

Formulating Time tested Knowledge of Urban Socio-Cultural Activities for Sustainable  
Spatial Risk Reduction; A Case Study of Kathmandu.

○ Roshan Bhakta Bhandari, Norio Okada

### **Introduction**

Kathmandu Valley, the capital city of Nepal is rich in its cultural heritage. Indigenous people of the valley, the Newars built the city with a religious symbolism giving the impression of a unique `Nepalese culture` alien to the values of the western modernity. The present trend of urbanization, however, is not properly sensitive to the traditional city plan and its unique features that considered how to deal with disasters such as earthquakes. At present Kathmandu is turning into one of the most vulnerable cities in the world from seismic disasters. The seismic record of the region suggests that earthquake of 8.2 Richter scale occurs roughly every 75 years and the next devastating earthquake is likely in the near future. In this context, the study is made to investigate about time tested knowledge inherent in vernacular technology and socio-cultural practices that contributed to seismic disaster risk reduction.

### **Methodology**

The research method adopted for the study is a mix of physical observation, interviews and questionnaire surveys. Field surveys have been conducted extensively to visit and study ritual routes, neighborhood spaces. People and their daily activities were observed, and the first author of this study attempted to shortly experience local people's life . Two traditional urban communities of the Wards 16 and 18 of Lalitpur Sub Metropolitan City within Kathmandu Valley were taken as the case study areas. The experience of living in local communities took place nearby the study area. All this gave the author

valuable insight into local socio-cultural practices. The field works included meeting with local women, elder people who live in accommodations with open residential courtyards, talking to local people in shops and out on streets. Interviews were conducted with key informants to know about the sequence of technological developments after past earthquakes and use of urban open spaces. A focused group discussion and mapping were carried out to identify suitable evacuation spaces and local amenities useful during disaster situations such as earthquakes.

### **Findings**

1. Socio- cultural practices do help in maintaining and conserving public open spaces like streets and courtyards. Open spaces like residential courtyards were used as temporary shelters during past earthquakes.
2. There is evidence that indicates possible linkage to disaster risk reduction, which is verified by key informants and experts. Local self help-based building construction practices in the past used technological means to cope with earthquakes.
3. Some local materials are known to have high salvage effects and to have worked well in quick recovery of neighborhoods after the huge earthquake (8.2 Richter scale) in 1934.
4. The ritual processions taking place around the city regularly at festive times is analogous to today's town watching. Conservation of such intangible heritage is necessary to keep urban common space and enhance community's capacity to cope with disaster risk.