

# A Report On Preliminary Investigating Of The Structural Condition Of The Chandeshwari Temple-Banepa-Nepal

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— John Sanday

## Introduction

At the request of the Department of Archaeology of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, I was asked to assist in the preparation of the cost estimate for the structural repair and rehabilitation of the Chandeshwari temple in Banepa.

This report outlines a brief historical background of the Chandeshwari temple followed by its description and some recommendations. The drawings which go along with this report have been prepared after several site visits during the months April and May 1983, but are still uncompleted due to the complexity of the temple.

## Historical Background

Although no references have been found on the origin or history of the temple precinct, it is supposed that the temple of Chandeshwari was founded during the 17th

century A. D. but since then has undergone several alternations and repairs, especially during the last century. According to a legend, the temple was built in thanks givings to the goddess *Chagdhonubika Bhagvati*. At one time the gods were being harassed by the demon *Chand*, because *Vishnu*, their protector, had journeyed to the Deladri Hills to obtain salvation from a curse. The gods asked *Bhramari* for advice and they were told to go to the *Retna Chandon Forest* near Banepa where *Chagdhonubika Bhagvati* lived under a huge tree. They asked for her help and she killed the demon with her trident on the day of *Baisakh-Purnima*. After this, the location became known as *Chandeshwari*, the site where the demon Chand was slayed. As an offering of thanks the temple was dedicated to her and every year a festival is held on *Baisakh-Purnima* in memory of this event. On that day a chariot procession with the

implements from the *Chandeshwari Dyochhen* processes along the pathway from the temple to Banepa and back.

### Situation

Chandeshwari is a temple precinct with some adjacent buildings which, together, form a monument of considerable charm. The group is approached from Banepa town along a stone paved pathway that runs roughly North-east along through farm land and rice fields. There is a fine view of the whole monument zone from a considerable distance around. The site is located on the right bank of a steeply sloping gorge, the opposite bank is well wooded. A stream, cascading down the gorge forms small pools between the rocks at the foot of the temple precinct proper. Below the temple are three ghats, a spring and various small sanctuaries including one dedicated to Hanuman. From these loosely but sensitively placed buildings and sculptures there are fine views up-towards the temple area which is accessible through a small gate at the top of a steeply ascending path.

The main entrance, guarded by lions is at the end of the paved path which comes from the South-west through the little hamlet of Chandeshwari. In front of the gate is an open area with a *pathi* on the left side, a recently restored pond and several other features which mark it as an zone of protection. There are a number of buildings located on either side of the pathway however they are mostly settled on the Northern side. A structure of interest is the *Chandeshwari Dyochhen* which is important because it houses the ceremonial implements used during the annual procession of the Chandeshwari divinity to nearby Banepa and back. This God-house has recently been preserved

against further dilapidation by the local people from Banepa and Chandeshwari.

The temple precinct proper is an irregular rectangle which is enclosed on all sides. Adjoining it on the West is a walled garden that stretches down the hill towards the ghats. The North and East boundaries are formed by a brick building which was recently completed with open rooms on the ground floor, serving as a *pathi* - some of which are used for meetings and pujas - and with open terraces on the upper floor. From the North-east corner of the courtyard there is access to this roof terrace and the path from here leads to the stream down the hill. In the South-east corner is a rather dilapidated two storeyed brick house. A ruined brick wall completes the enclosure on the Southern side.

### General Description

Within the temple precinct, in front of the main entrance, a brick *granthaku* dedicated to *Chandeshwari Mahadev* was erected in the 18th A. D. This temple which houses the image of *Chandeshwari* - in reality *Shiva*, the master of the slayer *Chond* - can be recognised by the image of *Shiva's* vehicle, *Nandi* the bull who faces the entrance. A wooden *torana* over the entrance contains the image of *Nriteshwar* and inside the temple a *Shiva-linga* is worshipped daily.

The Chandeshwari temple itself stands further more to the South of the brickpaved courtyard. It is a three tiered temple with a lion and a peacock on a column in front of the main entrance. The *torana* over the doorway is richly carved and contains several gilded sculptures. On each side of the entrance there is a small niche housing a protective divinity.

All the walls on the ground floor have been recently covered with white glazed tiles. Encircling the temple, except for the Southern side and part of the Eastern side, are rows of votive oil-lamps set on a wooden frame at about 90cm above plinth level. On the Western wall is a multi-coloured fresco of *Bhairab* which is repainted each year for the festival.

Within the sanctum of the temple is a free standing image of the Goddess *Parvati* wearing rich silver ornaments. On the other remaining walls several other clay statues are also worshipped.

Most of the windows are finely carved and contain carved heads of different divinities. The carved struts are of special quality and represent the images of the *Ashtamatrikas* and the *Ashtabhairabs*. The two lower roofs are covered with the original roof-tiles (*Jinghati*), while the upper roof is probably gilded copper with bells hanging from the eaves. This roof is capped with a gilded *Gajur*.

### Repair Recommendations

Since the architectural quality of the main temple within its confined compound is greatly enhanced by the natural beauty of the setting, both are to be protected. The protection area is thus to include the small hamlet, the ghatside along the nearby river and the ceremonial path from Banepa as essential elements.

Before any repair on the temple of Chandeshwari is started, a more detailed analysis of the structure is required. The inner structure has to be opened up and a foundation research is to be carried out in order to check the real cause of the settlement. The roof structure has to be

renewed and lightened. The traditional roof-tiles (*Jinghati*) will be laid in the traditional manner in a bed of clay, but following the special techniques set out in the conservation handbook from Mr. John Sanday.

The one storeyed addition, which enlarges the sanctum to the East needs another roof in order to match with the adjacent wall of the temple. The woodcarving of both windows and struts will be cleaned of paint and grime, repaired where necessary and treated against fungal and beetle attack. The facing brickwork needs to be cleaned and repaired and any defective bricks will be replaced with new matching bricks.

The multi-coloured fresco needs careful repair. The clay on which the fresco is painted is being pushed away from the wall and needs to be repaired. A damp-proof course at the bottom of the fresco will prevent further rising damp.

### Present Condition

The Chandeshwari temple is undoubtedly a temple of considerable distinction not only because of its religious importance, but also for its historical and architectural value. However, in its present state of disrepair and neglect, it is hard to visualise the quality of workmanship and its former grandeur. Most of the finely carved windows and struts as well as the brickwork are hidden under layers of paint and dust which has accumulated over the several decades.

However a problem that is far more serious is the severe distortion in the structure which was probably due to earthquake disturbance and subsequent movement along the Southern wall and lateral thrust caused by the heavy roofs. Although the temple was

probably built on solid rock foundations - the sub-stata is very rocky strewn - it is possible that the gorge may also have contributed to the movement of the temple.

It is fairly certain that the Eastern single storeyed addition was added after the completion of the temple, probably to enlarge the sanctum. This addition however, takes part of the inner structure without any recognizable alternation in order to hold up the upper structure.

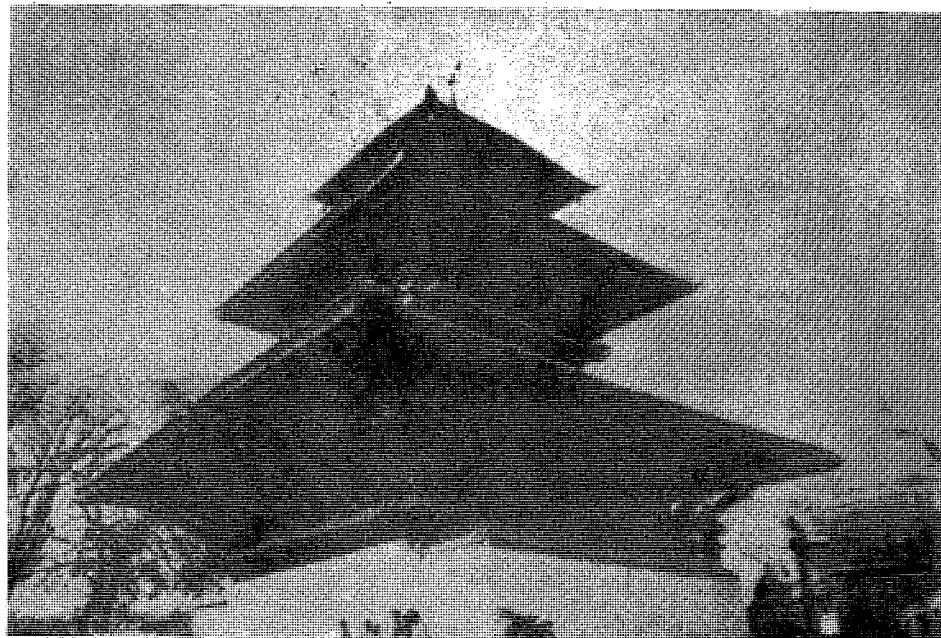
Inside the temple, the two upper roofs are supported off all very complex but weak timber structure, that has been propped in an apparently temporary manner - by two thin long posts.

Later this century the fine traditional glazed bricks on the outer walls of the ground-floor were covered with white glazed tiles.

On the South side, the roof structure is in a very bad state of repair, due to structural movement and several leaks in the roof.

The multi-coloured fresco which is painted on a layer of plaster, is been pushed off the wall at the top while at the bottom due to rising damp and the leak of a plinth, the paint is been washed away.

On the Southern side of the temple, the ground is slowly sliding down hill due to the ruined condition of the retaining wall.



*View from the South showing the single storied addition*



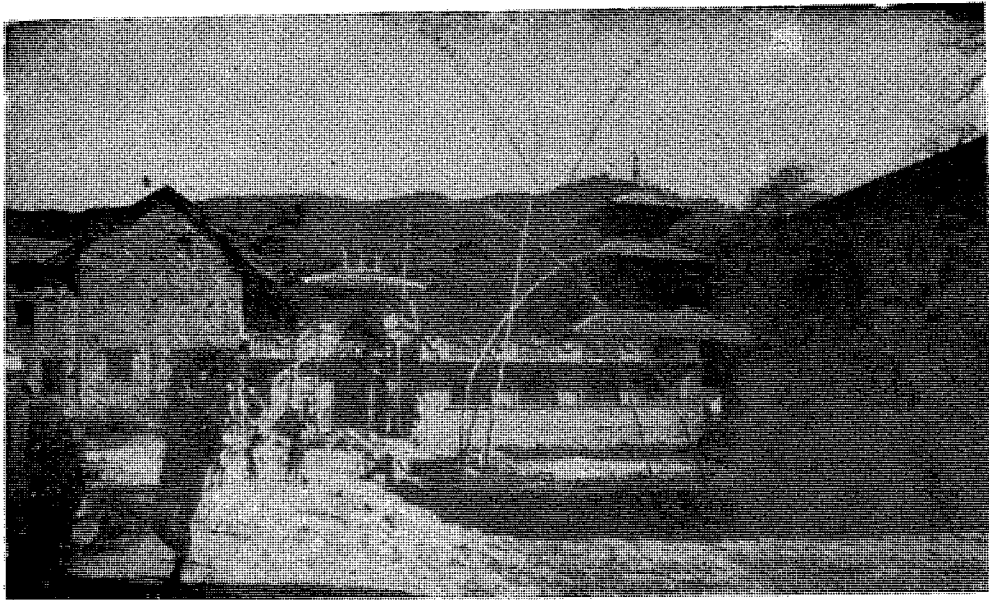
*Entrance to the Chāndeshwari Temple*



*Giant mural of Bhairab on the Eastern wall*



*Main entrance to the temple  
precinct — 1975 A. D.*



*New entrance and surrounding building*