



Tourism in Kathmandu Durbar Square Post Gorkha Earthquake 2021

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Abstract

Kathmandu durbar square and its establishment are believed to date back to the regime of the Shah and the Malla dynasty, the constructions believed to begin as early as the 3rd century. Enlisted in the UNESCO World Heritage site in the year 1979, Kathmandu Durbar Square is a reflection of historic pagoda styled temples crafted by Newar artists in Newari architectural style. Kathmandu Durbar Square is an important site for Buddhists and Hindus as it holds significant values. One of the most important sites in Kathmandu valley, the complex was badly damaged during the 2015 earthquake with numerous building collapses. The massive hit took great toll of the ancient structures and left stumps and ruins all over the durbar square area.

Restoration of the Durbar Square area was initially taken over by the Department of Architecture and the Government of Nepal through an open bidding process and completely depended on national/foreign aid and assistance. Various projects and plans were initiated to rehabilitate the destructed sites but they contradicted the traditional construction methods, resources and materials. The concerned authorities seemed to overlook the necessity of preserving the originality and the traditional values by agreeing on usage of unconventional methods and materials proposed by building contractors and created a controversial conflict. The demand for local participation and restoring the pre-existing socio cultural value along with the physical reconstruction was put forward postponing the projects and reconsidering all the plans and strategies.

This paper discusses the damages and loss in Kathmandu Durbar square due to the 2015 earthquake, its impact on local people, how the event affected the tourism industry and the progressive development of the heritage sites ever since. It reviews on the conflicts and difficulties experienced post earthquake while restoring the heritage through various studies and research. The report also reflects upon the controversies drawn upon the

reconstruction approach proposed by various stakeholders. The data, facts and information gathered shed light on the present scenario of Kathmandu Durbar Square; undertaken projects of restoration, completed plans, progressive report, achieved goals, ongoing construction and so on.

Introduction

Based on its past history of experiencing large earthquakes once in almost every century, Nepal has been considered an earthquake prone land geographically based on its building process and tectonic plates by experts all over the world. The landform of Nepal makes it vulnerable to earthquakes that can cause damage in enormous scale. Dominated by 3 major tectonic plates, Nepal stands in one of the most seismically active regions of earth.

Hit by a disastrous earthquake in April 25th, 2015 with a Moment Magnitude scale of 7.8 (or Surface Magnitude wave scale of 8.1) Nepal experienced one of the major strikes since the Nepal-Bihar earthquake in 1934 causing massive destructions. Barpak of Gorkha being the epicenter of the main shock followed by 2 major aftershocks in 26th Apr and 12th May of 6.7 and 7.3 moment magnitude respectively did severe damage in and around Kathmandu Valley including the ever standing UNESCO Heritage sites along with numerous landslides, avalanches, rock falls and converting villages into plain lands. While the earthquake caused catastrophic damage and fatalities, the ruins of the heritage sites left everyone questioning about its restoration since the damage within the Valley seemed particularly bad. Among which, Kathmandu Durbar Square (Basantapur Durbar Kshetra) also known as Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square with total 97 protected monuments seem to have lost its glory with numerous structural damages and monumental collapses. Out of which 39 have been damaged and 11 have been collapsed including the 9 storeyed Basantapur Tower, 3 storeyed Maju dewal and Narayan Temple.

Followed by the 2015 earthquake and the major aftershocks alone took toll of almost 9000 civilians, injuring around 22000 people leaving innumerable citizens homeless, damaging countless structures and monuments in the country. The devastating quake left the country's economy paralyzed with its major effect on the tourism industry; Nepalese heritage being the prerequisite of tourist attraction. People were left with nothing but the daunting duty of reconstructing all the damaged sites. This further raised controversial conflict among the approach towards building the monuments and the involvement of stakeholders which kept the restoration tasks postponing and delaying.

Over the year Nepal received great many international aid and assistance emphasizing the restoration of Kathmandu Durbar Square. Unhurried but progressively the damaged structures in the square have been revived in the past years and Kathmandu Durbar is rising from its rubbles.

Objectives of the study

1. To access the damage done
2. To know how it affected the locals
3. To know its effect on tourism industry
4. To know the present scenario

Research Methodology

Through an analytical analysis of the data, facts and figures we have known about the pre and post earthquake scenario of Kathmandu Durbar Square. This is a descriptive report accumulated with qualitative data. The engaging research on the palace area has provided more than fascinating perspectives towards the historical, archeological, cultural as well as economical significances of the monuments within the heritage. Studies show that this heritage is a reflection of authentic local architectural skills, ethnic lifestyle and remarkable settlement.

The 2015 earthquake had devastating impact on the heritage structures. This research is based on thorough study of various reports and researches previously carried out by various national and international teams and organizations. The dispatched teams have collected first hand information which makes this research's source a secondary base study. The research is a collection of secondary data and statistics published by local and international news media, university researches and reports and different online data origins through internet platforms. Facts and information for this study was assembled from various sources with a thorough review to realize the impacts on local as well as tourism industry and the progress aftermath.

Present scenario of Kathmandu Durbar Square since 2015 earthquake

Six years ago in April Nepal observed an enormous earthquake turning the capital's most prized possessions into rubbles in minutes. The 7.8 Mw earthquake followed by hundreds of aftershocks with 2 major aftershocks took toll of many Nepalese lives along with hundreds of historic buildings, monuments, temples and structures. Kathmandu valley in itself accommodates seven UNESCO World Heritage areas among which several sites have been either severely damaged or completely collapsed during the 2015 earthquake including Kathmandu Durbar Square. The central palace construction dates back to some 10th century showcasing amazing architecture and skills of the Newar artists and craftsmen over centuries. Kathmandu Durbar Square holds historic, cultural, emotional and sentimental values along with its medieval architecture that has been portraying Hindu and Buddhist practices through the city's layout and design.

Following the 2015 earthquake, various local, national and international teams in coordination with the Department of Archeology (DoA), Government of Nepal (GoN), International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) were dispatched to reassemble and store the salvaged artifacts and all kinds of materials. These retrieved components and artifacts came in great use during the renovation and rehabilitation of the damaged heritage sites. Since the damage done, Kathmandu Durbar Square was beyond recognition with nothing but stumps left behind of several monuments.

The immediate necessity to rebuild the structures was recognized by various stakeholders and the major authorities were DoA, Hanumandhoka Durbar Museum Development Committee, Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Metropolitan Police, Nepal Army based in Hanumandhoka Durbar, different local clubs, social organizations and local people. Within a week or so DoA deployed rescue team jointly with units of the Nepal Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police to rescue the findings of art objects and remaining of the monuments in the sites. DoA was supported by the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu to salvage the remains of the monument post disaster by forming a volunteering group through participation of local community. ICOMOS played a major role to carry out UNESCO's support projects.

Under these projects most of the sites were cleared within a week or two or at most it took a couple of months for severely damaged ones. Over the years, renovation work inside Kathmandu Durbar square has been seen lagging behind due to incompetent governance and conflict between various stakeholders despite the fact that the restoration funds received to revive these heritages came down to millions from all over the world. If one is to take a tour of the Palace area one can witness the inflow of various donor countries. However the dispute arises as whether to rebuild the structures considering a community based approach or a more sustainable western reconstruction approach.

The national government and the building contractors seem to have disrespected the authentic values and techniques. Controversies of materials to be used, methods, architectural design, selection of manpower, layout etc have caused dispute among the stakeholders halting various plans and projects. A sustainable western approach towards rebuilding this site is believed to sabotage the authenticity they have carried for centuries. These heritage sites not only signify physical buildings but connect people with them in religious, cultural and emotional values. The use of cheap and unconventional materials other than those used during the medieval era undermine the value of the site was the major concern of the local stakeholders (Guthis) who not only have sentimental values attached towards these structures but are the daily basis caretakers.

Kathmandu Durbar square suffered the greatest damage with 25 temples, other structures and monuments in the complex stretched within 40,000 square meters. Government of Nepal established a body National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) within a few weeks after the disaster to assist reconstruction and rehabilitation

work. A handful of international reliefs had particular interest in reconstructing important heritage sites among which Kathmandu Durbar Square was primarily held by US and Chinese Aid. The restoration progress is slow; half the damaged sites in the Palace area is yet to be completed and many projects are almost as non-existing. The Royal Seat otherwise known as the Gaddi Baithak was completely funded by USA and Nau Tale Durbar (nine-storey palace) is currently being restored with the help of Chinese investment.

A list of permission approved to execute restoration activities of the durbar square area are as follows:

1. Degu Taleju Temple
2. Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple
3. Laxmi Narayan Temple
4. Kageshwori Temple – KVPT
5. Natyeshwor Temple
6. Taleju Temple – DoA/GoN 6
7. Dashain Ghar
8. Shiva Temple in front of Taleju Temple – KVPT
9. Nagara Ghar - KMC 1
10. Maru Sattal
11. Tarini Bahal – KMC
12. Dhukuti Ghar
13. Gaddi Baithak – Miyamoto Global Relief
14. Saraswati Temple – KVPT
15. Pratap Malla Stone Pillar and statue – HMDC/GoN
16. Bamsha Gopal (Krishna Mandir/Octagonal) Temple – DoA./GoN
17. Trailokya Mohan (Dashavatar) Temple – DoA/GoN
18. Kashtahmandapa - KMC
19. Maju Dega - KMC
20. Mahavishnu Temple
21. Shiva Temple in front of Simhadhoka
22. Basantapur (Nautale) Durbar
23. Aagam Chhen and West Wing of Palace

Out of these listed heritages DoA and GoN have reconstructed some themselves. Degu Taleju Temple, Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple, Laxminarayan Temple, Kageshwori Temple, Natyeshwor Temple, Taleju Temple, Dashain Ghar, Shiva Temple in front of Taleju, Shiva Temple in front of Simhadhoka, Nagara Ghar, Maru Sattal, Tarini Bahal, Dhukuti Ghar, Gaddi Baithak, Saraswati Temple, Pratap Malla Stampha and statue, Bamsha Gopal (Krishna Mandir) Temple and Mahavishnu Temple have already been completed (DoA/GoN, 2018a; 2019). Correspondingly Basantapur (Nautale) Durbar, Dashavatar Temple, Kasthamandap, Maju Dega are undergoing in process of construction.

As for the tourism perspective Nepal saw dramatic drop in the arrival of tourist in the following year post the disastrous quake. In 2014 before the earthquake the number of tourist arrival had increased from 700,000 to a million but since the quake hit the country tourist arrival plunged by 55.59%. The tourist arrival was seen drastically fallen compared to the statistics of previous year than the first four months followed by the event. But with the following year's tourist arrival seemed to catch its pace by amazing increase in foreigners visiting the country.

The following tables shows the tourist arrival pattern from 2015 – 2018

Year	Arrival	Percentage change
2015	538970	-3.1
2016	753,002	40
2017	940218	25
2018	1173072	25

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics; MOCCA, 2018

The table above shows that in 2015 tourist arrival drastically dropped by a negative 3.1 percentages after the earthquake but it took a significant pickup by an increase of 40 % in 2016. Similarly in 2017 the tourist arrival seems to have increased by 25% compared to the previous year totaling the number of tourist to 940218 and 1173072 in 2018 with another 25% rise in total tourist arrival.

In the year 2019 Nepal welcomed and accommodated a total of 1.17 million tourists. According to the data published by Nepal Tourism Board in the first six month of 2019 a 12.6% increase in tourist arrival was recorded and 8% total rise until Oct, 2019.



Source: Nepal Tourism Board (NTB)

With Tourism industry taking its pick up Nepal introduced third edition of a yearlong tourism project VISIT Nepal 2020 targeting over 20 million tourists. Only to the world's dismay, the global pandemic of COVID -19 originating from China by the mid of Dec 2019 left the world with no choice but for a global lockdown which eventually withdrew the Visit Nepal 2020 plan in Nepal as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion to the information and data collected through secondary sources, this report is a compilation of an in depth study of Kathmandu Durbar Square after the Gorkha Earthquake 2015. Kathmandu Durbar Square is an important Heritage site of the country that does not only generate revenue through foreign currency earning but has cultural, historical and emotional values attached with the people and its origin. Experiencing a major earthquake every once in 75-80 years Kathmandu durbar square has prevailed against withering since thousands of years. Weakened at times the heritage has been rising along with the people living in and around the complex.

Over the centuries the layout, design, building methods, materials have been of conventional style without any disregard to the authenticity and originality. However the city has faced the point of change since the Nepal-Bihar Earthquake. Ever since then the building processes around have been influenced by sustainable western approach resulting the city to display itself more as a concrete city rather than a land of temples. The earthquake in April had left the country's economy shook with devastating damages upon the people, their property and heritages mainly in Kathmandu Valley and areas north of the Valley.

The post earthquake scenario in Nepal was dreadful with thousands of people left homeless, a lot of lives lost and countless infrastructural damages. Despite many obstacles, political disturbances and governmental incompetence the restoration, reconstruction and rehabilitation projects have been carried out effectively with the persistent local community members, stakeholders and foreign aid and assistance. Kathmandu Durbar Square can be seen taking a pickup in gaining back its glory however slow the progress might have been. The tourism industry seemed to have suffered equally if not less due to the massive impact on the tourist attraction sites in Kathmandu valley. Tourist arrival in Nepal totally dropped in the months following the earthquake. This impacted in the national economy as tourism industry unfolds one of the highest revenue in Nepal.

We can draw conclusion through this research that in a post trauma circumstance the meaning of reconstruction can vary as a desire to change with a sustainable modern approach rather than recovering physical infrastructure with the mutual purpose of reinstating pre-existing socio-cultural values. While carrying out the reconstruction project besides reinstating the physical infrastructure, re-establishing the heritage without compromising the cultural, historical and social values should be taken into consideration. In the process of reinstalling the collapsed building the originality of its art and architecture should not be sabotaged.

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