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Kathmandu Valley: A Living Cultural Heritage City of Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Nepal is a country with a rich cultural legacy and diversified caste, ethnicity, language, and culture. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Kathmandu Valley lies at the foot of the Himalayas in Nepal. There are chariot celebrations, fairs, festivals, stone spots, art and architecture, and traditions everywhere throughout the day year in Kathmandu Valley. The Kathmandu Valley's rich and diverse cultural legacy is reflected in the immovable and movable buildings, artwork, and festivals there. The living heritage of the Kathmandu Valley is the result of thousands of years of constant evolution and adaptation. Living heritage is an enduring custom passed down from generation to generation. For many years, the guthi system has nurtured Nepal's physical and intangible cultural legacy via the community. The endowment property was used for religious rituals, humanitarian endeavors, and the preservation of cultural customs. This article strongly emphasizes the need for indigenous systems, traditional designs, native resources, local knowledge/skills, and traditional practices for the preservation and conservation of living cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) in place of modern technology. This article focuses on the study of tangible and intangible heritage through the case study of different valuable heritages in Kathmandu Valley. This research paper mainly concentrates on the roles and responsibilities of tangible and intangible activities for the effective conservation and management of cultural heritage in Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, developing such a strategy and mechanism focuses on the sustainability of the importance of living heritage in the Kathmandu Valley.

1. Introduction

Since 1979, the Kathmandu Valley has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a place of outstanding universal value for its living cultural heritage. According to records, the Kathmandu Valley had over 1100 government-registered monuments. In addition, the government listed more than 2000 festivals in the region (Corporation, 2015a). The valley,

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nestled in Nepal's Himalayan highlands, boasts over 130 remarkable structures. It attracts many Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims seeking spiritual fulfillment. Seven groups of monuments and structures, representing the full range of historical and aesthetic achievements for which the Kathmandu Valley is known throughout the world, serve as examples of the cultural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley. These seven include the Buddhist Stupas of Swayambhu and Bouddhanath, the Hindu temples of Pashupati and Changuarayan, and the three Durbar Squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur (Amatya, 1999, 2007, 2011a; Besana, 2019; Conference & Educational, 2003; Dangol, 2010; Greer, 1994; Hutt & Gellner, 1995). The core community of a living heritage site is the one that created it, has maintained it over the years, and will continue to do so in the future, adapting to change. The researchers assessed the values held by the core community and stakeholders, as well as the values that have evolved. The core community placed a high value on aesthetic and architectural elements. The term “*guthi*” comes from the *Sanskrit* word “*gosthi*,” which means “gathering” or “association,” with a particular emphasis on religious and socio-cultural values (Dangol, 2010; Toffin, 2005). A *guthi* is a collective formed by an individual or members of a family united by a common caste, patrilineal lineage, or specific geographical characteristics (Corporation, 2015a; Nepali, 1965). *Guthi* is the term for a property that a donor donates for religious establishments like monuments (Temples, Devasthanas, shrines, inns, rest homes), etc. as well as for other social, charitable, and cultural endeavors while renouncing his rights to it (Corporation, 2019; Sansthan, 2015; Subedi, 2022b).

In recent years, the concept of "Living Heritage" has been widely discussed. In 2003, ICCROM, as part of its Integrated Territorial and Urban Conservation (ITUC) efforts, launched a program focusing on Living Heritage Sites. The primary objective of this initiative was to emphasize the dynamic nature of heritage sites, highlighting their contemporary significance, the benefits they provide to communities, and their ability to actively participate in their ongoing conservation as authentic custodians of these landmarks. The program recognized the importance of preserving the living aspects that host various socio-cultural activities, considering them as equally important as the preservation of physical structures (ICOMOS, 2003; Jokilehto, 2006, 2009). The main objective of this article is to explore the importance of living cultural heritage in the Kathmandu Valley, while also examining the traditional methods used to ensure its sustainability through the case study methodology with multiple methods (Pradhananga et al., 2010; G. Tandon, 1995).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Culture, and Traditions of Kathmandu Valley

The culture of the Kathmandu Valley encompasses the collective beliefs, practices, and artistic expressions of its diverse inhabitants, blending Hindu and Buddhist traditions into a rich tapestry of heritage, while its traditions include rituals, festivals, and social customs that are passed down through generations, fostering community cohesion and preserving a unique cultural identity (K.C et al., 2019; KC et al., 2018, 2019). Deeply rooted in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, Nepali culture, with its ancient origins shaped by diverse ethnic groups, celebrated through vibrant festivals, renowned for intricate art and architecture, and revered worldwide

for its Himalayan peaks, serves as a source of national pride and identity while preserving a rich heritage for future generations (Singh, 2016).

As per the Guthi Corporation records, there are around 2300 state-run monuments or *rajguthi* in Nepal as a whole. *Rajguthi* or government-registered public monuments, are also considered state-run monuments and are administered and operated by the Guthi Corporation following the Guthi Corporation Act of 1976. Before the Guthi Corporation was founded, various government agencies were in charge of overseeing and running each monument (Corporation, 2015b; GoN, 1976; Govinda Tandon, 1995a). Among these, there are 650, 301, and 161 monuments in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur, respectively. Additionally, there are 1282, 309, and 422 intangible cultural assets (Jatra/festivals) in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur, respectively (Sansthan, 2015; Subedi, 2022b). It shows that more than 50% of the heritage is situated in the Kathmandu Valley. The 2015 earthquake damaged 753 temples, shrines, and monasteries around the country, according to the DOA (Corporation, 2019, 2020). 241 temples and shrines in Kathmandu, 73 in Bhaktapur, and 130 in Lalitpur were damaged as a result of the earthquake (Rawat, 2021). Similarly, 436 state-run monuments (temple, *Pati/Pauwa*, rest home, etc.) have reportedly been damaged as a result of the 2015 Gorkha earthquake. According to Guthi Corporation statistics. 152 of them sustained destruction and the remaining 284 sustained moderate damage. The number of state-run monuments that have been destroyed in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur districts, respectively, is 48, 6, and 28. In addition, 89, 29, and 22 state-run monuments, respectively, have been partially damaged in the districts of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur (Corporation, 2019, 2020). The Kathmandu Valley's living legacy goes beyond its built environment. The Kathmandu Valley and its environment have a close connection to the local Newar population (Amatya, 2011a, 2011b).

Every day of the year, festivals, fairs, and celebrations are held in different regions, towns, and villages throughout Nepal. In the Kathmandu Valley, despite the common misconception that only dancing takes place there, festivals, fairs, and markets are held throughout the year in Bhaktapur, the city of songs. Bhaktapur is also known as the Living Heritage City, City of Culture, Open Museum, and City of Devotees. The historic city of Bhaktapur is famous for its magnificent art, wonderful culture, exciting festivals, traditional dances, and the way of life of the local Newari people (Shrestha et al., 2020). During the field study of researchers in Bhaktapur there are so many cultural events in a day to day. A festival is a day that individuals from many castes and groups observe as a unique celebration on a certain day and date to honor various gods and goddesses via feasting, eating, dancing, and having fun. Many people get together to enjoy the celebration, journey, and festival known as *Melapat*. People of Nepal refer to a "*Jatra*," and often imply types of goddesses *Rathyatra*, *Khatyatra*, etc. Similarly to this, tradition refers to a variety of long-standing practices, traditions, and rituals (Amatya, 2011a, 2011b; GoN, 1989). A glimpse into a nation's culture, people, and lifestyle is often provided by its diverse array of festivals, fairs, and customs. These celebrations and traditions are prevalent in societies with robust and entrenched caste and

community structures and symbolize the pride, dignity, and status of the nation and its social groups (Amatya, 2011a, 2011b).

There are three main levels of festivals, fairs, and customs in Nepal: the national level, the multi-district and district level, and the city, town, and village level. For example, *Shivaratri* (*Mahashivaratri*), *Chaitra Dashain*, *Ramanavami*, *Bada Dashain*, *Lakshmi Puja*, *Maghe Sakranti*, *Phagu Purnima*, *Buddha Jayanti*, *Shravan Shukla Purnima*, and *Raksha Bandhan* are national-level festivals that can be observed. *Gaijatra* or *Janai Purnima*, celebrated in the Kathmandu Valley, *Panchdan*, celebrated by Buddhist pilgrims, *Ganesh Chaturthi* (Chatha), *Ghantakarna* (it is more related to Newari culture: *Gatha: mo*) and *Dhanya Purnima* (Yohmari Punhi), celebrated on *Bhadra Shukla Chaturthi*, among others, are of great importance to the Newar community. Newar Community is one of Nepal's largest ethnic groups is the Newar. Beginning in the *Lichchhavi* era (5th to 9th century), the caste system first appeared in Nepal. King Jayasthiti Malla made an effort to sanitize religious practice in the Kathmandu valley in the latter half of the 14th century by enforcing caste rules and following Hindu law according to the *Manusmriti* code (Bista, 1991). Farmers in the Kathmandu Valley celebrate the *Ghantakarna/Gathamuga* festival, especially after planting, to purify and drive away ghosts, diseases, and other spirits from their homes and towns. The Terai community of Kathmandu Valley celebrates *Chhath Parba*, while the *Gurung*, *Sherpa*, and *Tamang* celebrate *Lhosar*, *Teej* (a religious Nepali woman celebrates *Rishi Panchami*), *Saraswati Puja* (Sri Panchami) and other festivals. Different communities celebrate *Lhosar* on different days. For example, the Tamang celebrate *Magh Shukla Pratipada* as *Sonam Lhosar*, the Gurung celebrate 31st December (*Nepali month of Paush 15*) as *Tamu Lhosar* and the *Sherpas* celebrate *Phagun Shudi Pratipada* as *Gyalpo Lhosar*. *Maghi* is a major festival celebrated by the *Tharu* community on January 15. They have marked the occasion with great fanfare and opulence, preparing alcohol, making liquor and fish dishes, and cooking sweet and savory foods such as bread. They also slaughter pigs, chickens, and ducks for the celebration. Traditional activities include eating sweets, dancing vigorously, bathing in sacred rivers, worshipping gods, and seeking blessings from elders and officials. It is customary to invite relatives, close friends, and daughters-in-law for dinner during this event (Amatya, 2011a, 2011b).

2.2 Major Festival in Kathmandu Valley

The political, economic, and administrative center of Nepal is the Kathmandu Valley. It is one of the fastest-growing urban regions in South Asia, with an average annual growth rate of 3.9% (K.C et al., 2019; KC et al., 2018). At the crossroads of several ancient Asian civilizations, the Kathmandu Valley is characterized by its compact urban structure, traditional planning ideas, rich architectural history, and diverse socio-cultural activities. Seven of Nepal's 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are located in the Valley (Amatya, 2011a, 2011b). Cultural heritage conservation involves legal frameworks, understanding cultural significance, physical preservation, documentation, community engagement, sustainable development, international cooperation, and risk preparedness (Reap, 2022).

Every year in the Bhaktapur Municipality, the traditional celebration known as Bisket Jatra (*also called Biska Jatra*) lasts from four days before the middle of April to nine days (Figure

1). The biggest *Jatra* observed in Bhaktapur is called *Biska Jatra* and *Vishwodhoj Jatra*. In the local language, it is also known as the *Chyacha Gunhuya Jatra*, which translates to "*eight-night and nine-day Jatra*," because it is celebrated for eight nights and nine days. Bhaktapur municipality and Thimi municipality will be responsible for supervising the placement of *Sri Bhairavnath* and *Bhadrakali* goddesses and goddesses in a pagoda-style artistic chariot during this chariot celebration. The deities are removed from their homes and reseated in the courtyard, rest home, etc. In this *Jatra*, various *guthi* communities are involved in various tasks as mentioned in the *guthi* archive (*Lagat*) (Amatya, 2011b; Corporation, 2020; Sansthan, 2021). *Guthi* derives its meaning from the *Sanskrit* word "*gosthi*," which means an "association" or "assembly that only focuses on religious, and socio-cultural values. In this sense, a *guthi* is a group that is created by individuals or members of a family based on caste, patrilineal affiliation, or territorial characteristics. A kind of community-based co-operative institution dedicated to religious and secular community activities for which land is allocated to generate revenue.



Figure 1: The Chariot of Bisket Jatra at Bhaktapur Durbar Square



Figure 2: The Chariot of Indra Jatra's (*Lingo Dhalne*) at Kathmandu Durbar Square

Source: Researcher field study March 2022-April 2024

The *Indrajatra (Yenya)* in Kathmandu is considered to be the "root celebration" of the city rather than merely one of the many festivals observed throughout the year (Figures 2 & 3). The festival is the most significant event in the city, and it includes a wide range of religious rituals, locations, and participants. The festival's two fundamental themes the unifying presence of monarchy inside an urban kingdom and the lasting presence of the city's ancestors among their urban descendants are supported by these spiritual components. By continually highlighting three ritualistic and symbolic elements that are found in many other *Hindu* religious acts, such as open street procession, the presence of many gods and goddesses, and the usage of iconic representations of these deities, items without obvious human form. This celebration is mostly run by the community and various *guthi* members (Baltutis, 2012; Sansthan, 2015; Studies, 1970; Studies & Studies, 2007). During the field study of the Ph.D. research, the researcher directly observes the different communities (*guthis*) involved in the fulfillment of this chariot. On the record of the *Guthi Corporation* archive (*Lagat*), ancestors donated the land in the name of *Indrajatra Bishowroop guthi* have the 26 ropani lands donated for the proper conservation of past legacy. Similarly, from the income of the *Swochandda Bhairab guthi of Indrajatra* (land 22.70 ropani), and *Linga guthi of Indrajatra* (land 154.5

ropani) *guthi* land belongs to use for the sustainability of the ancient *Indrajatra* culture, traditions. So from the discussion of *guthiyar* and observation, without the involvement and participation of different *guthi* not possible to conduct these festivals (Sansthan, 2015; Govinda Tandon, 1995b).



Figure 3: Indra Jatra's Kathmandu Durbar Square



Figure 4: The Chariot of Hadigaun Jatra at Kathmandu

Source: Researcher Field study March 2022-April 2024

According to Srizu Bajracharya (2020) *Handigaun* festival (*Jatra*), one of the earliest urban centers in the Kathmandu valley is today an almost forgotten place, recognized primarily during its festival (Figure 4). One of the most celebrated and joyful *Newar Jatra* is *Hadigaun Jatra* because of this, it is often referred to as "*Kahi Navako Jatra Hadigaun ma*" which means "*that festival only takes place in Hadigaun*". The *Hadigaun* people celebrate it primarily as a way to worship *Lord Vishnu*. The people of *Hadigaun* have conserved and encouraged this century-old ritual, which is also known as *Narayan Jatra* (Srizu, 2020). According to Guthi Corporation records, *Hadigaun Choktenarayan guthi* (land 65.643 *ropani*) actively participated in the management of all types of festivals on a daily, monthly, and annual basis. Numerous communities (*guthis*) and individuals are enthusiastically participating in close observation and have effectively executed this magnificent celebration so far (Scott, 2019; Srizu, 2020).

The *Rato Machhindranath Jatra*, often referred to as the *Bunga Dyah Jatra*, is an annual festival celebrated in the Lalitpur of Nepal. The festival honors *Rato Machhindranath*, the deity of rain and harvest. The festival is believed to bring prosperity and happiness to the Nepalese people. During the event, which lasts many weeks, a huge chariot pulling a statue of *Rato Machhindranath* is paraded through the streets. The chariot moves through the streets of Kathmandu. At the end of the festival, the chariot is pulled into the main square of the city (Pradhan & Shrestha, 2020; Pujari, 2014; Sansthan, 2015).

According to Guthi Corporation (2015) every year a magnificent 48-foot-long, 48-foot-high, 13-floor chariot is constructed using various types of wood and ropes, with each story representing a distinct meaning. During a conversation with the chief supervisor of the woodworkers, Mr. Dil Kumar Barahi, at the chariot construction site, it was revealed that the total height of the chariot reaches 65 feet from the ground to the top. The overall management of this project is overseen by 16 separate *guthis*, as documented by the Guthi Corporation and confirmed during discussions with *Guthiyars* during the field visit. During the field visit and discussion with *Rato Machhindranath* temple Paneju (Priest) Union President Mr. Yagya Ratna

Shakya, Mr. Anthony Shakya social activist of Bungamati Preservation Group, and Mr. Shahu Shakya (*guthiyar* of Machhindra *guthi*) and they explain the details of the temple (Amatya, 1994, 1999, 2011a, 2011b; Sansthan, 2015). Following are the routes and chariots of *Rato Machhindranath Jatra* (Figures 5& 6):

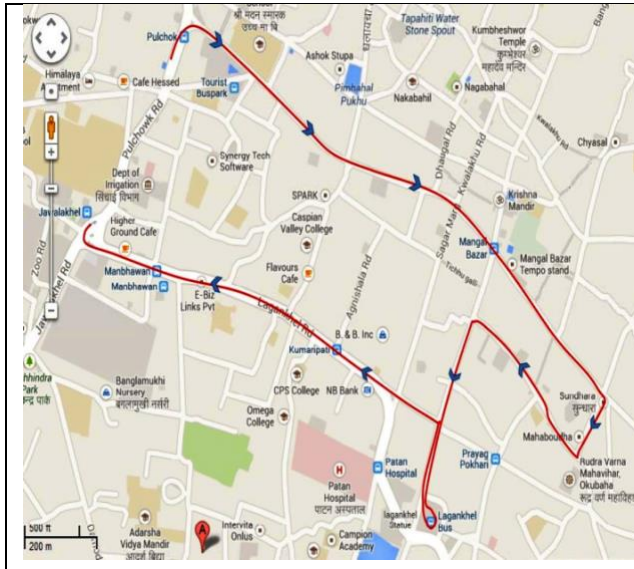


Figure 5: Rato Machhindranath chariot route



Figure 6: The First day of movement of the chariot from the Pulchowk

Source: Researcher Field study March 2022-April 2024

The numerous festivals, fairs, and customs practiced in Nepal's cities, towns, and villages are difficult to explain. Throughout the year, festivals, fairs, and other events take place in the Kathmandu Valley and nearby towns and villages. An example of a *jatra* is the *Satgaon* (seven village) *Jatra* which is observed in Satungal, Balambu, Thankot, Kisipidi, Kirtipur, Panga, and *Machhegaun*, *Mahalakshmi* and *Mahabhairav Jatra* in Lubhu and *Balkumari Jatra* in Thimi. Similarly Bode's Tongue Piercing Festival, *Pharping's Harishankar Festival*, *Sankhu's Bajrayogini Festival*, *Jatra of Pachali Bhairav*, *Jatra of Guheshwari*, *Jatra of Bhadrakali*, *Duimaju Devi Jatra of Bhaktapur*, etc. (Amatya, 2011b; Sansthan, 2015).

Every five to twelve years, a large fair is held at *Godavari Kund* in Lalitpur. Since traditions vary and are found in different regions, castes, religions, groups, and families, it is impossible to account for the customs of cities, towns, and villages. For example, during the *Gaijatra*, the Newars of Kathmandu are in the habit of eating *quanti*, which is made by combining nine different kinds of vegetables. On the day of the full moon, *Yomri roti* made of fresh rice is traditionally eaten. On the day of *Kumar Shashti Sithi Nakh*, it is customary to eat beef *bara*, *chatamari*, and rice flour bread. Festivals are usually held during *Bisket Jatra* in the towns of Bhaktapur, Thimi, Bode, etc. It is customary to feast at Patan during *Machhindranath's Bhoto Jatra*. Similarly, it is customary for several districts, towns, and villages to prepare and consume sweet delicacies in their unique ways during their major festivals and *jatras*. On *Sharawn Sankranti* (30th July) and *Maghe Sankranti* (29th January), *Kshetri/Bahuns* consume sweet foods throughout the entire Nepal (Amatya, 1999, 2011a, 2011b; Corporation, 2019, 2020; Sansthan, 2015; Scott, 2019; Subedi, 2022b).

2.3 Stakeholder's Involvement in the Conservation of Living Heritage

The primary actors in conservation efforts in the Kathmandu Valley are the government and the community. The government includes federal, provincial, and local authorities. Key organizations involved in heritage conservation in the valley include the Guthi Corporation under the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives, and Poverty Alleviation; the Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation; and municipal offices under the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. In addition, the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers oversees the enforcement of the Public Procurement Act and Regulations 2007. The Guthi Corporation focuses on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), while the Department of Archaeology (DoA) is responsible for tangible monuments. Further details are provided below:

2.3.1 Guthi Corporation

The Guthi Corporation is a federal organization of Nepal with socio-religious and cultural elements. It was established under the Guthi Corporation Act of 1976. The main objectives of the Guthi Corporation are to perform rituals and maintain activities that are useful, spiritual, historically important, and intangible cultural assets. The Guthi Corporation oversees and protects all of Nepal's assets, which are distributed among numerous traditional *guthi*. In general, Guthi Corporation deals with government institutions systematically and expeditiously, amending and merging necessary legislation as needed to establish more expedient and efficient policies. This promotes friendly interactions between members of different social groups and upholds the moral and ethical standards of the general public (Chapagain, 2008; GoN, 1976; Sansthan, 2015; Scott, 2019; Shakya & Drechsler, 2019; Studies & Studies, 2007; Subedi, 2022b; Govinda Tandon, 1995b; Tandon, 2020).

The Guthi Corporation has sole responsibility for the supervision and conservation of the entire *guthi* intangible heritage collection (Sansthan, 2015; Subedi, 2022a, 2022b; Subedi & Shrestha, 2023). There are about 2300 state-run monuments in operation, including *amanat guthi*, which is managed by the Guthi Corporation, and *Chhut guthi* managed by the concerned Shrine/Math (Corporation, 2019; Sansthan, 2015; Subedi, 2022b). According to the records of Guthi Corporation, in the Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur districts, the total number of state-run monuments is 650, 301, and 161 respectively (Corporation, 2019; Sansthan, 2015; Subedi, 2022b). Among the Rajguthi (state-run) monuments The Guthi Corporation Act of 1976 declared that the Guthi Corporation is primarily responsible for the overall management of intangible activities (GoN, 1976; Sansthan, 2015).

Among the list of intangible heritage, major festivals held in Kathmandu are:- *Indrajatra*, *Hadigaon's Jatra of Choktenarayan*, *A journey to find Hadigaon's jewels*, *Jatra of Seto Machindranath*, *Sankhu Vajrayogini pilgrimage*, *Pharping Harishankar Jatra*, *Tokha's Chandeshwari Jatra*, *Journey to Gangamai*, *Terri Jatra* and the *Guheshwori Jatra*, etc. Similarly, In Lalitpur district are:- the *Jatra of Rato Machindranath* and *Minnath*, *Khat Jatra of Balakumari*, *Chaitra Masanta*, *Sri Taleju Bhavani's Khat Jatra*, *Bhimsen Jatra*, *Pilgrimage of Harisiddhi*, *Harisiddhi's 12-year journey*, *Khadga Jatra*, *Thecho Navadurga Jatra*, *Twelve-*

year-old *Thecho Navadurga Jatra*, *Khokna Rupayani Jatra*, *Bhola Ganesh Jatra*, *Jatra of Bungamati Hygriv Bhairava and Manakamana*, *Sunakothi Balakumari Jatra*, *Pilgrimage of Thecho Vramhayani*, *Lubhu Mahalakshmi Jatra* and *Vajravarahi Jatra*, are the major *Jatra*. As per the Guthi Corporation and Lalitpur Metropolitan City, and another local level of Lalitpur districts record; the total number of festivals/chariots/stonecraft and other festivals is more than 200 number. In the Bhaktapur district festivals are:- *Bisket Jatra*, *Gaijatra*, *Mupatra Indrajatra*, and *Changunarayan Jatra* (GoN, 1976; Sansthan, 2015; Subedi, 2022a, 2022b; Subedi & Shrestha, 2023). Through these *Jatra* celebrations, the identity and unity of our many cases, faiths, cultures, civilizations, and nations have been enhanced. The visual and performing arts of Nepal have effectively marketed our country overseas. Both people and tourists value Nepal's religious and cultural celebrations. As a result, there are a lot of visitors present during the *Jatra*.

During the *Jatra* celebration, it has been observed that the locals repeat prayers in various temples and shrines, sing to their loved ones, and invite their neighbors over for a feast. Similar to this, the *Jatra* era is filled with the chanting of numerous gods and goddesses. When *Jatra/Parba* is celebrated, people dress up in various traditional outfits; play a variety of instruments, sing, and dance. They also parade about the city with idols (statues) of goddesses, chariots, and *jatra*. It has been observed that the pilgrims occasionally engage in loud behavior while having fun, which leads to conflicts.

2.3.2 Department of Archaeology (DOA)

DOA has a significant role and responsibility in the conservation of living heritage, especially for tangible heritage. They are responsible for ensuring that the rights of local communities and other stakeholders are taken into account when making decisions about cultural heritage, involving local communities in the conservation of living heritage, conducting research, curating artifacts and sites, and educating the general public about the importance of cultural heritage. The DOA is the government agency responsible for the conservation of tangible cultural heritage in Nepal. This includes both tangible heritage, such as monuments and artifacts, and intangible heritage, such as traditional knowledge and practices. The DoA's role in the conservation of living heritage includes (GoN, 1956, 1989; Shrestha, 2008, 2016):

- Identifying and documenting living heritage sites and communities
- Raising awareness of the importance of living heritage among government officials, local communities, and the general public
- Developing and implementing conservation plans for living heritage sites
- Providing technical assistance to local communities in the conservation of their living heritage
- Promoting the sustainable use of living heritage

The DoA works to preserve the local communities' cultural heritage while also advocating for their rights to voice their opinions. This is important because the identity and culture of local communities are often deeply intertwined with their living heritage. Without their

involvement, conservation activities are less likely to be effective. The primary piece of law for the conservation and management of cultural heritage (primarily tangible) and archaeological remains/objects in Nepal is the Ancient Monument Preservation Act (AMPA), passed in 1956.

The preservation of tangible heritage is the responsibility of the Department of Archaeology, the municipalities, and the ward offices. The preservation of temples, monuments, and historic buildings is the responsibility of the Department of Archaeology, a central government department. During the discussion of Chief Archaeology Officer of the DOA said that *“DOA is the only department for the conservation and protection of temples, monuments and heritage structures that are more than 100 years old. Also, any residential buildings that are more than 100 years old need to get permission from this department before they can demolish or make any changes to their residential buildings. The intangible heritage does not come under the domain of DOA”*.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research is characterized by an inductive methodology in which theories and hypotheses emerge from the data collected, rather than being predetermined. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the subject matter, free from the constraints of predefined variables, making it particularly valuable for studying complex phenomena that quantitative measures may not fully capture (Creswell, 2007; Witkowski & Jones, 2006). It is a systematic and subjective method of understanding human behavior, experiences, perspectives, and social phenomena using primarily non-numerical data such as words, images, observations, and narratives. The goal is to uncover meanings, patterns, and relationships within the data, often emphasizing participants' context and subjective interpretations. This flexible and interpretive approach allows researchers to gain deep insights through techniques such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, content analysis, and ethnography (Bowen, 2009; Byrd, 2020; Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative research methods seek to understand human experiences, opinions, and behaviors through non-numerical data collection and analysis. Common methods include interviews, focus groups, observations, and desk research that gather rich, descriptive data. Data collection is flexible and adaptive, allowing for the exploration of emerging themes and insights. Researchers interpret data from their perspective, which requires a reflective approach to methodology (Wilson, 1998).

Through an extensive review of existing literature, including historical documents, academic papers, and government reports, researchers seek to capture the historical evolution and functioning of living heritage in the Kathmandu Valley. The use of various research methods such as observational techniques, thematic analysis, open-ended questionnaires, key informant interviews, and qualitative approaches facilitates the researchers in acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the significance of the *guthi* system in heritage conservation and management. Collaborative research partnerships involving local communities, academic institutions, and heritage organizations enable co-design of research agendas, promote knowledge sharing, and foster mutual learning. This approach ensures that research outcomes are relevant, accessible, and beneficial to all stakeholders. Multi-method qualitative approach

used for the data were collection, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, from a living sacred site of the Kathmandu Valley (Denzin, 2009; Togia & Malliari, 2017; White, 2011).

4. Result and Discussion

According to this study, using various research methodologies such as inductive reasoning, case studies, historical analysis, field observations, and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders including members of *guthis*, residents, experts, scholars, archaeologists, and historical documents, it becomes clear that the functioning of this chariot depends heavily on the active participation of various *guthis*, *guthiyars*, and local communities. Through this study, it is evident that Nepal has established a systematic mechanism since ancient times to ensure the sustainability of such *jatras*. The fact is that ancestors developed the caste systems to run their daily socio-cultural system. Due to different reasons, many communities have been forgetting such indigenous systems, traditions, and customs and the state has started managing these precious heritages and created different laws and policies to regulate them systematically.

The *guthi* system facilitates the transmission of traditional knowledge and skills related to heritage conservation from one generation to the next. This ensures the continuity of traditional crafts and techniques that are essential to the maintenance of cultural property. Balancing tangible and intangible heritage through *guthis* have traditionally focused on preserving tangible heritage such as buildings and monuments. However, *guthis* also help preserve intangible heritage associated with rituals, festivals, and community traditions. This holistic approach ensures comprehensive protection of the Kathmandu Valley's cultural heritage.

Similarly, research indicates that there are numerous national and international policies related to heritage conservation that often overlap and conflict with each other. Consequently, adverse consequences may arise from such policy overlaps. Therefore, the government must formulate effective policies aimed at proper management of the cultural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley. During this occasion of such kinds of priceless activities, people congregate to celebrate their respective cultures and traditions. It is also a chance to honor the rain and harvest god, who is regarded as the protector and benefactor of the valley. Intangible cultural assets may provide funding and respectable employment for a variety of groups and people, including the impoverished and underprivileged. The cultural value and relevance of intangible cultural heritage must be taken into account, and communities, groups, or individuals must be actively involved in its protection and maintenance.

From the discussion point, the intangible heritage, which serves as a tree's root, is what enables the tangible heritage (Scott, 2019; Subedi & Shrestha, 2024). Thus, preservation encompasses both tangible and intangible history in a single basket. *Guthiyar* means a person who is entitled to enjoy the surplus income (*sheskasar*) of the *guthi* or operates the *guthi* and is the endower of a *Chhut guthi* or personal *guthi* or the heir to the endower, and the *Mahanta* and priest (*Pujari*) deputed in the yearly basis to a position of such a *guthi* (GoN, 1976). Many intangible heritages have been losing track of these unwritten traditions and practices for a variety of reasons and the state has begun regulating these priceless cultural legacies and developing various laws to rigorously govern. Being a party to various international charters

and treaties, the state or government is also required to recognize and abide by additional international laws on those conventions for the conservation and management of cultural heritage. However, there are many traditions, customs, norms, and values, and without these traditional ways of conservation and management is impossible to do anything for it. For example, from the beginning to the completion of the intangible heritage, more than a dozen different *guthi* communities are involved in their respective works. It shows Kathmandu Valley is the living cultural heritage city of Nepal (Subedi & Shrestha, 2024).

The living heritage of the Kathmandu Valley is under threat due to rapid urbanization and development. Some of the key challenges include: haphazard construction of multi-storey buildings encroaching on historic sites such as Durbar Squares, thereby diminishing their aesthetic value; conversion of heritage sites into slums due to lack of proper urban planning and public amenities; demolition of historic private houses by owners who prefer modern amenities over preservation of traditional architecture; unclear roles of various institutions involved in heritage management; lack of public participation in decision-making; and ineffective implementation of conservation policies (de Oliveira et al., 2024; Devkota, 2016; Maharjan, 2013).

The research suggests that in order to effectively preserve and maintain cultural heritage through traditional management systems such as *guthi*, it is essential to evaluate existing regulations and synchronize collaborative efforts (DeGeorges & Reilly, 2009; Martinez, 2016; Throsby, 2016; Turner, 2013). Based on the research, there is no separate law and agency for living cultural heritage as yet. In addition, there is no coordination mechanism between all the concerned authorities for the conservation and management of cultural heritage. In discussions with several respondents, Guthi Corporation is the major entity in the conservation and management of intangible heritage while DOA only focuses on tangible heritages. Finally, the sustainability of living heritage depends on the availability of budget, technical manpower, and overall organizational system/structure.

5. Conclusion

Based on the study, in Kathmandu Valley; daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly there are daily celebrations of *Jatra*, chariots, festivals, and traditions. Festivals also contribute to environmental change through collective action among people to people. It is necessary to include the World Heritage Sites as an entire Kathmandu Valley due to its richest culture (dance, fair, chariot, festivals, and many more events). Intangible heritage is the soul of tangible heritage and protects the cultural heritage, so cannot be isolated from each other. Living heritage connects social cohesion, unity, and cooperative culture among people. Intangible cultural heritage can be an important source of innovation for the expansion of human life because it is a living heritage. For the conservation of living heritage in Kathmandu Valley; create integrated policies and organization, ensure budgets, periodic maintenance plans and funds, etc. Develop localized rules based on the importance of tangible and intangible activities. Encourage a grassroots approach rather than a bureaucratic system for the maintenance and conservation of living heritage. Rejuvenate the *guthi* system and integrate it into educational curricula from elementary to advanced levels to ensure effective preservation and management.

Establish a living cultural promotion center to preserve and share knowledge of ancient customs and traditions such as jatra, art, artifacts and culture. Balancing heritage conservation with urban development requires policies to protect physical monuments and intangible cultural practices. Community engagement is essential to involve local people in heritage management. Building the capacity of heritage management authorities and professionals is critical, as are funding mechanisms for long-term conservation.

It is advised to strengthen Kathmandu Valley is itself a living cultural heritage city of Nepal. It might be able to mainstream the policy of cultural heritage protection and management with the contribution of the living heritage of Kathmandu Valley.

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