

Lubhu a Traditional town - Potential for Conservation and Development

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Abstract

Lubhu is a small Newari settlement which is about 6-Km east of Mangal Bazar, Patan. This settlement still shows the strong historical and cultural characteristic. Presently it is facing same problems of other traditional settlement of Kathmandu Valley. The settlements have various cultural as well as architectural elements which are today degrading due to modernization, negligence and lack of awareness regarding its importance. Apart from that settlement well known for their specialized production of Textile is in a serious degeneration due to decline in economic shift. Also it is under threat of diminishing service center role. In other words, the settlement is under the grip of limited economy. Degrading living condition is reflected by lacking of water supply, sanitation and unplanned housing.

So in this context the conservation of Lubhu can be carried out to preserve the historical and architectural importance and at the same time analyze the possible approaches for its Development. The situation analysis on physical, cultural and economic areas helped to know the settlement from different aspect. Similarly, participatory planning process of conservation would bring different areas and stakeholders into policies and conceptual plans would be more fruitful for further implementation and interrelationships. Finally, the study arrived with the policies and conceptual plans for conservation and development covering capacity building, plans regarding socio-cultural, economic areas and infrastructures. It is hoped that the study will be beneficial to the community and those who want to undertake further research in the area.

Keywords

traditional settlement, textile city, conservation, development, conceptual plans

1. Introduction

With the advancement in technologies, the way of living of the people changed all around the world. The lifestyle of the people has changed thus changing the form of the city as well. The functions of the places have been changing in order to accommodate the needs of people. The once use to be the image of the city has transformed, or being deteriorated due to recklessness or say due to the busy modern routine of the people. Thus, the once active city is now being dead or malfunctioning. Thus, it is believed that to maintain the image of the city these unique monuments, places, streets, spaces have to be conserved.

“Urban Planning as a subject embraces wide range of urban issues. It is not just concerned with the creation and development of new towns and cities for new communities but at the same time have to deal with ones that already exist and might be losing its past

characteristics and glory” (Shakya, 2009).

In Nepalese context, the emergence of modern era after the downfall of Ranas in 1950 and the subsequent change in the functional role of Kathmandu Valley towns have resulted into a clear distinction between growing city and the declining towns. Despite having vast potential to grow again, characteristically, the rapid growth of main valley towns in terms of concentration of economic and socio-political development, witnessed the slow decline of traditional, economically active, peripheral towns like Thimi, Lubhu, Sankhu, Bungmati and so on.

In this context, this study is carried out mainly to see and assess the potential for conservation and to provide a conceptual framework for the development along with strategic recommendations.

1.1 Problem statement

Looking at the present scenario, with the modernization of the area, the livelihood and life style of the local people is changing, this could be well reflected by – changing process of occupation, reduction in agricultural land holdings, increase in settlement, land pooling, new building and built form, increase use of modern amenities etc. This certainly has created development pressure in Lubhu with infrastructure service deficit, poor waste management, poor road condition and many buildings are not in a habitable condition.

In the early days, when textile business was in boom, Lubhu was a prosperous town. But in due course of time, the textile industries are in verge of decline. The traditional planning of street is being more congested due to increase in population and high traffic of vehicular as well as pedestrians. This is affecting to the cultural phenomenon (both tangible and intangible).

Lack of clear policy provision to guide conservation in traditional towns like Lubhu, have induced haphazard development in and around the settlement which have been the major threat to the rich cultural heritage. At present Lubhu seems a very old settlement without future promises. If some planning is not introduced immediately, the traditional image of Lubhu will soon disappear leading to degeneration of the historic town. The main objectives of the study are:

- To understand the characteristics of town in terms of its forms, functions & planning and to establish its importance in terms of its heritage or traditional values.
- To identify the elements related to urban conservation, issues, problems and prospects associated with the conservation and development of Lubhu.
- To analyze the conservation issues focusing on socio-cultural and economic aspects.
- To provide conceptual framework for the development through conservation along with strategic recommendations.

1.2 Conservation and Development – Theoretical Concept

“Conservation is the action taken to prevent from decay. The basis of historic building conservation is

established by legislation through listing and scheduling buildings and ruins, through regular inspections and documentation and through town planning and conservative action.” [1]

“The scope of conservation of the built environment, which consists mainly of historic buildings, range from town planning to the preservation of a crumbling artifacts.” [1]

Conservation means the maintenance of individual building, group of buildings and urban environment and their landscape elements. It involves the urban renewal process of improvement, adaptations and enhancement. Development is growth. It is transmission, which observes the three basic needs of our global society, which comprise justice, sustainability and inclusiveness. Development is changing with economic productivity and prosperity with new and more complex forms of social structure and organization.

“By definition it is the product of thinking, which in itself is a changing concept. ‘Development’ encompasses continuous ‘change’ in a variety of aspects of human society. The dimensions of development are extremely diverse, including economic, social, political, legal and institutional structures, technology in various forms (including the physical or natural sciences, engineering and communications), the environment, religion, the arts and culture.” (Sumner, 2007)

2. Study Area



Figure 1: Study Area - Location Map

2.1 Geographical Location

These 700 years old traditional Newar settlement situated at tar land and lies around 6km east from Patan Durbar Square. It is located at 85°24" east latitude and 27°39" north longitude. It covers an area of 7.45 km² and the elevation ranges from 3203 ft. at Godavari River (Wakhu) to 5208 ft. at Dhungakhani. It is surrounded by Siddhipur (Sanagaon or Thasi) to the west, Tikathali VDC to the NW, Sirutar VDC to the north, Lamatar to the east and Godamchaur to the south.

2.1.1 LUBHU - Historical Background

Lubhu passed through many prosperous stages and declines. A shortest route linking Patan and Panauti (Kabhre) passes through Lubhu and it also has served as a market center for its hinterland. From past history, it was understood that almost cent percent households in Lubhu had traditional handloom for textile production. Weaving was the primary occupation since Malla period, therefore also known as Textile Town. [2]



Figure 2: Mahalaxmi Temple

2.1.2 Lubhu as a Planned Settlement

Ideally, urban settlement of malla towns was planned in religious context. Similarly, Lubhu also consists

of a crossing of main roads with each of its related town district representing the elliptical shape with four entry points with gates. The Mahalaxmi/ Mahabhairab temple is placed at the central and core parts of the settlement providing the significance of the area.



Figure 3: Traditional Hand Loom

The main roads passing through East- West and North – south as well as the location of the ghat (funeral area) at the North West side and the plenty of agricultural land showed the characteristics of planned Newari settlement.

3. Analysis and Findings

Even though the settlement is well pre planned in terms of forms and function, but the current scenario shows that the traditional values has been declined because of the priority to the modernization. This is due to the lack of awareness of the local people about our traditional techniques, materials and the concepts. This is causing changes in various aspects which are described below.

3.1 Changing Scenario (Physical Aspect) - Change in Built Form

According to field observations, previous documents and interview with local people following change are taking place:

3.1.1 Changes in traditional structures

- Vertical division of houses- property division between brothers
- Addition of floors-expansions of families

- Change in space use- Change of Skyline-Construction of 5-6 storey buildings
- Change in material- Patis are also converted into R.C.C structure.
- Changes in openings-wooden door windows replaced by UPVC and aluminum
- Replacement of traditional structures with modern constructions
- Dominance of modern concrete buildings is slowly changing the architecture of the city.

3.1.2 Expansion of Settlement

- Settlement of Lubhu has expanded beyond its traditional boundary demarcated by 4 gates.
- Agriculture fields being converted to land pooling areas.
- Many elites and professionals have started to live in newly planned areas.



Figure 4: Land-Use Changes

3.2 Changes in Cultural practices

Dhime Guthi participating less numbers due to insufficient remuneration from land declination government policy of Guthi Raitani i.e. fragmentation after conversion of guthi land into private land, is one of the main reason for its declination. Grant available for the jatras from Guthi Samsthan and Malpot (Revenue office) had remained the same over the year.

4. Issues in Planning Level and recommended Strategies

The issues regarding planning level are categorized into three areas. They are Physical, Socioeconomically and cultural. Their problems, impacts and possible strategies are listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

4.1 Institutional Arrangement and Strengthening

The success of concept of conservation and development largely depends upon the financial capability of local institution. In our case, the success of conservation concept for Lubhu will also be dictated by the VDC’s capacity for resource mobilization to generate additional finances through various taxing system. Some of possible measures that could be used to mobilize resources are given below:

- Improvement of existing taxing system: -
- Tap Individual Resources
- Involve Private Sector

4.1.1 Government level strategies:

- Make arrangements for easy access and subsidy in loans for weaving.
- Impose tax on foreign cloths to protect domestic industries.
- Make yarn and chemical for dying VAT free.
- Make compulsion on local weaved cloths for government service holder.

4.2 Stakeholder Responsibilities and Roles

The stakeholder responsibilities and roles are listed in Table 4.

Table 1: Issues in Planning and Strategies: Physical Aspect

| S.N. | Problems | Impacts | Strategies |
|------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Saturation of land area and infrastructures in core area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haphazard development along the fringe area without planning and services • Encroachment of traditional buildings and monuments through modern structures • Loss of agricultural land | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of New settlement for future. • Set land use Plan for protection of agricultural land. • Set bylaws to maintain the traditional constructions |
| 2 | Urban fabric with no respect to traditional architecture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degradation of historic outlook • Imbalance in skyline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain urban renewal works by setting up minimum housing standards. • Enact special bylaws to check unwanted growth |
| 3 | Poor sanitary, drainage system and solid waste management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhealthy living environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of underground water drainage in narrow roads • Designation of areas for solid waste dumping |
| 4 | Inner core in slum condition (no private toilets in each household & lack of management of public toilets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhygienic living environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of public toilets • Awareness to locals |
| 5 | Vehicular movement within settlement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerability to the structure of monuments as well as traditional buildings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrianization of the core area • Vehicle route towards land pooling area |

Table 2: Issues in Planning and Strategies: Socio-economic Aspect

| S.N. | Problems | Impacts | Strategies |
|------|--|---|---|
| 1 | Decline in economic base like agricultural and weaving (due to haphazard settlement sprawl); Reduction in textile industry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational shift • Local economy severely affected | <p>For agricultural development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induce new technology to improve the productivity • Facilitate easy access to market <p>For economic development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location, historical and cultural advantage of the town for developing it as a tourist service center • Link tourism with the alternative employment • Skill training for existing technology needed for weaving to suit the modern demand • Promote cottage industry as an unique feature |
| 2 | Change of use value of space (drying of clothes in Patis, Garbage disposal in chowks) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of use value of space (drying of clothes in Patis, Garbage disposal in chowks) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revival of spaces according to its use and emotional value (through different degrees of intervention) |

Table 3: Issues in Planning and Strategies: Cultural Aspect

| S.N. | Problems | Impacts | Strategies |
|------|--|--|---|
| 1 | Significance and importance of Fortified wall and Gates are disappearing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of historical evidences • Loss of traditional values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalization of fortified walls and gates • Promoting it for cultural tourism |
| 2 | Declining status of traditional private houses, patis, sattals, temples etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of authenticity & sense of place | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of traditional facades around the chowk • Restoration of design elements like Pati, chaityas, Hitis etc. |
| 3 | Jatra route with deteriorated pavement & drainage on both the sides | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degradation of historic culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paving the entire “Jatra Route” and neighborhood courtyards with stone |
| 4 | Traditional culture playing indigenous musical instruments in pace of extinction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of tradition & culture of the indigenous community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward system to prevent extinction |
| 5 | Unmanaged space for funeral process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rituals not being followed in proper way | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovation of ghat area with restoration of street facade |
| 6 | Bihar not retaining its character & not in milieu with the settlement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of identity of the area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design in harmony with traditional setting of place |
| 7 | Ponds in declining states | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of identity of settlement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation of remaining ponds through timely maintenance |

Table 4: Stakeholder Responsibilities and Roles

| S.N. | Stakeholder | Responsibility | Roles |
|------|---|---|--|
| 1. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Municipality b) User’s Committees c) Tourism Development Committee d) CBOs, INGOs, NGOs e) CIUD, UN-HABITAT, Water Aid | Improvement of physical condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) collects revenues, issues building permits, coordinate line agencies, makes channel from community to government level b) Awareness, Motivation c) making contacts for tourism development with government, donor agencies and private sectors d) Training. Skill development, Group formation, Entrepreneurship, Saving & Credit e) Maintenance, community participation |
| 2. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Social Action Volunteer / Nepal (SAV/N) b) Tourism Development Committee | Improvement of socio economic condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Training for women in sewing, netting, fabric painting and dress designing b) Awareness and trainings |
| 3. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Guthis and Dewalis b) Department of archaeology | Improvement of cultural condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Conduct rituals, preserves religious affairs, historical and cultural activities, management of Guthi land b) Budget allocation for heritage needing immediate restoration, cost estimation, plans and programs for conservation c) Technical support (from DOA) i.e. dating, recordings, approval of conservation plans |

5. Proposed Concept for Development

The development of old Lubhu Town through conservation has been conceptualized in two-fold development plans.

5.1 Concept for Physical Development Plan

- A ring road is proposed to connect the peripheral hinterland so as to increase the economic linkage and act as a service center.
- A bypass road has been proposed along east-west direction of the town, which could ultimately be developed, as the bypass road linking Banepa, Lubhu and Panauti.
- The immediate surrounding areas covering north –east- south are proposed for residential development. It should be developed as high-density low-rise residential areas. The current trend of residential sprawl needs to be checked and regulated.
- The southwest peripheral areas are proposed for the development of small cottage industry based upon weaving activities using power looms.
- The northwest part could be developed as institutional area as the trend is already visible with the emergence of number of institute viz. German Technical School, Land of Don-Bosco Higher Secondary School.
- The fertile low land of southwestern part of the town is proposed for agricultural activities exclusively. This part has irrigation facilities and quite appropriate for vegetable farming. Strategies Suggested
- Enact the zoning ordinances with clear land use pattern, subdivision regulations. like widths and setbacks, Plot and block sizes provision for easement areas and provision of open spaces for high- density-low –rise residential development.
- A comprehensive building bylaws and code shall be proposed for this town.
- Minimum Housing Standards (traditional style) could be another strategy to ensure the minimum living standards.
- Land development programs should be used as a tool for regulated development.

5.2 Proposed Land Use map

New settlement is allocated to cater the new housing need of the area as well as to attract the outer population and developed it as a pure traditional town.

6. Conclusion

Lubhu is a typical, traditional & historic village with dominance of ethnic Newar community. The culture is the major spine of here to develop. By preserving the culture (intangible as well as tangible), Lubhu can be promoted as cultural tourism center. It has Potential of textile production which in current is in a pace of extinction. Infrastructural services which are not in proper condition needs to be maintained through participatory planning process -government should go in partnership with community, CBO's and VDC (Public private partnership). Conservation and development should not only foster economic aspects alone but has to do a lot more with religion-cultural values. Therefore, Conservation & development should go hand in hand.

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