

Impacts of Urbanization on Intangible Cultural Heritage: A case of Rato Matsyendranath Rath Jatra

Dipesh Pradhan ^a, Sudha Shrestha ^b

^{a, b} Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Pulchowk Campus, IOE, TU, Nepal

Corresponding Email: ^a 074msurp007.dipesh@pcampus.edu.np, ^b ioe.sudhashrestha@gmail.com

Abstract

Nepal with diverse ethnicity and culture has rich inherited heritage. Newari culture is one of the richest ethnic societies with invaluable heritage passed on by past generation. Like tangible heritages, the society is filled with immense culture of intangible heritages. From the culture of music, dance, arts, architecture, cuisine, to composite intangible heritage like festivals; it is abundant. Amongst the festivals, Rato Matsyendranath Jatra in Patan takes an invaluable place in Newar people. It has a long dated history and still the charm of this festival is immense. Urbanization of the valley on the other hand has greater impact on every sector of human lives including heritage. Due to rapid and haphazard urbanization the Jatra is exposed to its vulnerabilities and also reinforcing qualities. This research is based on field observation and interview with related key informants. Thus this research lies within pragmatic paradigm. Field observation was conducted, required photographs were taken meanwhile questionnaire were developed, interview with key informants were conducted to extract views of people about impact urbanization has on the festival. Analysis of collected information was done. Road condition on which the Jatra is taking place is in damaged condition; open spaces were being converted into spaces like parking and extension of retail stores; Chowks were barred with railing that squeezed the Jatra route; state of buildings was poor while there was increase in business of both formal and informal sector. Primarily space crunch can be seen as the factor that was impacting negatively on the festival. Besides, consequences of haphazard development are putting Jatra under threat. Similarly, we can find that the Jatra is a good resource of economic activities.

Keywords

Intangible Cultural Heritage, Urbanization, Rato Matsyendranath Rath Jatra

1. Introduction

Nepal is country rich in terms of cultural diversity, with more than one hundred ethnic and caste groups where more than 92 languages and dialects are spoken [1]. Grimes claims even more, 126 spoken languages [2]. Dahal classified the people of Nepal into five major categories: Castes originating from Hindu groups; Newars; the ethnic groups or janajati; Musliims and Others [3]. Tulsi and Chura Mani claims that the indigenous people of the Kathmandu valley are Newars who follow Hinduism and/or Buddhism who are classified into 40 distinct cultural groups all of which speaking common language Nepal Bhasha [4]. Tulsi and Chura Mani has distinguished Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) into Oral Folklore; Performing Folk Arts; Customary Folklore and Material Folklore [4]. Languages have been the

carrier for the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Out of 92 spoken languages, 14 are spoken by more than one lakh people in Nepal and categorized as major languages of Nepal, out of which Newari language falls under the category [1]. In Nepal, rituals are life-cycle related activity of people while festivals relate to annual lunar cycle and agricultural calendar. (Tulsi and Chuda Mani, 2007). Bel Bibaha is the symbolic marriage of young girls to nature. Various songs and dances are performed for the rain and agricultural prosperity, such as Bhoto Jatra and Indra Jatra; for the well-being of the children, Ghode Jatra is conducted in Kathmandu Valley. Traditional arts and crafts are unique examples of material folklore, as distinguished by Glassie who explains when pleasure giving functions predominates, the artifact is called art while if practical function dominates, it is called craft [5]. Nepal traditional craftsmanship is closely related

to the caste system [4]. Traditionally various castes of the hill such as Kami “blacksmiths”, Damai “the tailors and drum beaters”, Sunar “the gold smiths” all came from the untouchable castes whilst a law in 1960s legally emancipated the lower castes they remain important tradition bearers in the villages, serving people by making and repairing agricultural tools, ornaments and clothes for men and women. In Newari culture, one of the most important elements in fostering the idea of shared community identity is the Jatras (festivals) conducted according to ritual calendar. There are a large number of jatra tours where godly images are carried on a chariot on a ritually prescribed route [5]. Some jatras are specific for certain communities; others may be performed in several Newar communities. Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley have maintained traditional ecological practices for millennia despite various ups and downs [6]. Pandey claims Kathmandu being the capital city of Nepal, has experienced rapid urbanization of over 6 percent population growth per year which is putting pressure causing the loss of 31 percent of agricultural land [7]. Global climate change has also seriously impacted the weather pattern of valley so farmers are facing problems adjusting the crop calendar [6].

2. Rato Matsyendranath Rath Jatra

It is one of the most important festivals of Newar particularly by the residents of Patan celebrated annually as national festival. The festival lasts for around a month. Feasting takes place at the four different locations of the traditional route in Patan, with elaborated feasting in Lagankhel. The jatra ends in Jawalakhel by displaying the bejeweled “Voto” in the open field. The rath (Chariot) takes weeks to assemble and is done in Pulchowk, Patan. When the jatra ends, the chariot is dismantled and important parts of it is stored for the following year while in every twelfth year the chariot is assembled in Bungamati from where the jatra begins. Anderson claims the chariot is filled with the symbolic presence of the original Jyapu below the god’s seat, while Bandhudatta and Narendradeva are positioned one on each feet [5]. The bathing ceremony takes place at the Lagankhel platform annually attended by thousands of spectators [5]. The peepal tree in Lagankhel where the bathing ceremony is performed, symbolizes the deity’s mother and thus plays a vital role in the annual festival [5]. In this way the birth

rituals are performed, the tenfold initiation rites are performed. After these rituals are performed, the Matsyendranath is seated in the chariot bringing it from Bungamati to Pulchowk [5]. Besides, Patan Kumari is also brought in a procession to be present every day. Moving the rath needs hundreds of people and is filled with physical labor and tension and also violence fueled by consumption of toxic drinks. The immense size of the chariot and the mass of people dancing and singing loudly with loud music and wild spirit accompanying it cause many mishaps. The latest twelfth year celebration reported death of two people as bricks from a half constructed building fell upon them while struggling among the crowd for a better position to view the festival [5]. Others who do not involve in pulling the rath, provide water to the participants either volunteering or by splashing water from their houses.

Deducting from the present practice, the aspect of worshipping is associated with the provision of rain. The festival starts in Baishakh(April) a few weeks prior to the normal onset of the monsoon rains. The procession follows a ceremonially prescribed route with well-defined halting places, receiving the constant homage of the Patan people [5]. Finally, the chariots are brought to Jawlakhel. The jatra conveys the belief that link the fate of the country to the jatra for it has the capacity to real what is previously unknown. The jatra is instrumental in that it brings rain; it does not merely symbolize the coming of the monsoon, but it actually brings rain [5].

3. Urbanization

Nepal is one of the ten least urbanized countries in the world and is also one of the top ten fastest urbanizing countries [8]. UN DESA in 2014 revealed that the level of urbanization was 18.2 percent and a rate of urbanization at 3 percent with 1.9 percent of urbanization rate projected for the period of 2014-2050 [9]. Kathmandu valley, Pokhara valley, the inner terai valleys account for the high urban growth in Nepal while urban growth centers are also emerging close to the border with India [10]. 33.5 percent of the urban population is concentrated in 16 urban centers with disproportionate distribution [11].

Kathmandu Valley is the most densely populated urban area and one of the fastest growing urban agglomerations in South Asia [10]. According to Muzzini and Aparicio, in 2011, annual population

growth was high in the peripheral municipalities of kirtipur (5percent) and Madhyapur Thimi (5.7percent), a substantial land use change in Kathmandu valley. With 3.94 percent urban growth rate between 2010- 2014, the valley is having significant transformation of land use and heritage. Population growth in peri urban areas in 2011 was also high at 4.8 percent per year.

In 2011 census, the population of Kathmandu Metropolitan City was 1,003,285; updates to 1,142,000 and projects a population of 2030 to be 1,855,000 [1] [9] . Kathmandu valley has 29 percent of the country's total urban population, with Metropolitan city alone accounting for 22.2 percent [11] . However, the addition of 133 municipalities by 2014 drops it to 24 percent with metropolitan city alone accounting for 9.7 percent. The percentage of the total population residing in Kathmandu Metropolitan City in 2015 will be 4.2 percent, rising to 5.6 percent in 2030 [9].

With the change in structure of government, the creation of new municipalities occurred; decentralization of urban governance trend appears as evidenced by the formation of the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KDVA) and the implementation of the Local Governance and community Development Program [8] . It has responsibility for planning, development, enforcement of regulations and coordination of over five urban local bodies and 99 VDCs in Kathmandu Valley.

4. Methodology

The research will be located in the paradigm in which the research purpose can be fully achieved and will be considered as the appropriate paradigm that is the best fit to explain the research. Positivists aim to test a theory or describe an experience “through observation and measurement in order to predict and control forces that surround us.” [12] Post positivists’ work from the assumption that research is influenced by number of well-developed theories apart from, and as well as, the one which is being tested [13] . Transformative researchers believe that inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and political agenda and contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live and the researcher’s life [14] . Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy or reality. Pragmatist

researchers focus on the what and how of the research problem [14] . Interpretivist approaches to research have the intention of understanding the world of human experience [15] , suggesting that reality is socially constructed. The Interpretivist researcher tends to rely upon the participants’ views of the situation being studied [14] and recognizes the impact on the research of their own background and experiences. The ontological perspective of this research is based on relativism that includes local and specific constructed realities. The epistemological perspective is transactional and subjectivist. The methodology is hermeneutical and dialectical. The constructivist researcher is most likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods and analysis or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data may be utilized in a way which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description.

The research is designed through Ethnography and Phenomenology. The emphasis in ethnography is on studying an entire culture. It provides rich, complete insights into people’s views and actions, as well as the nature of the location they inhabit, through the collection of detailed observation and interviews. Phenomenology research will be done to describe the lived experience of the people under investigation. This is necessary to study as it is the phenomenon happening in their live setting.

5. Study Area

The study area to explore the intangible heritage is taken from Mangalbar to Sundhara. On the second day of the chariot pulling, the chariot reaches at Managalbar. Usually the chariot is not rested in Mangalbar in past times, but due to long route from Ganabahal to Sundhara. There were instances that the chariot reached the destination very late. Various kinds of difficulties like the problem of light, injuries and fights took place. Due to this reason, the chariot is seated at Mangalbar and the next day again the chariot is pulled to Sundhara. Sundhara is a peculiar node of the route as from the myth it is told that the people from Bhaktapur tried to take the deity to their place but the farmer who participated in bringing the deity with ill intention out smarted the king of Bhaktapur and turned the chariot again inside Patan. Thus every year the chariot is rotated a half circle to divert from Bhaktapur. Several group of people from Bhaktapur come to Sundhara to worship the god. The

people of Bhaktapur celebrate and make feast on this day as they accept the deity reach Bhaktapur when Sundhara is reached. The study area covers both core settlement and settlement that is transforming into modern streets. Partly the peripheral region is under the Preserved Monument zone designated by the bye laws of Nepal 2075 and the peripheral areas like Saugali to Sundhara lie in Old Settlement zone.



Figure 1: Figure showing the study street section (yellow) of the route (red).

5.1 Urbanization scenario of the study area

Google maps of 2003 A.D. shows the sparse population with few open spaces inside the areas adjacent to the street and distinct green image reflects the greenery landscape in the city. Image of 2010A.D. shows increasing households and decreasing open spaces and greeneries. While the image of 2019A.D. more densified housing while the open spaces and green spaces are squeezed.



Figure 2: Figure showing the urban fabric in 2003.



Figure 3: Figure showing the urban fabric in 2010.

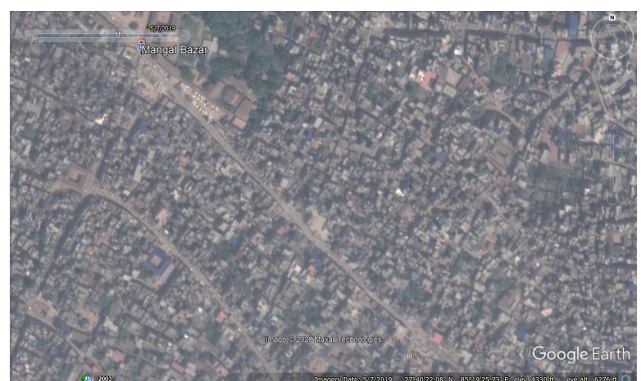


Figure 4: Figure showing the urban fabric in 2019 .

6. Observation and Data Analysis

6.1 Conversion of Open space to Parking Spaces

In Mangal bazar, space that used to be open is now barred with the railings and transformed into parking spot. This has impacted on festival. This has decreased the space for the chariot pulling purpose, the chariot pullers have to manage to pull from constricted space.

6.2 Road Condition and Traffic

During observation of the street, for the upcoming festival in coming 2 months, the road is in the bad condition. The road is usually pitched for the festival. The local resident, Mr. Rovich Maharjan explains during month of Chaitra of Nepali Calendar the government pitches road for the festival. This street connects Pulchowk to Ring road which is the reason why this street is very busy throughout day and all year. During festival time, the street is almost closed and traffic is diverted away from the place where chariot is placed.



Figure 5: Figure showing the damaged road condition in Saugal road.

6.3 Barring railings along the street line of Mangalbazar and Saugal

Local resident Ms. Shrestha claims that new construction of railings along the streets of Mangalbazar and at the junction of Saugal chowk has constricted the space for the festival. This has direct impact on the festival. Due to the railing bars, there is less flexibility during the pulling of the chariot. In the past, the area was without any boundary railings or any demarcating hindrances which helped chariot pullers to flexibly pull the chariot.



Figure 6: Figure showing the divider in Saugal.

6.4 Damaged buildings and the risks

After the earthquake of 2015 AD, a lot of buildings along this street are under severe damaged condition with rakers support. Due to these rakers the street is further narrowed and damaged buildings are threat during festival.



Figure 7: Figure showing the condition of damaged houses.

6.5 Increase in business of both formal and informal sectors

Festivals are good event for people who has retail business. Mr. Mohan Shrestha, a retailer claims that his business is thrice more as normal day sales. He prepares all necessary goods specially targeted to people coming to festival. The festival increases the business in the route. Retailers take advantage of the time of festival to create more transaction. As Mr. Shrestha claims, even if his shop lies in 100-meter distance from Sundhara, his business is hyped during the festival. Festival has created upsurge in the business in and around the peripheral region of the street.

Also the business of informal sector is also impacted. Wherever the chariot stops for the day, street vendors take advantage of the location and set up shop for the next day. Fabrics, Foods, Electric goods, kids' toys etc. heavily transacted informal sector business. Usually these informal vendors bring cheap goods which are attractive deal for the buyers as explained by Mrs. Bobby Amatya, a local resident of Sundhara. Streets are highly congested during this. A lot of informal vendors and people who come to visit the chariot at the same time make the area congested but at the same time this is the purpose of festival and create joyful atmosphere, claims Mrs. Amatya.



Figure 8: Figure showing the informal vendors on the street.

7. Discussion

7.1 Negative side of Urbanization

7.1.1 Space Crunch

Due to increase in population, the daily activity done by the mass of people; the retailers claiming spaces in adjacent open space; and open spaces being used to deposit constructional materials has crunched the space for the functions of Jatra. Widened road are sure the aspect of development which brings numerous positive impacts on intangible heritage, but due to unplanned non-conservative stance of planning has put intangible heritage at verge of unprecedented pressure.

7.1.2 Displacement of Indigenous people and consequences

Gentrification has major effect on migration of people from the core area due to increased land value [16]. Owners claim they would give their house on rent if they are provided with price they cannot decline and they would themselves stay at cheaper alternatives. Meanwhile, the people of the core claim that displaced indigenous people has been slowly dropping out the social traditions like Guthi. Contrastingly the displacement of people has not much impacted the presence of people during festivals.

7.1.3 Haphazard Development and consequences

Due to haphazard development intangible heritage has been the victim. Electric and communication poles and wires has accounted its space disturbing the space for conducting functions of festivals. Unplanned development has led difficulty in conducting these functions. Securing boundaries in chowks like in

Mangalbazar and Saugal has impacted the space necessary for chariot to be run. This unthoughtful development strategy has brought difficulty in festivals.

7.1.4 Sanitation

Increasing problem of sanitation has been another problem for intangible heritage brought by the urbanization. Lack of proper management of solid waste and the attitude of people has been creating this pollution. Littering behavior of people; unmanaged drainage system; conversion of soft landscapes to hard are creating pollution in immediate surroundings. Immediate response to sanitation behavior by the municipality and attitude of people are the problems that are identified.

7.2 Positive sides of Urbanization

7.2.1 Upgrade Economic Activities

Festivals are good events where both formal and informal sectors of business flourish. People coming from various part of city involve in economic activities during the festival time. Retailers are found to have increased their economy by many folds compared to normal business days. Meanwhile, informal business activities also seem to flourish during the festival. This on the other hand, increase the job volume. Also with the increase in the business an employment the tax revenue is also increased for municipal body. With the increased revenue of the municipal corporation, it provides the opportunity to invest in local development of disadvantaged groups in Patan.

7.2.2 Social Harmony

Due to urbanization, influx of in-migrants is taking place. This has mixed the people of different backgrounds. During festival times, the informal sectors are flourished economically and the people who involve in this business are mostly in-migrants. There seems to be cultural harmony between people from different background.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Urbanization has both positive and negative sides over the intangible heritage. Since Newari culture have huge collection of heritage, and the urbanization that went rapidly over the past few decades; the tension

between urbanization and heritage is inevitable. Intangible heritage has deeply rooted value in Newar community. The negative impacts brought by urbanization would certainly revert the urban community. Unplanned spread of urbanization seems to affect intangible heritage greatly. Proper management of electric poles and wires, planning beforehand should be the priority when necessary. This shows the development seems to neglect the stance of conservation during development planning process. Similarly, sanitation shall be properly managed and maintained in the urban area. Before, during and after the festival the sanitation is huge issue in such communities who host the festival. Related stakeholders like Guthi and Municipality has to be actively involved in such cases.

On the other hand, proper planning strategy are to be planned in order to keep social harmony among the urban populace. Proper plans that can incorporate both conservation and the development in the strategy shall be made. The current haphazard growth of settlement has created dispute among the people. Proper zoning of the area shall be designated in order to stop encroachment of heritage space. Local government has to be proactive to stop the social misbalance.

From the positive point of view, the complex between urbanization and intangible heritage bring economic activity within the city. The sudden upsurge of economy is noted during festivals which is beneficial to business person, creates job volume and add revenue to government and local bodies. Having many festivals around the year, government can intervene so as to cover maximum economic gain from it.

References

- [1] Census info nepal 2011. online, 2011.
- [2] Barbara F. Grimes. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Institute of Linguistics, Texas, 2000.
- [3] D.R. Dahal R.R.D. Bajracharya, K.B. Bhattachan and P.K. Khatri. *Socio-Cultural diversity and Development*. UNESCO Kathmandu Office, 2005.
- [4] Chudamani Bandhu Tulsi Diwasa and Bhim Nepal. *The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Nepal: Future directions*. Number 14. UNESCO Kathmandu Office, 2007.
- [5] Poonam Gurung. Bungamati; the life world of a newar community explores through the natural and social life of water. Master's thesis, University of Bergen, 2000.
- [6] Rishikesh. Religion, rainfall and rice: Social-ecological interpretation of festivals in kathmandu valley, nepal. online, December 2018.
- [7] Milan Shrestha Asif Ishtiaque and Netra Chhetri. Rapid urban growth in kathmandu valley. environments, 2017.
- [8] Shivit Bakrania. Urbanization and urban growth in nepal. Gsdrc helpdesk research report, Univeristy of Birmingham, Birmingham,UK, 2015.
- [9] UN. Un desa. online, 2014.
- [10] E. Muzzini and G. Aparicio. Urban growth and spatial transition in nepal. Technical report, The World Bank, 2015.
- [11] mould. Ministry of urban development. online, 2015.
- [12] Z. o'leary. *The Eessential Guide to Doing Research*. SAGE Publications, London, 2004.
- [13] N. Mackenzie and S. knipe. *Research dilemmas: Paradigms, methods and methodology.*, volume 16. iier.org.au, 2006.
- [14] J.W. Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Pblications, Thousand oaks, 2003.
- [15] L.M. Louis Cohen. *Research Methods in Education*. Routledge, London and New York, 2007.
- [16] Palistha Bajracharya. Study of emerging gentrificationin core settlement: Case of patan. Master's thesis, Tribhuvan University, 2017.