urgency of which cannot be overemphasized.

The 21st chapter of the manuscript deals with the topic of repairs called **jirnoddhara-vidhi**, but confines itself to images instead of structures. Though monuments include temples and images in practice it is difficult to extend the benefits of protection to images as they are usually loose and objects of constant worship including ritualistic applications of oil, butter; vermillion, milk, water etc. and as a result they are subject considerably to wear and tear. The situation is some what intensified by their greater accessibility to the devotees and worshippers.

It is interesting to record that the **Pratishthalakshana-sarasamuchchaya** indicates the reasons and justification for the restoration of damaged images in the following passages.⁷⁴

Atha jirnamascha dushtamascha lingandinscha Surajjhitan
Asrayantiha satvani bhutavetalarakshasah//
Mababhayakara nityam subhrisam krurarupinah/

kurvanti dōshasanghyatam yatra rashreshu te sthita/
 Mahotpatom dharanasam chamubhangam parabhavam
 durbhiksham darunam rogam prajanasam daridratam/
 udvegam cha vivadam eha vitamsan chatmajarthaya/
 Pida Gobrahmanadinam rajno dukkham kusieatam//
 Pratapasathvani cha lobhamohadiryuktatam/
 Satruvyasanapida cha chinta cha mahati bhavet//
 dushtalinge sthite rashtre praja rajno na sobhanan/
 tasmaduddharanam karyam vidhina mantrapurvakam//

The passage broadly means that the damaged images are abandoned by gods and become the abode of ghosts goblins and demons. Who are frightful and cruel and cause many evils to befall the country. Many calamities, landslides and land damages, dissensions in the army, defeat in war, famine, diseases and pestilence, decimation of the population, poverty, worry, disputes, destruction of wealth and children, diseases among the cattle and brahmins, unhappiness as well as misconduct among the kings, loss of prestige and personality and the incursion of greed and infatuation, increase of enemies and viciousness and great anxiety on account of all these and evils, bad subjects arise as a result of the existence of vitiated images. Therefore damaged images must be restored by the performance of proper rites to the accompaniment of prescribed mantras (hymns) for obtaining respite from all these evils.

The installation of the restored images was recommended to be undertaken on an auspicious day, under a favourable constellation as stated in the following passage⁷³

Sunakshatre dine yoge sadvare kartrisobhane

The inscriptional evidence cited earlier above bears out the fact that throughout her history kings and noblemen of Nepal have undertaken the repairs to monuments and images as and when they have been necessary in keeping

with established and sanctified principles, which have been variously described as **agamokta vidhi**, **vedoktavidhi**, **sastroktavidhi** etc.

8. Conclusion

The preservation of ancient monuments in Nepal has now come to be the centralized responsibility of the Department of Archaeology set-up under the Ministry of Education in 1952. The **Prachin Smarak Samrakshan Ain** of 1956-57 has provided for the punishment in the form of fine or imprisonment for those found guilty of damaging or disfiguring any protected monument (as a contrast to the wishful curses of the early and medieval times). Any structure that is older than 100 years is considered under the law of the land (also in India) to be protected automatically, regardless of a positive declaration or notification to this effect.

But the coming into existence of the Department or the passing of the Act of protection of monuments did not automatically bring into existence a mechanism for the undertaking of repairs to monuments in general.

In fact, an institution called **Chha-Bhadel**, dating from the times of the Mallas, had been carrying out repairs to the ancient and public edifices in Nepal out of state funds as its specific duty till almost recent times. But its functions were transferred to an organization called the

Valley Reorganization Committee (**Upatyaka Nirman Samiti**), in 1919 V.S. (A.D. 1956-57)

Its scope naturally was not confined to ancient monuments alone but encompassed the structures and public edifices all over the valley. The works of the Samiti were, from this time on, alternately carried out by this organization or the Public Works Department, which remained virtually in charge of all repairs to ancient structures till 1966, when the Department of Archaeology took up on its own the first major repairs to any ancient monument in Nepal, namely, the Kasthanandapa in the heart of Kathmandu, jointly with and under the entire financial support of the **Guthi Samsthan**, the centralized organization for the control and utilization of religious endowments.

Though the task of preserving the ancient heritage of the country is both a privilege and a duty of the Department of Archaeology, it is considerably handicapped for want of adequate financial allocations, and an adequate executive staff for carrying out the required repairs. To circumvent these difficulties an organization called the **Guthi Jirnoddhar tatha Nirman Samiti**, under the chairmanship of the Director of Archaeology, a committee of five members, including the chairman and a member-Secretary, was created in 1966 for the purpose of carrying out repairs to religious edifices as well as the construction of new structures appurtenant to the religious institutions which the Committee was meant primarily to serve. This arrangement seems to have been made because the funds for all constructional activity was to be provided by the Guthi Samsthan, which was accountable for all expenditure out of the Guthi funds, and at the same time the Director of Archaeology could provide the technical guidance and also exercise control over the execution of repairs. The arrangement may have some practical advantages, but has all the disadvantages of dual

responsibilities, the aims and objectives of the two organizations not often being common, apart from the basic differences in their approaches.

In this context it would be interesting to record that the infamous and disastrous earthquake of 1910 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1934) had damaged many monuments in Nepal, not to speak of numberless residential houses. The removal of the debris and reconstruction of the utilitarian structures were both a Herculean task and an expensive undertaking. There are inscriptional records again which have recorded the repairs or reconstructions that were then attempted on a large scale in the three cities of the valley and elsewhere.

The repairs that have been carried out from time to time in the past in Nepal have not always taken steps to ensure that the pristine outlines of the structures or even the age-old forms are not modified. In fact the idea of preserving monuments for the sake of preserving the ancient architectural styles and achievements have not formed part of the inspiration to preserve, reconstruct or repair; for all these works have been undertaken in the past with a view primarily to ensuring merely the continuation of the functions they had been serving. Sometimes, of course, the ancient styles have indeed been preserved and such happenings have been more often by accident than by design. The awkward and outlandish domical roofs, that we often see surmounted on the framework of a structure (temple) designed originally to be a multipleroofed temple, came in the course of repairs that were executed after the earthquake of A. D. 1934, under the orders of the then Rana Prime Minister. While these changes have not enhanced the beauty of the structures, but on the contrary often have detracted from the natural grace of Nepalese architecture, they speak of a style generally adopted during the

Rana hegemony. The truth of this statement would be apparent from the consideration of the difference that the newly introduced domical roof over the Siva temple in the centre of Rani Pokhari, originally built by Pratapa Malla in 1669 obviously in the multiple roofed style, has made to its view in contrast to the grace of the serrated silhouette against the backdrop of the Himalayas and of the reflection of the Deva style temple in the crystal clear waters of the tank under the canopy of a blue sky.

There are several inscriptions to indicate the large-scale damage and destruction that the earthquake of 1934 caused not merely to temples and such other monuments but also to the houses of the people and the steps that were taken to reconstruct and rebuild from the ashes. As a result many innovations were introduced, but the fact that the personality of Nepalese monuments stands largely unaltered and high and distinctive till this day is a tribute at once to the Nepalese love for and capacity to uphold its tradition. These inscriptions also point out that there was no specialized organization for the repairs to monuments ruined by the earthquake, to deal with which a general organization called the **Bhukampa Uddhar Samstha** (Earthquake Relief Committee) was brought into being under the patronage of the Prime Minister, Juddha Samsher.

The Bhaktapur Golden Gate copper plate inscription of the year 1989 V. S. (i. e. A. D. 1933) of the time of Juddha Samsher⁷ records the interesting account of the repairs that were carried out from time to time to the irrigation channel in Bhaktapur originally built by King Jitmitra Malla in the year 1735 V. S. (A. D. 1678). With the introduction of a stone conduit (**dhungedhara**). It states further that the channels and conduits at different places were kept in good repair and in functioning order

by King Bhapatindra Malla in 1760-V S. (i.e. A.D. 1703). The channel of Jitmitra Malla was repaired again under the orders of Bhimsen Thapa, as recorded in a Lal Mohar, in the year 1875 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1818). Thereafter again the arrangements for ensuring the proper flow of water in the channels was made during the regime of the Prime Minister, Dhir Samsher, who provided for the employment in perpetuity of three helping hands in addition to the existing strength of six persons in the year 1932 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1875). The **dharas** (water conduits) and the channels were somewhat neglected thereafter. As no repairs were carried out to them, they ceased to be functional, and some of them even got covered up with debris and earth. As a result, the priests of the temples had to walk long distances to the very source of the water for spring to fetch water for worship and as the population had meanwhile increased the Rajalakshmi dhara had become far too inadequate to meet their requirements. These matters were brought to the notice of the Prime Minister by his son, Dhana Samsher, and thereafter the **dharas** and channels were cleaned and repaired at the instance of Dhan Samsher but by the orders of the Prime Minister. An endowment was created for meeting the annual requirements of repairs to the **dharas** in future and a copper plate inscription to this effect was affixed to the **Gahridhara** at Bhaktapur. The inscription also records that such works were considered as the responsibility of the king and shows that the Prime Ministers of the time took a keen interest in such matters of public utility. This, together with the facts given below, would show up Juddha Samsher as inspired by the same spirit of preserving the past heritage as had characterized of Lord Curzon as Viceroy and Governor General in India, though the basic purpose in the former's case was somewhat different.

The copper plate inscription affixed to the

space above the inner door of the Dharahara (tower raised to honour Bhimsen Thapa) of the year 1992 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1936)⁷⁷ mentions that the monument, adjacent to the Sundhara in Kathmandu, which had been built in the year 1882 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1825) by Queen Lalita Tripurasundari had been damaged by the terrible earthquake of 1990 V.S. (i.e. 1934), only two of the three original storeys alone having been spared; and that it was repaired by Juddha Samsher in the year 1992 (i.e., 1936), by reconstructing the third storey. This distantly recalls the raising the height of the Qutb Minar in Delhi by Firoz Shah Tughlaq, the great preserver of monuments in medieval India, in the fourteenth century. The stone slab inscription on the eastern side of the pedestal of the statue of Juddha Samsher at the quadruple junction of the Juddha Sadak (New Road) in Kathmandu⁷⁸ mentions the event of the disastrous earthquake of A.D. 1934, the institution by the orders of Juddha Samsher of the **Earthquake Relief Society** (or Committee) and the execution of repairs to a large number of ancient monuments viz., Dharhara, Ghantaghar (Clock Tower standing on the eastern side of Rani Pokhari), the Taleju Bhavani temple at Hanuman Dhoka, Kathmandu, the Machchhindranath temple at Lalitpur, the Bhairab temple at Bhaktapur, many temples of Siva and other gods in addition to the grant of lakhs of rupees as loans to the dispossessed persons, for the reconstruction of their residential houses.

The Lalitpur Bhimsensthan stone pillar inscription of the year 1997 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1941) of Juddha Samsher⁷⁸ refers again to the devastations caused by the earthquake and to the wholesale reconstruction carried out in the three cities of Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, and Kantipur (Kathmandu), respectively, as a result of which the city of Bhaktapur had become as good as new. There is a reference in this inscription to the reconstruction of a large number of temples

in Lalitpur, as well as to the immensely large-scale reconstruction carried out in Kathmandu and the bringing into being therein of the Naya Sadak (New Road) and the Globe Park (Bhugol Park) adjoining the southern side of the road, etc. The pillar itself was meant according to the inscription it carried to serve as a memorial of the earthquake and the restoration of the valley from its ruins.

The Kathmandu Bhugol (Globe) inscription of Juddha Samsher⁸⁰ also refers to the clearing away of the debris of ruined buildings from the streets of towns and villages and the reconstruction of temples, **Patis** and **Powahs** (Rest Houses along the footpaths and in villages) through the **Earthquake Relief Society** at the expense of the state treasury and the grant of long term interest-free loans to the dispossessed for the reconstruction of their houses. The inscription incidentally refers to an older earthquake at the time of a former king Saktisimbhadeva, and another that had taken place in the year 1890 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1834). During the second earthquake people were made to fend for themselves, and got no assistance from the state, but, as a contrast, a good bit of assistance was made available from the state by the Prime Minister during the third great earthquake (of A.D. 1934).

It was at this time of reconstruction that some builders began to adopt new styles of construction which are subversive of the distinctive personality of Nepalese architecture. The inscription records this fact of change in style and also states that some two-storeyed houses were raised to three storeyed ones to four storeys as one liked. It also records that the reconstruction was carried out so fast as to leave or suggest no memory of the devastations suffered.

The stone inscription on the pedestal of the statue of Juddha Samsher standing to the

left of the Bhadrakali temple⁸¹ to the east of Tundikhel in Kathmandu of the year 2006 i.e. A.D. 1949 refers to the reconstruction, after the earthquake, of religious institutions, the hermitages of monks, temples, ~~powahs~~, houses associated with temples, steps, at the river banks, dharmasalas, the Dharhara and the Ghantaghar etc. by Juddha Samsher. These records point rightly to Juddha Samsher as an enlightened conservator of Ancient Monuments.⁸²

The tradition of causing inscriptional records of fresh constructions as well as of repairs to public buildings is even now in vogue in Nepal. The records are extremely useful as historical documents and are in keeping with the tradition handed to the down present generation from the remotest time of the Lichchha-

vis. The present study, in spite of its length, is comparatively a brief account of the vast inscriptional evidence on the construction in original and repairs to ancient monuments in Nepal through the entire expanse of her history. They tell us amply of the different dates and processes of construction and repairs, the agencies of execution, the changes introduced, the names of the donors, the texts of architecture followed for guidance (though only in very general terms) and together they all are a mine of information on the evolution and development of art and architecture in Nepal. It is hoped that a comprehensive study of the subject will be taken up at some future date by a budding young scholar, and this essay is humbly dedicated to the larger efforts that are sure to be made in future in the hope of fuller results.



(Continued)

- 72) Ibid., pp. 88-9
- 73) **Pratishthalakshanasarasamuchchaya, Part-I** (2023 V.S.) and **Part-II** (2025 V.S.) The illustrations called **Devatachitra-Samgraha** was published earlier. The text deals with both architecture and iconography.
- 74) **Pratishthalakshanasamuchchaya, Part-II,** p. 91.
- 75) Ibid., p. 92.
- 76) **Abhilekha Samgraha, No. 8,** pp. 7-8. This is a very important and interesting inscription as it indicates the unabated solicitude of the rulers for their subjects over nearly three hundred years in respect of the self-same institutions of public utility.
- 77) Ibid., pp. 8-9.
- 78) Ibid., p. 9.
- 79) Ibid., p. 13.
- 80) Ibid., p. 16.
- 81) Ibid., p. 32.
- 82) The solicitude of Juddha Samsher for the antiquarian remains of Nepal and his love for preserving the past are indicated also by his establishment of the **Juddha Kala Sala** in the year 2000 V.S. i.e. 1938, the purpose of which was to promote the traditional arts (painting) of Nepal as well as to serve as a store house of relics of Nepalese culture. This is clearly borne out by his two inscriptions kept in the National Museum at Kathmandu. One of these is a copper plate inscription fixed on the pedestal of the statue of Juddha Samsher in the central lobby of the **Juddha Kalasala** and the other one engraved on the stone pedestal of the same statue. Ibid., pp., 28-29.