

## Debating Identity: Reflections on Coverage of *Dharaharā* and *Kāṣṭhamanḍap* Post Gorkha-Earthquake 2015

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### Abstract

The 7.8  $M_w$  *Gorkhā*-earthquake in April 2015, took 8,857 lives, injured 21,952, destroyed 755,549 buildings, 581 heritages and cost an estimated approximate \$513.38 billion. Many heritage sites, including those enlisted in the World Heritage Site, were damaged due to this disaster. The fall of *Dharaharā*, among all cultural-historical sites, was given (un-) due attention by many national media, owing to high number of deaths and as a popular landmark of the city. This modern elite tower structure was presented as symbol of national unity and of 'rising back'. But there are other important public heritages too — many centuries older than *Dharaharā* and they too had stories of deaths, of injuries and of survivals, but received a very small space or almost none in the national media. I take an example of *Kāṣṭhamanḍap* that hosted over 54 people during the earthquake. I have used the method of qualitative content analysis to discuss the construction of identity by national media.

**Keywords:** *Gorkha* earthquake, heritage, *Kasthamandap*, *Dharahara*, media coverage, qualitative analysis, reconstruction, identity

## Background

Nepal has, for centuries, been prone to disasters, including earthquakes with major ones hitting almost once every century. Earthquakes, from the historically recorded 1223 AD (1280 BS) earthquake<sup>1</sup> or that of 1255 AD (NS 375 or 1312 BS) claiming life of reigning King *Abhaya Malla* (reign: 1216 – 1255 AD) and one-third of the city population to as recent as those in 1834 AD, 1934 AD and now 2015 AD are major ones of the respective centuries that proved disastrous for the nation.

The recent 7.8  $M_w$  *Gorkhā*-earthquake is the biggest of the century, claiming 8,857 lives and injuring 21,952<sup>2</sup>, destroying 755,549 buildings, 581 heritages and costing a damage and loss worth \$513.38 billion. It has been followed by 418 number of aftershocks with local magnitude of greater than or equal to 4.0  $M_w$ <sup>3</sup>, including major ones of 26 April (at 12:54:08 measuring 6.7  $M_w$ ) and that of<sup>4</sup> 12 May (at 12:50 measuring 7.3  $M_w$ , followed by another 6.3  $M_w$  shock only

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<sup>1</sup> Pant (2013) enlists a total of 22 recorded earthquakes before 1934 AD one over a span of 1223 to 1881 AD.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from [www.drrportal.gov.np](http://www.drrportal.gov.np), official website of *Nepal Disaster Risk Reduction Portal*, under *Government of Nepal* (GoN), data as of 16 July 2015. Also tweeted officially by *EarthquakeNepal-MoHA* (Twitter handle: @NEoCOfficial) at <https://twitter.com/NEoCOfficial/status/621649889047347201/photo/1> (district map of those dead by Nepal Earthquake) and <https://twitter.com/NEoCOfficial/status/621645187366850560/photo/1> (district map of those injured).

<sup>3</sup> As of 14 November 2015 at 6:19 pm, retrieved from [www.seismonepal.gov.np](http://www.seismonepal.gov.np), official website of National Seismological Centre (NSC), GoN.

few minutes after). It also triggered Himalayan avalanches at Mount Everest and landslides at various parts of Nepal making the disaster deadlier, and rescue and relief efforts more challenging.

### Heritages Lost Forever

The *Gorkha*-earthquake proved disastrous for many heritage sites, affecting structures and ancient settlements of *Kathmandu*, *Bhaktapur*, *Lalitpur*, *Sankhu*, *Bungamati*, *Pangaand* many others, including those enlisted in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list<sup>5</sup>. Several temples in the valley completely collapsed — *Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa*, *Māju-devala*, *Kāmadeva*, *Trailokya-Mohana Nārāyaṇa*, *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa*, *Nārāyaṇa* temple (Hanumāndhoka Palace), *Anantapur*, *Śāntipur* (Svayambhu), *Jaṅgahirāṇya Nema Nārāyaṇa* (*Tripureśvara*), *Jalavināyaka*, *Jaiśīdevala* in *Kathmandu* district, *Cāra-Nārāyaṇa*, *Hariśaṅkara*, *Maṇimaṇḍapa pātī* (Lalitpur Palace), *Jagata-nārāyaṇa* (*Sankhamul*), *Macchindranāth*, *Bhairavanāth* (*Bungamati*) in *Lalitpur* district, *Vatsalādevī*, *Phasī-devala*, *Kedāranātha* (*Bhaktapur* Palace), *Lakmi Nārāyaṇa*, *Ga-Mahādeva* (*Changu*) in *Bhaktapur* district — and many others were left severely damaged categorized under "partially collapsed" (95) and "partly damaged" (493)<sup>6</sup>. Also completely collapsed

<sup>5</sup> For the full list, see: [whc.unesco.org/en/list](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list).

<sup>6</sup> A list issued by Department of Archaeology (DoA) provides the following statistics:

were *Tripurāsundarī* temple (*Dolakha*), *Taleju* temple (*Nuwakot*), *Gorkhā* Palace, *TetāngchusāngGumbā* (*Mustang*) outside the valley. Most number of heritages in *Kathmandu* were lost (229), followed by that in *Lalitpur* (121) and *Bhaktapur* (73) — a combined total of 423 heritage loss inside the valley alone. Considering such a huge, irreplaceable loss of precious heritages, historian Purushottam Lochan Shrestha states:

We have lost most of the monuments that had been designated as World Heritage Sites in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. They cannot be restored to their original states.<sup>7</sup>

S. N.	City	Total Heritages Affected	Collapsed	Partially Collapsed	Partly Damaged	Remarks
1.	Kathmandu	229	43	50	136	Most damages in a district
2.	Lalitpur	121	13	20	88	
3.	Bhaktapur	73	20	10	43	
Kathmandu Valley		423	76	80	267	
4.	Gorkha	35	8	5	22	Epicenter of major earthquake dated 25 April
5.	Dolakha	29	9	0	20	Epicenter of numerous aftershocks following <i>Gorkha</i> earthquake
<b>Total</b>		<b>721</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>493</b>	All over Nepal

\* Credit to Er. *Om D Rajopadhyaya* for sharing this table by DoA, GoN.

<sup>7</sup> In an interview for *The Kathmandu Post*, quoted by *The Nation* (2015 April 26, 6:18 pm). Retrieved from [www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/Historical-monuments-lost-forever-30258805.html](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/Historical-monuments-lost-forever-30258805.html) on 14 December 2015 Monday. Bangkok: The Nation Multimedia.

For the purpose of this article, I focus on two major and popular structures of *Kathmandu*, viz. *Kāṣṭhamanḍap* (henceforth *Kasthamandap*) and *Dharaharā* (henceforth *Dharahara*). I fully acknowledge that these two heritages only do not entirely represent the essence of all other heritages that were lost to the *Gorkha*-earthquake.

### *Kasthamandap* and the Name '*Kathmandu*'

The Kathmandu city derives its name from *Kasthamandap*, the former being a corrupt of the latter Sanskrit word '*kāṣṭha*' meaning wooden and '*manḍapa*' meaning a pavilion or temple as well. The temple of *Kasthamandap*, befitting its name, is a master-piece of traditional architecture and exquisitely-carved wooden arts. Risal (2015:1) describes it as "the largest structure ever built in the traditional triple-tiered roof style... [with large ground floor space] until the eighteenth century". Thapa (1968:42) describes the structure as:

... a temple ... on a square plinth, built of bricks, that measures 65 ft. 11 in. on each side[,] ... the superstructure resting on the single-terraced plinth ... supported by four massive wooden pillars of square cross-section, that arch [arch?] upto the ceiling of the roof. Two successive floors of receding sizes rest on the basic pillars. The main deity enshrined in the *sanctum sanctorum* at the

ground floor is that of Shri Gorakhanatha (carved in stone).<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the construction of this wooden pavilion, Wright's *vaṃśāvalī* (1877:211) presents the following account in 1595 AD (NS 715)<sup>9</sup>:

In his [Lakshmi-narasinha Malla's] reign, on the day of Machchhindra-nātha's Lagan-jātrā ... Kalpa-briksha (the tree of Paradise) was looking on in the form of a man, and, being recognized by a certain Bisēta, was caught by him, and was not released until he promised the Bisēta that ... he would be enabled to build a satal (pāfī) with the wood of a single tree.

Local lore claims that the temple was built of wood of a single tree, granted by heavenly *Kalpabrikṣa* himself. The wish was fulfilled on the fourth day to build '*Madu-satal*'<sup>10</sup>, but the temple "was not consecrated, because the *Kalpabrikṣa* had told the *Bisēta* that, if it were, the wood would walk away."

<sup>8</sup> Thapa (1968:39) refers this as *Loyipāda Siddha*, while Pant (2015a) recognizes it as *Lūpā*, referring to a monograph entitled '*Śrīnāthātīrthāvalī*' compiled by the *Rājā* of Jodhpur, *Mānasīngh*.

<sup>9</sup> Pant (2015a) adds a line "This was constructed in NS 715" from the folio 126 of MS in the collection of University of Cambridge. But an English version of Wright (1877) in my collection, unfortunately, does not have this line.

<sup>10</sup> Wright (1877:211). The name is popular as *Maru satal* or *Kasthamandap* now.

(Wright, 1877:211). In view of this *vaṃśāvalī*, commonly, and mistakenly,<sup>11</sup> many consider this *sattal* to date back only to *Lakṣmī-Narasimha Malla's* reign. Pant (2015a), however, disagrees in the following points:

1. The reign of *Lakṣmī-Narasimha Malla* dates from 1621AD (NS 741)<sup>12</sup> to 1641 AD (NS 761)<sup>13</sup>, which does not match the afore-mentioned date of 1595 AD (NS 715). Historically, the validity of this date 1595 AD (NS 715) is thus hereby nullified.
2. A total of 15 evidences that *Kasthamandap* existed before the reign of *Lakṣmī-Narasimha Malla* has been published in *Itihāsa-Saṃśodhanako Pramāṇa-Prameyaby* Vajracharya (ed.) in 1962.<sup>14</sup> Among them, the very first mention of *Kasthamandap*,<sup>15</sup> as research till date suggests, has been found in an MS entitled "*Nama-sangiti*" copied in 1143 AD (NS 263) during the reign of *Narendra-deva II* (regnal year: 1140 – 1146 AD).

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<sup>11</sup> See: Pant (2015a) for details.

<sup>12</sup> Pant (2015a) cites Tiwari, Ramji et.al. (1964). *Eitihāsika-Patrasaṅgraha Vol. II*. Nepal Cultural Council. p. 1-2. Slusser (1982), however, approximates this date to 1619 AD.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* cites Vajracharya, Dhanavajra. (Ed.). (1962). *Itihāsa-Saṃśodhanako Pramāṇa-Prameya*. Lalitpur: Jagadamba Publications. p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Also enlisted by Thapa (1968:37-38).

<sup>15</sup> *cf.* Thapa (1968:41) and Risal (2015:4).

In addition, Risal (2015:4) cites Mary Slusser and Gautama Vajracharya (1974) to have discovered an MS *Astahasrika-Prajnaparamita* with a colophon dating it to 1090 AD (NS 210) in possession of a local *guthi* associated to *Kasthamandap*. However, he laments that "it was not made available to the authors [Slusser and Vajracharya] for more than a brief perusal" (Risal, 2015:4). Nevertheless, on basis of what Slusser and Vajracharya state, Risal (2015:10) asserts:

Kasthamandap was at least 900 years old and possibly more than a thousand, at the time of the 2015 earthquakes. It was therefore the oldest building in Kathmandu and anywhere in the entire surrounding Valley. It was also the largest traditional building.

A recent excavation campaign by a team of Nepalese and foreign archaeologists co-led by Professor Robin Coningham from Durham University, UK, Kosh Prasad Acharya (former Director-General of DoA) and Ram Bahadur Kunwar (Head of Excavation Branch, DoA) found that the temple was constructed in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, around 400 years earlier that it was traditionally thought (Neupane, 2016).

The large wooden pavilion was also used as a rest-house for traders through the city, and the surrounding *Maru tole* has for centuries been a popular market-place. "*Kasthamandap* occupies a central location in Kathmandu valley, at the intersection of two ancient towns known as *Koligrama* and *Daksina* (south) *Koligrama* (and later as *Yambu* and *Yangal*). Moreover, *Kasthamandap* sits squarely at the crossroads of



the ancient trade route that connected India with Tibet and the principal North-South road of Kathmandu." (Risal, 2015:2). A historic water-color painting by British surgeon at British Residency in Kathmandu, Henry Ambrose Oldfield, in the 1860s during Jung Bahadur's rule, reproduced in Risal (2015:2), also supports the claim.

With phonetic similarities between the two names, it is clear that *Kasthamandap*, as "an important shrine in the [social and cultural] life" (Thapa, 1968:43) of the ancient and medieval Kathmandu, "lend its name to the locality that grew around it, including the royal palaces" (*ibid.*) and subsequently the name "gradually acquired a much wider connotation with the passage of time" (*ibid.*). Thapa (1968:43) adds:

[A]s the original city should have been small, with the temple and palace as the central nucleus, it is reasonable to extend the application as well as applicability of the name of the royal city to the localities that grew up around it .... Thus it was the literary form of the name of the most important wooden pavilion that gradually ... [grew and] encompassed (1) the shrine (2) the locality and (3) the capital in gradual progression.

My focus here is that the *Kasthamandap* is a public heritage with a social, cultural and economic dependence of a large group of locals, especially from the southern half of the city. This heritage is one of the oldest ones known in the ancient city and was still in public use up to the time of its collapse.

### **The *Kasthamandap* Collapse**

On the day of the earthquake on 25 April, a local financial institution, by the name of *Nimbus Savings and Credit Cooperative*, had organized a blood-donation camp inside *Kasthamandap*. Altogether 54 people were reportedly "preparing to take a group photograph when the ground beneath them started shaking and brought down the ... temple, killing ten."<sup>16</sup> One survivor, *Amit Awale*, shares the following account:

Everything and everyone seemed to be moving. Bricks and mud started falling down ... nearby temples began going down one by one.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Nepal Samacharpatra (2015) published in *Nepali Times* (No. 757). The death toll has risen to 45 afterwards (and probably more?), as rescue efforts continued days after the quake (Pokhrel, 2015:56).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

With unavailability of any footages of the area, the understanding of the collapse depends on stories of the survivors and accounts of eye-witnesses. Another survivor, *Laxman Ranjit*, 30 of *Chikanmugal, Kathmandu* and also a weight-lifting national champion, shares this account during blood donation:

First, Kasthamandap and the earth started shaking slightly... I got [deep] into Kasthamandap thinking it safe. Those inside started running out ... Taking out the needle, I carried my son outside. Nilu [his wife] remained in. I was only few steps outside when the Kasthamandap collapsed with a large sound. I had never expected it.<sup>18</sup>

There were no close-circuit cameras installed at this place and, thus, our (and media) knowledge of its collapse are based on these stories. It, however, had many stories to unfold, which were much later (almost after more than a couple of years of the *Gorkha*-earthquake) recognized and covered in national media. But these materials do not come under the purview of this article.

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<sup>18</sup> Ghising. (2015). Translated by the author.

## Post-Earthquake Media Coverage of *Kasthamandap*

For the purpose of this article, I have analyzed the contents of five national dailies after the *Gorkha*-earthquake, viz. *Annapurna Post*, *Nagarik Dainik*, *Kantipur*, *Naya Patrika* and *Rajdhani* to see the coverage of *Kasthamandap*. The following table enlists few of the news, opinion articles and/or photographs regarding *Kasthamandap* used for this study. It also reflects the coverage pattern of the historic *Kasthamandap* temple by the Nepali national dailies:

Figure 1: Table showing media coverage of *Kasthamandap*

News paper	Date	Byline/ Writer	News Headline	Description	Remarks
Annapurna Post	11 Jestha (25 May)	Gopikrishna Dhungana	<b><i>Dharaharā durustai banāine</i></b> [Dharahara to be rebuilt exact]	News value due to a minister's visit	Only a reference to Kasthamandap
Nagarik Dainik	13 Baisakh (26 April)	KP Dhungana	<b><i>820 ko mṛtyu puṣṭi, arbaū kṣati, uddhar jāri, vivaraṇa āuna bākī</i></b> [820 death confirmed, billions loss, rescue	Hard news, double-line banner headline, details relating to	Includes reference to Dharahara and Kasthamandap

			continued, details yet to come]	cover story	
		Prakash Timalcina	<b><i>Kāṭhmāṇḍu upatyakākā adhikāṃśa sampadā dhale</i></b> [Many heritages in Kathmandu Valley collapsed]	Hard news, details relating to cover story	Only a reference to Kasthama ndap
Kantipu r	9 Jestha  (23 May)	Raju Ghising  (with a photo by Kaushal Adhikari)	<b><i>'Āfailāi pardā thāhā hudo raheca'</i></b>  ["We know only when it befalls on us."]	Soft news, story of a survivor	
Rajdhan i	13 Baisakh  (26 April)	Dabhu Chhetri	<b><i>Aitihāsik dharohara dhvasta</i></b> [Historic monuments devastated]	Hard news	Only a reference to <i>Kasthama ndap</i>
	23 Jestha  (7 June)	Nabin Luitel	<b><i>Pahilekai svarūpamā Kāṣṭhamaṇḍa p banne</i></b> [Kasthamanda p to be	Hard news, reconstru ction attempt	

			reconstructed in old style]		
(23 June)	Rajdhani Correspon dent	<b>Vatkiyeko Kāṣṭhamaṇḍa p bhittecitramā</b> [Destroyed Kasthamanda p in mural work]	Hard news, related to sentiment of reconstru ction		
31 July	Mahes Raj Pant	<b>Kāṣṭhamaṇḍa pa kati purāno? Kasale banāyo?</b> [How old is Kasthamanda p? Who constructed it?]	Opinion article on history of <i>Kasthama ndap</i>	Pant, 2015a	
1 Septem ber	Mahes Raj Pant	<b>Kāṣṭhamaṇḍa pasāga Līlavajrako sambandha</b> [Relation of Lilavajra with Kasthamanda p]	Opinion article on history of <i>Kasthama ndap</i>	Pant, 2015b	

\* All years in 2072 BS or 2015 AD.

The scholarship of Nepali media on *Kasthamandap* was much limited only to what Wright's *vaṃśāvalī* and local lore states — that it was constructed of the wood of a single tree — and that it gave *Kathmandu* its name. But the very entry in the *vaṃśāvalī* has already been questioned by Pant (2015a) as stated above. Only two articles on history of *Kasthamandap* have come into light (Pant, 2015a and 2015b). In addition, *Sukrabar* weekly (editor: Rajan Nepal) dated 15 May or 1 *Jestha* published by *Nepal Republic Media* has an article by *Dinesh Raj Pant* on "Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa (Marusattala)" (p. 8), reflecting the claim that unlike popularly believed, the structure existed way before the reign of *Lakṣmī-Narasimha Malla* from 1621 to 1641 AD.

The story of the actual collapse of *Kasthamandap* is only available via the version of a survivor, *Laxman Ranjit*,<sup>19</sup> who lost his wife at blood-donation and himself suffered leg injury. Additionally, a story in *Nepali Times* (not included as a sample for this study, but cited elsewhere due to lack of other documented evidences) has a story of another survivor, but he fails to give a detailed account of the collapse of the age-old structure. A commoner's observation of the large central pillars that supported the colossal structure of the *Kasthamandap* that were left unguarded at the Big Bell, Kathmandu shows the breaking and decaying of tongue of the pillar, causing the structural failure.

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<sup>19</sup> Refer to footnote #18.

## The *Dharahara* Tower: New Polity of Modern Nepal

As a popular landmark of *Kathmandu*, *Dharahara* is more known to all than other structures of traditional inner cities. The *Dharahara* is a nine-storey tower built in 1832 by *Mukhtiyār Bhimsen Thapa* (1775 – 1839 AD). The tower has a spiral staircase of 213 steps, with a balcony at eight-floor and a 5.2 meter (17 ft.) bronze mast on the roof. Two *Dharaharas* actually existed during *Bhimsen Thapa*'s time, called *Maharani Dharahara* and *General Dharahara*. The former was constructed in the name of *Queen Lalit Tripurasundari* (1794 – 1832 AD, regent rule: 1806 – 1832 AD) and was, by name, taller and wider than the latter, built in the name of *Bhimsen Thapa*. The devastating earthquake of 1834 AD saw the collapse of *General Dharahara*, while *Maharani Dharahara* survived with need for repairs. A century later, again in the earthquake of 1934 AD, the *Maharani Dharahara* collapsed and was rebuilt by *Juddha Shumsher JBR* (regnal years: 1932 – 1952); this later became popular as *Bhimsen Stambha* (*Bhimsen* column, or more popular *Dharahara*).<sup>20</sup>

Constructing tall columns had been popular in traditional architecture of the valley as well; reference can be seen from that at *Changu Narayan temple*<sup>21</sup>, the oldest temple in Nepal or at all medieval royal palaces and even those in the *Shah* rule (e.g. at *Guhyeśvarī*) — all aimed at depicting the height of power of those atop. Likewise, *Dharahara* named after

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<sup>20</sup> op.cit. Dhungel (2015).

<sup>21</sup> I refer here to the *Garuḍa* column of *Changu Narayan*, of which only a small stump now remains and the *Garuḍa* icon, of course.



Queen *Lalit Tripurasundari* and *Bhimsen Thapa* marked their power in the modern Nepal for over three decades.

The major idea is that *Dharahara* was a very late heritage and symbolized elite groups — those in power, without any cultural-economic relation with the locals. The Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) opened it to general public taking a specific entry fee and was maintained by an external partner, Sidewalkers Pvt. Ltd., with whom the Kathmandu Metropolitan city had a Memorandum of Understanding to manage the area. It was later, thus, more commercial than cultural.

### **The Fall of the Tower**

In Nepali, *Dharahara* stands for tall tower. Many papers almost synonymized *Dharahara* with another phonetically-similar Nepali word '*dharohara*', meaning somewhat close to heritage. Most papers (including those taken as sample in this study) have also used *Dharahara* to represent the idea of heritage overall.

It fell for the first time in 1834 AD earthquake, only two years after its construction, and collapsed to 1934 AD earthquake. Later, *Juddha Shumsher JBR* repaired it, but it fell to the recent 2015 earthquake. Some reports also accused that reconstructions were not made in time and properly ("*Bhūkampale 5 saya 81 sampadāmā kṣati*" by *Rajdhani* dated 17 May). Its fall to 1834 earthquake, however, clearly marked *Bhimsen Thapa*'s fall from power, especially after the death of the regent Queen. Historian *Ramesh Dhungel* adds:

After the fall of *General Dharahara* (of Bhimsen Thapa), his power in the rule started decreasing. Thus, the *Dharahara* named after him could not be reconstructed at that time.<sup>22</sup>

Many versions of the fall from *Kasthamandap* and other accounts by eye-witnesses have been reported (e.g. "*Dharaharāko tuppobāta khasdā pani bāciyo*" by Babita Sedhai in *Annapurna Post* dated 30 April, "*Jyāna Jogiyeko Janmadina*" by Gopikrishna Dhungana in *Annapurna Post* dated 23 July and "*Dharaharā cāra tukrā vaera dhalyo*" by Bijay Chamling in *Rajdhani* dated 14 May). The weekly-holiday on Saturday added the flow of people inside the tower. Some videos of the fall from *Dharahara* also went viral in YouTube<sup>23</sup> as well. Overall, we have more documentation of the fall of *Dharahara* as compared to that of *Kasthamandap*.

The following table gives a comparison of *Dharahara* and *Kasthamandap*; the figures are for representational purpose only and do not exact in measurements.

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<sup>22</sup> Historian Ramesh Dhungel speaks for *Naya Patrika Dainik* (2015).

<sup>23</sup> See: "Dharahara Falling Live Nepal Earthquake 2072/2015"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qwr3bljnzPo>.

Figure 2: Comparison of Dharahara and Kasthamandap Coverage (Images for representational purpose only)

<p>200'</p> <p>150'</p> <p>100'</p> <p>50'</p> <p>0</p>		
	<p><u>Dharaharā Tower</u></p>	<p><u>Kāṣṭhamandap</u> (Wooden Pavilion)</p>
<p>Alternate name(s)</p>	<p>Bhīmsen Stambha</p>	<p>Maru Sattal, Madu Sattal</p>

<i>Type</i>	Tall tower / minaret	Public building
<i>Architecture</i>	Mughal style	Traditional pagoda-style
<i>Storey</i>	9	3
<i>Height</i>	203' (61.88 m)	65' 4"
<i>History</i>	1832 by Bhimsen Thapa	c. 8 <sup>th</sup> century
<i>Purpose</i>	Military watch-tower, information-dissemination <sup>24</sup>	Public / religious / cultural, market-place
<i>Re- construction</i>	After 1934 earthquake	Several times, including recent ones
<i>Fall</i>	First at 1934 earthquake, now collapsed to Gorkha- earthquake	Previously undocumented; now completely collapsed
<i>No. of affected people</i>	150 <sup>25</sup>	54 <sup>26</sup>
<i>Death toll<sup>27</sup></i>	60	45

<sup>24</sup> Nepal (2015)

<sup>25</sup> Dhungana (2015). He reports 240 tickets had been issued before the incident occurred.

<sup>26</sup> NepaliTimes (2015)

<sup>27</sup> Pokhrel (2015:56)

<i>Present status</i>	Only a 33' (10 m) stump now remains, reconstruction commenced	Completely grounded, reconstruction commenced
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**Post-Earthquake Media Coverage of Dharahara**

Similar to the previous one on the coverage of *Kasthamandap*, I have analyzed the contents of the afore-mentioned five major national dailies after the *Gorkha*-earthquake, to see the coverage of *Dharahara*. The following table shows quantitatively a large coverage of less than two centuries-old *Dharahara* in various aspects.

*Figure 3: Table showing the media coverage of Dharahara*

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Byline Writer</b>	<b>News Headline</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Annapurna Post	13 Baisakh (26 April)	Gyanendra Khadka	<i>Nepālamāsaktiśālī bhūkampa, Dharaharā dhalyo, bhayānaka kṣati</i>	
			[Strong earthquake in Nepal, Dharahara collapsed, large destruction]	
	17 Baisakh (30 April)	Babita Sedhai <i>(Presented by Rajkumar</i>	<i>'Dharaharāko tuppobāta khasdā pani bāciyo'</i> [‘Survived the fall	News Feature

		<i>Dikpal and Kirtan Adhikari)</i>	from the top of Dharahara']	
			<b><i>Durvala Dharaharā Durvala Netṛtva</i></b>	
	18 Baisakh (1 May)	Devendra Prasad Sitaula	[Weak Dharahara, weak leadership]	Opinion Article
			<b><i>Jagadambā Steelsle Dharaharā punarnirmāṇa garne</i></b> [Jagadamba Steels to reconstruct Dharahara]	
	21 Baisakh (4 May)	Annapurna Correspondent		
			<b><i>Dharaharā durustai banāine</i></b>	
	11 Jestha (25 May)	Gopikrishna Dhungana	[Dharahara to be rebuilt exact]	
			<b><i>Jyāna Jogiyeko Janmadina</i></b>	
	7 Shrawana (23 July)	Gopikrishna Dhungana	[Narrow escape on birthday]	News Feature
			<b><i>Mahābhūkampak o dasāū dina somabāra rājadhānīmā Dharaharāko</i></b>	
Kantipur	22 Baisakh (5 May)	Prakash Timilsina		Photo

			<p><i>bhagnāvaśeṣa</i>  <i>herdai</i>  <i>sarvasadhāraṇa</i>          [People watch the ruins of Dharahara on 10<sup>th</sup> day of earthquake on Monday]</p>	
	22 Bhadra		<p><i>Dharaharālāīṭhuṭ</i>  <i>o nai rahana diaū</i>          [Let Dharahara be left a stump]</p>	Opinion article
	(8 September )	Rupa Joshi		
			<p><i>Darjanaū dhakkā,</i>  <i>hajāraū hatāhata</i>          [Dozens shocks, thousands injured]</p>	Cover Feature
		-		
	13 Baisakh		<p><i>820 ko mṛtyu puṣṭi, arbaū kṣati, uddhar jāṛī, vivaraṇa āuna bāṅkī</i> [820 deaths confirmed, billions loss, rescue continued, details yet to come]</p>	
Nagarik Dainik	(26 April)	KP Dhungana		
	22 Baisakh		<p><i>Dharaharā</i>  <i>banāune rahara</i>          [A wish to make Dharahara]</p>	Soft news
	(5 May)			

			<b><i>Punarnirmāṇamā rāṣṭriya abhiyāna</i></b>	Opinion article, drawing of Dharahar a with national flag
29 Baisakh (12 May)	Gopinath Mainali	[National campaign in reconstruction]		
31 Baisakh (14 May)	Rabi Adhikari	[Searching silver line in black clouds]	<b><i>Kālo bādalavitra cādiko ghera khojdā</i></b>	Opinion article, drawing of broken Dharahar a
14 Baisakh (27 April)	Shreelochan Rajopadhyaya	[Ruins of Dharahara being taken to home]	<b><i>Dharaharāko avaśeṣa dhamādhama ghar lagīdai</i></b>	
Naya Patrika	NA	[Crowd seeing the ruins of Dharahara]	<b><i>Bhagnāvaśeṣamā pariṇata bhayeko Dharaharā herneko ghuīco</i></b>	Photo



		Gyanmani Nepal	<i>Sucanā dina baneko dhiyo Dharaharā</i>	(Presented by Sujit Mainali)
	29 Baisakh		[Dharahara was constructed to give information]	
	(12 May)		<i>Duitā Dharaharā thiye Kathmandumā</i>	(Presented by Sujit Mainali)
		Ramesh Dhungel	[There were two Dharaharas in Kathmandu]	
	13 Baisakh		<i>Aitihāsika dharohara dhvasta</i>	
	(26 April)	Dabbu Chhetri	[Historic monuments devastated]	
Rajdhani	22 Baisakh  (5 May)	Rajdhani Correspondent	<i>Jagadambāle Dharaharā punarnirmāṇa garne</i> [Jagadamba to reconstruct Dharahara]	
	30 Baisakh  (14 May)	Bijay Chamling	<i>'Dharaharā cāra tukrā vaera dhalyo'</i>	[Dharahara collapsed after

		breaking into four pieces]	
2 Jestha (17 May)	Nabin Luitel	<b><i>Bhūkampale</i></b> 5 <b><i>saya</i></b> 81 <b><i>sampadāmā kṣati</i></b> [581 heritages affected by earthquake]	Photo of Dharahar a
31 Baisakh (14 May)	Ganesh Adhikari	<b><i>Dhvasta</i></b> <b><i>Dharaharā ra</i></b> <b><i>Siudo Puchiyeke</i></b> <b><i>Kāṣhmāṇḍu</i></b> [Devastated Dharahara and unbeautified Kathmandu]	Opinion article
6 Jestha (20 May)	Nabin Luitel	<b><i>Bhūkampa</i></b> <b><i>pratirodhātmaka</i></b> <b><i>Dharaharā banne</i></b> [Earthquake-resistant Dharahara to be built]	

\* All years in 2072 BS or 2015 AD.

The table shows that *Dharahara* found comparatively a larger space than any other heritages. It was portrayed as the ornament of Kathmandu (in Ganesh Adhikari's opinion piece, see Appendix 3), as the representation of all other historic monuments that fell to the earthquake (in the news, feature

and photos by almost all media, see Appendix 3), as a subject of emotional appeal (by Kantipur, see Appendix 4) and as a symbol of national unity (see Appendix 4). Slogans of rising back from the disaster also included the portrayal of *Dharahara* for almost all Nepali national newspapers.

### **Attempts at Reconstruction**

News have been disseminated announcing the undertaking of reconstruction of *Dharahara*, but almost no such news of *Kasthamandap* was seen in Nepali national dailies. *Dharahara*, as popular landmark of the city, received due importance with commitments of reconstruction by government ("*Bhūkampa pratirodhātmaka Dharaharā banne*" by *Nabin Luitel* in *Rajdhani* dated 20 May). Even the corporate sectors were interested in its reconstruction. One such included that by *Jagadmba Steels*, which brought mixed reactions — some reacted that *Dharahara* should be left as it is (e.g. *Rupa Joshi* in *Kantipur*, 8 September, p. 7), while some complained no corporate houses should be allowed to use *Dharahara* for their advertisements.

The reconstruction attempt at *Kasthamandap* received almost none media attention. Far the mainstream media interest, alternative ways were initiated by the locals only. For a campaign on rebuilding *Kasthamandap*, *Risal* started a website [www.rebuildkasthamandap.com](http://www.rebuildkasthamandap.com) in an attempt to bringing it back. *Risal* (2015) is also concerned in finding the lost inscriptions to save history, especially those attached to the temple woods. Some local organizations also announced *Campaign for Reconstruction of Kasthamandap*, while

Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) also took few steps for the cause. Currently, a team of archaeologists are undertaking excavation works at the devastated site. An artistic representation of *Kasthamandap* was made in mural art at *Babarmahal, Kathmandu* by *Hatemalo Campaign* and was inaugurated by Chief Secretary *Lilamani Poudel* on 22 June 2015. A modelled 3-D design of *Kasthamandap* was prepared by artist *Hira Ratna Brahmacharya* and was handed to the KMC. Meanwhile, Ar. Wolfgang Korn also handed over his structural drawings on 7 November 2015, Saturday that he used for his book (Korn, 1998) asserting its importance to the national identity.

Nonetheless, the attempts at reconstructing *Dharahara* also used alternative artistic ways. A miniature replica of *Dharahara* is also placed at a traffic triangle at *Sahid Gate, Kathmandu* commemorating the tower that is now no exist. Several other replicas were also made at different places of the valley too.

### **Theoretical Epilogue**

*Dharahara* found more space in national dailies, symbolic of enormity of the earthquake (as reflected in the photos of the devastated site), and was later reproduced to represent call to rising (e.g. see appendix 4) and to national identity (appendix 5: *Nagarik* dated 12 May). The tower-structure was portrayed as identity of Kathmandu and entire Nepal; portrayal of Nepal's rising back included *Dharahara*, an elite heritage of modern times, while public heritages were completely neglected by the mainstream media.

Ganesh Adhikari's version that Kathmandu lies tearful at the loss of its ornament *Dharahara* ("*Dhvasta Dharaharā ra Siudo Puchiyeke Kāṭhmāṇḍu*", Rajdhani, 14 May) asserts this single heritage as what matters to the Kathmandu (and subsequently to Nepal). Other heritages that went undamaged or only partially damaged were not in the mainstream media. This too had to take alternative course in the form of a hash tag "#notallgone" that gained little popularity along this line.

The much-criticized idea of unity in diversity that was enforced during Panchayat regime of King Mahendra (1920 – 1972, regal years: 1955 – 1972) that gave supremacy to one culture, language and symbol over the other. The Nepali media too was guided by the same idea to give supremacy to *Dharahara* over all other heritages, no matter however significant they are. Pushing aside the historic, socio-cultural and economic significance of *Kasthmandap* for the local and all those traders, who once travelled through this ancient open square, the Nepali national media desperately put ahead or enforced *Dharahara* as a symbol of national identity.

The elite ruler notion can also be seen in the light of ethnic notion, where the ruling-class Brahmin-Chhetri built *Dharahara* gained supremacy over the now ethnic locally-owned *Kasthmandap*. The fact that Nepali media itself is owned and operated by majority Brahmin-Chhetri too accounts for this bias. It was the ruling Shah-Thapa class, who built the *Dharahara* and was later named upon the ruling class, but the story of *Kasthmandap* is otherwise — it is essentially public and lore has it that it was built by a local Lilavajra (though it is questionable).

The Foucauldian idea of subjectivation (or subjectivization) comes into play here: the identity is not self-internalized but enforced by various, what Althusser would say, ideological mechanisms. No matter how much local newspapers (mostly in *Nepal Bhasa*) would assert the essence of *Kasthmandap*, the identity was shaped for elite tower-structure *Dharahara*. Technically, both are national heritages, both collapsed and both claimed many lives — both deserve to stand as a symbol of unity and of respect for age-old heritages.

The idea that Nepali media lacked evidences of *Kasthmandap*, while those of *Dharahara* were plenty too helped such portrayal. The evidences of *Kasthmandap* are scattered — the very first evidence dating to 12<sup>th</sup> century and many others following that have been currently found at *Sakya* monastery in *Tibet* (Pant, 2015a). Such biased media reporting and loss of *Kasthmandap* would also mean loss of a heritage that has survived so centuries, of medieval and of modern Nepal.

As discussed earlier, *Dharahara* represented a new symbol for modern Nepal during the Shah period, against the traditional *Kasthmandap*. As a popular heritage of early medieval Nepal, *Kasthmandap* had represented the identity of the city and even lend the expanding city its name.<sup>28</sup> This identity-making has been overpowered owing to the dynastical shift, and as the city and in-migration grew more, the new polity shed traditional identity of *Kasthmandap*, which was once popular as public rest-place. It might be interesting to examine further how the collapse of both these

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<sup>28</sup> op.cit. Thapa (1968:43)

structures — artistic master-pieces of their times — can give symbolic interpretation to the course of history.

A constructivist<sup>29</sup> national identity of *Dharahara* in the modern Nepal seems to have followed a nationalistic model, characterized by "national homogeneity under the aegis of ... those in power"<sup>30</sup>, in the post-earthquake context. With government, public and corporate commitments on reconstruction of *Dharahara* (e.g. "*Bhūkampa pratirodhātmaka Dharaharā banne*" by Nabin Luitel in *Rajdhanidated* 20 May, "*Jagadambā Steelsle Dharaharā punarnirmāṇa garne*" by *Annapurna Post* dated 4 May and "*Jagadambāle Dharaharā punarnirmāṇa garne*" in *Rajdhani* dated 5 May), the step has already been taken. But, nevertheless, people are still divided over what should be prioritized *Dharahara* (an elite, commercial heritage) or *Kasthamandap* (a cultural public one).

As *Dharahara* has been presented as a national symbol for unity, Sitaula (2015) rightly warns:

*Dharahara* had collapsed to 1934 earthquake, and after mere 82 years it again collapsed. Now if it is to be raised, it must be considered — how powerful and strong it should be. It has other symbolic meanings too. *Dharahara* must not be raised weak, as national leaders of today. Now *Dharahara* must nurture strong

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<sup>29</sup> See: Gellner (1997).

<sup>30</sup> See: Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997).

leadership in symbolic meaning for the nation  
and for its future.

The above call stands true, even if *Kasthamandap* shares a similar position.

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## Appendices: Illustrations

### 1. Dharahara: Then and Now



A poster comparing photographs of *Dharahara* before 1934 earthquake and in the new century, against the background of the post Gorkha-earthquake 2015 remains of *Dharahara*

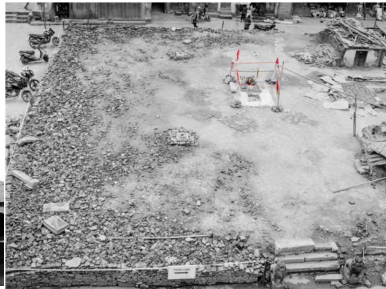
Source: Tweeted by @anshuedc (1 June 2015, 11:53 am)

## 2. Kasthamandap: Then and Now [Compilation]

Then



Now



Source: Rajdhani Daily (1 September 2015)

Source: Risal (2015:4).

Photo by: Sameer Tuladhar.

## 3. Dharahara as symbol for enormity of earthquake devastation



Source: Nagarik Dainik (14 May 2015 | 31 Baisakh 2072, Thursday)

Source: *Naya Patrika Dainik* (28 April 2015 | 15 Baisakh 2072, Tuesday)

## 4. Dharahara as symbol for revival



A photo of remaining stump of *Dharahara* was used by *Kantipur Dainik* in its announcement of *Kantipur National Tragedy Support Fund*. Source: *Kantipur Dainik*.

(Right): Tall *Dharahara* as symbol of reconstruction, revival of life. The text reads in simple English as follows:

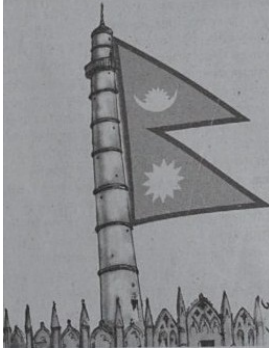
*Dharahara will rise back from ruins, if we make a common determination.*

*But, ask yourself, what have we done for the country at the time of this disaster?*

*A campaign of Naya Patrika for national self-determination.*

"Source: *Naya Patrika*

## 5. Dharahara as a uniting force



Source: *Nagarik Dainik* (29 Baisakh 2072 | 12 May 2015) in an article by Gopinath Mainali

### **End note**

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