

Article

Cultural Heritage Deterioration in the Historical Town ‘Thimi’

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Abstract: The gradual or rapid deterioration of cultural heritage buildings can be a source of the loss of heritage assets over time. Cultural heritage encompasses tangible and intangible aspects of a society's heritage, including historical buildings, archaeological sites, artworks, artifacts, traditions, customs, and ethnic customs. This research paper investigated the causes and effects of the deterioration of the heritage system from the Madhyapur Thimi in Nepal. A case study of tangible heritage (Thimi settlement) and intangible heritage (Bisket Jatra—community celebrations—and Ritual Guthi—a local group formed to conduct cultural activities) helped to achieve the objectives of this study. The existing unique cultures from the Madhyapur Thimi, including the built culture, Guthi, Bisket Jatra, and Ritual Guthi area support the sustainable development of heritage structures to some extent. The cultural heritage is now at risk due to institutional inadequacies, economic and social issues, resource depletion, and natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Policy should be modified, and heritage should be conserved and maintained well for future generations to own it as an identity and pride of the Thimi community.

Keywords: culture; conservation; heritage deterioration; historic towns; Thimi



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1. Introduction

In recent years, numerous scholars in heritage studies [1,2] have established new and provocative but helpful discussions about heritage. They have debated how the destruction and alteration of heritage are also a part of heritage development that is necessary and can have a positive impact. The positive impact of demolitions and alterations of heritage can ultimately create new heritage and memories. Similar research should be conducted on architectural style and the ethical destruction of heritage in the Kathmandu Valley.

Heritage deterioration can be the result of the gradual or rapid decay, damage, or loss of cultural heritage assets over time. Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible aspects of a society's heritage, including historical buildings, archaeological sites, artworks, artifacts, traditions, customs, and cultural knowledge systems. Cultural heritage is now at risk due to institutional inadequacies, economic and social issues, resource depletion, and natural disasters [3]. The statement by Paul Thomas Welty (1966) provides an excellent example as it retells that the ‘People’ are the critical patrons behind all activities regarding heritage cultures. Heritage and memory are rapidly disappearing because, in the post-capitalist era, nostalgia has been turned into a commodity and treated as a product for sale [4]. Smith (2006) challenges this notion, asserting that the value of heritage is not inherent in physical entities, but rather in their role as vehicles for expressing and affirming societal values [5]. Yannis Hamilakis explores the interplay between classical antiquities, archaeology, and the formation of modern Greece and its national identity [6]. The emphasis of “The Tourist Gaze” (Urry, 1990) is on the visual dimension of tourism, while acknowledging the participation of other senses in travel experiences. According to Urry, sensory interactions become more important inside a visual framework, transforming mundane activities into remarkable experiences set against visually captivating backdrops.

According to the argument, visual consumption in tourism is complex, involving the interpretation of signs that infuse everyday scenes with cultural or romantic implications [7]. This valuable new resource serves as a necessary complement to existing literature in the cultural heritage management field, providing an excellent introduction and overview of established principles and contemporary perspectives. With comprehensive coverage of major issues and solutions in Britain, the USA, and Australia, “The Heritage Reader” holds international appeal as a key guide in the study and practice of this significant archaeological sector [8]. Cultural heritage, originating within nation-states, was initially viewed as a public asset, curated to narrate ancestral history on behalf of descendants. In the present neoliberal context, privatization in the heritage sector has surged, ostensibly for the benefit of tax-paying citizens and under truncated views of the welfare state’s social responsibility. Lekakis and Dragouni’s (2020) study scrutinizes the prospect of positioning cultural heritage as a common good or commons, examining Greece as a case study. Despite facing austerity, grassroots mobilization in Greece defends community rights to collectively enjoy, manage, and co-create cultural goods [9]. Thus, heritage is important. It carries outstanding value for future generations. Heritage is related to the physical, religious, cultural, and economic sectors. On the one hand, a luxurious lifestyle may herald the preservation of the past, but on the other, it may limit people’s access to a better way of life [10]. This historical study of Thimi’s heritage conservation shows Thimi is under the pressure of modern amenity trends. It is now more challenging to conserve cultural heritage. Thus, this paper explores many historical research works on cultural heritage form Nepal. Historical research lacks a detailed study of heritage deterioration. Therefore, this study gathered samples from settlements in different indicator-built cultures, using Guthi and rituals as case samples.

Research gap: In recent years, several heritage studies experts have created fresh, controversial, yet beneficial dialogues regarding heritage development from a diverse perspective. They have debated that the process of heritage conservation involves not only preservation but also the demolition and reformation of cultural artifacts, which is crucial and can bring positive changes, leading to the creation of new heritage and memories [11]. There are still not enough studies on the ethical sideways of the destruction and modification of heritage. Therefore, this study fills a few gaps in the research regarding the deterioration of cultural heritage and its conservation.

This investigation was conducted primarily on these two questions: (a) How bad is the heritage deterioration of the built culture, Guthi, and rituals of the Newari settlement of Thimi? (b) What types of community involvement in heritage conservation exist in the current circumstances and what types of efforts will be required in the future to stop deterioration?

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- (a) To examine the heritage deterioration of the built culture, Guthi, and rituals of the Newari settlement of Thimi.
- (b) To study community involvement in heritage conservation.

Limitations: This study completely relies on two datasets, the primary data of Thimi and the secondary data of the Kathmandu Valley. Figure 1 shows the location of the case studies.

1.1. Literature Review

Heritage consists of the tangible and intangible elements of both cultural and natural heritage, and it can also be considered collectively, as well as a channel for disseminating beliefs, ideals, and knowledge [4,12]. These “ideas, beliefs, and knowledge” have been developed due to interpersonal and collective interaction. The knowledge of local, ethnic, religious, and other communities has evolved, having definitive beliefs, though these meanings and values can change in the future and have changed in the past [4,13]. Some facets of traditional heritage can lose their importance. According to Harrison (2016), heritage is utilized as a valuable resource in the future through its ongoing shaping and management in the present [11]. Ashworth et al. (2007) indicated that cultural heritage

is kept alive through memories that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Nonetheless, cultural heritage often retains its significance, predominantly its tangible legacy, because it offers both the foundation and the resources for creating a shared identity [14].



Figure 1. Location of study area: Thimi.

UNESCO referred to historic urban areas as “historic cultural landscapes” and provided a definition that encompasses a collection of buildings, open spaces, structures, and their natural and environmental surroundings. This definition also includes archaeological and paleontological locations, in place of human settlements in urban environments over a significant period of time. The recognition of their cohesion and value is approached from an archaeological perspective. Architecture, prehistory, history, science, aesthetics, sociocultural factors, or ecology have contributed significant contributions to our understanding of our lives today and have shaped modern society [15–17]. The Council of Europe’s Landscape Convention of 2000 and UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage Convention of 2003 both emphasize the varied importance of landscapes. They emphasize landscapes’ public interest function in cultural, ecological, environmental, and social elements, as well as their importance as a resource for economic activity and employment generation. The norms emphasize landscapes’ importance to local cultures, emphasizing their critical position in European natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, landscapes are seen as critical for human well-being, influencing the quality of life in a variety of contexts ranging from urban to rural, degraded to high-quality. Landscape protection, management, and planning are emphasized as obligations and rights for everyone, emphasizing their importance for individual and social well-being [18]. Therefore, heritage and community are interrelated, and conservation of the heritage community is an important aspect of the community ethic.

1.2. Introduction of Thimi

Individual residences, localities, and urban squares, as well as community places and constructions, all exhibit the valley’s specific architectural and settlement patterns. This pattern is regarded as uncommon across the diverse cultural zones of South Asia [19]. Thimi, one of the 31 Kathmandu Valley villages, has a history dating back to the medieval era and earlier centuries. Thimi is located eight kilometers (km) east of Kathmandu, Nepal’s current capital city, and four kilometers (km) west of Bhaktapur, the country’s medieval capital city, south-east of the Manohara River; a tributary of the Bagmati Thimi was also

known as Madhyapur throughout the medieval eras until 1997. Thimi, an ancient and culturally important city in Nepal, lies between Bhaktapur and Kathmandu. Covering an area of 11.47 square kilometers, Thimi has a population density of 84,259 people per square mile, with 21,738 households and an average family size of 4.09 people. The town features open spaces, historical courtyards, and various landmarks like chowks, toles, and nanis, each with a Ganesh shrine or a water source [20]. Thimi's unique characteristics and traditional connections with nearby communities, Bode and Nagadesh, make it a historically important settlement [21]. Thimi, known as the Newar City, has a strong association with Guthi, regulating cultural and religious activities. Various festivals like Bisket Jatra and Gai Jatra are celebrated with enthusiasm [22,23].

1.3. Heritage Deterioration: Causes, Issues, Cases

Heritage deterioration can be caused by various factors such as natural causes, human activities, and ignorance. Here are some of the most common causes of heritage deterioration: natural disasters, climate change, pollution, vandalism, theft, neglect, development, war, and conflict [24].

1.3.1. Natural Causes

Natural catastrophes act as the main source of danger to cultural heritage. It makes cultural assets more vulnerable [24]. Natural disasters can be divided into several categories: those that occur suddenly, such as floods, earthquakes, severe landslides, and storms, and those that occur frequently, such as precipitation, temperature variations, and wind, which increase the vulnerability of cultural heritage. The earthquake that occurred on 26 December 2003 destroyed the Bam Citadel in Iran, which is the largest and oldest collection of Adobe buildings. In 2004, the area was listed as an endangered World Heritage Site, and the worldwide community has worked hard to restore it [24,25].

On 25 April 2015, Nepal experienced a devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8. This seismic event caused extensive damage to multi-story buildings in Kathmandu, the capital city, and also resulted in avalanches and landslides in the Himalayan Mountains [26]. More than 22,000 people were injured, and about 9000 people died. Among the seismically active areas all around the world, it was the deadliest earthquake in 81 years [26]. As a result of the catastrophe, heritage structures suffered considerable damage.

1.3.2. Economic Causes

The advent of economic and technological advancements brings transformations in traditional production systems, leading to their displacement from old medinas and souks. This phenomenon is evident in world heritage cities such as Zabid and old Shibani in Yemen. Infrastructure development can cause considerable damage from the establishment of fresh road networks, railways, airports, dams, and new settlements.

1.3.3. Social Causes

Population growth in historic city areas leads to detrimental consequences, including reduced maintenance, increased waste generation, the demolition of historical structures, and unauthorized construction activities. The old city of Damascus in Syria serves as a poignant illustration of a heritage site in peril. Dating back to the 16th century and recorded as a World Heritage site in 1979, it faces significant threats. The al-Bara Quarter, a historically significant section, was demolished in the early 1980s, only to be replaced by subpar concrete structures that have remained underutilized [24].

1.3.4. Institutional Weakness

In certain instances, the fragility of institutions exacerbates the detrimental impact of natural, economic, and social forces. Governance systems prove inadequate in protecting cultural heritage, as evidenced by the destruction of the ancient inscription on Khark Island

in Iran. Institutions exploit heritage properties and disregard established norms related to them.

Thimi is deteriorating due to natural causes, economic causes, primary social causes, and institutional weakness.

1.4. Heritage Conservation and Community Renewal in Historic Towns

The roots of urban conservation can be traced back from the preservation movements that appeared in the late nineteenth century [22]. During that era, the awareness of the importance of significant urban centers was perceived in response to the damage of the defense buildings of many fortified medieval city expansions in Europe. During that period, a town was also a monument or an item of art [27,28]. In the initial twentieth century, following World War I, the restoration of historic centers began, in slow pace. But the conservation movement gained speed after World War II [29]. John Ruskin, a notable conservationist, discusses the ideals of conservation in his work “The Seven Lamps of Architecture”. His seven lamps were said to be guiding principles: sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, memory, life, and obedience. He has emphasized the role of social history in the development of memory [27,30,31]. According to Townsend (2003), critical protection (i.e., a critical process followed by a creative act) is most proper in urban conservation practices because a historic urban centre cannot be treated as a work of art or a static object but rather embodies multidimensional cultural ethics that must be measured alongside its contemporary role [32]. The significance of conservation was further underscored by the establishment of global organizations, the development of charters and conventions, and numerous other initiatives aimed at preservation.

Heritage and memory are essential for people examining their historical identity [4]. The destruction of cultural memory and heritage can be excruciating for people [33]. Author Veysel Apaydin highlights that cultural memory and heritage are not limited to being associated solely with the past or a mere remembrance of past material culture. Instead, they are portrayed as dynamic processes that actively shape the social, economic, and political aspects of contemporary life [32]. It is emphasized that cultural memory and heritage are vibrant living processes, serving as tools for community resilience.

Around a century ago, the recognition of integrating heritage management into broader planning policies began to gain prominence. This concept has been consistently reflected in cultural policies, as evidenced by UNESCO’s initial recommendations in the 1960s [34].

The term “community” signifies a collective of individuals deeply connected to a specific location, fostering reciprocal trust and relationships with both each other and their surroundings [35]. It is important to note that a community is not a fixed entity within an unchanging landscape but rather a dynamic entity characterized by ongoing interactions and interdependencies [22]. Consequently, as the community actively shapes and transforms the landscape, the landscape, in turn, influences and shapes the community [36].

According to Feng’s (2020) architectural policy for community development or building, the word “community” typically refers to a type of location-centered commune, an organic whole comprising a cluster of people and a shared space or site where they live and are acknowledged [37]. Through energetic community sharing and the strongest possible reliance on native initiative, community growth aims to establish environments for overall economic and social development. Community renewal refers to the process of revitalizing and improving a community, often in urban areas, through various strategies and initiatives. It involves efforts to enhance social cohesion, promote resident participation, and achieve long-term sustainability [36].

Guthi is a social group that is formed to preserve the socio-economic instruction of Nepalese society based on relationships, caste, or territorial aspects for the establishment and maintenance of religious and cultural functions. Jatra is a periodic festival in honor of an idol to which pilgrims resort. In Nepal, people used to celebrate different gods’ festivals,

where they used to pull huge chariots in different places to travel with the god through different places.

1.5. Theoretical Framework: Heritage Deterioration and Conservation

Cornelius Holtorf (2018) emphasizes that as heritage studies experts, we must be careful around ‘overt political motivation’. The main argument is entirely in line with his contention that conducting a critical investigation does not include all malicious acts of legacy destruction and choices to modify or adapt heritage [2]. Social situations never have a clear-cut cause-and-effect relationship since they involve several dynamics. To address these social and political paradoxes, we must adopt a constructivist strategy [38]. Nevertheless, it is essential for critical heritage scholars to bear in mind that heritage studies are inherently connected to real individuals. The majority of our data are gathered through fieldwork involving human participants immersed in diverse natural and cultural environments. The relationship between people and legacy is inherently entirely political and involves a wide range of topics, including social and economic difficulties as well as values, meanings, and a sense of identity and belonging. Critical legacy studies must therefore engage with the societal contexts and the political, economic, and social systems in which individuals live. As an illustration, when examining the connections between climate change and heritage, it becomes imperative to explore the political and economic choices that contribute to climate change [2]. By acknowledging these aspects, Holtorf emphasizes that while legacy studies should be kept open and offer a voice to as many individuals as possible, any kind of sectarianism must be avoided within the field.

Muller Ulrike gives an overview of the physical, economic, social, and political aspects of Thimi. The researcher has extensively studied community structure composition, social hierarchy, interaction, spatial distribution, profession, etc. [30].

Research on the spatial formation of a Kathmandu Valley town—the case of Thimi (Pant, 2002)—gives a detailed account of the historical development of Thimi. Another researcher, Dil Bhakta Jayana, focused on investigating the trend of spatial transformation beyond the traditional settlement area over more than a decade (1983–1998) and related it with the urban context [39]. This socio-economic aspect brings a change in spatial transformation and helps in finding the pattern of spatial expansion. People also settle near the place where they feel socially connected among themselves through their place of origin and family relations. They quickly adapt to settle due to common religious and cultural attributes such as Jatra, festivals, etc. [39].

Bhatta and Chan and Chan (2016) emphasize the conservation of the urban morphology of Thimi. The study mainly pinpoints the Chapacho area of the Prajapati clan and their traditional craftsmanship [22]. Not only this, it works on the social issues and causes of decline in the traditional ways of making local arts and crafts from clay. He further says that the identifiable town is changing into an undefined shape and form of a town due to the vertical division of property. Urbanization brings rapid changes in the expansion of the town that have broken the town’s historic character and identity [22].

The literature review raises questions regarding the methods of effective examination of the heritage deterioration of the built culture established by the Newar settlement at Thimi. Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible heritage. Considering three cases (1. built cultural heritage (tangible); 2. Bisket Jatra (intangible); 3. Sii Guthi (intangible—Shree Panchami Guthi)) helped to understand the causes and effects of the deterioration of heritage cultures.

1.6. Methodology

This adopted the “Case Study technique”, an experiential investigation that examines a current phenomenon in its real setting, especially when distinctions between the phenomenon and setting are not clear [40]. Previous studies on heritage conservation in Thimi applied qualitative methods [15,26,41], applied qualitative methods, and were

helpful for this study to streamline the case study, while other papers provided additional helpful details.

This section outlines the methodology that worked as a procedure to accumulate state-of-art research to address the research gap.

Data collection involved structured questionnaire surveys in two significant Thimi neighborhoods: Chapacho (Prajapati community) and Balkumari (Shrestha community). Stratified random sampling was conducted to understand community perceptions of heritage importance, participation, and the effectiveness of conservation and development policies. The study also examined the Ritual Guthi (Shree Panchami Guthi) and intangible cultural heritage of Bisket Jatra. This study has more focus on the heritage deterioration in the Newari settlement of Thimi area. The study process was outlined as listed below.

- (a) Perform a careful desk study at the establishment by exploring the latest research papers, old histories, and trends.
- (b) Conduct interviews with as many heritage experts and academicians as possible.
- (c) Study the existing literature on the 51 households in the Chapacho area and 50 households in the Balkumari area.
- (d) Communicate with and comprehend the feelings of the locals. Gather more information with the help of local stakeholders.

We scrutinized the information thoroughly and used it to analyze the situation of heritage deterioration of the built culture of the Newari settlement of the Thimi area.

2. Case Study (Tangible Heritage and Intangible Heritage)

2.1. The Tangible Heritage of Thimi in the Past and Now (Community, Economy, Built Heritage, Land Use, Environment)

Thimi, as a mainly Newar town, consists of diverse communities, each forming distinct social relations known as Guthis. The scattering pattern of these communities within Thimi has resulted in unique urban spaces with distinctive urban characteristics and arrangements shaped by their sociocultural and religious practices [21]. Communal activities and the cultural significance of these communities have played a crucial role in influencing the patterns of urban built form in the town [3,15,29,42]. Notably, the majority of Thimi's population belongs to two communities, the Shresthas and Prajapatis, comprising over 85% of the total population in the Bhakha to Tachhutole area. Shresthas primarily inhabit the southern part of Balkumari, while Prajapatis are concentrated on the northern side of Chapahcho. Pant's research highlights that Thimi's organization revolves around clan clusters known as "nani", the essential urban tissue [21,43]. The form and distribution of these settlement clusters indicate the evolution of the nani urban system and the town's spatial growth, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

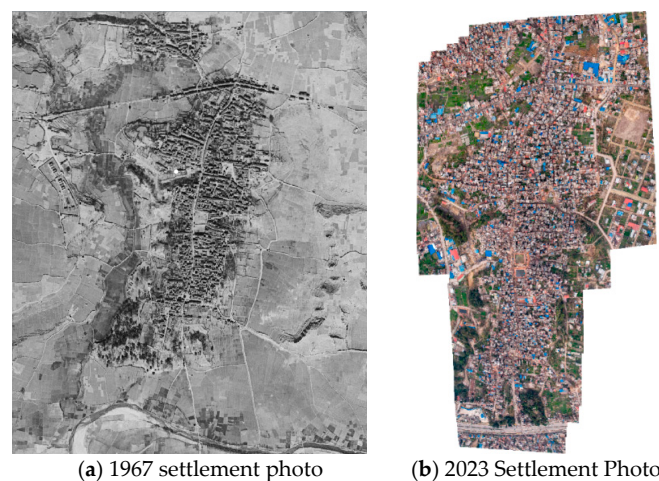


Figure 2. Change in land use map (sources: (a) photo from ICMOD; (b) photo taken by author).

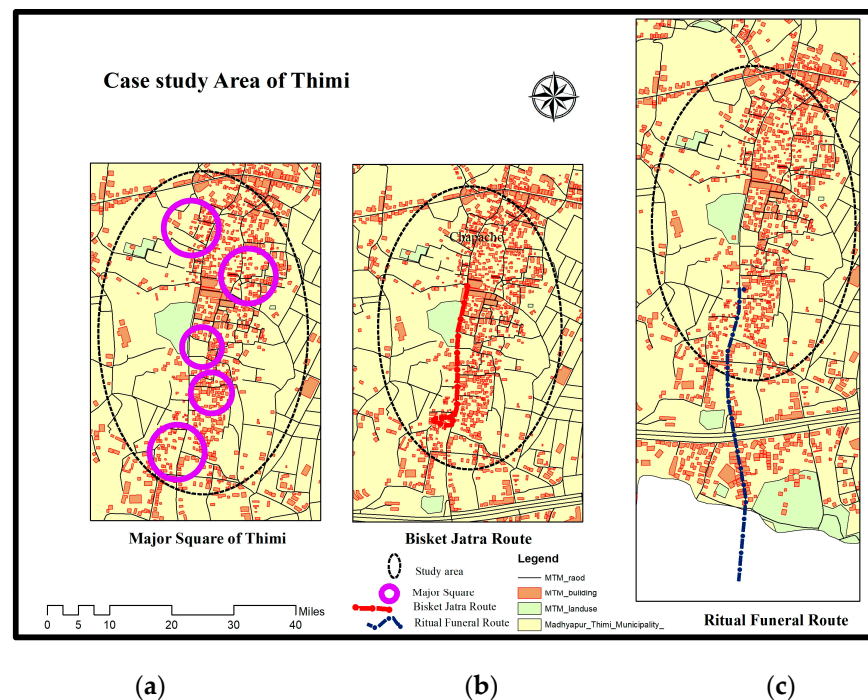


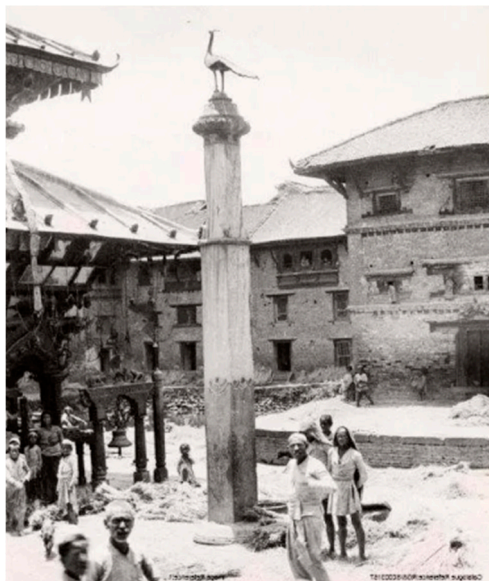
Figure 3. Map (a) the major square of Thimi, (b) Biska Jatra, and (c) the ritual route of Shree Panchami Guthi. (Sources: author prepared using GIS).

The Kathmandu Valley, including Thimi, is home to diverse communities, often characterized by their traditional occupations known as “asta dasprakriti” [21]. Over time, these communities have integrated into a cohesive Newar culture with a shared language and cultural practices. The ethnic roots of these communities are a subject of complex historical investigation, with evidence seen in the division of labor and the inheritance of family professions, which have become the traditional characteristic features of Newar society since the Malla period [23]. Thimi’s distinct built environment and cultural heritage owe much to the interactions and practices of its diverse communities as shown in Figure 4. Understanding these historical dynamics is vital for appreciating Thimi’s cultural significance within the broader context of the Kathmandu Valley’s heritage.

Economy: Thimi’s economy thrives on agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism. With its fertile land and favorable climate, agriculture is a crucial sector, and main crops include rice, wheat, maize, millet, and vegetables. The town’s renowned pottery industry serves as a significant income source, establishing Thimi as a pottery production hub. Additionally, tourism contributes to Thimi’s revenue. The town’s economy blends traditional and modern sectors, with agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism playing vital roles in its development.

A lifestyle change has also been seen in the Newar community of Thimi. This change introduced contemporary facilities and changes in traditional occupations and socio-cultural activities. There is a cumulative tendency to change traditional occupations to trade, services, and commerce. Strangely, even the Prajapatis, who are conventional potters, are now competing with business dealers such as Shrestha and others in the transportation sector, jobs, and commerce.

Economic deterioration: The analysis of 101 household surveys shows that most of the families are found to have difficulties basic needs for their members. The survey locations are shown in Figure 5. Family expenditures on education, health, and celebration of the festival are very high. Because of the increasing maintenance of intangible heritage and culture, more challenges are added in preventing the deterioration of these cultures.



(a) Old photo skyline at Balkumari square.



(b) Current photo skyline at Balkumari square.



(c) Old photo skyline at Chapacho–Siddikali Dyo Chhen.



(d) Current photo skyline at Chapacho square.

Figure 4. Change in landscape at Balkumari and Chapacho Square (Sources: (a,c) are photos taken from Google and (b,d) are photos taken by the author).



Figure 5. Household Survey at Chapacho and Balkumari (Sources: author prepared using GIS).

Built heritage in Thimi is a rich collection of physical structures and sites with cultural and historical importance. The town's historic center houses 246 artifacts, including shrines, temples, stupas, and monuments, alongside residential heritage. Numerous Buddhist

courtyards and temples adorn thresholds, backyards, streets, and intersections [22]. Thimi, the “Living Museum of Newars”, showcases heritage treasures like the Layaku palace, Mahabihar, Siddhi Kali, and Bakachhen Mahadev. While modern structures replace traditional buildings, preservation efforts conserve Thimi’s unique architectural style through museums and cultural centers, securing its cultural heritage for the future.

The survey conducted in the historical core area of Thimi encompassed 78 households, indicating that 34% of the buildings have undergone modifications or have adopted completely new designs. Among these, 23% of the new constructions involved the demolition of traditional buildings, 6% were built on vacant land, and 4% witnessed changes to their facades. As a result, the conversion of heritage structures’ uses and alterations to the visual aspects of buildings, skylines, and streetscapes have contributed to a loss of the historic urban identity and heritage ethics, as revealed in the 2007 survey [22]. Currently, in a 2022 survey of 102 households, 49% lived in a load-bearing structure, 42% lived in RC Structure building, 5% used composite materials, and 4% reported other materials. These data show the change in built heritage. Figure 6 provides the pie chart for the building structure types included in the survey.

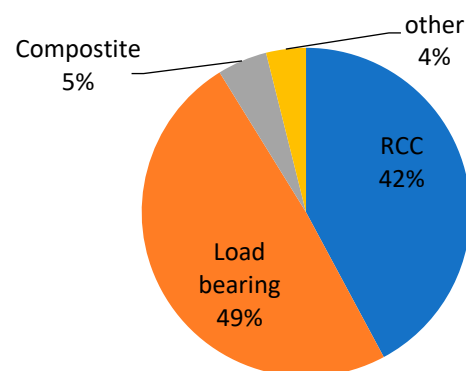


Figure 6. Building Typology Chart (n = 101 survey household).

2.2. Intangible Heritage

A. Festival Bisket Jatra

Bisket Jatra, a vibrant cultural festival in Bhaktapur, Nepal, is named after the “festival following the demise of pythons” in the Newari language [21]. The festival’s origin is steeped in fascinating and mythical tales, varying across different areas of Bhaktapur. In Thimi, it extends for three days and is known as Sindur Jatra or Dyo Jatra. Characterized by chariots, music, vibrant colors, and a lively gathering, the Bisket Festival captivates locals and visitors. The grand ceremonial union of vermillion and the beloved Dhimey drum adds to the festive fervor, as people enthusiastically rain vermillion powder on each other during the procession. The rhythmic beats of the Dhimey drum accompany the chariot parade, and devotees pay homage to the gods residing in the chariots throughout the festivities. The Bisket Jatra is an enchanting celebration that unites the community and showcases the rich cultural heritage of Bhaktapur. Figure 7 shows the routes for the different Jatra occasions in Thimi.

Bisket Jatra, the colorful festival of Thimi, is celebrated over several days. On the day before the first day of Baishakh (first month of the New Year), the “Gusin Chhoykkegu”, a traditional ceremony, begins by setting a fire to a piece of wood brought from forest. The logic behind setting fire to the wood could be to keep people warm in the cold night during this Jatra event. As shown in Figure 8, traditionally, an old-style wooden pole with flags is erected in front of Balkumari Temple, but this step is no longer followed. On the same night, palanquins of gods are carried with Dhimay Baja and burning torches to Kwachhen (Dakshin Barahi Temple) from Layako, and they are carried around the local area in a vibrant procession.

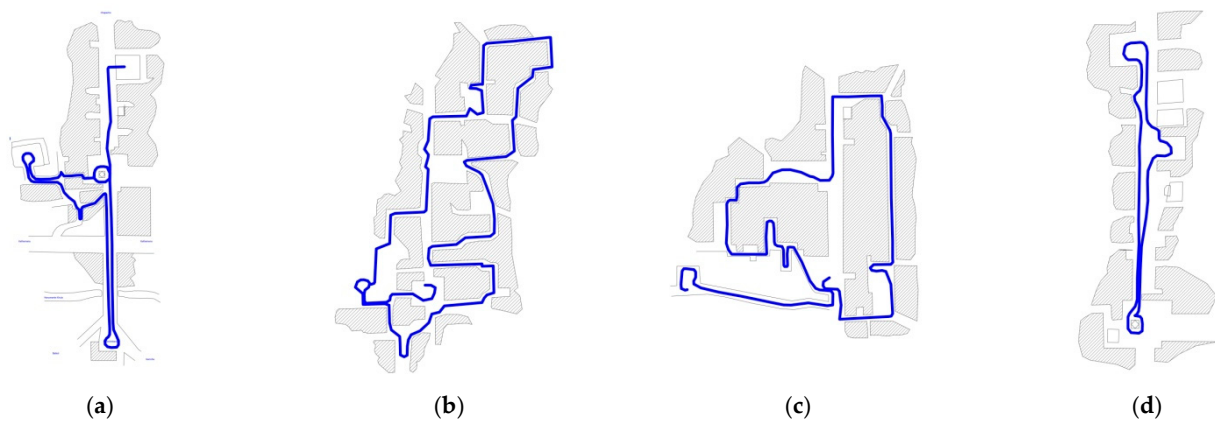


Figure 7. Bisket Jatra with route map (Sources: author prepared using Auto-CAD 2023). (a) Chanehesiya (Night) Jatra, (b) Bishnu bir Jatra, (c) Sidi Kali Jatra, (d) Suthasiya (Morning) Jatra.



Figure 8. Bisket Jatra (Sources: (a) Photo taken from websites and (b) Photo taken by Author).

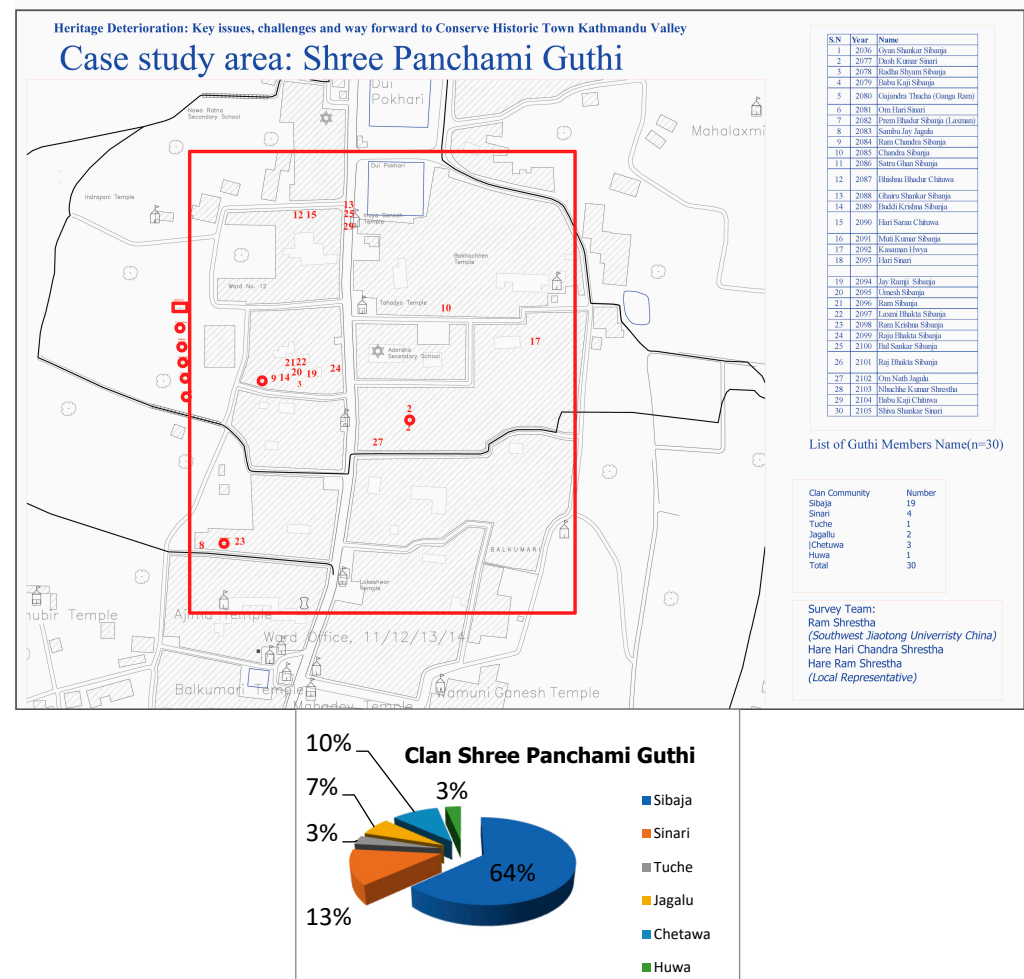
During the 1st and 2nd of Baishakh, devotees gather at Balkumari to worship and light ceremonial oil lamps. Some show their devotion by placing lamps on their bodies for hours. Siddikali and Vishnuvir host a separate Baishak Jatra in the evening. The second day features a palanquin festival at Bakumari, where participants carry palanquins and sing with vermilion powder. The Bisket festival occurs in Tigani, Nagadesh, and Madhyapur Thimi. The Bhagu tole festival in Bode involves tongue-piercing, followed by carrying torches in a bamboo rack. The Bisket Jatra palanquin is then paraded in Bode. Shown in Figure 7 are Bisket Jattras with a route map (a. Chanehesiya (Night) Jatra, b. Bishnu bir Jatra, c. Sidi Kali Jatra, d. Suthasiya (Morning) Jatra).

B. Ritual Guthi (Shree Panchami Sii Guthi)

The Sii Guthi, a significant Newar community group, holds responsibility for the cremation rituals of its members. Established around 200 years ago in Thimi, Nepal, this Guthi is exclusive to specific clans, including Sinari, Sibaja, Jagalu, Tuche, Chetawa, and Huwya, residing in certain areas of the town, as shown in Table 1, Figure 9. The primary purpose of the Guthi is to organize funeral ceremonies as shown in Figure 10. Traditionally, male relatives and friends participate in the funeral procession, wearing three-layered typical 'dhaka' shawls and walking barefoot while sobbing. The body can be carried either on a bamboo and wood carriage or on a sandalwood chariot, depending on the deceased's wish.

Table 1. Clan Shree Panchami Guthi distribution (Sources: chart prepared by author).

Clan Community	Number
Sibaja	19
Sinari	4
Tuche	1
Jagalu	2
Chetawa	3
Huwa	1
Total	30

**Figure 9.** Clan Shree Panchami Guthi old boundary areas (n = 30 Guthi members) (Sources: map prepared by author).

Guthi members are divided into four groups, and each group is assigned specific tasks for the funeral. Fines are imposed on those who fail to fulfill their duties. The collected fine money goes to the savings account of the Guthi fund. Twice a year, during the Shree Panchami and Sidi Nakha festivals, the Guthi members conduct a meeting to prepare activity plans. An outgoing coordinator hands over responsibilities to the new coordinator during a ritual ceremony. Membership in the Guthi is passed down according to seniority, and the children or siblings of members can join if they wish to separate from their large families. Female members are exempt from Guthi duties, and families with solely female members have specific rules.



Figure 10. Guthi activities (Sources: photo taken by author). (a) Guthi work on the death of a Guthi member, (b) Shree Panchami Guthi celebration.

Over time, the Guthi system has been criticized, and now members can use meetings and votes to bring about changes. However, it remains a remarkable social tradition that represents harmony and societal advancement passed down through generations. Preserving the Sii Guthi in its original form with appropriate updates is crucial to safeguard this unique cultural heritage. The Guthi continues to be a symbol of cultural richness and social cohesion in the town of Thimi, Nepal. As Sii Guthi has special importance to the community of Thimi, it ensures that it is continuously passed down from generation to generation.

3. Result (Research Finding)

The following physical, cultural, and religious factors are observed in this study.

3.1. Physical Factor

The survey (101 households surveyed) shows the physical issues in Thimi's built-up area, such as land use pattern changes after the earthquake. Most open or undeveloped space has been turned into a built-up area. Almost all the buildings are constructed using modern RCC structures. Modern construction techniques replaced traditional construction methods, and it will not be wrong to say that no building is constructed using the traditional method. The building's front face has been turned into plaster-faced and pseudo-change brick cladding. The façade elements, doors, windows, and slope have been redesigned to something different from traditional designs. Some open spaces have been converted into parking lots. These physical changes greatly cause Thimi heritage to deteriorate significantly. Different physical factors are shown in Figure 11 (a. an open space as parking space; b. alley height becomes small; c. alternative façade elements; d. vertical property division as urbanization; e. deterioration of heritage rest house; f. a public building used as a shop).

3.2. Socio-Economic Factor

A legal document study and survey of 51 households in Balkumari and 51 household surveys in Chapacho show that the culture of Thimi is changing day by day. Since Thimi had been a VDC in the past, it was transformed into a municipality in 1996. After that, Thimi-area residents began slowly leaving the agriculture occupation and moving into non-agricultural professions. Most of the culture is based on the agriculture occupation, and adopting non-agriculture occupations results in fewer social activities that used to help to preserve heritage. New-generation community people are not interested in the Guthi concept. The new professions also discourage people from getting involved in the cultural program, and this assists the deterioration process of the heritage culture.

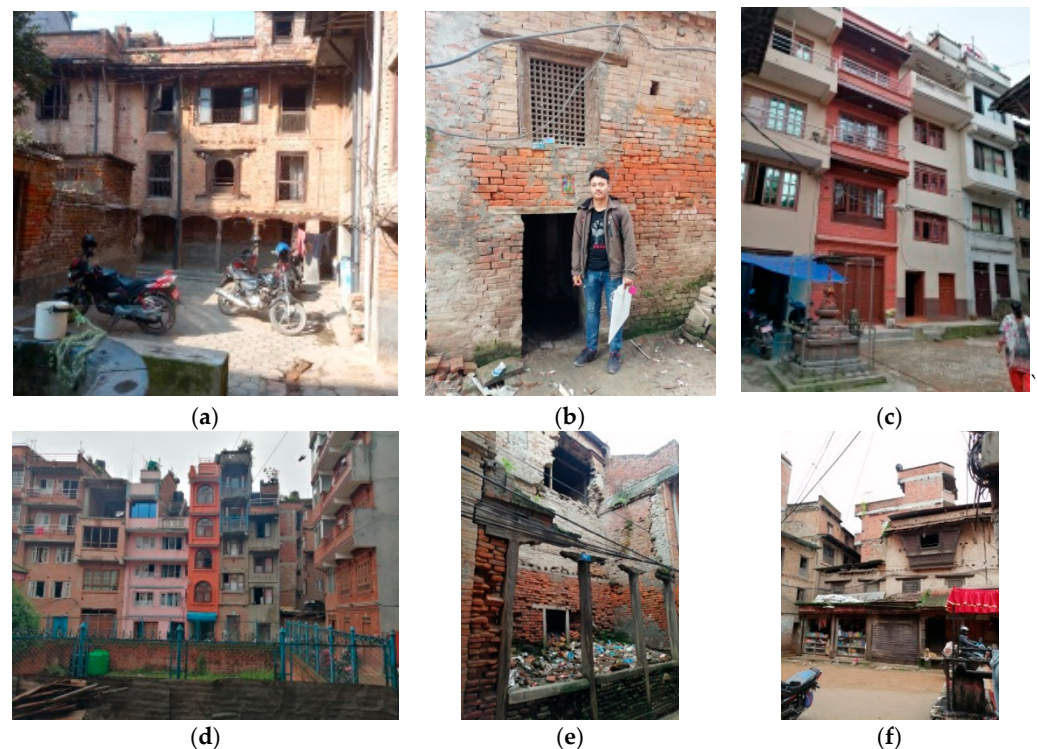


Figure 11. Different physical factor changes shown in photographs (Sources: all photos taken by author). (a) Open space as parking space; (b) alley height becomes small; (c) alternative façade elements, door window, and the slope; (d) vertical property division as urbanization; (e) deterioration of heritage rest house; (f) a public building used as a shop.

The following picture shows the socio-economic pattern.

3.3. Socio-Cultural Factor

Socio-cultural interviews with local people and stakeholders show that, after earthquakes, political revolution, urbanization, and the expansion of Thimi, a change in cultural activity was also noticed. The cultural program was affected much because of young people starting employment outside of Thimi. The young generation did not have enough time to participate in cultural programs. When they were self-employed, they could manage time for social and cultural activities. After getting engaged in employment for others, they had to commute to their job and had less time for extra activities. The employment generated by entrepreneurs pushed the young generations of Thimi away from heritage conservation activities. This situation assisted heritage culture deterioration significantly. As shown in Figures 12–14, this was due to different socio-economic factors (a. young people engage in traditional pottery occupation; b. drying pottery at chowk; c. processing soil for pottery; d. selling vegetables in the street; e. selling vegetables and parking at the street junction; f. morning vegetable shop in the main street junction).

Table 2 presents different issues of tangible and intangible heritage cultures. This table lists different issues and factors for heritage deterioration, such as migration, authenticity, lack of inventory, belief system, occupation, institutional system, three-generation location (grandfather, father, and son), and built culture. The conservation process comprises actors involved in cultural heritage conservation, issues of the cultural heritage conservation process, and policies and regulations for the conservation of cultural heritage.

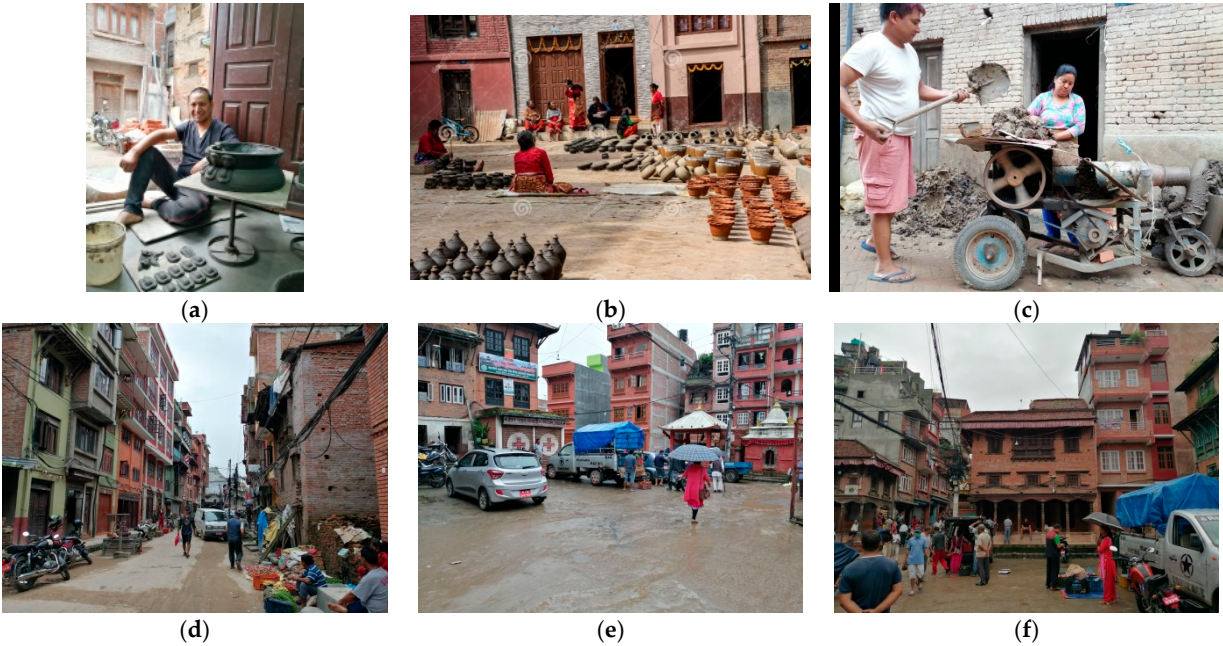


Figure 12. Different socio-economic factors shown in photographs (Sources: all photos taken by author). (a) Young people engage in traditional pottery occupation; (b) drying pottery at chowk; (c) processing soil for pottery; (d) selling vegetables in the street; (e) selling vegetables and parking at the street junction; (f) morning vegetable shop in the main street junction.



Figure 13. Different programs (Sources: all photos taken by author). (a) Cultural heritage on the pathway; (b) Gathamma Chare Festival; (c) everyday morning devotional singing program at the rest house.

	Physical factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Architectural element• Building matreial• Building height
	Socio-econoiic factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No. of occupants• Landuse value• Ownership type
	Socio-cultural factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building use• Real work factor

Figure 14. Deterioration of built heritage Thimi.

Table 2. Comparative case study.

Case Study		Tangible	Intangible	Intangible
Issues		Tangible Heritage: Cultural Heritage in Balkumari and Chapacho	Intangible Heritage: Bisket Jatra	Ritual Traditional Route (Si Guthi/Shree Panchami Guthi)
1	Migration	Residents moving out from the Thimi core area.	Reduced participation of youth generation.	Because of new professions, youth generations are unable to allocate time for cultural activities.
2	Authenticity	The use of modern materials and new construction technology destroyed authentic heritage structures. RCC structures replace local load-bearing wall systems.	During the festival or the Jatra period, people wanted to introduce new concepts, which impacted the authenticity of Jatra.	The ritual process has been modified as people compared its value in money instead of its sustainability.
3	Lack of inventory	Most cultural heritage has no inventory, which is why after the earthquake, it was difficult to restore to its original state.	Because of no inventory, Bisket Jatra is at risk of being deviated from a typical authentic system.	As there is no documentation of Guthi processes, the new generation has no clue about the traditional culture.
4	Faith in system	It measures a part of sustaining cultural heritage.	It measures a part of sustaining intangible heritage.	It measures a part of sustaining intangible heritage.
5	Occupation	In the past, agriculture was the common occupation. Cultural heritage is related to occupations such as worshipping different paddy gods, drinking well water, and hiti (community tap area) cleaning during a festival called Sidi Nakha.	Adopting different occupations caused a conflict with their profession because of no public holidays during the Jatra days.	During the ritual culture event time, people do not have time because of their duties of employment. Therefore, people are more flexible regarding the celebration of the cultural function at their convenience.
6	Institutional system	The government has rules and regulations to support cultural heritage. However, this alone is not enough and needs other community support to increase as well.	The central government and local government do not function with each other in harmony. There is a need for good co-ordination between the local government and central government to support Jatra events.	There is no institutional system to support the ritual system. Only the local community is active to conserve and bolster ritual functions.
7	Built culture	Built culture is directly related to cultural heritage such as temples, public rest houses, open spaces, courtyards, etc.	Built culture is directly related to cultural heritage such as Bisket Jatra.	Built culture is directly related to cultural heritage, such as traditional ritual events.
8	Conservation process—actors involved in cultural heritage conservation	Newari culture can be considered living heritage.	Newari cultural Bisket Jatra is living heritage.	Newari cultural rituals are living heritage.
9	Three-generation location (grandfather, father, and son)	Most grandfathers are farmers. Therefore, built cultures are created based on their livelihood. But the father and son generations relocating their residencies out or to the periphery of Thimi impacted traditional culture negatively.	Bisket Jatra is one famous festival, but due to the relocation of residency of local people, they have now less attraction to Bisket Jatra festivals.	A ritual called Sii Guthi is one sustainable community system, but due to the heavy relocation of people after the catastrophe, the ritual program seems inconvenient for people since these events are organized in the Thimi area, now far from their residence.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Case Study	Tangible	Intangible	Intangible
Issues	Tangible Heritage: Cultural Heritage in Balkumari and Chapacho	Intangible Heritage: Bisket Jatra	Ritual Traditional Route (Si Guthi/Shree Panchami Guthi)
10 Issues of cultural heritage conservation process	The conservation process is being noticed to be deteriorating day by day.	Conservation efforts seem smaller compared to the deterioration rate.	The awareness program seems negligible compared to the deterioration factors.

The Thimi area has a good reputation for tangible and intangible heritage. Many tangible heritage properties/elements have to be restored after the earthquake. The Upabhokta Samittee (consumer's committee) has a primary role in the restoration process, but new generations favor modern-style construction (lifestyle change). New generations prefer to use modern material and implement new construction technology; i.e., RCC structures replaced traditional construction techniques.

4. Exploring Key Issues in Heritage Deterioration (Discussion)

According to Chapagain (2013) [3], heritage deterioration can be a result of the gradual or rapid decay, damage, or loss of cultural heritage assets over time. Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible aspects of a society's heritage, including historical buildings, archaeological sites, artworks, artifacts, traditions, customs, and cultural knowledge systems. Similarly, in Thimi, cultural heritage is now at risk due to institutional inadequacies, economic and social issues, resources depletion, and natural disasters.

The statement by Paul Thomas Welty (1966) [4] provides an excellent example as it retells that the 'People' are the critical patrons behind all activities regarding heritage and culture. Similarly, in case of Thimi, the 'People' are also the critical patrons behind all activities regarding heritage and culture.

Apaydin, Moreno-Melgariejo et al. [4,12] illustrated collective cultural and natural heritage by mentioning that it embodies tangible and intangible elements, disseminating beliefs, ideals, and knowledge. Similarly, in Thimi, heritage comprises tangible cultural elements, natural heritage, and a means of transmitting beliefs, ideals, and knowledge. These values have evolved over time through collective interactions. Bisket Jatra, Ritual Guthi, and other cultural aspects are significant identities of Thimi.

In Nepal, both the national and local governments have identified community engagement as a crucial goal in specific plans and policies. However, actual implementation has fallen short of these goals. A study of 101 respondents found that 80% were dissatisfied with Madhyapur Thimi Municipality's current policies and programs. Despite the fact that the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) of 2017 emphasizes decentralization in order to foster public engagement in development efforts, a clear framework and instructions on the needed forms and level of participation in local development and planning procedures remain absent. Furthermore, there is no statutory requirement for participation if local governments fail to ensure it.

According to Bhatta (2008), it is critical to develop active community participation by building a complete statutory structure and demonstrating strong political commitment. Addressing public concerns directly in urban conservation and development strategies, plans, and programs is critical to meeting local communities' true development requirements. Understanding heritage significance during the identification of values, setting objectives to protect these values, and managing project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes all require community involvement [22]. This spectrum of participation includes fundamental information broadcasting as well as more consultative approaches such as seeking input and feedback from diverse groups and engaging key community stakeholders in decision-making.

UNESCO referred to historic urban areas as “historic cultural landscapes” and provided a definition that encompasses a collection of buildings, open spaces, structures, and their natural and environmental surroundings. This definition also includes archaeological and paleontological locations, in place of human settlements in urban environments over a significant period of time. The recognition of their cohesion and value is approached from an archaeological perspective. Architecture, prehistory, history, science, aesthetics, sociocultural factors, or ecology have a significant contribution to our understanding of our lives today and have shaped modern society [15–17]. So, heritage and community are interrelated, and conserving the heritage community should be a primary objective for local governments. Here, the community of Thimi, the community of Bisket Jatra, and the community of Ritual Guthi have a leading role in the conservation of the heritage of Thimi. Hence, heritage conservation in Thimi is of utmost importance and requires public involvement to promote sustainable tourism and a thriving community. Essential factors include efficient institutions, integrated conservation plans, effective legislation, and sustainable tourism practices. Governments must allocate technical and financial resources, demonstrate strong political commitment, and enhance awareness of heritage conservation for sustainable development. Preserving Thimi’s heritage contributes to the continuity of shared memory that has been demonstrated by significant case studies such as Chapacho, Balkumari, Bisket Jatra, and Ritual Shree Panchami Guthi. The conservation process also safeguards against the deterioration of heritage and helps to maintain collective memory of traditional culture.

5. Conclusions and Recommendation

Thimi, despite its vibrant cultural heritage, has witnessed substantial changes in its built heritage over the years. Nevertheless, the town’s traditional arts and crafts continue to be a source of pride for the local community, and efforts are being made to safeguard and promote this cultural heritage for future generations. Cultural heritage is important for tourism; therefore, Thimi’s cultural heritage promotes tourism and has a good impact on economic activity.

Thimi’s cultural heritage shines through the Bisket Jatra festival, a grand celebration held in April. The festival’s chariot processions honor Thimi’s rich legacy, but traditional rituals face decline as modern life impacts the Sii Guthi. The younger generation shows less interest, influenced by socio-economic changes.

The cultural heritage of Thimi faces numerous threats, including natural disasters, resource exploitation, economic and social challenges, and institutional vulnerabilities. Developing cities in Western and Central Asia, like Thimi, hold a significant portion of the world’s cultural heritage, but they often lack public awareness about the risks faced, further exacerbating the situation. To protect these endangered heritage sites and prepare for future risks, a comprehensive assessment of the current situation is essential, followed by the development of suitable protective measures.

Thimi, with its cultural richness and historic charm, has faced the decline and destruction of its treasures, risking its distinctive identity. Tourism development has been neglected despite its strategic location, and there are ineffective heritage conservation plans, policies, and institutions. By valuing and promoting its cultural legacy, Thimi can safeguard its past and foster a brighter, sustainable future.

Recommendations:

- Good bonding through intangible heritage makes community resilience. Jatra and other festivals bring all relatives together, and they help to build a strong relationship. Tangible heritage is conserved by intangible heritage conservation. Therefore, intangible heritage is a sustainable indicator and should be conserved first to save tangible heritage.
- There is no policy for private dwelling restoration or reconstruction. A more detailed policy is needed, and implementing it correctly is important if the private dwelling has heritage value. The municipality has no law to grant a permit for the traditional

way of construction. Therefore, the municipality should make a law for traditional construction techniques.

The entire historical tangible and intangible heritage should be documented. This research was conducted only in Thimi and highlighted its built culture, Bisket Jatra, and Guthi ritual. To have more understanding throughout the country, other areas with historical values should be included in further studies. By examining similar cases within the Kathmandu Valley and drawing comparisons, we can gain valuable insights into resolving issues related to practical heritage conservation. This comparative study can offer new ideas and strategies for addressing the deteriorating state of heritage in areas where communities are still awaiting conservation efforts. Furthermore, it can provide insights on how successful models can be scaled up to tackle heritage preservation on a broader scale.

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