

NEPAL – HERITAGE @ RISK!

The built and natural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley is vulnerable to natural as well as man-made disasters. Therefore, a strategic plan of action is necessary to prevent, prepare for and mitigate the impact of such disasters. These impacts will increase because of high population growth, a high concentration of houses and commercial complexes, the use of vulnerable building technologies and materials, and numerous unsafe and illegal constructions etc. Of great disadvantage is also the sense of general apathy and a disturbing lack of awareness among the inhabitants. This has led to a growing number of unauthorised demolitions and new buildings in the centres of the three historic cities of the Kathmandu Valley, which have been on the World Heritage List since 1979.

In the centre of Patan alone six historic secular buildings have been demolished and five more drastically altered by additional storeys. No efforts were made to at least save some of the furnishings and decorative details (eg the elaborately carved window frames) and to use traditional materials instead of concrete for the new buildings. One of the most outstanding buildings is the public resthouse in Patan Darbar Square Monument Zone. In September 1999 it was illegally dismantled without the approval of the Department of Archaeology. Although *in-situ* repair would have been possible, the resthouse was reconstructed using new building materials and thus has lost its authenticity.

Another critical example is Itum Monastery in Kathmandu, dating back at least to the 13th century. Although the complex retains much of its original configuration, architectural detailing and wood carvings, the future is precarious: the timber roof

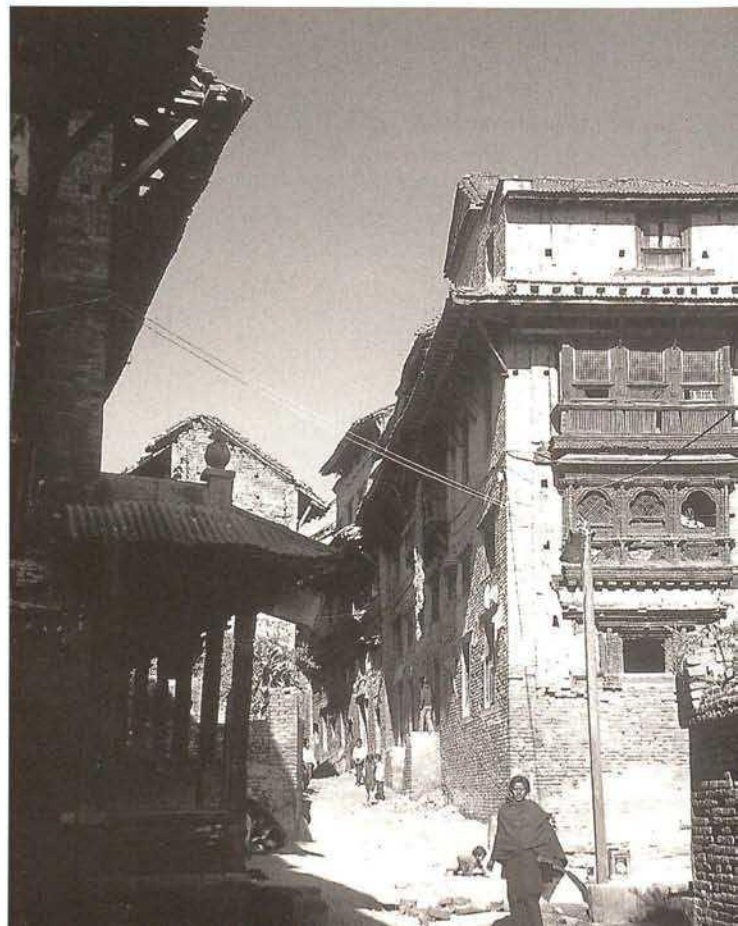


structure is in danger of collapsing, there is no money for repairs and no legal means to prevent a new building from replacing it.

Both examples illustrate some of the major problems of monument protection in Nepal: most of all, the inability to identify, list or protect historic structures which are not in the World Heritage List or under private ownership. There is also an inadequate centralised trust for heritage maintenance created when community trusts were nationalised in 1962.

(Information taken from: UNESCO heute No 1/2000; World Monuments Watch, 2000 List)

Patan, Durbar Square



◀ Monastery area near Katmandu, detail



The historical dwelling buildings in decay are more and more replaced by the customary new constructions



The traditions of vernacular architecture will hopefully be preserved in Nepal (Helambo mountains)