

SAVE TRADITIONAL NEWARI HOUSES AND SCHOOLS



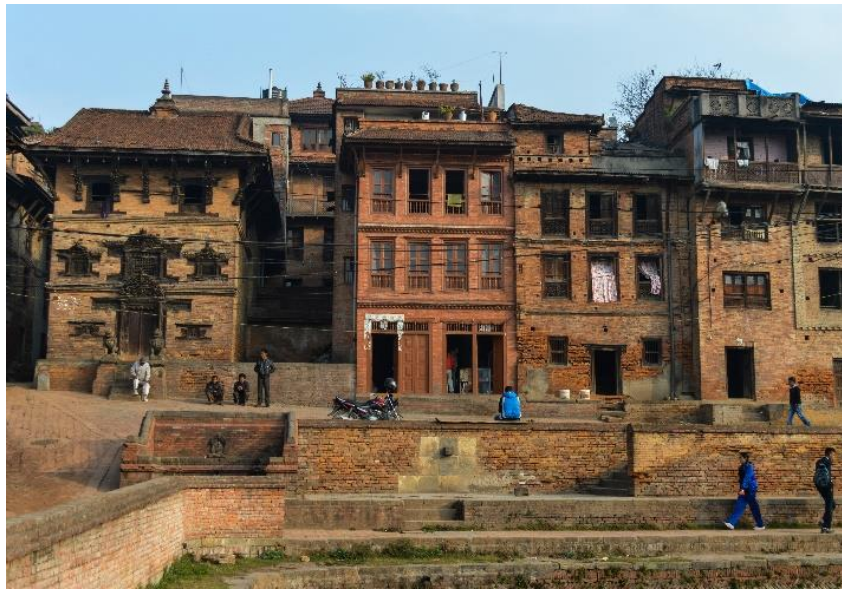
We have been counting the days of aftershocks and it has been 44 days today (7 June) since 25 April. Although aftershocks are getting lighter and lesser, no day has passed without aftershocks less than and equal to 4.0 magnitudes until today. So the ground has not quite stopped shaking. People who have less destroyed houses, have started to go back home to live on ground floors or the safe sections of the houses. Life is gradually getting back to normal but not quite because the undeletable pain that the devastating quake has left is still fresh. The loss of life and property is massive and beyond repair for Nepalese who have GDP per capita income USD 717, displaced people are still in temporary shelters, and so on.

Rescue and relief phase in my village Panga and the Kathmandu valley is almost over. Clearing debris is going on and has become a major obstruction before construction, and then it's time to concentrate in renovation and reconstruction. People who have been displaced and their houses destroyed are saying that they will survive with nettle soup but they badly need permanent houses as tents and temporary shelters are only short-term alternatives.

Life has to go on. Construction is inevitable after destruction. When it comes to constructing houses, it reminds me about gradual replacement with ugly structures over a few

decades when people put new houses after they pull down the old houses in villages and towns.

Without giving little heed to the identity of traditional houses, culture, and identity of ethnicity, many locals have erected new concrete blocks amidst classical structures. People are getting commercial and erecting tall structures to rent them out. It seems that many are not aware of the aesthetic beauty and value of their superb looking ancient houses or they want something new to be proud of or show off their status with new concrete models. People who are still forced to live in old houses have a feeling that they are economically backward to keep up with modern structures.



It is obvious that some want a change just in the name of competing with a neighbour although they understand the value of ancient houses. People are forgetting the old style because they are less aware, not convinced, not abide by law to do so, or some think it's an annoying job to keep the old style. Therefore the old spectacular classical appearance is disappearing and may completely disappear very soon if not cured in time. If you compare the old look with the new ones, you will definitely vote for the old look because they are far better looking than modern plain structures full of plasters and colourful glasses. So why not we keep the charming old look to our new houses? It's high time someone thought about preserving the identity of ancient houses.

Culture is the second attraction of Nepal after nature. The Kathmandu valley possessing seven UNESCO world heritage sites within 220 square miles is the cultural centre of the country. One of the attractions of the valley is unique classical ancient Newari architectural houses in different cities, towns, and villages. Fine brick exposure, clay insulated rooms, exquisitely carved windows, wooden supported floors, slope tile roofs are the characteristics of these unique looking houses. These, one of the most beautiful

houses in the world, are the gems of the Kathmandu valley.

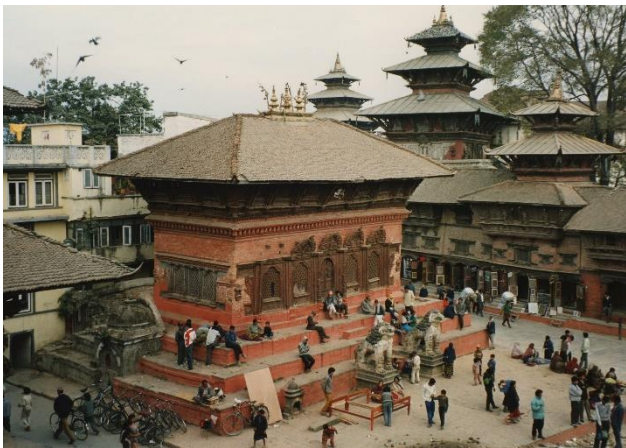
Unfortunately more than 75 per cent of these old houses are hit hard by 7.9 magnitude earthquake and the subsequent aftershocks greater than and

equal to 4.0 magnitude that continued until today (7 June). Illiterate groups of Nepal do not know that Nepal is in the line of earthquake zone or tectonic plates under Nepal are moving.

Although many Nepalese know that earthquake is frequent in Nepal, we are ill prepared from beginning due to various reasons. Nepalese have been too poor to build quake resistant houses, some people don't pay heed to seismic resistant houses, many rural areas are out of transportation for building supplies, and we lacked a good engineering or technology. Therefore our old structures were not seismic resistant and now after this deadly quake followed by subsequent aftershocks, the need for seismic resistant structure is well realized by the people and government.

In my opinion Panga and the other Newari villages like Panga should maintain the classical look with their upcoming reconstruction or renovation. The municipality and the intellectual group of Panga have to seriously think it over and take this initiative to maintain the cultural identity of the unique villages like Panga. Similarly the other ethnic groups from all over Nepal can also do the same for their identity.

If somebody won't think wisely and seriously about this topic, the new structure of Panga, I know for sure, will be very ugly because the massive upcoming reconstruction sooner or later may completely erase all old structure and may completely die out soon. So I am very concerned about the new ugly structure which will definitely destroy the beauty of Panga as some new ugly structures have already done so.



Let me take a superb example from Bhaktapur old town which is in the UNESCO world heritage list. Thanks to Bhaktapur municipality that realized the value of the old houses and already took initiative to conserve them. Therefore it has by now gained the status of the most beautiful town in Nepal. It's high time the authorities or conscious group of other Newari villages and towns realized to conserve such houses. It is the responsibility of the government body and the ones who are aware of the value to make the rest aware of the value of such houses. Of course some wise people from different ethnic groups have already realized

and expressed their view to protect their cultural heritage with upcoming renovation and reconstruction.

Many people don't seem to know that tourism is going to be the biggest industry in Nepal and these superb classical houses are one of the biggest attractions to tourists and precious treasures of Nepal tourism. The importance of preservation of these houses is not only for the sake of tourism, it's also for society's identity and retain culture as the second biggest attraction of Nepal. It's difficult to preserve than destroy. The act of preserving these houses would be as difficult as preserving the rare species of wildlife if the authorities do not act now.

About 15% house holders of Panga are probably financially sound to take care of reconstruction by themselves whereas about 85% do not have enough money to do the job. The government has announced that every damaged house will get Rs. 200,000 and get a loan at low interest rate provided that they follow a certain rules. It's perfect timing for the government to have a demand on the families for the fund it is providing for reconstruction.

The government has to demand that the quake damaged houses can only get cash or something, provided that they keep the classical style of their houses all over the country. Most Nepalese will not go for a loan as the new refinance provision lacks procedural clarity. When Nepal was hit by 1934 earthquake, the biggest so far, the then authority (Rana Regime) provided loans. Many hesitated to take it because they were not sure that they would have managed to pay back. Ultimately the loan was excused. Nepal is not much ahead in literacy so far therefore most Nepalese are still not familiar with loans and even if they are, they are afraid of loans. Whatever they get from the government will not be enough to rebuild their houses. They will probably get some fund from donors if they are lucky. The fact is also that the



My vision: Old Face
New Technology
During my visits to Europe I was impressed by well-preserved old towns. That's why they are popular tourist destinations. Panga is still a nice village where some movie makers are attracted due to its unique ancient houses.

About 600 houses have been damaged in Panga by the recent powerful earthquake followed by more than 44 days subsequent aftershocks with a few of them quite powerful. This has obviously made them even poorer. I don't know how it will go with other Newari villages but at least I want to preserve the

house holders also need to contribute the rest of the amount by themselves. It is trendy in Kathmandu that most poor people sell their land to build a house. That's the easiest alternative they have if they have no other alternatives. But not all people have this alternative because not all have enough land left and some have no land at all.

Considering the fact of massive destruction on houses, the government is determined to introduce new building codes. There is no doubt that one of the codes will be connected to building earthquake resistant houses. People have well realized and learnt a big lesson from this quake and prolonged aftershocks that now there will be no other alternatives than replacing with earthquake resistant structures.

uniqueness of these old houses in Panga as practicable as possible. It is therefore I am thinking of raising some money to help them raise their spirit which is down about this time due to loss of life and property and especially to encourage them to rebuild in old style with new technology.

Of course it will cost a massive amount to rebuild about 600 houses and obviously we will not be able to raise fund for overall reconstruction and I also don't mean it.

Therefore let me make it clear that we are not collecting fund to be entirely responsible for total reconstruction. Although our fund may be a very small amount for the overall cost of

rebuilding, it will play a crucial role to inspire, convince, or force people to keep the old style. So the fund will be focused on preserving the classical identity of the old houses of Panga like in Bhaktapur. We will have a demand on people and our specific demand is they must keep the old classical style when they rebuild. Whatever donation we will collect will be divided between only those who will accept our demand. This, in my opinion, is the best way of using the money we are collecting for earthquake victims.

Therefore my appeal is if you care and are conscious of old culture, please donate some money to conserve something that is soon going to be rare. Your small or big donation will preserve one of the fast dying cultures of the world.

I will sincerely use the fund fully for our purpose and later I will present proofs and reports to you all concerned. I am more concerned about my village and want to do something when the

village needs something. Similarly I wish that someone from different communities also do the same to get out of the current problems of their communities. In this way ultimately we all Nepalese help come out of the current problems.

It also depends on the amount of fund that will be collected to meet our purpose or we have to think about another soft purpose for example helping a local school.

If you are interested in my vision of saving traditional houses of Panga, please contact Ellika Nyqvist Livchitz at Globalrunners.

I on behalf of all Nepalese would like to salute all kindest contributors who have already contributed with their invaluable support to help earthquake victims.

Yours sincerely,
Shekhar Dangol