



HERITAGE & RECOVERY:

Lessons from the Gorkha Earthquake

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Intoduction	1
Pathways To Recovery Of Heritage	3
Aspirations For Heritage Recovery	5
Infrastructures For Heritage Recovery	7
Documentation For Recovery	11
Materials And Technologies For Heritage Recovery	13
Centre And Peripheries In Heritage Recovery	15
Conference Schedule	17
Conference Proceedings	21
Organisers	33

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INTRODUCTION

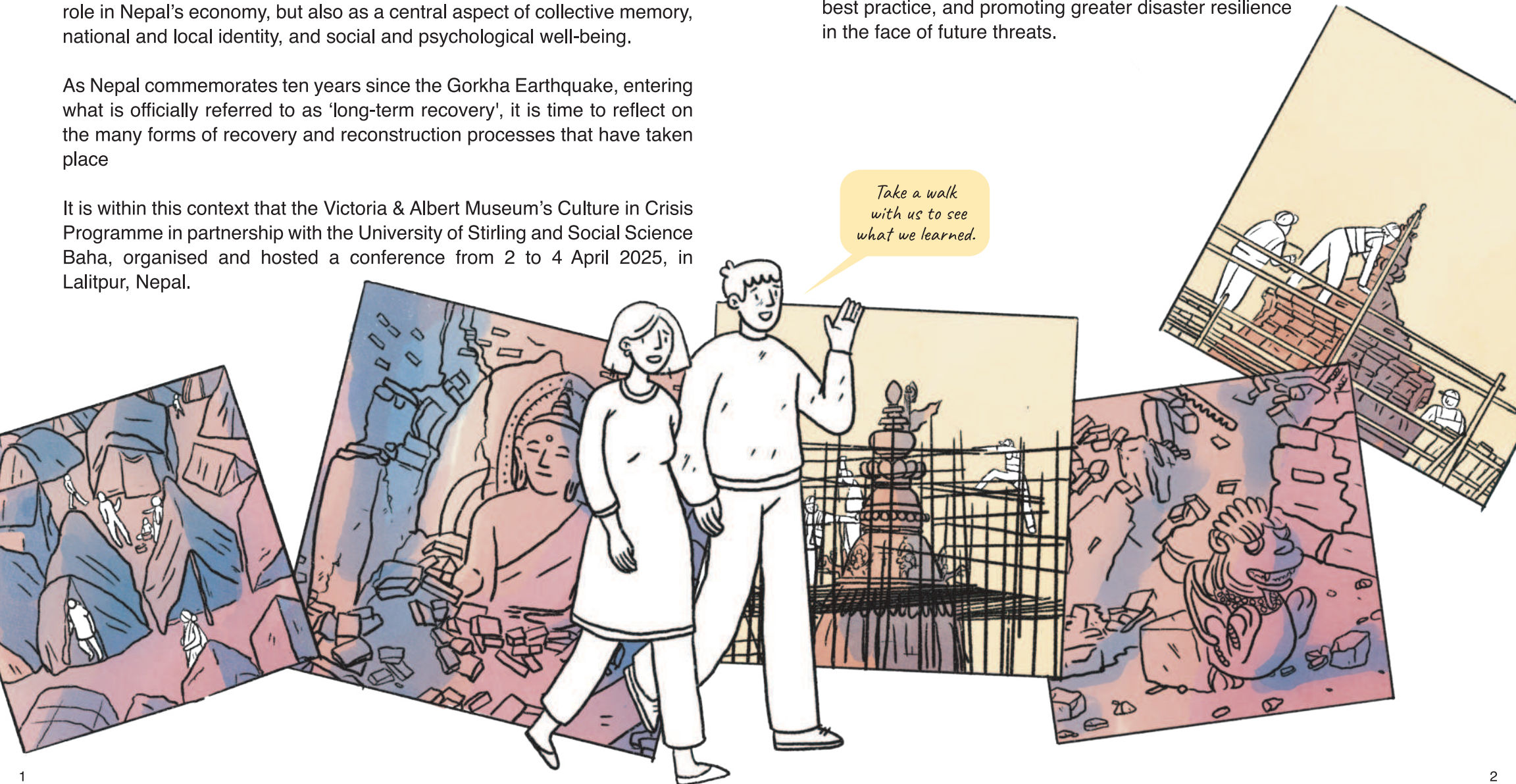
2025 marks ten years since the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake(s) struck Nepal, killing nearly 9,000 people, and causing catastrophic damage to lives and livelihoods, as well as physical, social, and cultural infrastructure. The disaster left a deep impact on heritage across the country; from internationally recognised monuments and heritage sites to community and religious heritage buildings and landscapes, objects and museums, and the myriad cultural practices that enrich the lives of Nepal's inhabitants. In the aftermath of the Gorkha Earthquake, heritage has emerged as a key sector for post-disaster recovery, not only because of its role in Nepal's economy, but also as a central aspect of collective memory, national and local identity, and social and psychological well-being.

As Nepal commemorates ten years since the Gorkha Earthquake, entering what is officially referred to as 'long-term recovery', it is time to reflect on the many forms of recovery and reconstruction processes that have taken place

It is within this context that the Victoria & Albert Museum's Culture in Crisis Programme in partnership with the University of Stirling and Social Science Baha, organised and hosted a conference from 2 to 4 April 2025, in Lalitpur, Nepal.

This conference, its workshops and site visits brought together Nepalese heritage professionals, activists, academics and community members involved in various forms of heritage recovery. Together we discussed efforts across the past decade; their challenges and successes, as well as exploring shared learning opportunities for the future. In particular, this conference highlighted a diversity of voices, bringing together different scales and conceptualisations of heritage

Situating its central narrative around the 2015 earthquake, the conference also brought together international experts to discuss comparable environmental disasters around the globe, sharing their experience and best practice, and promoting greater disaster resilience in the face of future threats.

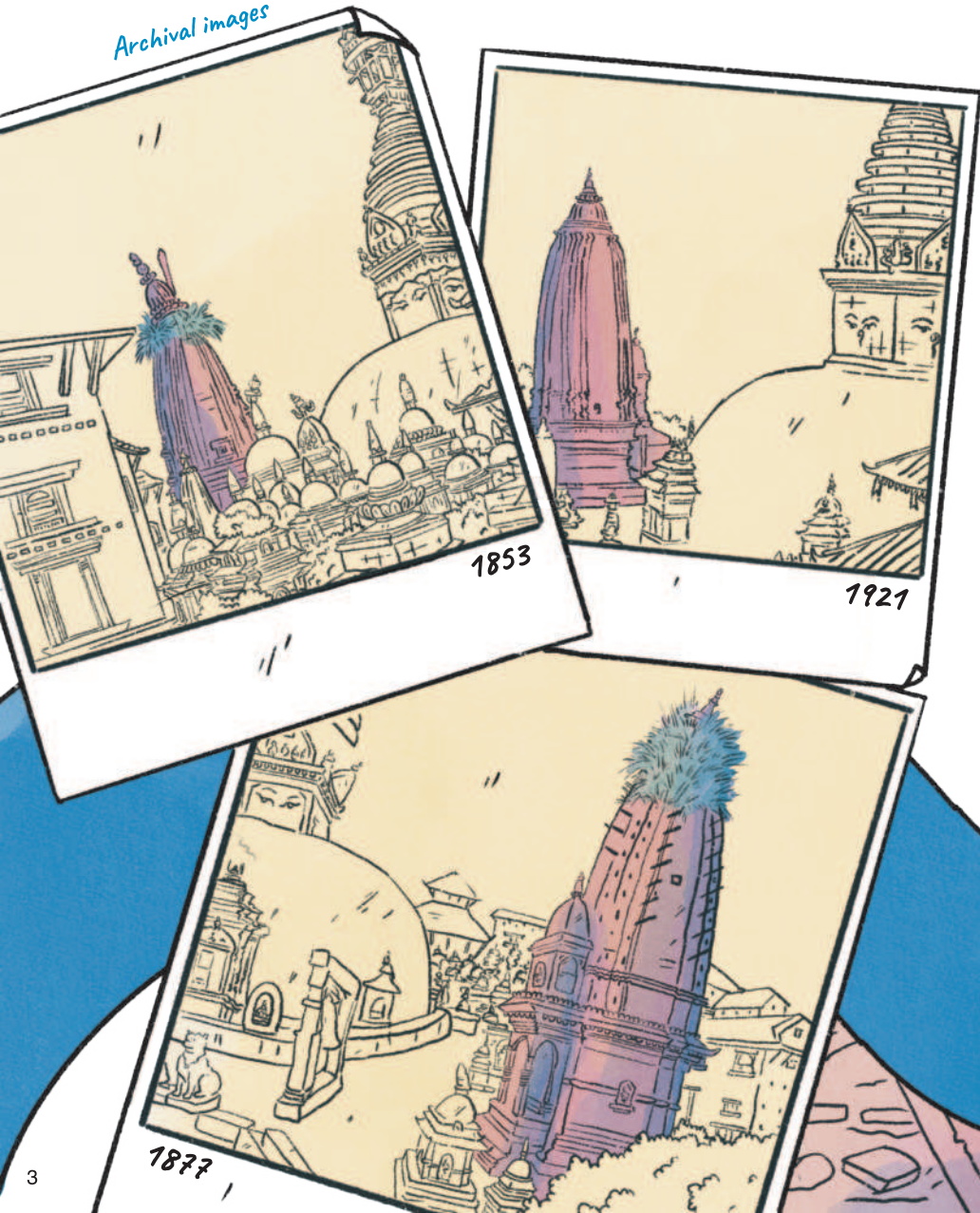


PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY OF HERITAGE

Recovery of heritage after a disaster is not a linear pathway, nor it is bound by fixed time-scales. It is sporadic and distributed and overlaps with other forms of ongoing development as well as other socio-economic crises.

Heritage in Nepal has had diverse trajectories of recovery in the aftermath of each catastrophic earthquake in its long history. These memories and histories continue to inform heritage recovery and reconstruction today.

Archival images

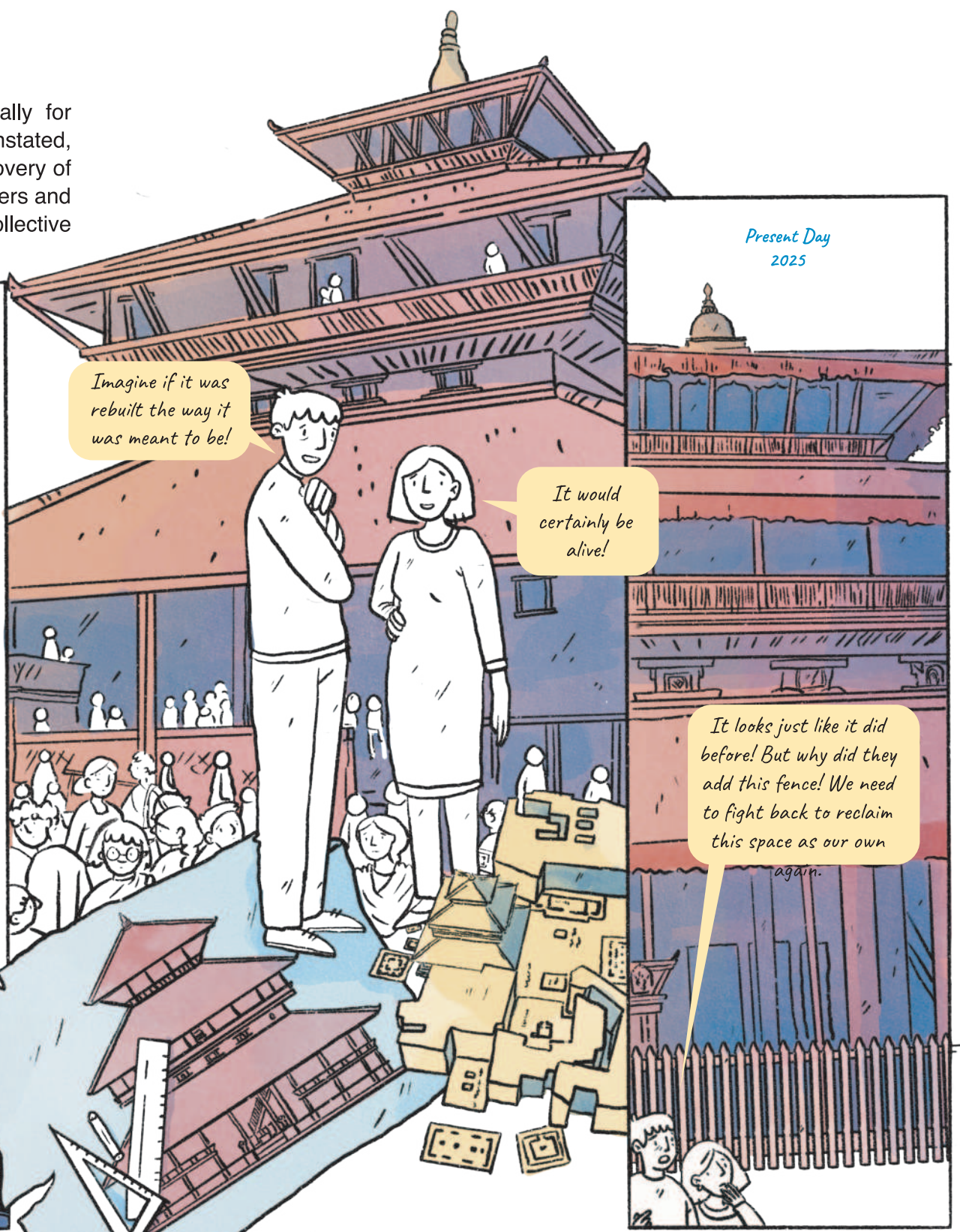
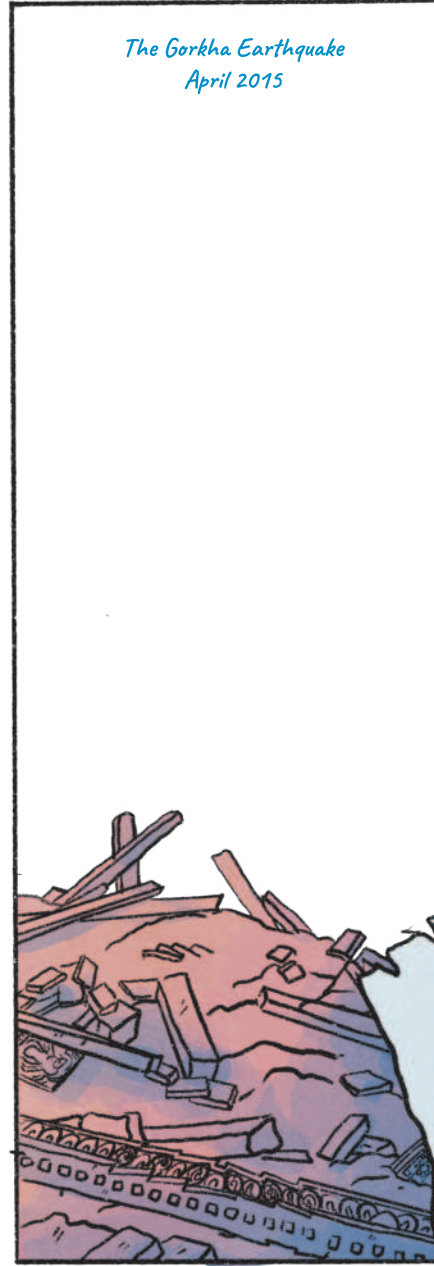


- Border Closure 2015
- Constitutional Crisis 2015
- Covid Pandemic- 2020

Anantapur, Swoyambhu, Kathmandu

ASPIRATIONS FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

Post-disaster recovery is always aspirational or utopic, especially for heritage. However, in practice, there is no static past that can be reinstated, and recovery always involves transformation and adaptation. Recovery of heritage curates the past we want to project onto the future. Disasters and other crises can often act as catalysts for bringing together collective aspirations and drive new forms of action.



INFRASTRUCTURES FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

Various forms of infrastructure enable sustainable and equitable recovery of heritage. These range from adaptable but robust legislation, policy and institutional frameworks, mechanisms of funding at different scales, materials, technologies and skills. But the most important of all infrastructures are networks of engaged people, professionals and communities.

Policy



Institutional Frameworks



Engaged Communities



Take these to the Museum, where we placed all the other artifacts.

Volunteering, community activism and local engagement have played a critical role in ensuring the success stories of innumerable heritage buildings and places in Nepal. International assistance works only if it is locally responsive and flexible

This stone looks pretty important with its scriptures

This is heavy work!

INFRASTRUCTURES FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

To foster community resilience and maintain links between people and their heritage, continuity of practices in the aftermath of disasters should be prioritised as far as possible. Annual traditions, festivals, communal gatherings reinforce collective identity and ensure the recovery of intangible heritage.



Annual festivals and processions are a central aspect of cultural and religious life in Nepal. In the aftermath of the Gorkha Earthquake, festivals such as Indra Jatra in Kathmandu, the Biska Jatra in Bhaktapur and many others were celebrated despite the widespread damage to the city pathways and buildings.

Get your blessings

Be careful!

Isn't this beautiful!

*Mum! Look!
It is the Kumari!*

Gaddi Basithak, Basantapur Durbar Square, Kathmandu

DOCUMENTATION FOR RECOVERY

The importance of documentation for heritage recovery has long been emphasised. More importantly documentation needs to be accessible and usable by the people most closely involved in recovery and reconstruction. Technical drawings, complex archiving systems and digital technologies may not always be useful.

Many heritage buildings in Nepal have been reconstructed to a version that more closely aligns to their appearance preceding the 1934 Nepal Bihar Earthquake in an attempt to “correct” past mistakes in recovery. Here, local aspirations must negotiate with international conservation approaches which put firm emphasis on recorded evidence.



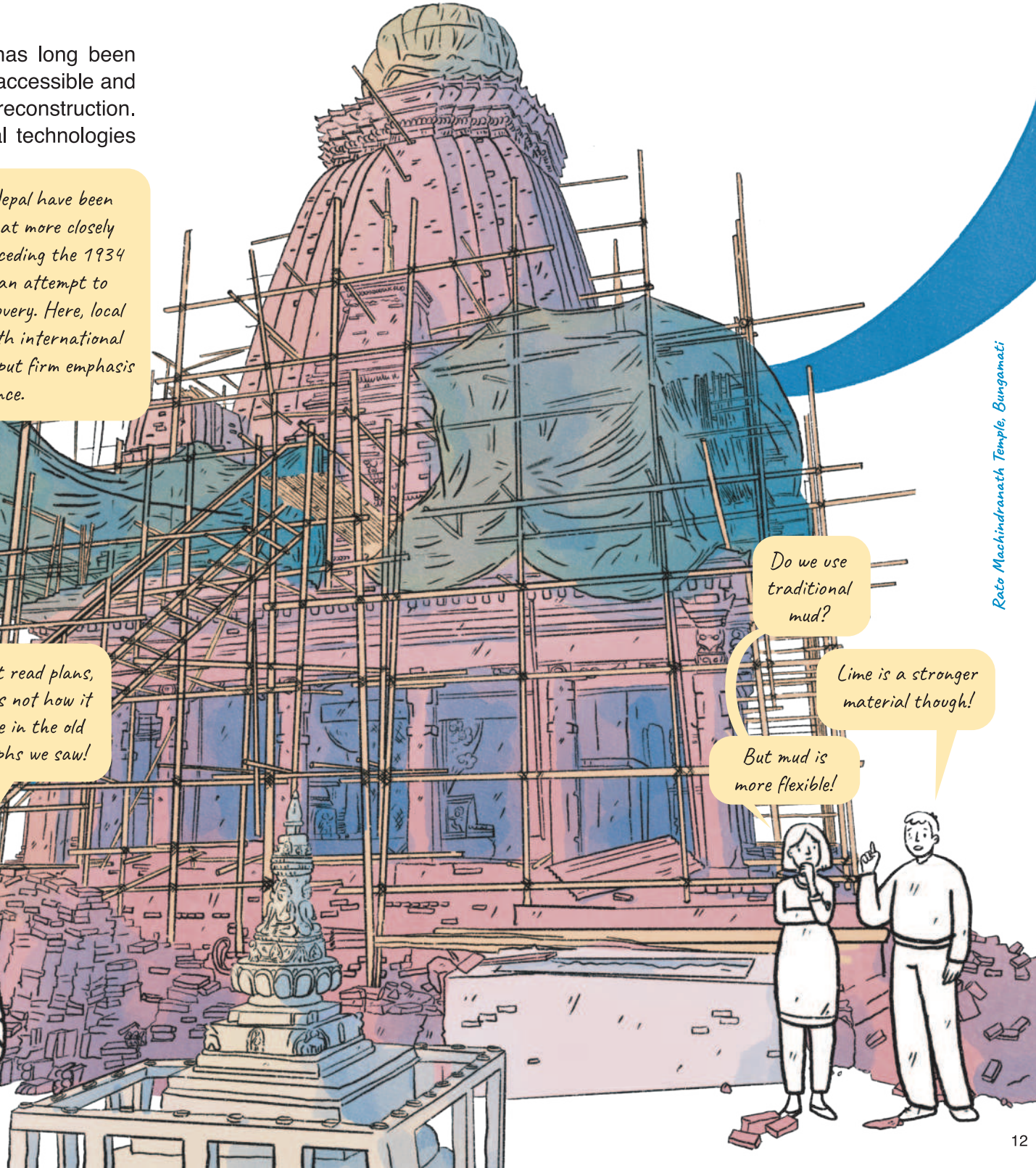
Why aren't you following the drawings I sent you?

We cannot read plans, plus this is not how it looked like in the old photographs we saw!

Do we use traditional mud?

Lime is a stronger material though!

But mud is more flexible!



Rato Machindranath Temple, Bungamati

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES FOR HERITAGE RECOVERY

Tensions persist between maintaining authenticity of materials, practices and skills or ensuring continuity of heritage values through adaptation. In disaster prone contexts, pragmatic concerns of safety and stability also need to be taken into account.

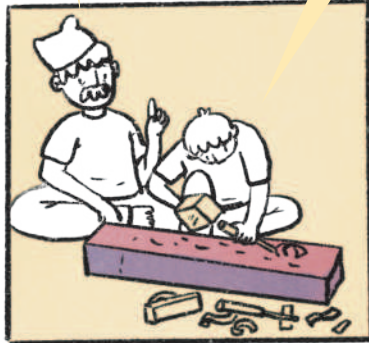
Watch carefully, one day you will be making such struts.

Yes, Bua!

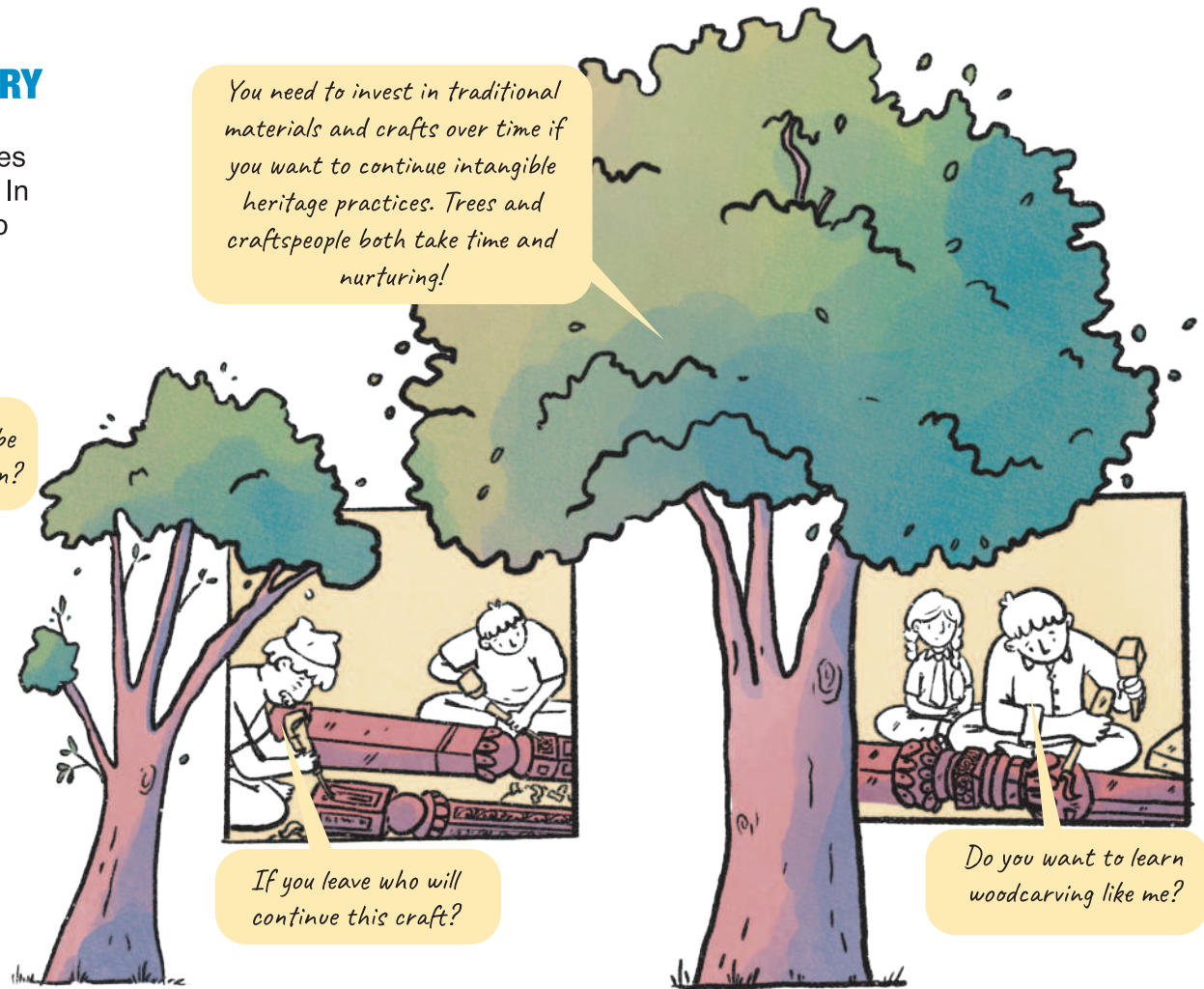


Gently!

What if I want to be in another profession?



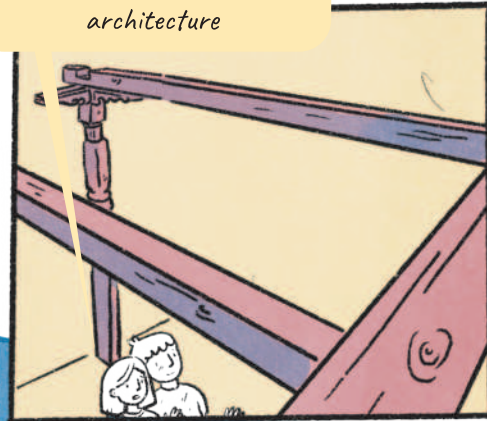
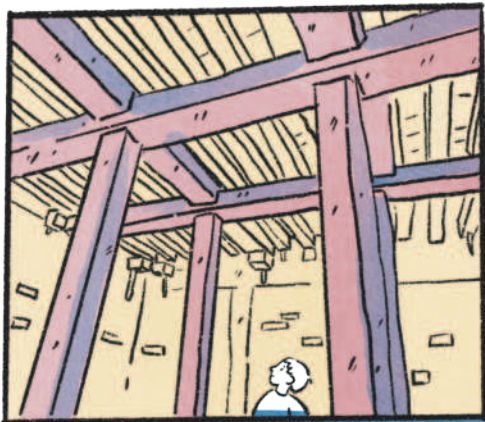
You need to invest in traditional materials and crafts over time if you want to continue intangible heritage practices. Trees and craftspeople both take time and nurturing!



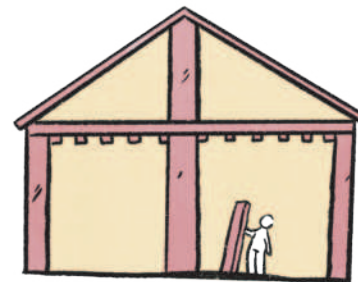
If you leave who will continue this craft?

Do you want to learn woodcarving like me?

Getting the right timber size is hard these days, they come much too short in the market - that don't fit traditional architecture

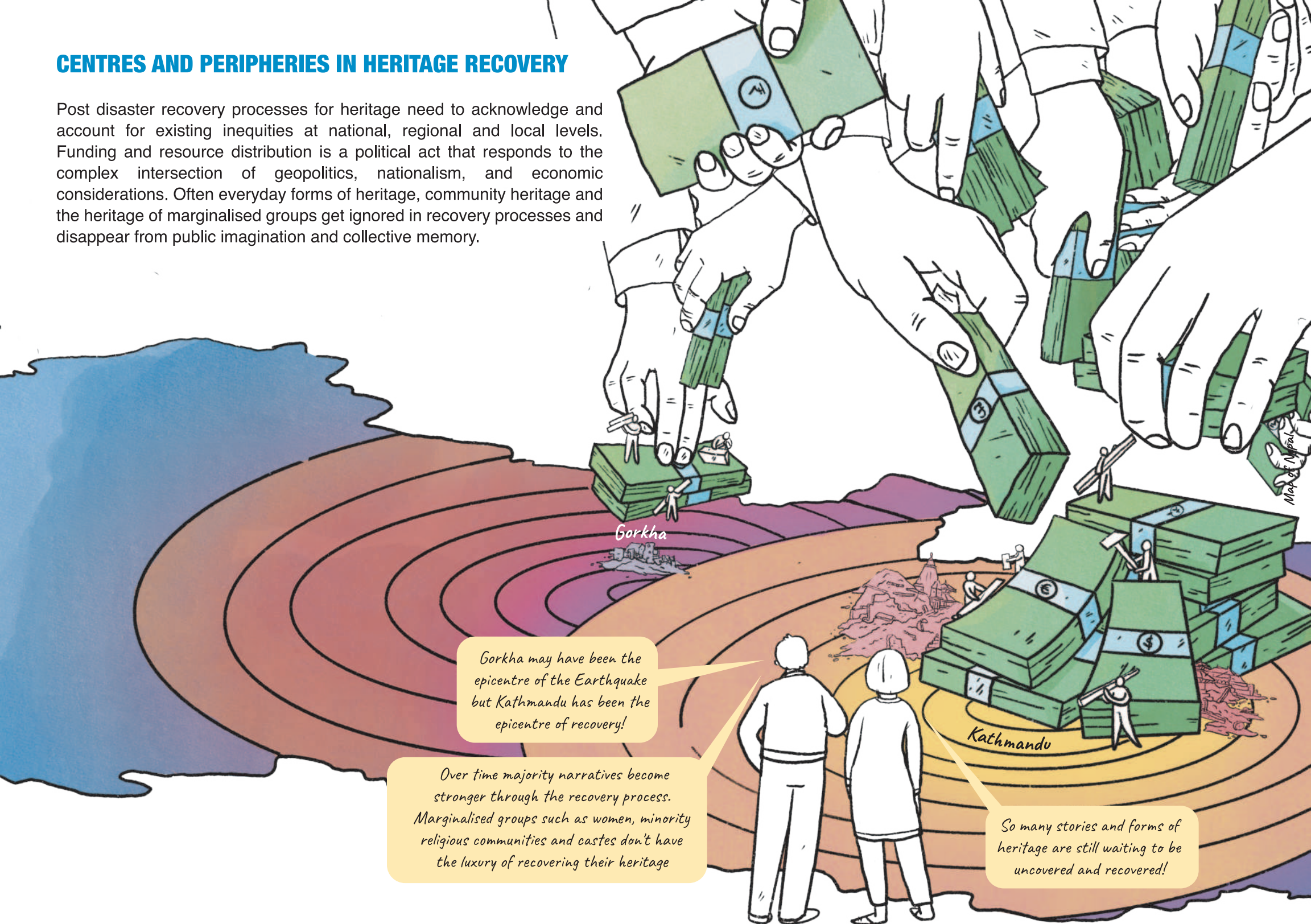


Disrupted supply chains and scarcity of traditional materials such as high quality, large sections of timber or of mud caused major delays across Nepal following the earthquake. Expert craftspeople have become rarer over time as intergenerational transfer of skills begins to decline and aspirations of new generations differ from those of their parents.



CENTRES AND PERIPHERIES IN HERITAGE RECOVERY

Post disaster recovery processes for heritage need to acknowledge and account for existing inequities at national, regional and local levels. Funding and resource distribution is a political act that responds to the complex intersection of geopolitics, nationalism, and economic considerations. Often everyday forms of heritage, community heritage and the heritage of marginalised groups get ignored in recovery processes and disappear from public imagination and collective memory.



Gorkha may have been the epicentre of the Earthquake but Kathmandu has been the epicentre of recovery!

Over time majority narratives become stronger through the recovery process. Marginalised groups such as women, minority religious communities and castes don't have the luxury of recovering their heritage

So many stories and forms of heritage are still waiting to be uncovered and recovered!

Map of Nepal

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY 1: Conference , Wednesday 2 April, 2025

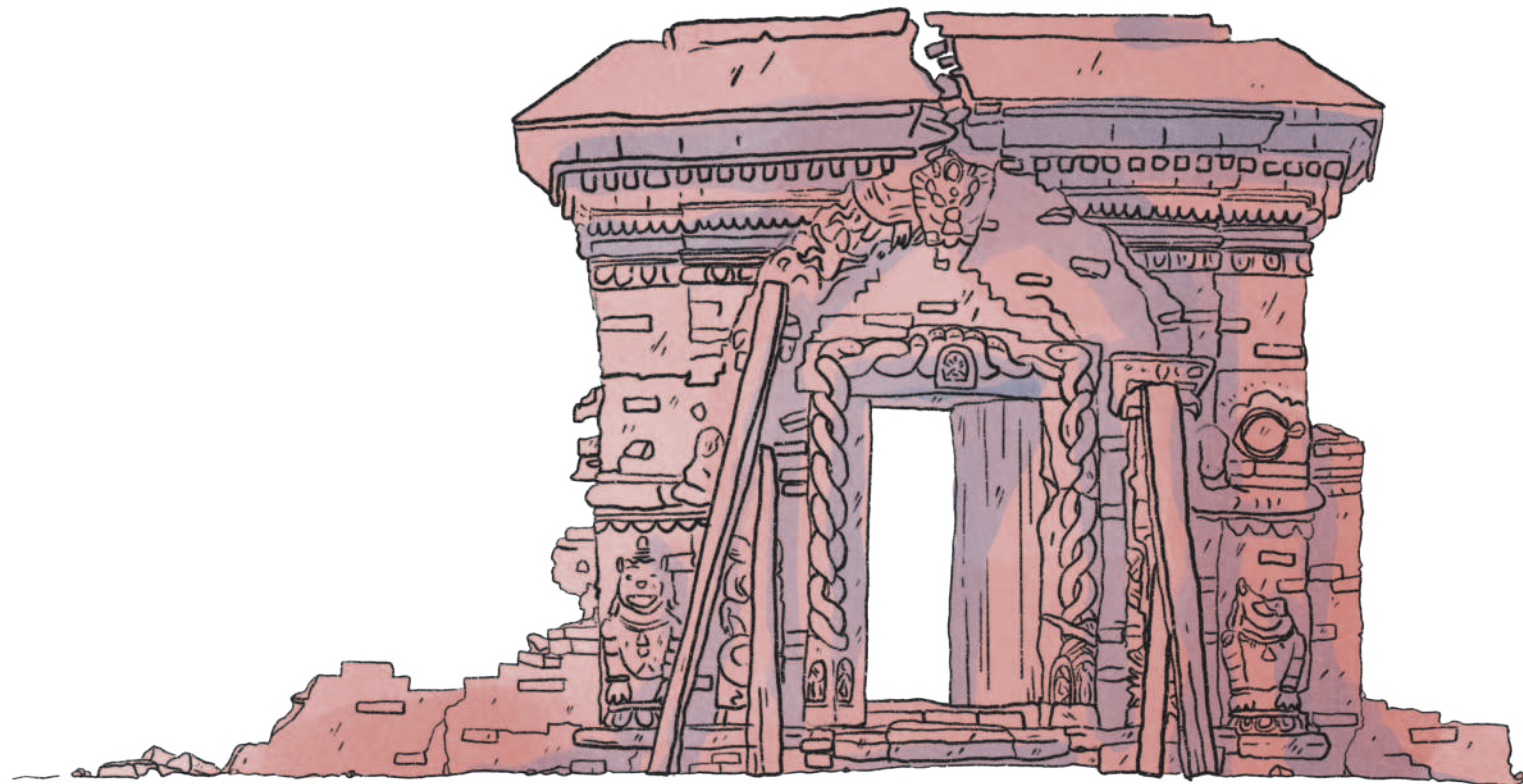
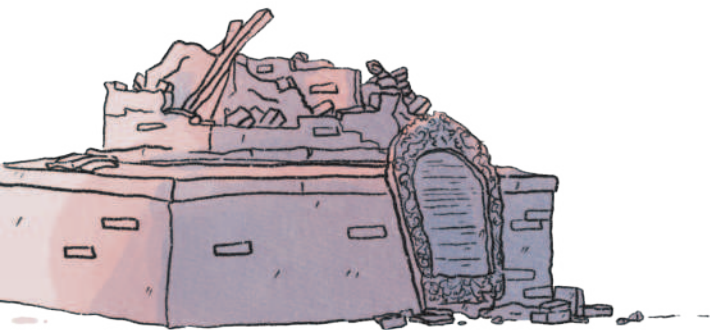
09:00 - 09:30	Arrival and Registration at Jyapu Pragya Bhavan	13:15 - 13:25	ICCROM's Initiatives for Post Crisis Recovery of Cultural Heritage (Video Presentation) Aruna Francesca Maria Gujral, Director General, ICCROM
09:30 - 10:00	Welcome and Introductions	13:25 – 13:35	Role of International Organizations in Post Crisis Recovery of Heritage: Dilemmas and Opportunities Rohit Jigyasu, Programme Manager, Sustainable Urban and Built Heritage Conservation, Disaster and Climate Risk Management & Post Crisis Recovery, Programmes Unit, ICCROM
09:30 – 09:40	Prof. Nirmal Man Tuladhar, Chair, Social Science Baha	13:35 – 13:50	Roundtable Discussion with Chair
09:40 – 09:50	Laura Searson, Cultural Heritage Preservation Lead, V&A	13:50 – 14:00	Audience Q&A
09:50 – 10:00	Vanicka Arora, Lecturer in Heritage, University of Stirling	14:00 - 14:30	Refreshment Break
10:00 - 11:30	SESSION 1: HERITAGE RECOVERY BY AND FOR COMMUNITIES (Chair: Laura Searson)	14:30 - 16:00	SESSION 3: LOCAL GOVERNANCE, ACTIVISM AND HERITAGE RECOVERY (Chair: Sabin Ninglekhu)
10:00 - 10:20	Preserving the Past: Digitizing Visual Heritage Cristeena Chitrakar, Art Director, Lumbini Museum and Director, Chitrakar Legacy	14:30 - 14:45	Heritage Recovery: Critique of Government / Governance Padma Joshi, Vice President, Madan Bhandari University; Advisor, Lalitpur Metropolitan City Office; formerly, UN-Habitat, Nepal, Country Representative
10:20 - 10:40	Homes and Non-Monumental Heritage Sabin Ninglekhu, Principal Investigator of Heritage as Placemaking, Social Science Baha and Heidelberg University	14:45 - 15:00	Architectural Documentation for Heritage Recovery and Beyond Jharna Joshi, Director, Kathmandu Institute
10:40 - 11:00	'Performing' Heritage Reconstruction in Bhaktapur Vanicka Arora, Lecturer in Heritage, University of Stirling	15:00 - 15:15	Heritage Activism for the Commons: Agents, Possibilities and End Goals Monalisa Maharjan, Resident Representative, South Asia Institute (SAI)
11:00 - 11:15	Roundtable Discussion with Chair	15:15 - 15:30	Power, People, Heritage: The Path to Recovery Alisha Sijapati, Founding Member and Director of the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign
11:15 - 11:30	Audience Q&A	15:30 - 15:45	Roundtable Discussion with Chair
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch Break	15:45 - 16:00	Audience Q&A
12:30 – 14:00	SESSION 2: INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND HERITAGE RECOVERY (Chair: Vanicka Arora)	16:00 - 16:30	Closing Remarks (and Audience Q&A)
12:30 - 12:45	The Kasthamandap and the Intersection of Activism and [Geo-]Politics Kai Weise, Architect, ICOMOS Nepal and ICORP		
12:45 – 13:00	Crisis Response, World Monuments Watch, and Community Recovery: Lessons and Insights Hung-hsi Chao, Regional Director, East Asia, World Monuments Fund		
13:00 - 13:15	Emergency Response and Heritage Recovery Processes Rohit Ranjitkar, Director, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust		

DAY 2: Workshop and Site Visit , Thursday 3 April, 2025

- 09:00 - 09:30 **Registration and Introductions at Jyapu Pragya Bhavan**
- 09:30 - 12:00 **Object Recoveries: Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign**
Alisha Sijapati, Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign
- 12:00 - 13:00 **Lunch Break**
- 13:00 – 13:30 **Education Outreach: New learning tools for Heritage Recovery, Documentation, and Seismic Safety**
Rishi Govinda Amatya, Writer and Heritage Researcher; Sophia L. Pandé, Director of Development, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust
- 14:00 - 16:00 **Tour of Reconstruction Projects in Durbar Square**
Rohit Ranjitkar, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust

DAY 3: Site Visit , Friday 4 April, 2025

- 09:00 – 09:30 **Registration at Hanuman Dhoka, Durbar Square**
- 09:30 - 12:30 **Reconstruction Trajectories in Hanuman Dhoka**
Kai Weise, ICOMOS-ICORP
- 12:30 - 14:00 **Lunch Break**
- 13:00 – 14:00 **Bus Transfer to Bungamati**
- 14:00 - 17:00 **Reconstruction and Recovery in Bungamati**
Rohit Ranjitkar, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust and Sabin Ninglekhu, Social Science Baha
- 17:00 – 18:00 **Return Bus Transfer to Hanuman Dhoka, Durbar Square**



Session-1

HERITAGE RECOVERY BY AND FOR COMMUNITIES

PRESERVING THE PAST :

DIGITALIZING VISUAL HERITAGE

-Cristeena Chitrakar

• Photographic archives documenting the history of Nepal. Can be used to shed light on the daily life of Royal Family as well as local communities.

Digitizing our archives allows them to be protected and makes them accessible for the future. We can use them in recovery efforts too!



'The past can help us to recover in the present, but we can't just replicate - Change is a part of evolution.'

HOMES & NON-MONUMENTAL HERITAGE

- Sabin Ninglekhu

• Architecture is about people and family as well as monuments.

NEWA URBANISM

• blends community, spirituality and sustainable design.

3 Research location

- PHILACHYA: Sustainable Rebuilding Model
- BUNGAMATI: Craft Heritage Model
- HARISIDDI: Emulating Model from Bungamati embedding traditional heritage practices and materials.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FALLS SHORT

International aid & support for reconstruction & rebuilding.



PERFORMING HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION IN BHAKTAPUR

-VANICKA ARORA

Reconstruction as Practice and PROCESS



'Ancestral Gift' leads to the division of land and traditional styles of living.

'CONSERVATION is a compromise' : between people and their places.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Time & Commitment**
Building trust with communities requires long-term, meaningful engagement.
- 2. Rethinking recovery**
Not just about returning to past but adapting to new change.
- 3. Tangible and intangible heritage**
Both aspects are equally important to review during recovery.
- 4. Cultural sensitivity**
a deep understanding of cultural values is necessary to avoid conflict during recovery.

HERITAGE & RECOVERY

Decade of learning from Gorkha earthquake



THE KATHMANDU AND THE INTERSECTION OF ACTIVISM, RECOVERY and RECONSTRUCTION

both require strong foundation.

KAI WEISE

ARCHITECT/ICOMOS/ICORI
 • The sites which survived were the ones that embraced maintenance.
 • We must understand and work with the construction process.
 • REUSE is important in REBUILDING.



ARUNA FRANCESCA MARIA GURJAL

DIRECTOR GENERAL
 ICCROM

- CRISIS assessment for recovery.
- Technical support and funds for training local community.
- Collaboration with community and government.

CRISIS RESPONSE, WMF

EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY
 • TÜRKIYE
 • SYRIA
 • NEPAL

- Provide technical support and funding to help in CRISIS.
- Collaboration with local community
- Supporting long-term recovery & culture tourism



HUNG-HSI CHAO

REGIONAL DIRECTOR, EASTASIA
 WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST & PARTNERSHIP in community.

"The disasters are collaborating better than we are!"

- Although it is difficult, we must establish priorities for recovery with collaboration with the community.
- International organizations should play the role of facilitator.

CONSERVATION - for whom? Who are we centering in recovery efforts, our work or our community?



ROHIT RANJITKAR
 DIRECTOR, KATHMANDU VALLEY PRESERVATION TRUST

Multiple Voices

Government

Heritage Organization

FUNDING AGENCY

COMMUNITY at center

Organization to organization collaboration is also important.



ROHIT JIGYASU
 PROGRAMME MANAGER
 ICCROM

invest in long-term sustainable strategies for recovery.



2015 EMERGENCY RESPONSE:

- Local people coming together helping each other to collecting artifacts from rubble for safeguarding
- Understanding the cultural or religious context is important for successful recovery.
- Community representation is necessary.

INTERNATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONS HERITAGE RECOVERY

SESSION-2

सोशल साइन्स बहा
 SOCIAL SCIENCE BAH



Culture in Crisis

UNIVERSITY of STIRLING



V&A

CRITIQUE OF GOVERNMENT / GOVERNANCE

PADMA JOSHI

COMBINING STAKEHOLDER CAPABILITIES



HERITAGE ACTIVISM FOR THE COMMONS: AGENTS, POSSIBILITIES and END GOALS

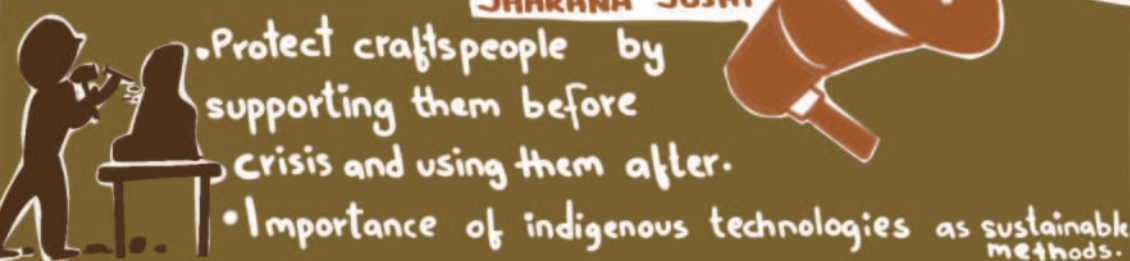
MONALISA MAHARJAN



SESSION - 3 LOCAL GOVERNANCE & ACTIVISM & HERITAGE RECOVERY

ARCHITECTURAL DOCUMENTATION

JHARANA JOSHI



CHALLENGES

- lack of archival records / information
- The climate crisis posing issues for raw materials.
- A lack of skilled labour due to migration.
- Building codes which are inflexible to the needs of heritage.

POWER, PEOPLE, HERITAGE: THE PATH TO RECOVERY

ALISHA SITAPATI



OBJECT RECOVERIES: NEPAL HERITAGE RECOVERY CAMPAIGN



POWER, PEOPLE, HERITAGE: THE PATH TO RECOVERY

TRANSIT POINT
not the end of the Chain!



JORNALIST, RESEARCH LAWYER, AGENCY

"Culture Heritage is everyday living not the exotic art for other!"

Community holds the power.

Restitution Vs Reparation: Can we work more cloesly with communities to achieve meaningful resolutions?

Religious statues are not merely 'cultural objects'; they are considered the physical mainfestation of gods and goddesses and as such are sacred.

communities reject repatriated deities upon their return, as they are considered deconsecrated.

Nepal's unique experience:

GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT
the role of community activism, journalism and the museum sector to leverage government engagement.

Role of Museums: Should be considered transit points, not the ultimate location of items looted from community spaces.

Weak Legal Structures: Laws protecting heritage are not enforced. Professional care: there is a perceived lack of understanding within the government on how to care for objects upon their return.

POST-RECOVERY: Repatriation is not the end of the story. We need to understand how the return impacts communities locally.



'CULTURAL HERITAGE IS LIVING HERITAGE'

Education Outreach: 'New Learning tools for Heritage, Recovery, Documentation and Seismic Safety.'



RISHI GOVINDA AMATYA
Writer and Heritage Researcher

'Let's Discover Patan Durbar'
Series and School Tour Programme (2017)

'KATHMANDU VALLEY PRESERVATION TRUST:
EDUCATION OUTREACH PROGRAMME'



'together we can expand our learning experience with new and exciting activities.'

'Learn about the history of cultural heritage in our local area with fun and interactive maps, designed for young visitors.'



available in Nepali and English

INTERACTING WITH AND ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS WITH VISUAL RESOURCES

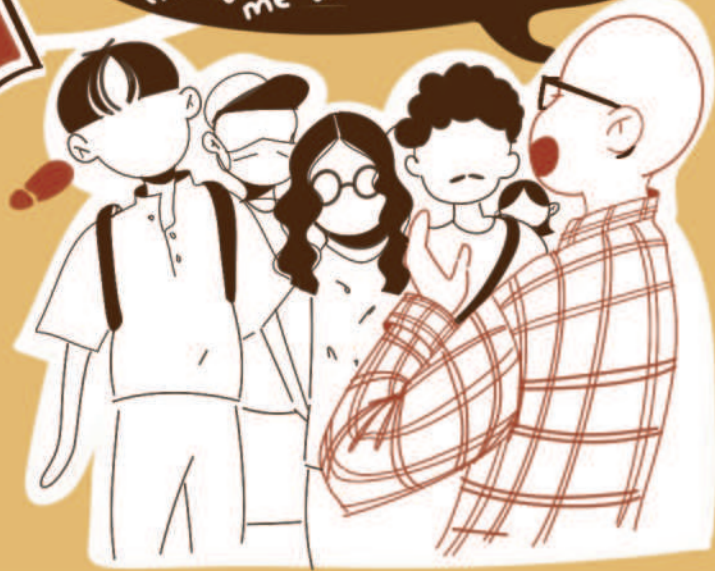


'now let me tell you an interesting story about the designs carved into the front of this temple... Can anyone tell me what they might symbolise?'

- VISUAL NARRATIVE
- EXPLORATION GAMES
- HISTORICAL FACTS



PATAN DURBAR SQUARE



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

DECADE OF LEARNING FROM THE GORKHA EARTHQUAKE

WHAT DID WE LEARN? 

History of Hanuman dhoka:
 • The area was established in the Pratap Mall Period (16/17th Century) and continued to develop throughout the subsequent periods

KAR WEISE 



- Large-scale destruction during earthquake was caused due to low maintenance and inappropriate intervention.
- Earthquake recovery involves merging traditional design with new safety features, improving resilience against future.

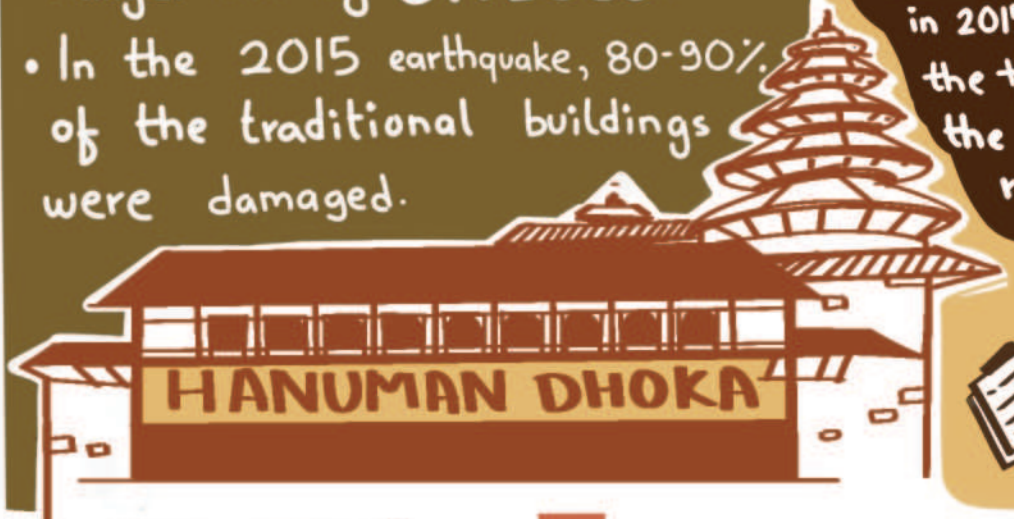
UNESCO

World Heritage Site at Risk:

in 2015, local stakeholders believed the threat was not earthquake but the mismanagement of 'good' recovery.

POST EARTHQUAKE RESTORATION ASSESSMENT. 

must consider not just financial investment needed for repair but also the skills and people infrastructure to achieve it.



Conflict between global standards (lime Mortar) and local solutions (mud Mortar) meant that projects are failing.



Responsibility and Coordination 

MAINTENANCE BEFORE A CRISIS IS CRITICAL 

ORGANISERS

Culture in Crisis Programme, V&A

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is an international organisation with collections from around the globe. We are committed to protecting the world's cultural heritage and supporting communities that suffer cultural loss, whether through Conflict, Criminal Acts or the impacts of the Climate Crisis. Our Culture in Crisis programme brings together those with a shared interest in protecting cultural heritage, providing a forum for sharing information, inspiring and supporting action and raising public awareness.

Centre for Environment, Heritage and Policy, University of Stirling

The Centre for Environment, Heritage and Policy (CEHP) at the University of Stirling promotes and supports world-leading interdisciplinary research on environment, heritage and policy across the University and beyond. The Centre aims to make a difference by developing sustainable approaches to the challenges and opportunities surrounding environment and heritage in a world of accelerating change and increasing pressure on natural and cultural resources.

Social Science Baha

Social Science Baha (SSB) is an independent, non-profit organisation established in January 2002 with the objective of promoting and enhancing the study of and research in the social sciences in Nepal. Starting with setting up a social science library, the only one of its kind in the country so far, SSB soon diversified its activities to pursue other means of helping the growth of the social sciences. By the time of its formal registration in January 2007, activities included lectures, discussions, workshops and conferences as well as publishing books and other research papers. Soon afterwards, SSB also began undertaking research, both as a collaborating partner with academic/research institutions and on contract.

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Edited by

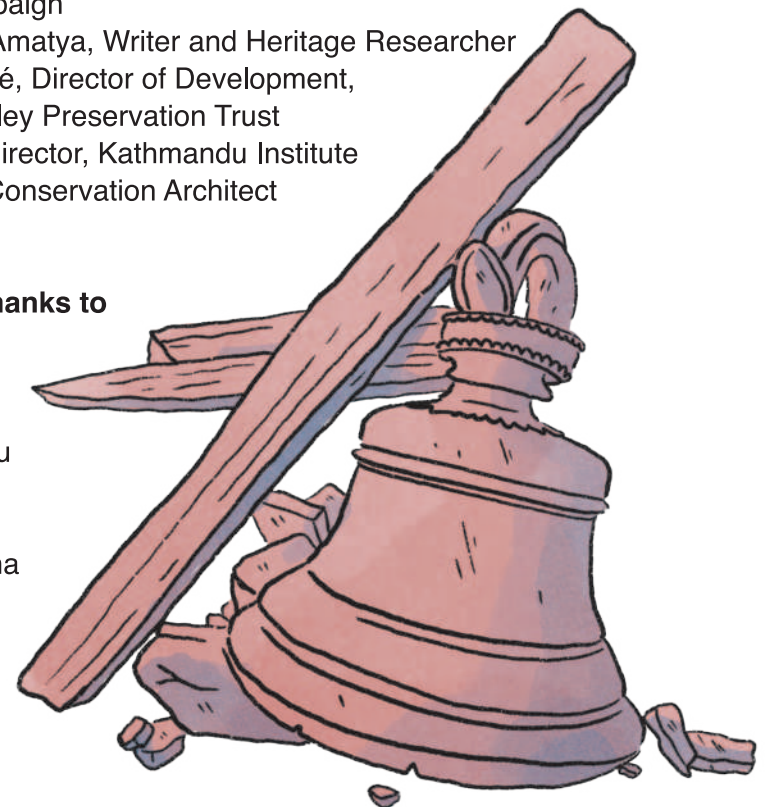
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Rishi Govinda Amatya, Writer and Heritage Researcher
Sophia L. Pandé, Director of Development, Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust
Jharna Joshi, Director, Kathmandu Institute
Anil Tuladhar, Conservation Architect

With special thanks to

Deepak Thapa
Jeevan Baniya
Sabin Ninglekhu
Rohit Ranjitkar
Binita Magaya
Bindiya Shrestha
Ajay Subedi



सोशल साइन्स बाहा
SOCIAL SCIENCE BAHA



Culture in Crisis

UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING

