

# Report on the Monuments of Northern Nepal

(Research in Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Sindhu Palchok,  
Kabre, Dolakha, Manang Districts)

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## Summary of Recommendations

To strengthen the present cultural heritage conservation programme in the northern regions of Nepal, the following actions are recommended :

- The creation of a research unit in the Department of Archaeology to make an inventory of the cultural property. The unit should include an architect specialized in restoration, an epigrapher, a specialist in the humanities (history, religion and ethnology), a photographer specialized in the photographing of mural paintings and images, a master craftsman.

The unit's work will consist in the pursuance of a systematic inventory of cultural property in all the districts.

For each monument and each site a considered statement of facts is essential in order to set up guidelines for the restoration.<sup>1</sup>

A translation of this document in Nepali and Tibetan for distribution among the local authorities would be invaluable.

The research unit will also compile a list of the craftsmen belonging to the various corporations by region and by group of villages. These craftsmen will be needed for repair work and they could also promote local production of traditional objects likely to interest tourists.

All available building materials should likewise be listed.

- The constitution of a special team to intervene in matters related to the maintenance and restoration of imperilled monuments. In some regions, protective measures should be taken immediately, particularly where buildings or ruins need to be protected from rain or movable objects safeguarded from theft or pillage, the most vulnerable being paintings, statues and books.

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1. See : C. Jest, *Northern Monuments of Nepal*, UNESCO, Paris, 1981.

Should the Nepalese government consider it worth while, a single monument might be selected in each district for restoration by specialists so as to serve as an example to be followed.

Periodical inspection tours would also fall within the responsibilities of the team, and its head would be empowered to act as advisor after an examination of the problems with the local authorities.

- The establishment of a permanent consultative bureau where local authorities and chiefs of districts could obtain the assistance and cooperation of specialists, architects, conservators, restorers, etc. When major repairs are being done, certain modern improvements such as fire walls and anti-earthquake reinforcements may well be considered applicable.

- The organization of a propaganda campaign aimed at the responsible authorities, the general public and the school children by means of audio-visual media, exhibitions, lectures and seminars on the theme of conservation.

It is conceivable that seminars will be an opportunity to present special facets of conservation. Several topics worthy of illustration naturally come to mind, e. g. the utilization of new building materials with their advantages and pitfalls, the protection of wooden structures, mural paintings, etc.

The members of the communities must assume themselves the protection of monuments and culture.

- Close liaison between the preservation specialists and the tourism authorities. Buddhism and the environment are the two poles of attraction for cultural tourism. The monuments of Northern Nepal are always set in an excep-

tionally beautiful landscape. The problem of safeguarding the cultural heritage as well as permitting access to it today has assumed the character of an emergency and demands thought.

In addition, it would be useful to train certain members of the community as guides.

A specific legislation should be conceived. Some of the temples should be listed as "national monuments" and taken over by the Government (such a procedure has already been adopted in several countries, for example in Japan).

The next step should be the continuation of the general census of the districts which have not been surveyed yet.

## Introduction

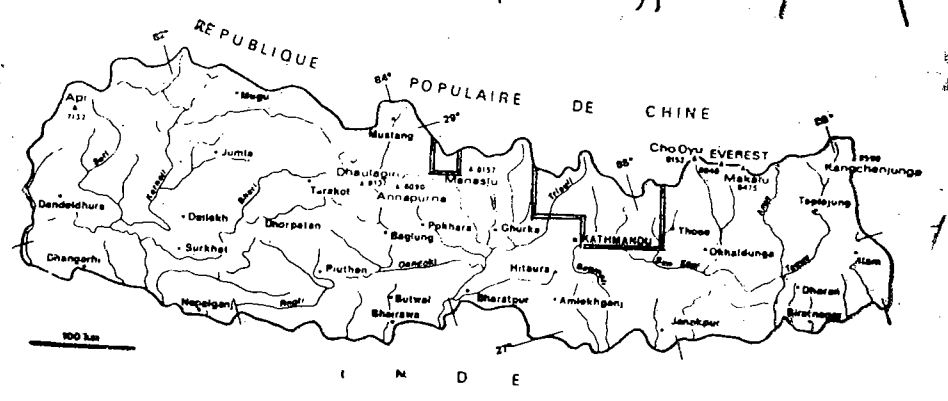
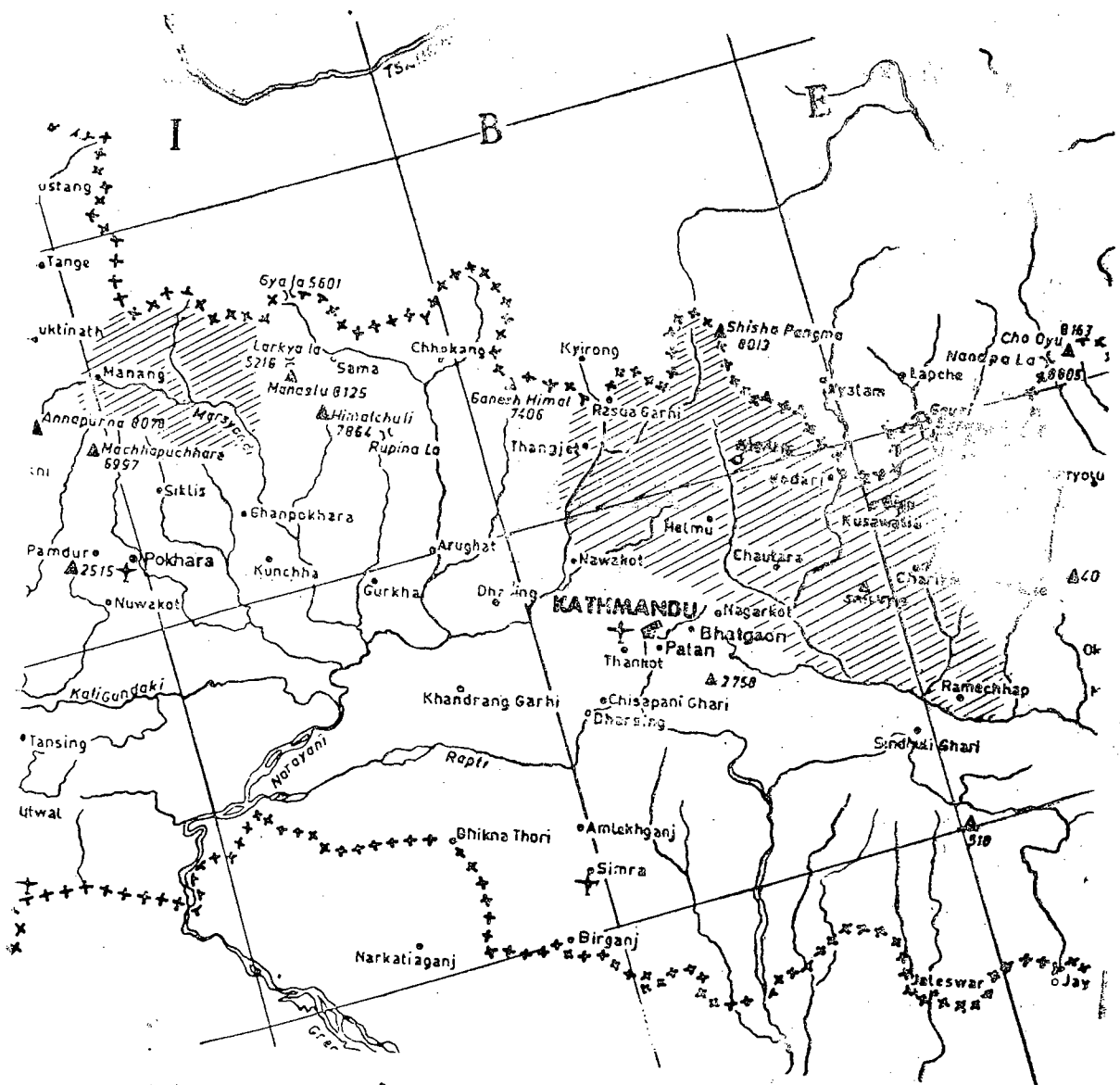
### Terms of Reference

In 1978, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, with the help of UNESCO, decided to develop an inventory of the monuments of Northern Nepal, especially in the Buddhist areas.

A first action was taken including the elaboration of a method of investigation; field studies, classification of documents and promotion of the idea of conservation.

In a second phase (1980-81), further field trips have been made, discussions and meetings with decision makers held and a strategy for implementation elaborated and proposed. The present report concerns this second phase.

In advancing in the research one must draw attention to the extreme diversity of the mentalities in Northern Nepal which are due to differences in ecological and cultural environments and the influence of one or another religious leader.



### The Survey

Extensive research has been done in the districts of Rasuwa, Nuwakot, East of Kathmandu, and in Dolakha-Charikot, Kabre and Sindhu Palchok, West of Kathmandu. (See map).

The monuments are mostly related to the Buddhist religion. It was not our intention to undertake the study of the building structures. Nevertheless the data collected can help if a technical analysis is necessary.

The team comprised two photographers Mr. Tej Ratna Tamrakar and Mr. Chiniya Tamrakar.

Contacts were established with the head and members of the Panchayats, the village elders and the responsible members of the Clergy.

Separate reports were made on each field mission and the data and photographic documentation were deposited with the Archaeological Departments of Nepal in a special filing system.

### Arrangement of Report

It has obviously been difficult to reduce the large quantity of material (especially photographic) available into a report.

We present successively :

- The populations of the Central part of Nepal.
- Their religious beliefs.
- The monuments and their typology.
- The legislation.

For the districts of Central Nepal presented here each building has been examined in detail following a standard pattern, giving a

simple analysis of the construction and condition.

Restoration work has already started in the Northern region and we add a note on the present activities and projects for 1982.

A list of monuments to be designated as *national monuments* is given.

The second part of the report is devoted to a detailed description of the buildings, which are presented as follows :

- Location and environment
- A description of the building or complex of buildings.
- The present condition.
- Architectural and historical elements.
- The important religious ceremonies.

[In Annexes we present the tables of the temples of the districts surveyed.]

At the end of the report, general observations are made and conclusions are drawn as to the possible future of the cultural heritage of the Northern regions of Nepal. The approach has been rather dispassionate as it was felt necessary to consider the entire cultural problem rather than isolating the buildings or taking them out of context.

### Acknowledgements

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Kusho Tsechu, religious leader, Kathmandu.

### Populations of the Northern Regions of Central Nepal

The population of the Northern districts in Central Nepal is essentially Tamang and Sherpa.

The Tamangs form one of the major Tibeto-Burman speaking communities in Nepal. They are more than 700,000. The main area inhabited by the Tamang lies in the hilly region between the River Likhu Khola in Eastern Nepal and Buri Gandaki in Central West Nepal. The majority is found in the Bagmati Zone around the Valley of Kathmandu.<sup>1</sup>

Tamangs themselves distinguish between Eastern and Western Tamangs, but in spite of noticeable differences in language and culture they come from a common ethnic stock.

Their culture was partly influenced by Tibet, especially by Buddhism. The tradition of a southward migration is alive. Political history and the adaptation to lower altitude conditions shaped the Tamang culture into its present form.

The economy is based on rice and wheat cultivation and on cattle breeding.

The community is divided in exogamous clans (*rui*) and the village is a geographical and ritual entity.

The religious beliefs of the Tamang are of a very complex nature and one counts not less than five major ritual specialists: the *lama*, Buddhist Priest whose main responsibility is to perform the rites connected with death; the shaman, *bonpo*, an ecstatic specialist and healer; the *lambu*, an exorcist; the *mukhiya* or 'headman' who is in-charge of the cult of local deities and the *pujari*, an expert in rituals addressed to certain Hindu divinities.

In the present report we will be only concerned with the buddhist aspects and the material expression of these beliefs in buildings, images and worship.

The Sherpa, a Tibetan speaking population have a clear sense of distinct identity, that sets them apart from the other high altitude dwellers of Tibetan stock along the Main Himalayan Range.<sup>2</sup>

1. C. Von Furer Haimendorf.- "Ethnographic notes on the Tamangs of Nepal", in *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. IX, 3-4, 1955-56, pp.166-177. A Hofer.- *Tamang Ritual Texts. Preliminary studies in the folk religion of an ethnic minority in Nepal*, Wiesbaden, 1981.

2. B. H. Aziz.- View from the Monastery Kitchen, *Kailash*, Vol. IV, 1976, No. 2, pp. 155-168.

F. Funke.- *Religioses Leben der Sherpa, Khumbu Himal*, Vol.9, Innsbruck-Munchen, 1969.

C. Von Furer Haimendorf.- *The Sherpas of Nepal, Buddhist Highlanders*, London, 1964 (fieldwork in 1953 and 1957).

T. Hagen, G. O. Dyrenfurth, C. Von Furer Haimendorf, E. Scheider.- *Mount Everest. Formation, Population and Exploration of the Everest Region*, London, 1963.

L. G. Jerstad.- *Mani Rimdu. Sherpa dance-drama*, Seattle, 1969.

M. Oppitz.- *Geschichte and Sozialordnung der Sherpa, Khumbu Himal*, No. 8, 1968.

R. A. Paul.- *Sherpas and their religion*, Ph. D., University of Chicago, 1970.

Sangye Tenzing Sherpa Lama, A. W. Macdonald (compiled by).- *Documents for the study of the religion and social organisation of the Sherpas*, 3 Tibetan manuscripts (in Tibetan), Junbesi, 1971.

D. Snellgrove.- *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford, 1957.

The main concentration of Sherpas is in the Solu-Khumbu region. Migrations have been considerable and there are also Sherpa settlements North East and North of the Kathmandu Valley.

The total population is established at 20,000 people.

Sherpa society has evolved along a specific pattern. Its specialization being in economic activities, such as yak-breeding and trading with Tibet (up to 1959), and the development of religious activities and institutions in contact with the Buddhist monasteries of Tibet proper.

The settlements do not possess resources enabling their inhabitants to maintain themselves throughout the year. The cattle breeders are semi-nomadic, continually moving their herds from one pasture to another, which explains the reason for several dwellings belonging to each family at different altitudes. In the main villages there are the principal houses, shrines and temples and in the subsidiary settlements, located at higher altitude, there are houses of a smaller size.

The Sherpa settlements and houses are of great uniformity. The dwellings are built on a rectangular plan with stone walls, usually double storeyed. The roofs are covered with shingles held down with boulders. In some houses there is a place of worship consisting of an altar with moulded figures and panelled walls decorated with frescoes. Temples and religious buildings as well as shrines and prayer-wheels are found in all the main villages.

Sherpa tradition says that the Sherpas immigrated from Tibet between 400 and 500 years ago.

A Village constitutes a community of integrated families, linked by kinship and friend-

ship. This community is able therefore to take concerted action for the general organisation of the agro-pastoral and religious activities. The Panchayat System has replaced now the former system of village administration based on the principle that all authority is delegated to officials elected for a limited period of time. These panchayat members can however still call public meetings to discuss the more important problems.

#### Religious Beliefs in Central Nepal

It is necessary to comprehend the importance of Buddhism in the Central part of Nepal where it is intrically interwoven with Hinduism and Animism.

The monuments, religious ceremonies and festivals are only the visible portion of a complex web of beliefs and Buddhism in its Mahayana form is part of the most visible and demonstrative aspect.

In fact there is an integration of different and sometimes seemingly antagonist cults, the worship of local deities residing in lakes, on mountain ridges, in forests, harmful if not properly controlled; the respect one has to pay to the ancestors (gods), the *kul*, the protection one has to organise to avert evil spirits of all kinds, the faith one has to direct towards the Buddhist gods.

In Nepal, Hinduism and Buddhism dovetail, the Nepali speaking people, whose racial and linguistic affinities lie with Northern India represent Hinduism, the Tibeto-Burman and Tibetan speaking populations of the Northern valleys adhere to Buddhism.

The Tamang Lamas are performing a certain number of ceremonies, mainly the after-

death ceremony *Gyewa*, leaving to the medium *Jhakri*. The exorcisms and protection of the household and settlements. In the Tamang tradition each village has a Lama, called *Tika Lama*. He must stay in the village, has to perform the after-death ritual, give a name to children, organize the worship of the ancestor gods *Puitcma* (or *Dugunya*), organize the festival of *Dewali* (once every 3 or 4 years) related to the cult of ancestors.

He also paints religious paintings and murals. If a village has no Lama, the community asks a Lama to settle, gives him land to build a temple and some arable land to cultivate.

The function of *Tika Lama* is hereditary and cannot be refused by a member of the family. It is always a member of the same clan who has to be a priest. His functions can be compared to the *Purohit* in Hindu society.

For the Tamang, religion is a social affair and the practices led by 'Lamas', who have a poor religious education, are imprinted with beliefs which have little to do with 'orthodox' Buddhism.

The most important ceremony is not the one performed in the temple, but the one called *Gyalwo*: dealing with the clan divinity or god associated or interpreted as the ancestor god and protector.

If the ceremony is done according to the Nying-ma-pa ritual, the effigy substitute represents a female demon. After a night of chanting this effigy is expelled by a group of laymen at the border of the village with whistle and shouting. The evil has been 'cast away', men, house and property are protected for the year to come.

But the Lama is not the only one to worship and protect, a shaman (*Jhakri, Bonpo*), or an intercessor (*Dhami*) complement the rituals.

Once one reaches the high valleys, which form an integral part of the Tibetan cultural area, Buddhism takes over with its strong religious rules and frame of action. The religious inspiration derived from the great centers of Buddhist learning in Tibet is now replaced by Kathmandu.

The major acts of life are an expression of religion. The head of the community, if not a priest/lama, has to take advice from a Lama.

In Sherpa country the establishment of monasteries in Solu as well as in Khumbu is a recent phenomenon and they are today a focal point in the Sherpas' religion life. The performance of seasonal and domestic rituals is a function performed in the village temples.

The *Lamas* are members of the village community, are married and head also a secular life.

As the village communities are of small size, the weight of religion is primordial.

The Buddhist church is a solid structure which has been expending for more than twelve centuries along the Himalayan range. This missionary spirit, which can be compared to the Western Christian practices, has been during the centuries, and is now-a-days, one of the components of the conservation or restoration of monuments and religious landmarks.

The fluctuations in the practice of religion in the different areas is exemplified in the maintenance of the buildings. In some places the derelict state of gompas is indication of the decline of religion.

A renewal can come from the presence of a Lama who revitalizes Buddhism and brings together the members of the community to pool their resources to restore a temple or a shrine.

Such activities, well known through history, can set in motion a religious renewal.

The Tamang and Sherpa ethnic groups though none of them can claim a historical connexion with them, consider Padmasambhava and Milarepa as their main patrons.

Padmasambhava, the saint who developed Buddhism in Tibet during the VIIIth century, travelled extensively in the Himalaya. He came from India and visited the following places: *Chumig Changchub Durdzi* (South of Kathmandu), *Yangla Shel* (in the Southern part of the Valley of Kathmandu), then went to the East, stayed in the cave of *Halashe*, came back to *Sailung* where he spent sometime in *Nange* (above Kalbari-Tamjet), he left a print of his feet in a cave. He stayed also in *Dorjegang* in the mountain of Timal, West of the Sun Kosi, went to *Pematsal*, to Yolmo and entered Tibet via Kyirong and reached *Pamopangdang* and finally Samye.

Milarepa, a saint who lived in the XIth century A. D. has spent sometime in Yolmo and in the upper Tamba Kosi valley. He also stayed in Kosa and Lapchi to the East of the Bhote Koshi.

The influence of the Drugpa-Kagyupa sect in Nepal is to be related with historical events dating back to Narabhupal Saha, father of king Prithvi Narayan (beg. of XVIIIth century A. D.).

A follower of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, Lama Sherab Gyaltzen was of his way to Mount Kailas in western Tibet when he

met the king of Gorkha. A few years later the same Lama was given the property of the shrine of Swayambhu in the valley of Kathmandu and two summer residences (*Yarsa*), one in Nagtali on the way to Kyirong, at present in Rasuwa District, and another in Kangyul-Yolmo (in Sindhu Palchok District).

The influence of the Drugpa-Kagyupa sect extended during the XVIIIth and XIXth century in Central Nepal.

A recent times, Sherab Dorje, a Drugpa Kagyupa Lama travelled extensively in the central part of the Himalaya, building and repairing temples and shrines.

#### The Religious Education

Upto 1950 the Tamang and Sherpa lamas were educated in Tibet, in Kyirong Drakar or Lende (a monastery close to Kyirong) sometimes in Gyantse or in Khasa (on the Bhote Kosi). The young students used to spend two to three years with a teacher, learn the texts and rituals, the basics of painting. Back in their village they built an hermitage to spend each year sometime in meditation.

Today the religious instruction is given in Tsum, or in Bigu or in Daragaon by Kusho Pema, a monk of the Kagyupa sect. An other education centered is located in the district of Solu Khumbu.

A serious of major religious ceremonies occur during the year cycle and constitute the frame of the community's social meetings.

Presented here the calendar of the religious festivals as they are performed in the villages of the district of Rasuwa.



|                        | Tibetan<br>Calendar | SALME     | BALCHE           | KAULE | HAKU | GRE | GOLJUNG | GATLANG    | CHILIME | BREMDANG | NAGTALI          | THONMON | PADZONG<br>DZONGDI G. |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------------|-------|------|-----|---------|------------|---------|----------|------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| BAISAKH<br>(April-May) | 3                   |           |                  | P     |      |     | P       | P          | P       |          | P                |         |                       |
| JETH<br>(May-June)     | 4                   |           |                  |       |      |     | P       | 4th<br>day |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| ASAR<br>(June-July)    | 5                   |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| SAUN<br>(July-Aug.)    | 6                   |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| BHADAU<br>(Aug.-Sept.) | 7                   |           | P<br>Tse-<br>chu |       | P    |     |         |            | P       |          |                  |         |                       |
| ASOJ<br>(Sept.-Oct.)   | 8                   |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         |          | P<br>Tse-<br>chu |         |                       |
| KARTIK<br>(Oct.-Nov.)  | 9                   |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| MUNSIR<br>(Nov.-Dec.)  | 10                  |           |                  |       | P    |     |         |            |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| PUS<br>(Dec.-Jan.)     | 11                  |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         | D        |                  |         |                       |
| MAGH<br>(Jan.-Feb.)    | 12                  |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| PHAGUN<br>(Feb.-March) | 1                   | P<br>Mane |                  |       |      |     | P       |            | P       |          |                  |         |                       |
| CAIT<br>(March-April)  | 2                   |           |                  |       |      |     |         |            |         |          |                  |         |                       |
| Manishawa              |                     |           |                  |       |      | X   | X       | X          | X       | X        |                  | X       | X                     |

In Bhadau *Purni* the Bonpo of Gatlang, Chilime, Goljung and Haku go to the lake of Jesor in the Ganesh Himal Range to worship Mahadev.

P=Purni : full moon

D=Drumcho

### Religious Buildings

The religious buildings fall into the following categories :

1.- The monastery, *gompa*, a group of buildings, consisting of a large temple, surrounded by dwellings for the inmates and their families.

2.- The village temple, *yul-gi-lhakhang* (in Tamang : *gombo* or *gyang*), usually a free standing temple with or without courtyard. The *lhakhang* is located usually fairly close to the center of the village and belongs to the community or to a clan or lineage.

The temple faces on a paved forecourt, surrounded by prayer walls, *chorten* and flag poles.

3.- The family chapel, *lhakhang*.

The chapel is an element of a private dwelling, the house of a lama or a wealthy member of the community.

4.- The hermitage, *tsamkhang*.

As its name implies, the hermitage is located far from the settlements, built against a rock or on a mountain slope.

### General description of a temple

The religious buildings all follow a fairly standard pattern in their plan.

The type of architecture of the temple is often an extension of the Tamang or Sherpa house of the area, and follows the domestic scale and design.

If possible the building faces East for religious reasons. The plan is rectangular. A porch gives access to the assembly hall.

The type of material follows the regional pattern : random rubble stone bedded in mud mortar. The exterior is sometimes plastered over with mud and whitewashed.

The porch : the opening is formed by a lintel supported by posts and brackets.

The entrance open porch is in most cases an addition built with less costly material. The social reason for it is that with the growth of population more devotees need shelter during the festivals.

The building has no windows, very seldom there is a lantern opening in the center of the chapel.

The structure stands on a platform protected by the projecting roof.

The roof is of very low pitch with plain gable and covered with wooden shingles or flat stones.

### Interior of the building

The temple consists of the porch or lobby which has a boarded floor and decorated walls (the Wheel of the Law, the Four Guardian Gods).

The entrance door to the chapel is centrally placed in the wall.

The assembly hall or chapel directly opposite the entrance is the altar which is usually a wooden construction or a socle in masonry on which are placed the images of the main divinities.

### Minor Buildings

- Prayer Wheels. Located in the main building, and connected with the entrance porch, or in a separate building but adjacent to the temple, is usually found a big prayer-wheel, *mani dungyur*, (average size h. : 2,50 m/ diam.

1,50m to 1,70m). Often several such units can be added to a temple group and the donor gains merit by the act of its construction. Once built the merit is accomplished and the need for its maintenance is considered unnecessary, hence their general state of dilapidation.

- *Kakani*. At the entrance to a religious complex or even a village settlement there is often a small free standing gateway construction *kakani* consisting of a rectangular roofed unit open along the axis. The ceiling and walls are decorated with paintings. These entrance-gates have both a demarcation value as well as a religious value.

- *Chorten* (*mane* in Tamang). A shrine in the strictest sense of the word, built usually of stone following an almost standard pattern enclosing the relics of an important Lama. These are generally often to be found within the religious complex but can be encountered along the trail and at the entrances to village settlements.

- *Mane-Walls*. These are stones engraved with the sacred invocation "Om Mani Padme Hum", which are either built into walls or piled as engraved stones around *chorten*.

#### The management and maintenance of religious buildings

##### The ownership of religious buildings

A temple can be common (a village) or private (an individual or family) property. However merit can be gained by adding to common property or even the replacing of a defective roof over a chapel can be classified as a meritorious action. Usually it is difficult to establish these donors as records are seldom kept. With the change of mentality and attitude towards religion, the inhabitants of the Northern regions are investing less

money in religious buildings and ceremonies. A fact backed up by a number of religious followers and Lamas.

#### Personnel of the temple

*Lama* : a term reserved for senior members of a religious group but now used to generalise men who belong to a religious Buddhist order.

*Gelong* : A monk or fully ordained member of a monastic community.

*Konyer* : A keeper who is in charge of the temple, whose duty is to replace the holy water in front of the images each day and to offer butter lamps.

#### Maintenance of religious buildings

Financial input into these buildings is very spasmodic. As mentioned previously, Actions and Merit are made by local people. Generally the monks are sponsored by their own families as each man must provide for his lodgings and maintenance. Unfortunately families find it difficult to finance such an undertaking and the numbers in each community are dwindling.

#### Present Legislation Concerning the Ownership of Temples

The oldest and most important shrines have been donated and belong to a structure called *Guthi*.

The *Raj guthi* (or *Sarkar guthi*) is a royal donation and the *Niji guthi* (or *Duniya guthi*) a private donation.

The *Raj guthi* is considered as inalienable property granted by the State and tax free.

The *Niji guthi* can be sold and have to pay taxes.

The income of the land provides for the maintenance of the building and the welfare of the caretaker.

After the Land Reform Act certain religious leaders took advantage of the law to put on their name the property of the temple become the legitimate owners of the land, therefore the income does not go anymore to the buildings.

Smaller temples and shrines are owned by a family or lineage.

#### **Restoration work in progress or Planned in the Northern Regions of Nepal**

The Department of Archaeology has started a programme of restoration in the District of Sindhu-Palchok, and financially supported the building of a new temple in Ganyul and repairs in Lakhang Gyang and Chure Gyang.

In November 1981 a team of three members of the Department has made a survey of the temples of Muktinath, in Mustang District. In 1982 an amount of 200,000 Rupees will be spent for the restoration of temples in the Sindhu-Palchok and Rasuwaz Districts.

Under the World Heritage Site Project Sagarmatha, a restoration programme is planned in Khumbu (see B. COBURN, Cultural Preservation World Heritage Site Project. Sagarmatha National Park; *Progress Report* 26 June - 1 October 1981).

The Thame, Tengboche, Namche Bazar and Khumjung Gompas were visited, measured, and discussions were held with the curators. Specific plans, lists of material; itemized budgets and work schedules for restoration work prepared (the work includes tin roofing, stone paving and reconstruction of walls).

"Cultural Survival", an American organization that supports projects to help indigenous peoples to survive, is helping in the creation of a "Sherpa Culture Centre" at Tengboche Monastery in the foothills of Mount Everest.

This Center will train young monks, conserve precious books and art, help to maintain Sherpa's pride in their tradition, provide library facilities.

(To be continued)