

RELOCATION OF MONUMENTS IN KWELACHHI OF LUBHU

Rabina Shilpakar^{1*}, Sandip Shrestha²

¹ Department of Architecture, Khwopa Engineering College, Purbanchal University, Nepal

² Zero Dia Design, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract

Lubhu, a historically important city located in the Lalitpur district, houses numerous monuments from different historical timeline. Lubhu is home to several centuries' old monuments where some monuments still are intact today though facing many changes due to natural calamities like earthquake while some has undergone changes with the changing urban development factors such as infrastructure expansion especially the road widening projects. Few of such examples are located in the Kwelachhi tole of Lubhu. In 2022, the temples dedicated to Ganesh and a chaitya has been relocated few distance apart to clear the roadways considering the future road expansion in the area. This study focuses on these two temples of the roadside which were shifted to short distances from the original position. The study will focus on the process of relocation of these temples and the issues arouse among the locals. The role of community involvement is important in such conservation programs as they are the users of those monuments in their daily social life. This research will study the engagement of the community in different phases of conservation. The methodologies to conduct this research will be questionnaire surveys, interviews, study of the old photographs, and site inspections. The data will be qualitatively and quantitatively analysed on conservation efforts applied on those structures by the concerned authorities.

Keywords: Relocation; Heritage conservation; Kwelachi; Community involvement

1. Introduction

Lubhu, situated to the southeast of Lalitpur district, is a compact Newar town developed in the Kirat dynasty. It is said that the Kirats entered Kathmandu Valley through this point. (R. B. Shrestha, 2020). Planned along a major east-west road axis, major open spaces such as Kwelachhi and Chwelachi are located along this axis serving as an important communal and cultural nodes. The research is focused on Kwelachhi, one of the major open spaces of Lubhu positioned to the entry point to the historic core area of Lubhu. This particular open space houses numerous monuments, many of which dates back to centuries, reflecting settlement's long-standing culture and religion.

Kwelachi in Newari language is composed of two words-Kwe meaning lower and lachi is a terminology for open space. So, Kwelachi is a name provided to the lower

open space of Lubhu town. The neighbourhood of Kwelachi tole is a vibrant neighbourhood deeply rooted in Newar culture ad communal life. It is characterised by compact housing clusters, narrow lanes and numerous religious monuments including temples, chaitya and roadside shrines. These monuments and structures function not just as places of worship but also the markers of collective social identity, memory and social cohesion.

Figure 1 shows the settlements and location of monuments. Inscriptions available in Narayan temple and Ganesh temple of Kwelachi area dates back to NS 572 (1481 AD) and NS 741 (1620 AD) (O. Shrestha and Joshi, 2012) indicating neighbourhood's existence for more than 550 years. Plan of Lubhu is shown in Figure 1.

Despite these deep historical facts, the town of Lubhu today faces significant urban planning pressure. Kathmandu Valley Development Authority KVDA has proposed widening of the existing road from its current width of 4.09m - 9.83 m to a 22 m road connecting Kavre and Banepa to the ring road as shown in Figure 2. It is supposed to be a bypass road connecting Lubhu with Banepa and Panauti and also to increase economic

*Corresponding author: Rabina Shilpakar
Department of Architecture, Khwopa Engineering College,
Bhaktapur, Nepal
Email: shilpakar.rabina066@gmail.com
<https://doi.org/10.3126/jsce.v13i1.89575>



Figure 1. Plan of Lubhu showing settlements and heritage monuments Source: (UN-Habitat & Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, 2021)

linkage (Thapa, 2022). Particularly, traditional Newar towns have been developed along a major road axis for trade purposes. Streets and open spaces are vital urban design element that defines character and identity of the town. Kwelachi, Chwelachi and bus stop are all situated along Lubhu's main street functioning as a datum space where all street networks converge and connects settlements. Road expansion, however not only sweep away these spaces and existing residences of the neighbourhood but also threatens to erase memories, identities and spatial qualities.

1.1. Socio-cultural Importance

Although Kwelachi is comparatively smaller than other open spaces of Lubhu, it holds immense socio-cultural importance. There are altogether 13 monuments at Kwelachi as shown in Figure 3. Among them, Yosin dyo and Khuoo dyo are in the ritual poles erected once annually during Indra jatra. The deceased family members perform puja in the Ganesh temple of this area and distribute sameybaji (beaten rice, soyabean, ginger, garlic, buffalo meat, fish) to the people on the day of Indrajatra. A major puja is also performed in this lachi during Mahalaxmi Mahabhairab jatra. Other temples and shrines in this area serves the locals for daily morning and evening worshipping and performing rituals. The monuments that will be affected by road widening projects is shown in Figure 2 and 4.

2. Research Methodology

The methodologies employed in this study encompass a multi-dimensional approach to understand the conservation challenges and interventions in the monuments of

Kwelachhi, Lubhu. The research process begins with problem identification, where relocation of shrines, and the deterioration of monuments are carefully documented and issues raised related to road expansion and relocation/conservation of the monuments. This is followed by a site context study, aimed at examining the spatial configuration of Kwelachhi, its relationship with the surrounding neighborhoods, and the socio-cultural functions of the open space.

Questionnaire surveys and interviews are conducted with local residents, heritage stakeholders, and authorities to understand the community perception on the topic. These tools provide insights into people's perceptions, cultural practices, and their responses to the conservation or relocation of heritage structures. Furthermore, the study incorporates the analysis of old photographs which help to trace the historical evolution of the monuments and identify changes in Kwelachi over time.

Additionally, on-site inspections are carried out to document the present physical condition of temples, chaityas, and shrines, after relocation including structural and architectural features, technology employed and conservation efforts used. The collected data is then analyzed through both qualitative and quantitative methods. While qualitative analysis highlights narratives of cultural identity, community attachment, and social significance, quantitative assessment measures the extent of physical deterioration and the scale of interventions implemented by concerned authorities.

Through this combined methodology, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the conservation efforts



Figure 2. Road expansion proposed by KVDA (UN-Habitat & Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, 2021)



Figure 3. Plan of Kwelachi

in Kwelachhi and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures applied to safeguard its historic monuments.

2.1. Problem Identification

The research is carried out regarding following questionnaires and objective regarding shifting and relocating of the religious and cultural edifices of Kwelachi.

a) Why do these structures need relocation from their original position?

b) Are these structures properly rebuilt/reconstructed after relocation?

c) Are proper procedures including cultural rituals followed while relocation?

d) Are the locals involved in the relocation procedure?

e) What kind of issues arose during this process?

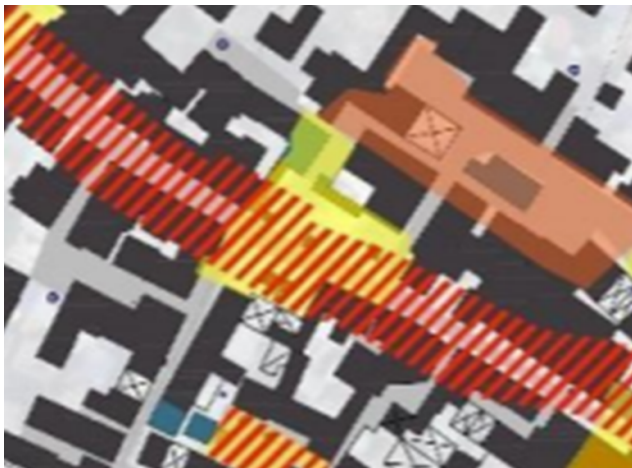


Figure 4. Road expansion project affecting spatial layout of Kwelachi (UN-Habitat and Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, 2021)

3. Theoretical Frameworks

Ebbe (2009) emphasizes that infrastructure projects can be designed to meet development goals while preserving traditional streetscapes and historic urban fabric. The paper argues urban heritage conservation is important for preserving its historic significance, cultural value, city liveability and competitiveness and also bring economic opportunities.

Maharjan (2020) in his article also shows a similar case of Sunaguthi where road widening project through the traditional settlements in Kathmandu Valley threatens traditional the houses and monuments lying along the main road in the name of development. The author suggests to propose and explore alternate route instead of expanding roads through historic core settlements.

Roka (2024) discusses about the tension of infrastructural development and heritage conservation in a least-developed country like Nepal. The sustainable development of Nepal is affected by a lack of a proper legal and policy framework for balancing infrastructure development and heritage conservation. This research dwelves into the analysis of the existing laws and policies of Nepal. The research further investigates the gap in the legislation and practice in Nepal and inappropriateness of the international frameworks in the context of developing countries like Nepal. Nepal has several national laws and ratified conventions like the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act in 2013, and the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972, etc. but despite of the existing laws and conventions, lack of effective implementation and contextual adaptation undermines sustainable heritage management.

Tao et al. (2025) explains relocation often create

contradiction between conserving historical buildings and achieving economic growth, public authority and private rights, and even inconsistency between national and local policies. Exemplifying China's social transformation case, they argue that such practices reveal political nature of heritage management and inevitable contradiction between official heritage norms and heritage practices.

4. Findings and Analysis

Every day, hundreds of vehicles pass through this street from early morning onwards. Along the northern edge of this busy road stand the Ganesh Temple, a chiba/chaitya, and Narayan Temple—important religious sites that continue to play a vital role in the daily lives of the locals. As described earlier in the socio-cultural context, these monuments are actively worshipped, with women and children forming the largest group of devotees.

Traditionally, the planning of Lubhu—like other Newar towns—was pedestrian-oriented, designed for communal interactions and pedestrian activities. The adaptation of these narrow streets with recent increasing urbanization and modern living trends into vehicular road has increased the amount of traffic significantly and has created significant spatial conflicts. The juxtaposition of the chaitya and Ganesh Temple with the busy street has disrupted vehicular movement, but more importantly, it has disturbed pedestrian activities and the act of worship itself.

Until 2020, the Ganesh Temple remained in a dilapidated state, further weakened by growth of a peepal tree whose branches and roots enveloped the structure mostly in the upper structure, making it fragile and feeble. The chaitya, positioned close to the road, forces devotees to conduct worship directly from the roadside, exposing them to both traffic hazards and compromised spiritual space. While Narayan Temple and some other shrines stand at a safer distance from the street edge, the temples in immediate proximity—particularly the Ganesh Temple and chaitya—have been repeatedly damaged by passing vehicles. Several structural elements have disintegrated over time due to these collisions. Moreover, the site has witnessed minor accidents and frequent traffic congestion, further causing distress to worshippers and local residents.

As a solution to these encounters, locals and the ward think the road expansion will solve the problem of traffic congestion. Many of the house along the main road, owners left their houses abandoned as their houses will be cleared during the expansion of road. Many of the houses have already got compensations. The locals whose houses are at the back of the main road are the supporters of the road expansion as they will get mutual advantage through exposure to the road. So there seems to be biasness among the locals either to expand road or not.

These challenges have prompted ongoing discussions

within the community regarding the possibility of relocating the temples and shrines to safer positions deeper inside Kwelachi, ensuring both the preservation of heritage and the safety of daily practices.

4.1. Conservation Efforts

4.1.1 Chaitya



Figure 5. Chaitya before relocation source: Samiti, S. G. (2023)



Figure 6. Chaitya after relocation

According to interviews with local residents, Chaitya at Kwelachhi is believed to have been constructed during the Lichchhavi period by Charumati, daughter of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. Historical evidences state Charumati was married to a Kshetriya prince named Devpal of Nepal, and accompanied his father in establishing Buddhist practices



Figure 7. Decreased plinth height after reconstruction

in Nepal. The chaitya at Gwarko, Lalitpur, is one of the prominent monuments associated with this period and serves as evidence of the flourishing trend of Buddhism in the district.

In 2020, the chaitya at Kwelachhi was relocated approximately three meters from its original site as part of the road expansion project. Figure 5 shows the previous state of chaitya before 2020. The process was contested by heritage activists, who argued that such monuments are not only religiously significant but also vital markers of historical memory. Despite these protests, the relocation was executed quickly by the Department of Archaeology, in collaboration with local residents and representatives of ward No. 8.

The heritage activists' effort to raise voice against the demolition of the years long history could not do anything because many locals prioritized road safety and infrastructure development over conservation in situ. For years, the chaitya and nearby shrines had been vulnerable to damage from vehicular movement, with plinths repeatedly struck at night by passing vehicles. Concerns about accidents and ongoing deterioration thus created pressure for immediate action, leading to its reconstructing it to a short distance away. Likewise, rituals are followed while dismantling any religious structures, the local residents of this area are not properly informed about those rituals due to biasness among different groups.

This case reflects a broader pattern seen across the Kathmandu Valley, where urban development and heritage preservation frequently clash. Similar instances include the relocation of chaityas at Tripureshwor and Kalanki, as well as smaller roadside shrines in Bhaktapur and Patan, which were shifted during road-widening projects. In most of these cases, while heritage activists raised concerns, local communities often compromised in favor of infrastructure improvement, highlighting the difficult balance between safeguarding cultural identity and meeting modern urban demands ((UN-Habitat & Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, 2021).

Several construction errors can be found in the newly constructed structure. One of the possible reasons for this could be the reliance on contractors selected through the tender process. Unlike the user-community groups-based constructions, where community members are directly involved and carry a strong sense of ownership and attachment over contractors emphasizing deadlines more



Figure 8. Misplacement of overall superstructure over plinth



Figure 9. Misplacement of elements during reconstruction



Figure 10. Condition of Ganesh temple before 2020 source: annual calender of Lubhu

over quality. Another contributing factor may be the urgency to complete the structure in speed in an external pressure between the heritage activists and locals leading to poor workmanship, and neglect the traditional construction techniques.

The plinth height of the chaitya has been reduced significantly in this process as shown in Figure 6 and 7. Some of the existing parts of the chaitya have not been kept in their original position and directions (as shown in Figure 10) due to which size and design is not in proportionally matched as the original one. Also, the position of the plinth and upper structure is not accurately placed (as indicated in Figure 9 and 10) due to which the northern façade of plinth does not consist of nagol while other three sides have more plinth stones and nagol as shown in Figure 8.

4.1.2 Ganesh Temple

Ganesh temple at Kwelachi was located near to the main road of Lubhu near an electric pole as shown in Figure 10. The area bounded shows the original position of the temple in Kwelachi. Since it is located very near to road and its main entrance located towards the roadside, the traffic

congestion creates problem to its access. As this portion of road acts as a bottleneck of this road (wider to the west and east in the buspark), vehicular movement more often hit the guardian lions and temple parts. So, the locals and the ward initiated to relocate it few metres apart in the square. Figure 13 shows the relocation of Ganesh temple and chaitya being shifted few metres back from the original position. Majorly the upper part of the temple was affected by the growing peepal tree branches and leaves inside the structure which covers upper portion completely. The temple was in verge of reconstruction till 2020 AD as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 11. Original position of Ganesh temple in Kwelachi

The reconstruction of the temple was carried out by the ward in 2020. As seen in Figure 11, while reconstructing temple, plinth height has been increased in the newly constructed one. Apart from it, other parts of the structure have been carefully constructed similar to the original one. However, the use of mortar seems to be cement in the newly constructed one. While shifting the structure from its original position (see Figure 11), the foundation works were kept intact. Only superstructure was removed from the original position. Figure 12 shows the reconstruction of the temple after shifting from its original position whereas Figure 13 shows the scenario after relocation of Ganesh temple and Chaitya in Kwelachi.



Figure 12. Ganesh temple after relocation



Figure 13. Kwelachi after relocation of Ganesh temple and chaitya

5. Conclusion

The case of Kwelachi in Lubhu demonstrates the relocation of two significant monuments of that area deeply woven into the socio-cultural and religious fabric of Newar community. Such lachi and open spaces serve as active spaces for communal interaction, rituals, festivals and daily worship. Yet, the present trend of road widening in the name of development and removing traffic congestion often leads to erase the historical and archaeological values and ethics while fulfilling modern urban pressure. The relocation of monuments such as chaitya and Ganesh temple reflects both traffic congestion and road safety and deeper compromise in authenticity, and design integrity. Errors in construction, loss of original proportion, inappropriate position of existing elements and reliance of contractor led process led to gaps in heritage management and conservation.

This case represents a wider pattern across Kathmandu Valley and many other places, where development is prioritized over safeguarding cultural landscape. The

exploration of alternate routes for road infrastructure could be a better way to keep the settlements and monument intact. For a sustainable planning, infrastructure planning must adopt heritage-sensitive approaches that safeguards historic urban fabric, active involvement of locals and communities in decision making and integrate the traditional construction techniques. Thus, towns like Lubhu can adopt to modern needs without losing cultural values and the historic existence.

References

- Ebbe, K. (2009). Infrastructure and heritage conservation: Opportunities for urban revitalization and economic development.
- Maharjan, P. S. (2020). *Development-destruction-dilemma: Assessment of socio-cultural impacts of road widening projects in traditional settlements of Kathmandu valley study reference sunaguthi* [Masters in Urban Design and Conservation Thesis]. Khwopa Engineering College.
- Roka, S. (2024). Balancing development and heritage conservation in Nepal: An analysis with reference to legal and policy framework. *Unity Journal*, 5(1).
- Samiti, S. G. (2023). *Smarika: Lubhu mahotsab 2054* (2nd Edition) [Commemorative Publication]. Office Support Service Center Chhapakhana Pvt. Ltd.
- Shrestha, O., & Joshi, R. (2012, November). *Lubhu ya abhilekh muna* [Collection of historical inscriptions]. Newaah Samskriti Sarshyan Samitee.
- Shrestha, R. B. (2020). *Lubhu ya mahalaxmi jatra* [Cultural and Historical Documentation]. Dots Printing House.
- Tao, R., Chen, P., & Aoki, N. (2025). Conceptual changes and controversies in rural historical building relocation in China under the heritage adaptive reuse discourse. *Built Heritage*.
- Thapa, S. (2022). Lubhu, a traditional town- potential for conservation and development [Conference Paper]. *11th IOE Graduate Conference*, 11.
- UN-Habitat & Lumanti Support Group for Shelter. (2021, January). *Lubhu heritage recovery plan documentation* (Heritage Recovery Plan) (Technical Report). United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and Lumanti. Kathmandu, Nepal.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons “Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International” license.

