

A Contribution to the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Nepal: The Restoration of the Brahmayani Temple in Panauti

— Riddhi Pradhan

Isolated up to 1950, the Kingdom of Nepal has rapidly taken conscience of the necessity to preserve its cultural heritage, restoration campaigns have been undertaken and at the same time inventories of sites and monuments have been prepared by His Majesty's Government of Nepal.

In 1975, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, with the assistance of UNESCO, has developed a "Master Plan for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Nepal." The French research team, Himalaya - Korakorum of CNRS decided to contribute to this endeavour and gave its collaboration to the Department of Archaeology, HMG Nepal.

For the purpose of the basic study, the choice was made of a township of rather small dimensions: Panauti.

Panauti and its environment

Panauti, located at the confluence of two rivers, the Punyamati and the Rosi Khola, 30 kilometres South East of Kathma-

ndu in the district of Kavre Palanchowk, in Bagmati Zone, has its own entity. (Pl. No. 1 A.)

Although we have no precise data of its early existence, it is mentioned in the inscriptions which dates back to 600 years.

Panauti is a very active agricultural and commercial centre. Most of the trade routes to eastern Nepal go through it. It contains about 3000 people.

Panauti is a very important religious centre: the importance of the confluence of the Punyamati and Rosi Khola is emphasized by religious activities and buildings that form an architectural complex called Tribeni-Ghat. (Pl. No. 1 B.). Every twelve year, a large festival takes place at Tribeni-Ghat attracting thousands of pilgrims from different parts of Nepal. Every year it observes a festival on full moon-day of Jetha.

A French team, led by Dr. Gerad Toffin had made a detailed study on Panauti. The aim of the basic study by the French scholars was to analyse the socio-economic structure of the town and its relationship with the architecture, keeping in view of the process of development and the improvement of living conditions of the people.

In the course of the study, the team with the help of French Government was able to contribute to the restoration of the Brahmayani Temple, one of the most prestigious monuments in Panauti.

The Brahmayani Temple

The site

The Brahmayani temple is located on the northern bank of the Punyamati river, outside the town and facing the Triveni Ghat. (Pl. No. 2)

The temple is standing about 3 metres above the river level, the main entrance faces north.

There used to be a pavement in stone and square bricks (Chikan-appa) around the temple, two pati (one of them destroyed) have been built on the eastern and northern side of the Temple. (Fig. No. 1)

The temple

The date of the construction of this temple is known through an inscription of Ranjit Malla and Viswa Laxmi Devi in 1715 A. D.

The temple is a fine example of early Newar architecture; it has a three tiered roof. The wood carvings, torans, struts, windows are of fine quality craftsmanship. (Fig. No. 2)

The interior is of an unusual construction in that it is completely open with a high lantern style ceiling, over the main shrine, with wall paintings of Asta Matrikas and Asta Bhairavs.

The roofs are supported by carved wooden struts and covered with traditional jhingati tiles.

The topmost roof is crowned with a gilded copper pinnacle or gajur. (Fig. No. 3) The temple together with its religious functions is under the religious association Guthi Sansthan whose duty is to upkeep the majority of the temples and shrines of Nepal.

The temple had 8 ropanis of land to provide income in cash, for its maintenance (Recorded in Guthi Sansthan) and religious functions.

The restoration work

Because of lack of maintenance and conservation through years, this temple had reached a very dilapidated state. Most of its wood carvings were disfigured or lost. (Pl. No. 3 A and 3 B)

In 1981, the Department of Archaeology in cooperation with the French research team, Himalaya-Korakorum, established the Brahmayani Temple conservation project under a team consisting of the present writer as incharge of the project, a senior draftsman, a surveyer and photographer of the Department.

This project made a survey, estimated and started the actual restoration work from August 1981 and by the end of Sept. 1982 the major work was completed. As

of Sept. 1982 this project incurred Rs. 3,56,058/26 out of which 25% was borne by His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the rest by the French Government (CNRS).

Calendar of repair

The site work started on August 1981. The work involved wood carving, carpentry and masonry. The well experienced craftsmen from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, Gokarna, etc. were brought to Panauti, and through them the local people have been trained in this line for future work.

The Calendar of repair

1. Prior to the starting of actual restoration work the heap of fallen material from the temple were carefully examined and the reusable materials were kept aside in safe custody. The other materials were removed from the temple surrounding and made the temple area clean.
2. Scaffolding work was done by an expert in this field. Immediately after scaffolding the pinnacle was removed and stored in the office.
3. The walls and roofs of each storey were systematically dismantled and these were stacked carefully for future use. (Pl. No. 4 A.)
4. All the wooden artifacts were registered while they were being removed from the temple.
5. The four central pillars inside the temple were strengthened with R.C.C. foundation to protect them from further sinking.
6. Similarly the ground floor walls were reinforced by R.B.C. foundation.

7. The temple was reverted back to its balance as it was tilted by about 4" towards its eastern side.
8. The masonry work started from bottoms-up.
9. The carpentry and roofing works started from top-downwards and the Gajur, after its cleaning and repairing was re-instated in its original place.
10. After the completion of the temple, wall paintings were restored and chemically treated.

Types of material used

As in other project, we have followed the same original technique applied to this temple for its restoration works.

The temple was built with special sized slip glazed Telia bricks of different sizes, which are not available in the local market. A special arrangement was made with the brick master of Bhaktapur six months ahead so that it would be possible to start restoration work in time. Special sized Sal (Shorea robusta) timber were brought from Tarai.

Special clay was dug-out from about 5.6 metre depth. This clay was used for roofing purpose as it must be elastic, strong, and free from plant seeds.

The other construction materials like rope, tarfelt, cement, bitumen, nails, etc. were all acquired from Kathmandu market.

Technique utilized for the conservation of Timber and roof structures

All the new and old timber articles used in this temple were chemically treated

with insecticide. The chemical used for wood treatment is the mixture of wykamol-plus and kerosene (1:10), old timbers were submerged in this chemical for half an hour and for new pieces more than one hour. (Pl. No. 4 B.)

For the roofing purpose herbicide chemicals were used in clay and jhingati tiles. One layer tarfelt was laid down on the planks for protecting from water leakage and plants. The chemical used for the clay is a solution of Denkol and water (1:50 lt.) and for jhingati tiles is a solution of silicone and water (1:20 lt.).

While restoring the temple one copper Shree Yantra, some copper and silver coins were found inside the supporting holes of the "Gaju Sin" (timber post supporting the Pinnacle). (Pl. No. 5 A.)

Shree Yantra

It is 12'1 X 12'2 cm. which is a tantric symbol. It shows the order of the seat of Asta Matrikas and Asta Bhairavs.

Copper coins

Some copper coins available were round in shape and thick without any prints.

Silver coins

Silver coins of different denomination found in the temple were dated S. S. 1737 and 1739 (1817 and 1819 A. D.) of Siddhi Laxmi Devi, King Rajendra Bikram Shah and Siddhi respectively.

Before the erection of the pinnacle, besides the Tamapatra and old coins some new coins were put inside the supporting holes by the devotees.

Calendar of different Pujas during restoration

1. Chhemapuja

Before starting the actual site-work the Chhemapuja was offered to the Goddess Brahmayani, Chhema literally means "Excuse". Normally people hesitate to climb the temple. Hence, this Puja is offered to the Goddess to forgive for doing so.

2. Chhemapuja

After Chhemapuja, the next puja (worship) is offered to Brahmayani for her permission to remove the pinnacle from the temple. Removing the pinnacle is done with the help of a cow's tail and a long rope.

3. Eye opening ceremony

The leader of the wood carvers acts as the main priest who performs the eye opening ceremony. During the Puja, he has to stand in front of all the newly carved struts, lion's heads (Swinkhwa) and carvers tools. He worships the struts, lion's heads and tools with a special Mantra, and gives lives to the struts and lion's head by opening the eyes of the figures in the struts, lion's head, etc. Only after the puja the struts and lions heads will be placed on the temple in their respective places. (Pl. No. 5 B)

4. Chhemapuja

After the completion of restoration work of the temple, carvers and carpenters perform separately the chhemapuja; and the masonry perform ja puja (filled-up),

Sculptures in and around the Temple

Inside the Temple

1. The main Goddess Brahmayani Pith a lump of stone facing North is at the centre of the southern wall of the sanctum, adorned by three decorated stone Toranas. In front of the shrine there are three stone patras, in between of which is a stone the symbol of learning (Khadkon) covered by metal. To the left of the main diety is placed a stone bust of so-called Kumar.

2. Towards the east of the sanctum is kept a stone, Bhadrakali facing west, adorned by two stone toranas.

3. To the west the sanctum is Bhairav also a stone, facing east, adorned by two toranas.

In front of both Bhairav and Bhadrakali there are one stone patra and a stone symbol of learning (Khadkon) on each side.

4. On either side of the sanctum are two small stone lions, and above the sanctum are three small hanging metallic bells and a strong iron chain.

5. At the centre of the floor there is a Yajna kunda which is covered by a lotus designed stone. During the festival the Yajna (Hom) takes place here before the puja starts to the Goddess Brahmayani.

6. Wall painting

The ground-floor walls of the lantern are painted with representation of divinities (Asta Matrikas and Asta Bhairavs). The paintings extend at a height of about 2 mts. on two levels. (Pl. No. 6 A). From the Northern side clockwise they are as follows.

North - Tigress, lioness

East - Upper level - Mahalaxmi, Mahakali, Vaisnavi, Ganesh
Lower level - Bhairav, Bhairav
Bhairav, Tiger

South - Upper level - Maheswari, Brahmayani, Kumari
Lower level - Bhairav Bhairav,
Bhairav

West - Upper level - Varahi, Bhairav,
unclear
Lower level - Bhairav, Betal, unclear

Among the painted figures the main central figure Brahmayani standing at the southern wall, facing north is in white colour, largest in size and richly decorated. These paintings are of vegetal colour. Some of the figures are unclear because of its time worn.

7. A stone inscription of 88 cm X 50 cm size is placed near at the north - eastern central pillar post. This inscription is facing to the west which is undesipherable.

8. On the north-western central pillar there was a copper plate of 16 cm X 9 cm size, which is now disappeared.

Besides these, there are some lotus designed stone on the floor pavement.

Outside the temple

1. To the south-east corner of the temple pavement there is a stone. People worship it as Masan Bhairav.

2. A pair of headless stone figure facing south is at the north of the temple.

3. In front of the main entrance of the temple is lying a big stone slab (2 mts X 80 cm Lahtwankiu Lohn) where the dead body is laid down just before

the cremation. The relatives of the deceased person offer water to the dead body hoping to regain life again. (Pl. No. 6 B.)

4. To the north-eastern corner is a standing stone where the oil lamp is lit while the dead body on the above said stone slab.
5. There are four stones, two are on either side of the main entrance of the temple and two on the way to the temple within the temple boundary.
6. In front of the western gate of the temple there are two stone sacrificial posts.
7. A stone inscription of 92cm X 54 cm is attached to the western wall dated N. S. 837 and 841 (1716 and 1720 A. D.) mentioning the names of the builders of this temple as Ranjit Malla and Viswa Laxmi Devi. They also donated land for the maintenance and to carry-out the religious functions of the temple.

Conclusion

Panauti is a small township. It is a Newar settlement with numerous architectural monuments; the Brahmayani Temple is one of the major temples. But lack of maintenance through years it was in very bad shape. With the assistance of French Government (CNRS) the temple has been restored in its original shape. (Pl. No. 7 A and 7 B.)

Acknowledgement

I expressed my deep gratitude to Mr. Ramesh Jung Thapa, then the Director General of Department of Archaeology and presently, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture for providing me an opportunity to work in this project and his valuable guidance. Due acknowledgement is given to Mr. Jest of CNRS, France, who has encouraged me to prepare this article, for his endeavour to make this project a success. And lastly, Mr. John Sandey is also thankful for his technical cooperation.

Wood carvings on the temple (Clockwise from the North)

	North	East	South	West
Ground floor	Toran Maheswari, Brahmayani, Mahalaxmi	Kumari, Maheswari, Vaisnavi	Mahalaxmi, Vaisnavi, Maheswari	Indrayani, Vaisnavi, Mahakali
1st floor	Struts Maheswari, Maheswari, Brahmayani	Mahalaxmi, Mahalaxmi, Maheswari, Goddess on horse ?	Goddess on snake ? Ganga, Indrayani, Indrayani	Mahalaxmi, Kumari, Brahmayani, Goddess on deer ?
	Window faces Kumari, Bhairav, Kumari	Kumari, Brairav, Kumari	Kumari, Bhairav, Kumari	Kumari, Bhairav, Kumari
	Window Toran Tara, Brahmayan, Tara	Tara, Vaisnavi, Tara	Tara, Bhadrakali, Tara	Tara, Maheswari, Tara
2nd floor	Struts Bhairav, Goddess on dog ? Brahmayani, Bhairav	Bhairav, Mahalaxmi, Mahakali, Bhairav	Bhairav, Indrayani, Varahi, Bhairav	Bhairav, Kumari, Vaisnavi, Bhairav
	Window faces Kumari, Bhairav, Kumari	Kumari, Bhairav, Kumari	Varahi, Bhairav, Kumari	Mahakali, Bhairav, Kumari
	Central Window Toran Brahmayani	Brahmayani	Varahi	Brahmayani
3rd floor	Struts Maheswari, Brahmayani	Mahalaxmi, Mahakali	Vaisnavi, Varahi	Kumari, Indrayani

A Contribution ...

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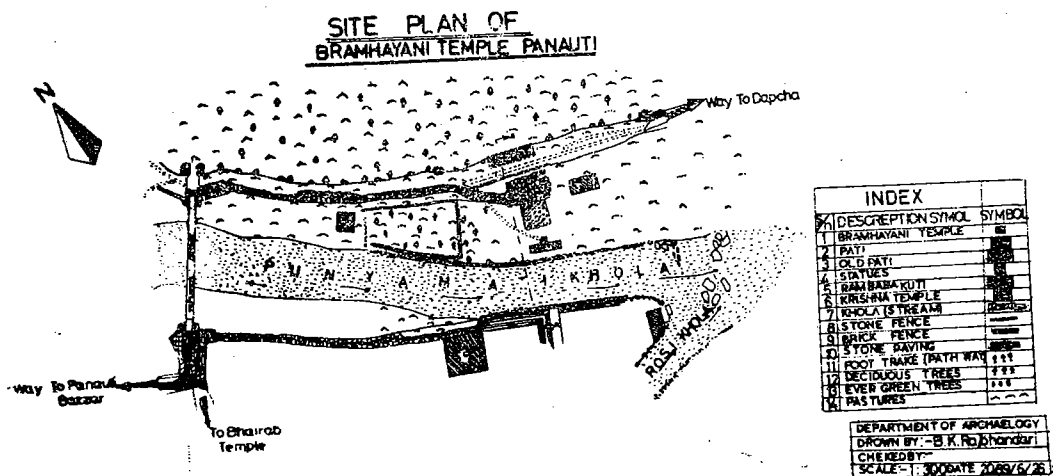


Fig. No. 1

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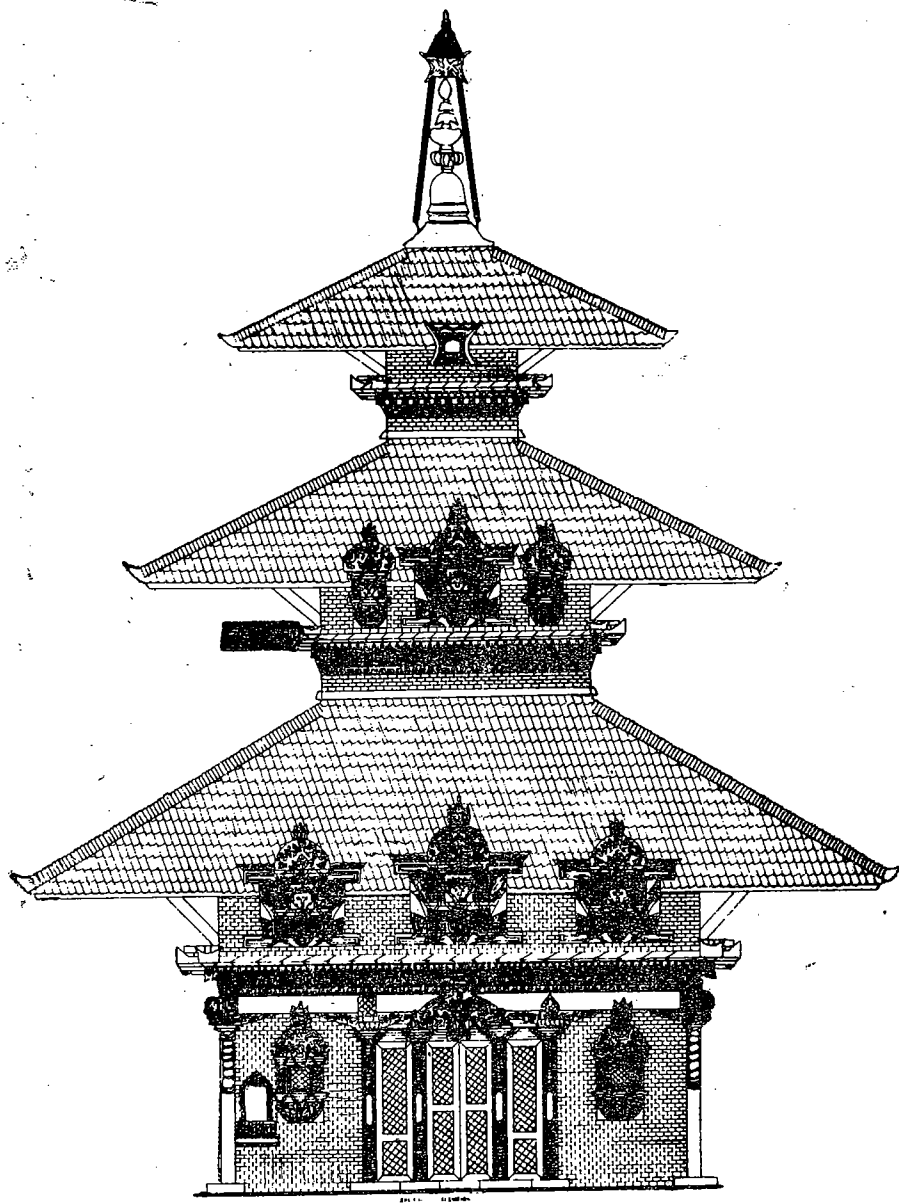
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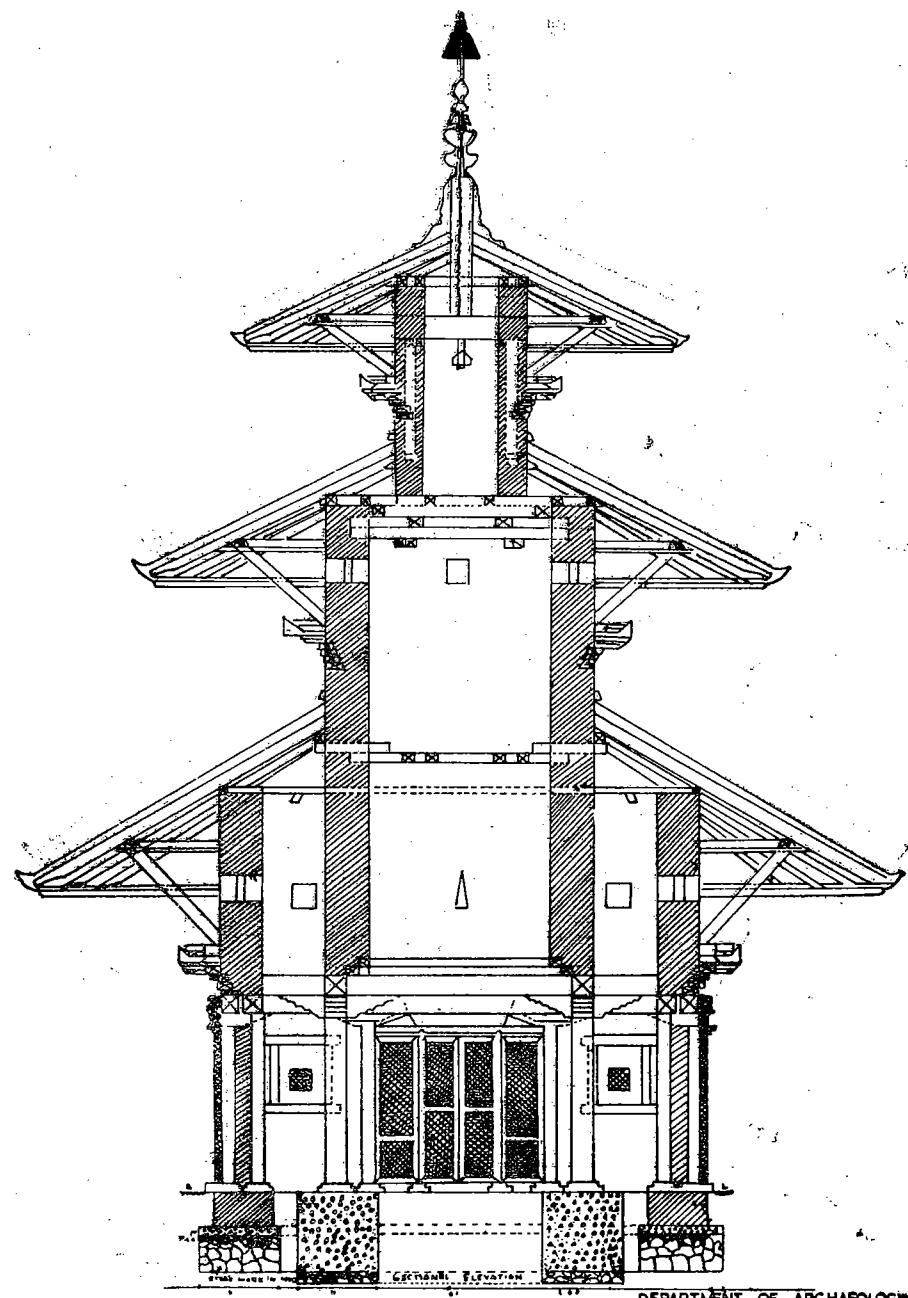
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Fig. No. 2

Elevation of Brahmayani Temple

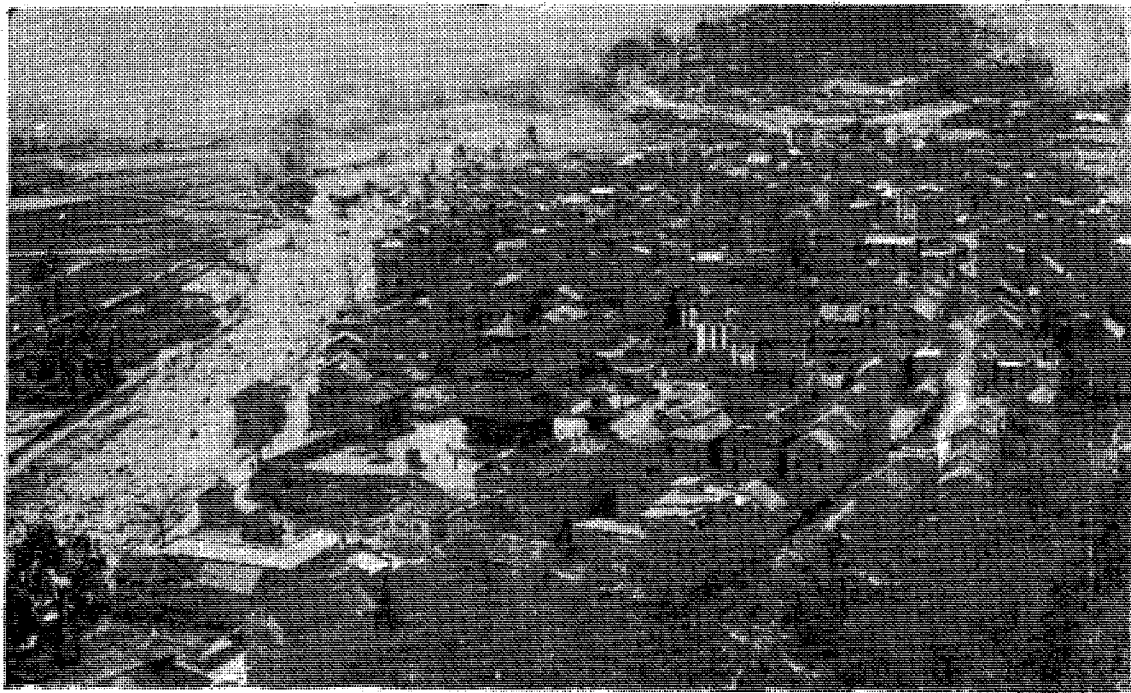
BRAHMANI TEMPLE CONSERVATION PROJECT PANAUTI



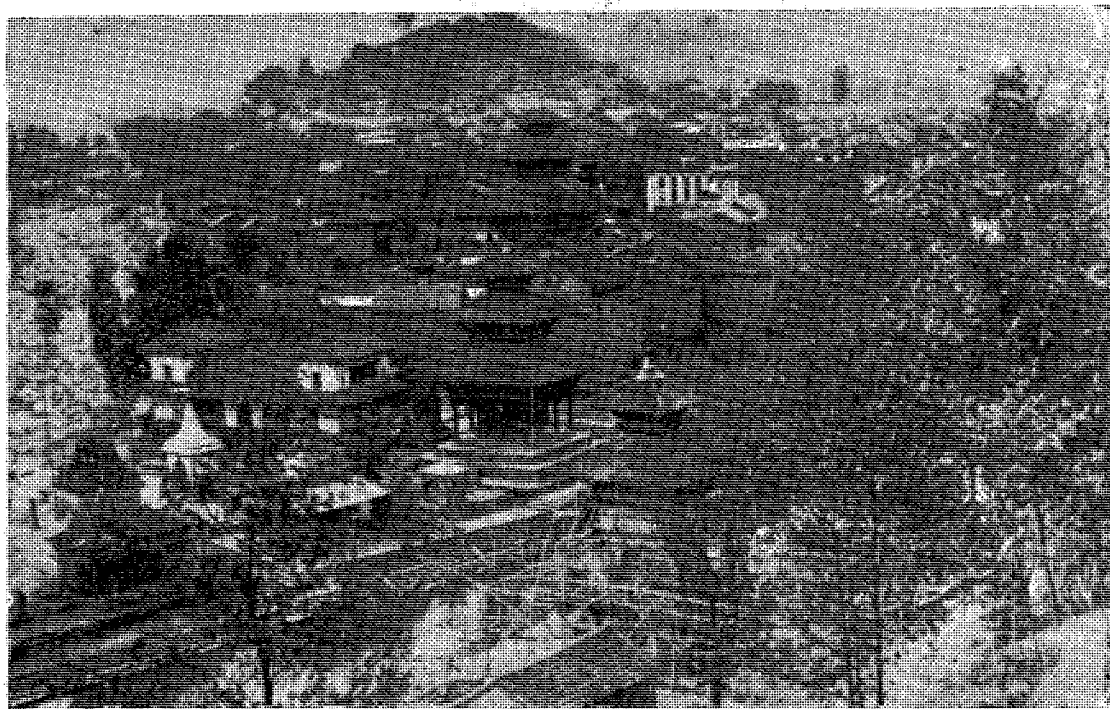
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Fig. No. 3

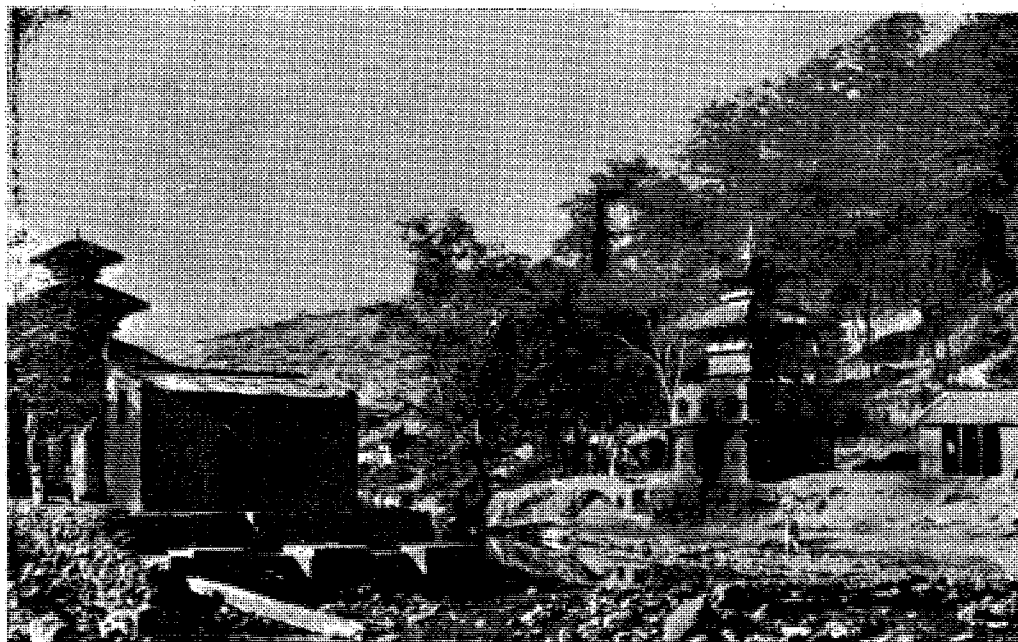
Section of Brahmayani Temple



(A) General view of the town Panauti



(B) Ensemble of the monuments at Triveṇī Ghat in Panauti.



A view of Brahmayani Temple at Triveni Ghat



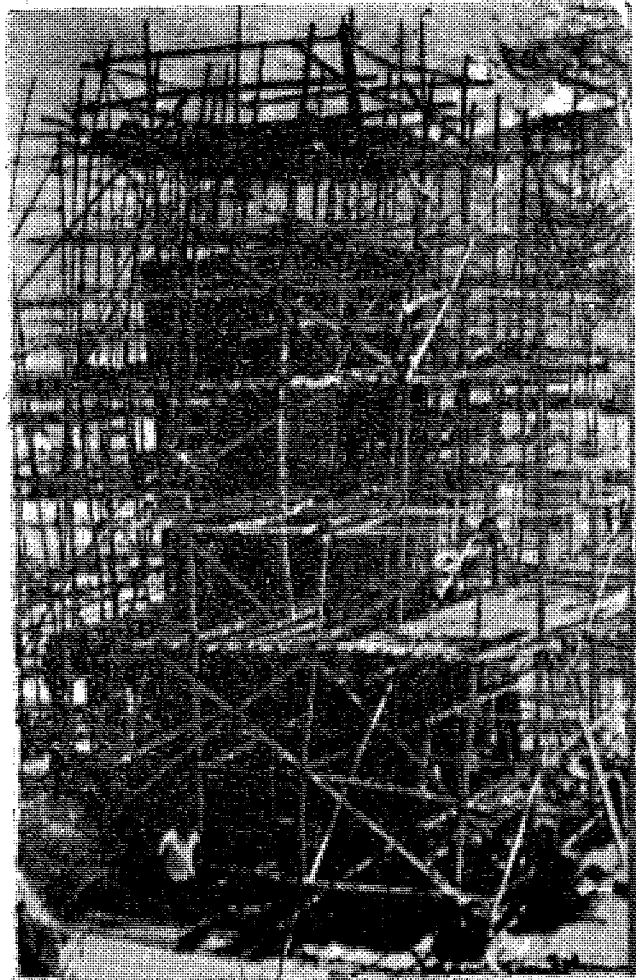
(A) Brahmayani Temple before restoration



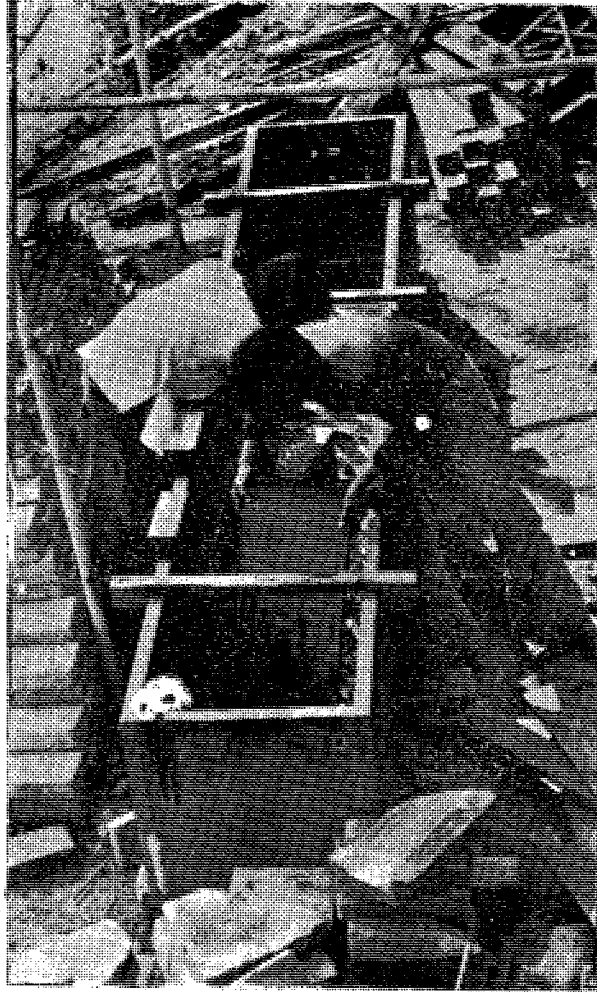
(B) A close-up view of western entrance of Brahmayani Temple

Plate No. 4 (A)

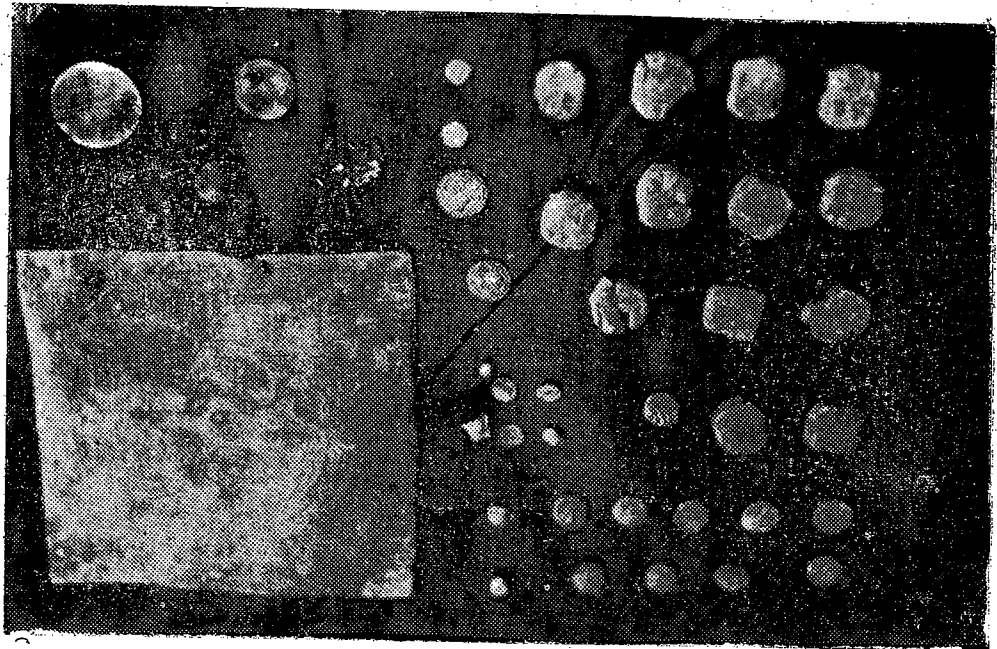
Ancient Nepal



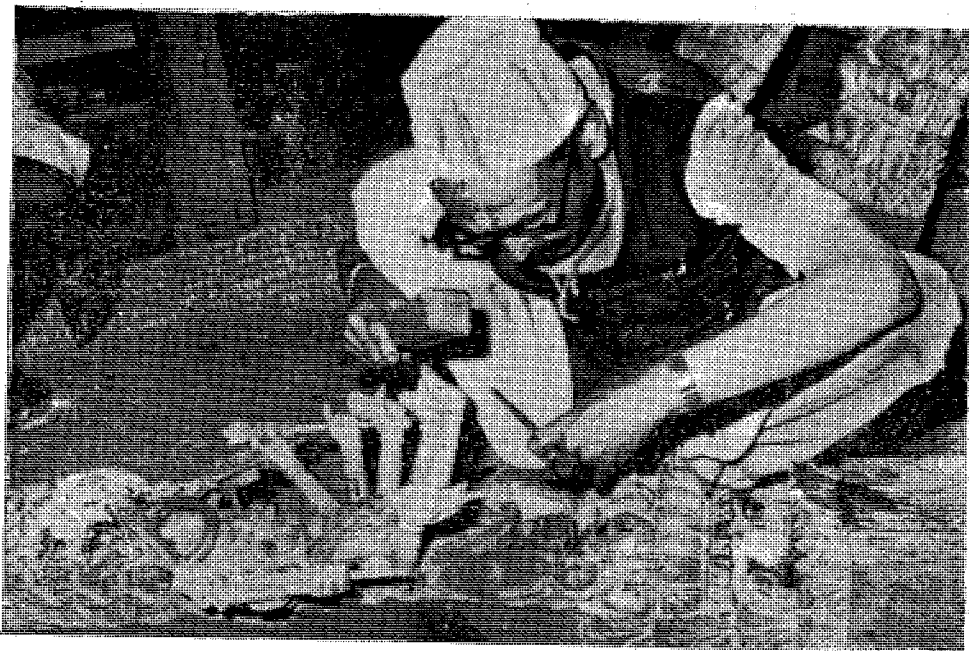
Brahmayani Temple during restoration



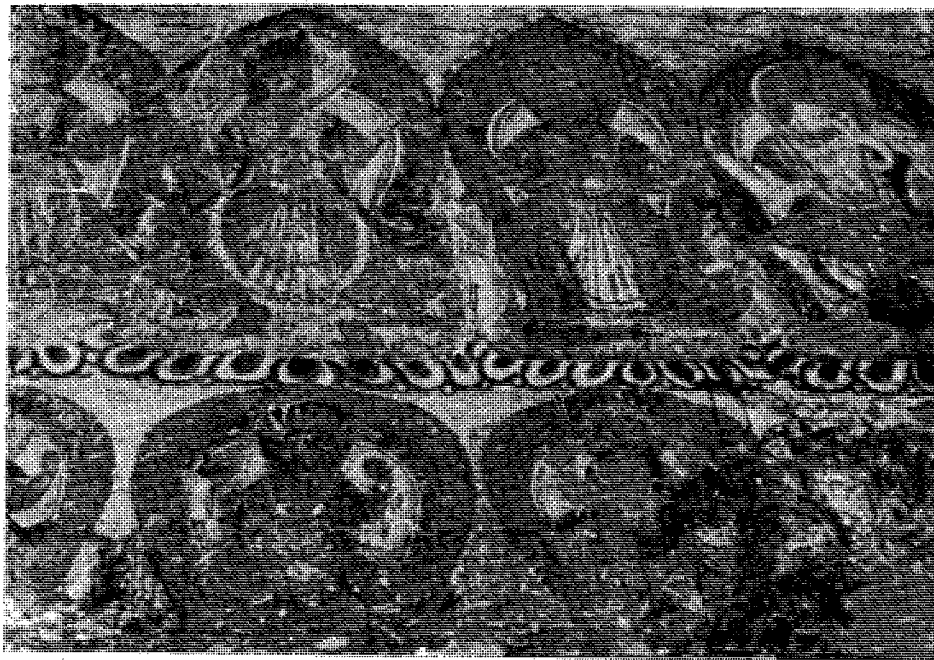
A process of chemical treatment going on wooden objects



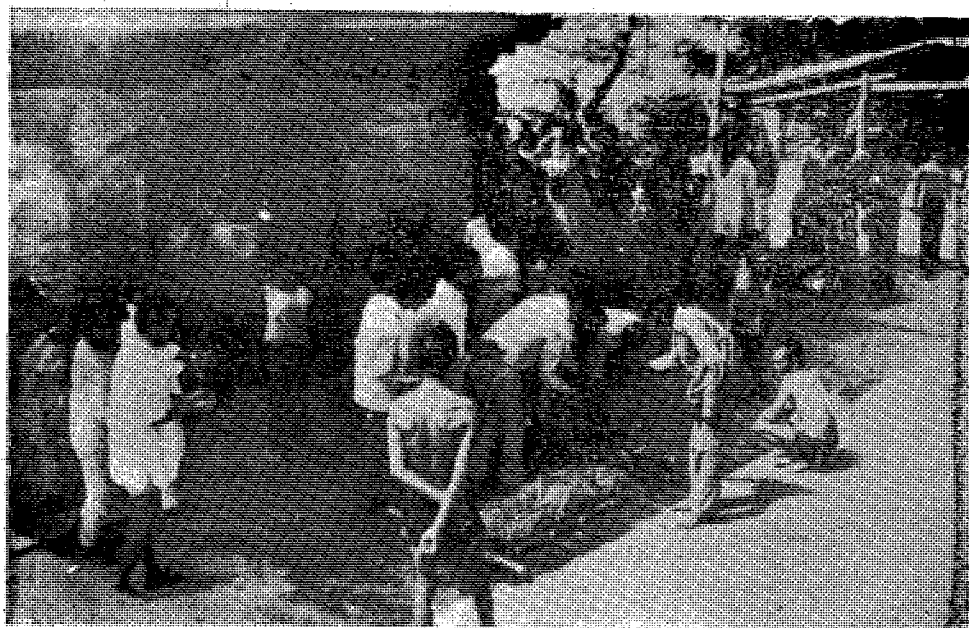
(A) Coins and shree yantra found on the supporting timber of the Temple's Pinnacle



(B) A scene of Eye opening ceremony.



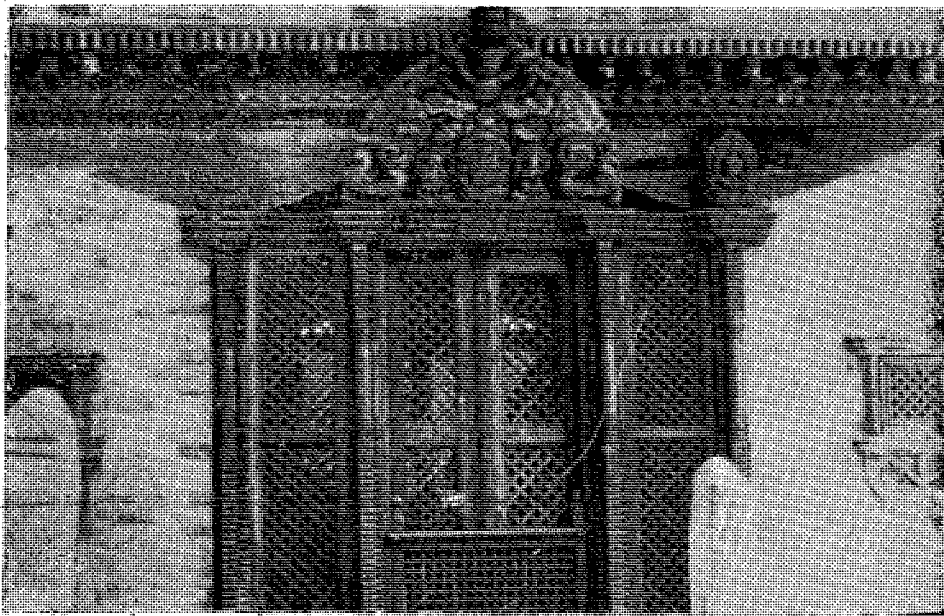
(A) Eastern side wall painting after chemical treatment.



(B) A scene of offering water to the dead body.



(A) Brahmavani Temple after restoration



(B) Western entrance after restoration