

The traditional water supply system in the Newar historic settlements of Khokana, Nepal

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Khokana, the vernacular village and its mustard-oil seed industrial heritage, has been one of the World Heritage tentative-list sites of Nepal since 1996. In the context of Newar culture, water spouts, so-called “hitis”, as well as ponds and wells can be seen beside the religious monuments in Kathmandu valley. Therefore water was one of the important elements in the context of Newar culture. The earthquake hit the village in 2015. We as a research team under the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Japan surveyed Khokana as a cultural heritage site in November 2015.

It is true that rehabilitation of houses for local victims should be the first priority. However, cultural components also require careful examination after such a disaster in order to ensure the continuous protection and conservation of its identity. Regarding the village as Cultural Landscapes, “combined works of nature and of man (UNESCO, 2008)”, we focussed on the traditional water supply system in Khokana.

In this context, the study was not restricted to a survey of the irrigation system but included the examination of water from several ponds and wells in the village. The most profound discovery was that the irrigation system, part of the Rajkulo, the royal canal built by Malla Kings in the medieval period, was still effective; however, water spouts, most of ponds and wells in the village were of no use as they were heavily polluted.

With many victims now living in the temporal shelters in and around the village and hardly any infrastructure, reactivation of the traditional water system in the village has a potential both for post disaster and cultural rehabilitation. The significance of the finding is that it could determine future rehabilitation and conservation planning of Khokana as a Cultural Landscape.

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References:

1. UNESCO World Heritage Center, *The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, 2008, p.8