

# A Brief Note on Strategy of His Majesty's Government on Heritage Conservation

- Shaphalya Amatya

If somebody asks me what is the strategy of HMG/Nepal on heritage conservation, my simple answer will be that there will not be a single government in the world which does not love to conserve their heritage and our country. Nepal is no exception to it. But the question here arises how they conserve their heritage. When we talk of cultural heritage it covers a vast multitude of seen and unseen heritages of a country or a society. Just putting together bricks of a monument will not be enough to preserve it. As we are proud of our culture being a living culture that means all the components of it or in other words environment of it should be properly preserved. Methods and means of preserving culture heritage might differ from place to place and country to country because of many determining factors like availability of resources, consciousness or awareness among the people, promulgation of proper legal measures ensuring the preservation of those heritages, and political stability or peace in the country, etc. but everywhere it has a single and only one aim that is

the preservation of cultural heritage for posterity. If somebody is of opinion that the Government is the only one responsible agency for protecting the heritage, he is mistaken. Here, I do not deny, the Government is one of the most essential and effective agencies or means. But on many occasions the Government has to change its decisions if the people or some section of them are against it. Infact, the Government is only a custodian of people's property or heritage. People are the real owners and therefore it is their profound duty to protect it for their existence and for the survival of their incoming generations. These are the values, we have to teach our children; then only what we are trying to do will have any chance of succeeding in the face of extremely hostile factors all around. As a matter of fact, people's participation in every spheres of development activities are essential in a country like Nepal. One of the main directive principles of our Democratic Panchayat System of the Government is to mobilise, to the maximum possible extent and on a voluntary basis,

the national genius and resources for the setting up of a free society (i. e. a society which is democratic, just, dynamic and free from exploitation) by associating, through gradual decentralisation, the maximum number of representatives of the people at all levels of the administration and by making the general public vigilant and conscious.

Now I would like to limit myself on monument conservation. Our ancestors have not only built and left us a vast number of monuments of architectural wonders but also kept a long and unbroken tradition of maintaining and preserving them by means of institutions like "Guthis" or trusts. Numerous inscriptions have proved that "Guthis" were already in existence during the Lichchavi period. As we all know, till 1950, Nepal lived a life of isolation. In 1950, it was not only opened to the outsiders but a new democratic political system was also introduced in Nepal. As in every traditional society, these changes brought changes in their social values. The new democratic governments introduced many radical and dynamic laws in land and socio-economic system which automatically brought changes in their life. Contact with international world attracted the Nepalese to many new wants and desires. As a result, slowly and gradually they began to forget their old values, which also caused the decline of institutions like "Guthis". Sons and grandsons knowingly or unknowingly began to forget the contributions or artistic creations of their forefathers. In such a situation our monuments became orphans. In course of time the number of these orphans increased tremendously. The great earthquake of 1934 took lives of thousands of them. Some were rescued, some were saved but

not all. The Governments after 1950's could not save thousands of important monuments, private houses and shrines which are vanishing from the landscape of the Kathmandu valley. They were only shedding crocodile's tears. The ratio of decay is so much in proportion according to Dr. Prayag Raj Sharma (to quote) "Kathmandu valley inventory had enlisted a total of 680 individual monuments in the three towns of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur in 1975 .. to-day, only eight years since its publication, many of the monuments it had enlisted have fallen and even disappeared completely".

I do not mean that our government has not done anything or is not worried to save this heritage. If I am not mistaken the establishment of the Department of Archaeology in 1952 and the promulgation of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act in 1956 were the two prime measures adopted by our Government in this direction. This act has certainly provided due protection to our ancient monuments, sites and objects of archaeological, historical and artistic importance. It is true that upto 1960's there was no central organisation responsible for the maintenance and preservation of monuments. The Public Works Department was responsible for major repairs to monuments. Repairs were also undertaken by District Magistrates. Further, some of the trustees of the temple also carried out minor repairs to monuments under their charge.

Even in the absence of one single central organisation the Governments after 1950's did give some attention to save this heritage. For example, a number of major monuments were repaired and facelifted during the coronation of late King Mahendra

in 1957. A joint venture of the Guthi undertakings and the Department of Archaeology restored hundreds of monuments in 1970's on the occasion of the auspicious wedding ceremony of their Majesties, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev and Queen Aishwarya Rajya Lakshmi Devi Shah. Similarly many important monuments of the Kathmandu valley were repaired and restored in 1975 on the auspicious occasion of the coronation of their Majesties.

Undoubtedly since the establishment of the Department of Archaeology, HMG/Nepal has been taking proper care and interest to save this heritage. Both in regular as well as development programme some budget have been allocated every year. But the resources or finances available for the heritage conservation are not at all mentionable or sufficient. Not only lack of resources but there are also many other lacunas, the Department is facing to-day, which I have discussed in detail in one of my recent articles published in the souvenir of PATA Heritage Conference 1983. Here, I would like to mention some of the most prominent among them in brief. Firstly, the Department does not have a separate building after Simha Darbar Secretariat it was destroyed by fire in 1974. At present it is temporarily housed in the National Archives. Secondly, the lack of trained man-power has been affecting seriously the functioning of the Department. For example, at present there are eleven museums headed by Gazetted Officers but only three out of them have diploma in museology. Due to the lack of trained man-power institutions like National Archives and National library have been headed by non-professionals. Last, but not the least, intelligent and talented persons do not take much interest in joining this Department

because there are hardly any chance of career-building opportunities, for example after a long spell of nearly twenty years only recently some new upgraded posts have been sanctioned, etc.

For the Conservation of Cultural heritage of the Kathmandu valley, UNESCO has prepared a Master-Plan in 1977. The Department has already launched the Master-Plan in a very humble way. His Majesty's Government has generously agreed in principle that it will contribute a matching fund of twenty-five per cent in any project if it has been taken up by donor country or organisation or individual to its total cost. This approach of HMG/Nepal is not only appreciated by donors but also encouraged them to take interest in this project. It has also proved HMG's inner commitment to this Master-Plan.

As all plans are useless, if their aims can not be put into practice because the necessary funds have not been approved or available I hope such situation will not arise on the implementation of the Kathmandu valley Master-Plan. We all know, to make it a success, we need co-operations and donations from friendly countries, international agencies and other generous donors. But what I would like to convey here is that this heritage is a valued treasury primarily of Nepal and the Nepalese and then after of the mankind as a whole, therefore it is the foremost of the Nepalese to save and preserve them.

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