

EDITORIAL

There is palpable anxiety in the world. The rise of ISIL in the Middle East, expansion of gruesome murderers like Boko Haram in Africa and ceaseless shelling of civilian population in eastern Ukraine by own State has been keeping the global leadership on tenterhooks. And suddenly, the Himalayas shook on 25th April. The shaking was experienced from Chennai to China. Nepal bore the brunt. Thousands of lives have been lost and rehabilitation of millions is a challenge for the international community. Destroyed homes and villages are to be rebuilt from the scratch. The support poured from around the world. Humane face trumped over the evil face of religious terrorists. But, it will be a Herculean task to restore the ancient temples and cultural treasures.

The earthquake and after-shocks proved disastrous to the Newari architecture in particular. Nepal was world-famous for its architecture which emerged during the Newar –Malla rule before Gurkhas took over the Kathmandu valley in 1769. The three centres of Nepal's history and culture, Durbar Square in Kathmandu, Patan(Lalitpur) and Bhaktapur lies in ruin. Even the Dharahara Tower which symbolized Nepal's pride and unity, built by Nepal's first Prime Minister in 1832 has been reduced to a stump. The decapitation of Dharahara was analogous to the beheading committed by a samurai through the bushido honour code of seppuku. It was a suicide of Himalayan heritage and the Himalayan plate performed the bushido code. But, what lies in ruin, must stand tall once again.

Nepal, in fact, is the Himalayan Bridge. Till 4th century, it was under the suzerainty of the Gupta empire. It was at this time that Newars of Tibeto- Burman language group populated Kathmandu valley. The Licchavis established a Kingdom in the valley and Xuanzang has written a detailed account of the life in the valley. When the dynasty declined, Newari rule was established in 879 A.D. The Newaris engaged in a task of grand fusion. They cultivated Hindu-Buddhist culture. There was fusion of different language groups and Newari itself went into a major transformation by appropriating Sanskrit vocabulary and several Indo–Aryan dialects. Complementing cultural fusion, there was fusion of linguistic universes.

The Mallas continued the synthetic tradition and established three major politico-cultural centres at Lalitpur (Patan), Bhaktapur and Kathmandu. Gurkhas overwhelmed the divided Mallas. During Gurkha rule, there was significant decline of the unique Nepalese-Newarese culture of aesthetic fusion, this-worldly joy and ritualization of the human life.

It was the grounding during earlier Golden period of Nepal that inspite of presence of giant neighbours, Nepal stands united. The Newarese custom of Hindu- Buddhist fusion is evident from the myth-making regarding the origin of Nepalese inhabitants. While many claim the ancestry from as far back as Kerala (Nayar), several other claims the northern heights to be the originary home. There are different origin myths for the Kathmandu valley alone. While Buddhist claim it was a lake which was drained by the sword of Manjushri, the Hindus believe that the Gods descended from the Devapuri to live at the human plane. Kathmandu itself has two major centres- Swaymabhunath and Pashupatinath, for Buddhist and Hindus, respectively. But, both are venerated and visited by the adherents of two religions.

The fusion is more discernible in culinary sphere. In Nepal, *Ghasa* is a particular kind of food items which is ceremoniously displayed before the proper feast begins. These are characterized

numerically. *Nyataghasa* is five-item ritual arrangement of food; *cyataghasa* is eight-item based display and so on. The simplest is the five-item based and the most complex ghasa is 84-item based. There is unique correspondence between food item, and pantheons in Hinduism and Buddhism. In the first set of *Nyataghasa*, the five components and their correspondence are as follow: *Palu* (ginger) → *Vairocana* → *Bhimsen*; *Musya* (soy bean) → *Akshobhya* → *Arjuna*; *Wo* (pulse cake) → *Ratnasambhava*- *Nakula*; *Khayapi* (pumpkin) → *Amitabha* → *Sahadev*; *Wauca* (vegetable) → *Amoghasiddhi* → *Yudhisthira*. In this *Nyataghasa*, the same food item signifies Dhyanis Buddhas as well as Pandavas of Mahabharata, simultaneously. Thus, an elaborate system of fusion between vegetation, Hinduism and Buddhism was established. This culture of fusion can also be seen in the Newari cult of Kumari goddess where a pre-puberty young girl is worshipped as the embodiment of feminine energy, Devi. In fact, the political system that has evolved itself has element of fusion between communism of northern neighbour and democracy of southern neighbour.

Reconstruction of Nepal and Newari architecture cannot be achieved without imbibing this spirit of fusion. While the intermittent aftershock was occurring, the world community rushed towards Nepal. The arch-rivals like China- India, China-Japan, Israel-Iran, India-Pakistan, US-China – sent their relief and rescue teams. This was the true Nepalese spirit of grand synthesis of differences. The indomitable spirit of Nepalese , commendable rescue, treatment and relief work by the local authorities and prompt action by world community in airlifting immediate support have helped to mitigate the impact of disaster.

The calamity also teaches us lesson. We must not be enamored by the non-local architecture and western developmental model. Most of the death was reported from the cities where people were trapped in cement-brick rubble. The West developed the cellar-model of living habitat utilizing concrete and iron due to its climatic condition, where heat is to be preserved in the cold climate. In the earthquake prone zones of the Pacific and the Himalayas, wooden and bamboo are the traditional building materials. Infact, many earthbag structures in places like Badhikhel survived the earthquake. Houses ought to be built as a response to the landscape. But, the political parties as well as the governments in South Asia promise '*pucca*-houses" as the panacea for all the miseries of life. While thatched roofs are better suited to climatic conditions, the impact of western discourse of modernity does not allow other epistemological world-views to be considered significantly. What is required is an ecology-specific Developmental Model, a "*fusion of horizon*" between different epistemological frameworks which the leading Indologist from Nepal, Professor Sthaneshwar Timalsina wrote about in the previous issue of the *Journal of Indian Research*. The Asian governments must raise red flag to Chinese plan to build railway tunnel under Mt. Everest. The glacier ecology of Sagarmatha has been badly disrupted. Avalanches were perhaps the Sagarmatha's coughing- a warning sign to human engineering chutzpah which can destroy the Himalayan culture, ecology and communities.

Nepal is a surplus state in terms of biodiversity. Though, it covers around 0.1% of the world's total land mass, over 2% of flowering plants, 8% of the world's bird species and more than 4% of mammal species abide in Nepal. Reconstruction must take into consideration '*fusion of horizon*' of both human and "other-than-human-species". Nepal will rise soon with the feet firm on ground that can never be overpowered by any shaking-geological or political. Nepal will also bring two competing Asian giants to synergize. From the rubbles of the Himalayas, the New Asia will arise!