



Cultural, Religious And Archaeological Heritage Of Lomanthang And Their Restoration

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Lo Mustang is situated between 28°36' N to 29°19' N (Lat.) and 83°28'3" E to 84°8'E (Long.) in North- Western Nepal at the altitude of 3781m. The word Mustang is derived from the name Manthang. It is called Lo by its inhabitants – Lobas. It is surrounded by – Tibet from three sides. It has snow capped mountains in east and west. The climate is arid here. It has very few arable land and most of the soil is composed of a loose conglomerate of rounded pebbles and sand. Agriculture, animal husbandry and trade have been the main sources of livelihood in Lo since ancient times. But now tourism is also becoming a major source of livelihood

Lomanthang's early history is correlated to the western province of *Ngari* in Tibet. It is mentioned in the chronicles of Ladakh of the time of *Srong btsan sgam po* in the seventh century. Several monuments like Ghami Mane wall (240 meter long), Dakmar and Ghar Gonpa of Lo Gekar in Upper Mustang have still enlivened the legendary history of Padmasambhav. Ghar Gonpa of Lo Gekar is believed to be the monastery built at the same time as Samye Gonpa of Tibet in the eighth century. Likewise, the famous

Indian teacher Atisa had visited Lo enroute to Tibet in the tenth century.

The first King of Lomanthang was *Amadpal*, who was born in 1387 A.D. He built the wall around the settlement of Lo in the second half of the fifteenth century. He also built the four storey palace in 1440 A.D. The oldest monastery in Lomanthang is Jhyampa, built by *Amgon Bzyang po* in 1447 A.D. He was the son of *Amadpal*, born in 1419 A.D. It was later restored by *Bsam grub dpal bar* in 1663 A.D. The other most important monastery in Lomanthang is Thubchen. It was built by *Tashi Goyan* in 1472 A.D. Mustang was under the influence of Jumla in sixteenth and eighteenth century. Jumla was annexed to Nepal in 1789 A.D. and Mustang became an integral part of Nepal. But its king is still recognized as a local king. The present king *Jigme Palbar Bista* is believed to be the 24th descendent of king *Amadpal*.

Father Guissep Maria the Gargano, Kirkpatrick, Hamilton, Smith, Oldfield, Tucci (1952 A.D.) and Snellgrove (1961 A.D.) had written an account of Mustang. Michael Peissel was perhaps the first person who tried to collect the history of Mustang from

Molla in 1964 A.D. Dr. Harka Gurung has also described Lo in 1980 A.D. But it was D.P. Jackson (1984 A.D.) who analyzed three generation before *Amadpal* and sixteenth generation after him by different Mollas.

Jhyampa Gonpa

It is the oldest monastery inside the wall settlement built by *Amgon Bzang po* in 1447 A.D. It was later restored by *Bsam grub dpal bar* in 1663 A.D. It is 42 m long, 24m wide and 16 m high. The main entrance is in the East. Its courtyard has open gallery supported by wooden pillars. The Meth of the pillars are beautifully carved with Ranjana script. Most of the pillars are cracked and out of the plumb. The rafters and joists of the gallery are not in good condition. It is the three storey monastery made of mud, stone and wood. There is a circumambulation path around the sanctum. The surrounding walls of the circumambulation have wall paintings. But due to the water leakage from the wall, most of the paintings have been damaged specially on west and north wall. The rafters and joists are broken in the West and south of circumambulation. There are cracks in the northern wall. The doorframe of the sanctum is carved with Chhepu above it. The sanctum has ten wooden pillars. The pedestal made of mud with the Ranjana script is attractive. The huge figure of Jhyampa or Maitraya or the future Buddha is the most attractive and beautiful. The sculpture is in the second storey. There are sculptures of Dorje Semba, Buddha and three wooden chortens. The interior walls of the second and third storey are full of Mandalas (more than 100 paintings). It is not an exaggeration to say that this monastery is the treasury of wall paintings. But the dripping of rain and snow has damaged the marvelous Mandalas as well as the monastery itself. The repairing work of the third roof has been started from this year, which is definitely laudable.

We came to know that the rafters and joists of the first storey on east, north and some of the parts of the top roof were repaired fifteen years ago.

The Pali of the second storey on east side has been restored from this year.

The repairing work of the third roof has also been started. The broad and awkward skylight is now given better shape, which is very practicable than previous one.

Thubchen Monastery-

It is one of the most important monastery in the wall settlement of Lomanthang. It is 37.20 m long, 24 m wide and 12 m high. It is constructed with stone, mud and wood. The main entrance is located in the East. The door is beautifully carved and the upper part of the doorframe has Ranjana script, and above it, stands the row of six lion heads. Inside the main entrance, there are huge earthen images of Chhtra raj and Vina raj on the north and Khadga raj and Chaitya raj on the south. There is another carved door which leads to the entrance of the sanctum. The main pillared hall is astonishingly very large. There are only 35 pillars now, but evidence shows that there were 42 pillars originally. The northern wall was shifted inward which reduced the place of 7 pillars. The central ceiling is raised high for skylight which consists of 36 lion heads in the projecting joists. According to the available document it was rebuilt in 1815 A.D. by Padma Bhuti.

The walls of monastery have paintings of gold, depicting the peaceful postures of Buddha. It was noted that the wall was plastered first, with fine yellow mud with sand like grit, then gray mud with ingredients like cow-dung, grass etc. was applied in the second layer. Finally fine mud was again plastered for the original painting. The layer is found 4 cm thick but the later painted wall was found devoid of any grit layer. The eastern wall of the sanctum has six large peaceful postures of Buddha, with the thousand small

Buddha around it and the Vairochan Buddha with DHARMA CHAKRA PRAVARTAN mudra in the middle of it. Among them two has carried the script of Tibetan. There are eight paintings of Buddha on Southern wall and one on West wall behind the Namgyal Chorten. Two figures, which are lifting the Asana of Buddha, are quite interesting. It shows the influences of China. These paintings are original and dated to 15 century. But the paintings of north wall (rebuilt) belong to the nineteenth century. One of the nineteenth century paintings of Mahankal was detached while repairing the wall of western side of Northeast corner. But the original wall of the north (5.40 m long) has still two wall paintings.

Each painting is 7 meter high and 3.40 meter wide. These are secco paintings made of mineral, malachite, azurite and gold color, which are beautiful and artistic. Most of the wall paintings are damaged due to damp and crack. About 1.40 meter area of the lower portion of the painting was destroyed because of raising the defective wall haphazardly over the paintings and also due to damp. But now these wall paintings are conserved by chemical treatment (cleaning, consolidating and conserving). Dr. Rodolfo Lujan and his team and trainees are doing wonderful restoration work of the wall paintings.

On the mud platform, at the western sanctum are Namgyal Chorten, Khadchheri Lokeswor, Thubchen (Shakya Muni Buddha), Manjushree and Padmasambhav with his two consorts. In front of these sculptures are Vajradhara, Padmasambhav with his two consorts, Aparmita and Hayagriva. All these sculptures are made of mud except Thubchen which is made of copper. This marvelous monastery was in state of dilapidation. The planks and joists above the images were in such condition that they seemed to collapse any time. Some of the pillars and beams were also out of the plumb.

The main cause of the damaging monastery

was due to water penetration from the wall and roof. But the restoration work since 1998 till now are as following ;

- The whole roof structure was completely repaired. The deteriorated and damaged rafters and joists of the roof have been changed and covered again by stone and mud. The parapet around the roof was covered by stone.
- The skylight of the roof is modified. Before, there was light from the above section but now light enters from the south.
- The roof of the vestibule is repaired.
- The main entrance is also renovated including the six lions.
- The wall of the Khadga raj and Chaitya raj has been conserved. There are wall paintings in this room too.
- The staircase towards the north wall is maintained and a hole is made on the roof of the northeast corner for the sake of sky light.
- The space of southern side of entrance, which was a wasted land before is now going to be two-storey room. It will secure the wall paintings.
- The kitchen beside the entrance was hindrance of the grandeur of Gonpa, now demolished.

King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (Annapurna Conservation Area Programme) and American Himalayan Foundation have been working together to conserve this significance monument as Thubchen Gonpa Conservation Project. So, it is indeed a matter of great pleasure that conservation work of Thubchen Gonpa (except chemical treatment of wall painting) has already been completed according to the norms of the archaeological conservation.

Palace

The four-storey palace was built by *Amadpal* in 1440 A.D. It is constructed by mud, stone and wood,

which has nine corners. The palace also consists of wall paintings and Ranjana script. The main entrance of the palace is in the east. It is painted white by lime mud. The palace has valuable and important Kanjur, Tanjur, Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparmita, Shtasahasrika Prajnaparmita etc.

Chhoedye Monastery-

It is also built by Tashi Goyen in fifteenth century. The monastery is now running a school for monks. The valuable sculptures, books, thangkas and masks belonging to the Jhyampa and Thubchen monasteries are kept here for security. The famous traditional Tiji festival is conducted every year by the monks of Chhoedye monastery.

Lomanthang wall-

The wall was built by *Amadpal*, the first king of Lomanthang in 1440 A.D. It is 1.5 m at the base. The base is built of boulder stone without mortar. On this boulder, Gyang (beaten mud, 40 cm wide, 50 cm high and 3 m long) has been put making it tapered at the top. Pop (mud brick 42cm*13cm*21 cm) is found in later repairing work. The height of the wall is 8.55 m. It has stone paving walkway (60-70 cm wide) below the top of the wall and the height of the top from the stone is 75-80 cm. The wall of Lomanthang has five corners which consists of several bastions (*Zhong*). The average height of Bastion is 10m. The wall is 270 m long in the west and 153 m wide in the south. It is 59m less in north comparing to the south. The wall occupies 3.51 hectare (68.87 Ropani). The main entrance of the wall lies in the north. It is 3m wide and 5m high. It is the only entrance of the fortress but now there can be seen many openings in the wall.

Importance of the wall-

It is the only walled city of Nepal. The first ruler of Lomanthang had built the wall and his palace in 1440 A.D. The wall is like a fortress protecting the inhabitants of Lomanthang from the beginning.

There are 175 habitans and 1009 inhabitants living within this walled city. The most significant monuments inside the wall are three red painted monasteries, the white palace, twelve chortens and a Mane wall.

Lomanthang settlement is divided into two parts- the southern part known for palace and habitans of white painted and the northern part, known for Gonpas painted red. The settlement is also divided into four area; each area named after the God and Goddess. Isana direction is named after Vajra Sadhu Mahankal, which is called Gunthang. Agneya direction is named after the Dolma which is called Dolma Lakhang. Nairitya direction is named after Cherenji which is called Potaling and Vayabya direction is named after Jhyampa which is called Jhythang. Actually Lomanthang has only one entrance in the north but now people have misconceived the wall as hindrance to the free access to their plots and fields outside the wall.

There are altogether 60 spouts and 25 openings in the wall. These spouts are used as their roof drainage which is in fact the main reason for deteriorating the mud wall. The lack of proper drainage inside the wall seems a big problem. Last year the eastern wall portion of Chhoedye Gonpa collapsed completely which is now being restored from this year by ACAP. Surendra Bista pulled down the dilapidated portion of the wall which was against the Ancient Monument Preservation Act of 2013. Later he constructed it with Pop brick which is an alien of Gyang. The other portion near the dismantled wall was also collapsed naturally because of its worst condition. DOA had contributed Rs. 12,16,756.09 in 1987/88, 1988/89 and 1989/90 for the conservation of the wall.

Stone foundation of Zhong was located when digging at North west Bastion, North Wall where the opening is made near Health Post and western wall near the cracking.

Each and every monument of the Lomanthang has been listed in the map.

1. Mane (near the main gate) – Prayer wheel. It is believed the number of Mantras consist inside, would be prayed when rotating it.
2. Mane (above the gate) – Prayer wheel
3. Avalokiteswor, Padmapani and Cherenji – Boddhisatwas and symbol of knowledge
4. Palace- built by Amadpal in 1440 A.D.
5. Dharsing (in front of the palace)- It is believed that fluttering of the flags bring good luck to the people throughout the year
6. Dhye (Dabali) –where Tiji festivals are celebrated for three days
7. Thubchen Gonpa –built by Tashi Goen in the 15th century
8. Dharsing (in front of Thubchen Gonpa)- victory of Buddhism
9. Niwa Mane –two prayer wheels
10. Dhesidhunpa (8 chorten)- chaitya
11. Achhuluma (4 chorten) – chaitya
12. Kulo (water channel)-for whole settlement of Lomanthang
13. Jhyampa Gonpa-built by Ageon Sangpo in 1447 A.D.
14. Mane –prayer wheel
15. Sangu Mendang- Mane wall
16. Chhoedye Gonpa-built by Tashi Goen in the 15th century
17. Dhara – the game of bow and arrow
18. Dharsing (in front of the main gate) –flag
19. Kyangniwa (two chorten)- chaitya
20. Mendang and chorten – Mane wall and chaitya
21. Jhiwa chorten (3 big chorten, 5 small chorten and Rigsung Gonpo
22. Mendang (in front of Day Care Centre)
23. Lukang (King’s garden) –dedicated to Serpent Deity
24. Rig Sung Gonpo – Avalokiteswor, Cherenji and Vajrapani
25. Chorten –Chaitya
26. Mendang –Mane wall
27. Circumambulation path for going around the wall fifteen times in full moon (Purnima)
28. Lukang – dedicated to Serpent deity
29. Serki Jangwa –tree of gold
30. Tibli (water reservoir)
31. Sukti (seat for the king for watching Yartung festival)
32. Chorten – Chaitya
33. Related to Tiji festival
34. Related to Horse racing (yartung) festival

Besides the above monuments the other important monuments are :

- Kagbeni-Fortress and gate of Lomanthang
- Muktinath-Confluence of flame, water and earth. Sacred place of both Hindu & Buddhist.
- Chu Ranju Cave(down below, on the way to Syangmochen)
- Ghiling Monastery and Chorten
- Ghemi Mane Wall ,monastery and caves
- Logekar Monastery
- Charang Palace ,Monastery and caves
- Luri Monastery
- Bonpo Chorten (on the entering way of Lomanthang)
- Ketcher Zhong (Ruined Palace)
- Kyakyakhang (ruined settlement)
- Hot water spring
- Marchung caves
- Bonpo Chorten (near the Tibli and crematory)
- Samduling Monastery and caves
- Namgyal Monastery
- Thinkar (palace of king)
- Choser Caves and monastery

Festivals

1. Tiji (religious)-on the occasion of happiness for killing the demons. The tradition of Lama’s dance.

2. Lhosar (historic)-New year at the month of Falgun, still prevalent.
3. Yartung (historic)-The Lamas of Chhoedye take feast enjoying the ride of the horse at the month of Bhadra.
4. Phangi dhajyang (religious)-for the digestive system. The coeval younger eats feast at rainy season.
5. Shaka Lhuka (religious)- for the sake of good harvest, they perform the puja before sowing the seed in the field.
6. Shaka Dhawa (cultural)- Surkhang V.D.C.(all the villagers)- painting on monasteries and chortens and puja of Nyune.

Kai Weise says "The identity of Lomanthang is primarily based on the fact that it is a medieval walled city which is still to a large degree intact. This should be seen as a cultural heritage of world value. Not only the settlement and cultural heritages of the walled city are important but also the path around the city wall are significant for religious purposes of procession and circumambulation. Therefore the whole walled city and the path around the Mendang has become integral part of culture, and archaeology of Lomanthang." Actually, the people of Lomanthang need to understand that by preserving the unique identity of their settlement, they are securing their own future (Weise K., 1998.)

Impacts on cultural heritage-

- The present alignment of road is within the chortens. Chortens are made of stone, mud and wood and they are in dilapidated state. So if the vehicles come, the chortens will collapse due to the vibration.
- The immediately threatened zones to the historic/religious structures of Lomanthang would be within 75 m area which means the northern wall, Mendang, two chorten, palace, northern gate, Lashing, three chortens, eastern

wall and half of the southern wall are affected by the vibration. Likewise, the eventually threatened area are chhoedye, Jhyampa, Thubchen and the chortens which will destroy the monuments slowly.

- The mud town wall is highly vulnerable to vibrations. The stone and mud foundation which has not been checked in detail, is assumed built of rubble stones and mud mortar. It is particularly susceptible by virtue of poor adhesion of mud to stone. The mud upper structure will definitely shake with the vibration from the passage of loaded trucks along the wall. The vibration will pass into the earth and travel through sub surface and up the wall. The vibration will be greater due to the rough surface of an unpaved road and even greater in damp areas (every monsoon) and areas weakened by dampness. The eastern wall is in danger of collapsing at least in one section and is in very poor condition due to the following factors through out its length. The upper section has been broken by door, window and drain spout openings. The wall is out of the plumb in at least on section. It is no longer tied into the internal residential building fabric in this area nor in the other three sections of the eastern section of the town due to demolitions and one long interior walkway along the wall. Its base has been weakened in at least three sections by annual flooding and pounding at the internal side of the base of the wall. The external base has been weakened by deep surface erosion due to the urine acids from the corralled animals (SKA, 2000)
- The privatization of the area around the town wall has diminished the cultural status of it.
- The eastern section would have air and surface pollution.
- Circumambulation would be impeded.
- The diurnal passage of animals out of and back

into the town would be highly interrupted.

The primary attraction of Lomanthang is very much in its exterior appearance. The town wall defines the town. The town wall is already comprised of the corrals, exterior buildings and penetrations of the wall. Tourists make long trips to Lomanthang to get away from the degradation of the nature that they live with on a daily basis. Truck stops on the way to reach Lomanthang would reduce tourists desire to make an exciting trip .

Mitigation measures-

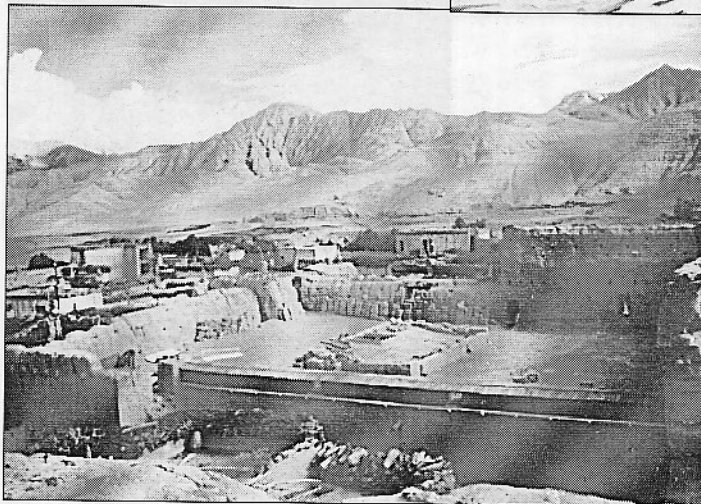
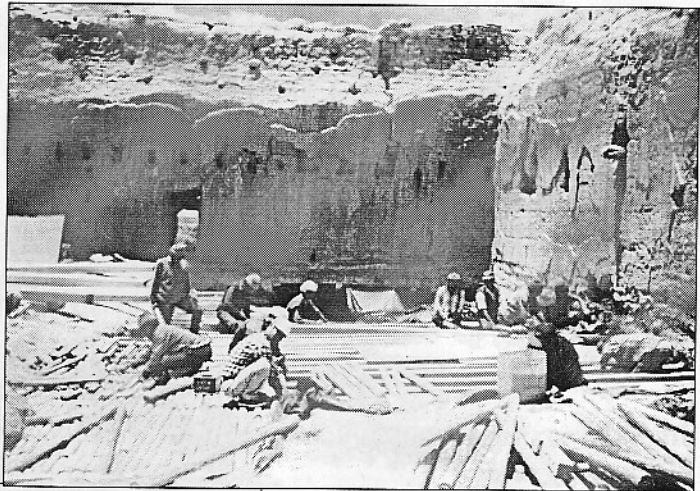
1. Lomanthang – a walled city should be thoroughly documented (detailed survey, drawing, mapping and inventory) and a master plan for its conservation should be prepared.
2. In order to stop the further encroachment and construction of the buildings around the wall and to keep the aesthetic and cultural value of Lomanthang, HMG-N should take immediate step to declare it as the protected Monument according to Ancient Monument Preservation Act 2013, Clause 3.
3. Lomanthang is unique by its architecture, art, history, culture, religion, festival and archaeology. It is the only intact medieval fort located in Nepal. So, it can be classified as an internationally important monument of Nepal.
4. According to the structure of the monuments any vehicular roads would be very harmful for Lomanthang. No vehicular roads should be constructed around the wall.
5. Lack of proper drainage is the main factor causing deterioration of Lomanthang wall and its important monuments. So proper drainage system is immediately needed to be built.

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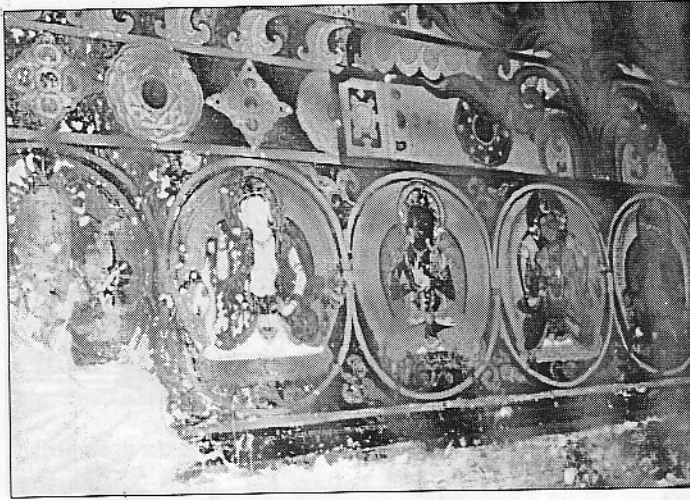
1. Roof repairing work in Thubchen Gonpa



2. Roof of the Thubchen Gonpa after repair.

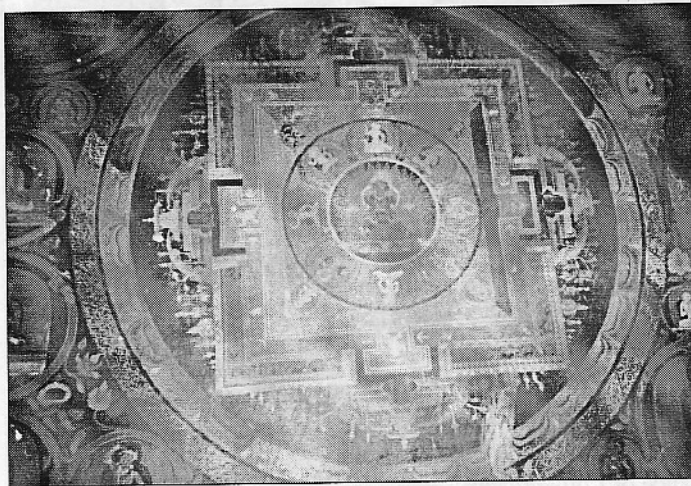


3. The famous Tiji dance of Lomanthang



4. Wall painting of Thubchen Gonpa

5. Wall painting of Thubchen Gonpa which shows influence of China



6. Mandala wall painting inside the Jhyampa Gonpa