

Orientations

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Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust

Shortly after King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency in Nepal on 1 February, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) held a conference in New York. Three former US ambassadors reviewed the gravity of the situation and concluded that international development assistance should continue 'now more than ever'. Peter Burleigh emphasized that support of worthy projects should be encouraged, and Michael Malinowski identified KVPT as 'a fine example of an aid organization which functions with great effectiveness despite the obvious challenges of the present situation'.

Founded in 1991, this US-based non-profit organization is the only international charity exclusively dedicated to preserving architectural heritage in the Kathmandu valley, and has an impressive track record saving historically significant religious and secular buildings. The trust's field operations are directed by Rohit Ranjitkar and it employs more than eighty craftsmen and project personnel.

Ongoing projects include the preservation of Itum Baha, a 13th century Buddhist monastery in old Kathmandu, and three 17th century structures in the Kathmandu Darbar Square: the stone shrine of Kal Bhairav, and the Jagannath and Kageswar temples. Local participation has played a major role in these four projects. Support from the sangha of Itum Baha and a consortium of Nepalese businessmen, led by Prabhakar Rana, was used as leverage to obtain international funding from the World Monuments Fund, the Robert W. Wilson Challenge Grant Program, the German Foreign Ministry and the American Ambassador's Discretionary Fund. Work on three other temples in the Darbar Square - Indrapur, Narayan and Mahavishnu - has recently been completed, and the trust has plans to restore Bansagopal, Lakshmi Narayan and Mahadev.

KVPT will hold its annual fundraising event, 'New York for Nepal', on 18 May in New York. At the cocktail and dinner, KVPT's executive director, Erich Theophile, and the board will honour the achievements of Mary Slusser. They will also announce the establishment of an annual research scholarship in her name. Slusser was a founding board member of KVPT, and her research, scholarship and documentation of the valley has proved invaluable to its conservation projects.

For further information on KVPT and the fundraising event, contact KVPT, email: info@kvptnepal.org; tel: 1 212 727 0074; or see www.kvptnepal.org.



View of temples in Kathmandu Darbar Square with restoration ongoing at Kal Bhairav shrine and Jagannath temples

Mary Slusser

by Gautama V. Vajracharya

It would take more than a full-length article to do justice to Mary Slusser's contributions in the field of Nepalese studies. In this all too brief tribute, I hope to provide the readers with a glimpse of her achievements. Mary has modestly described herself as an enthusiast who ached to unravel the past. She first arrived in Nepal as a wife following her husband's career. Without any specific training with which to approach the cultural wealth she encountered, she embarked on research as a means of assuaging her curiosity about the fascinating world that she had unknowingly fallen into.

Early on, she realized the merit of scholarly teamwork, and in areas where she was not proficient, she sought the help of many specialists. In doing so, she was able to implement immaculate research methodology that combined interdependent disciplines such as art and architecture, cultural history, epigraphy, Sanskrit and classical Newari. Mahesh Raj Pant, a well-known Sanskritist and historian assisted in these areas, as did I. My own involvement in her work resulted in a series of joint articles on Nepalese sculpture and architecture. Because of her training in anthropology, she was fully aware of the value of historiography, and approached the subject diachronically and synchronically. She quickly realized that some elements of ancient Nepalese culture had remained intact in various aspects of Newar culture of the Kathmandu valley. Long before she started writing her magnum opus, *Nepal Mandala*, she began systematically to collect information not only from international and local publications, but also from conversations - notwithstanding her rudimentary Newari - with Buddhist and Hindu priests, and wandering yogis heading toward the sacred Himalayan lake, Gosainkunda.

Mary's most remarkable contribution is perhaps the establishment of a chronology of Nepalese art and architecture that follows available sources as closely as possible. She also discovered that the annual Newari custom of circumambulating the city in honour of the ancestors was a continuation of a much earlier practice. This proved to be crucial as it enabled her to precisely define the ancient borders of various cities and towns in the valley. The importance of the annual ritual of exhibiting artefacts during the rainy season retreat in Buddhist monasteries of the valley, and the reliability of traditional chronicles for the investigation of ancient Nepalese sculptures would not be known if she had not drawn our attention to them.

The Kathmandu valley is deservedly famous for the so-called 'pagoda-style' temples. But it was only after Mary's investigation that scholars began to realize the greater significance of secular architecture that ranged from simple resthouses to royal palaces. She also found early wood carvings depicting elegant salabhanjika-type female figures on the struts of the Newar architecture that were unknown to previous scholars.

Given her shortcomings, her accomplishments are even more admirable - perhaps only one who has undertaken a similarly ambitious project, with the same spirit and enthusiasm, can understand the gravity and depth of her lifelong passion.



Thomas Schrom, Niels Gutschow, Gotz Hagemuller and Mary Slusser, consultants to the Patan Museum, and Mrs Saphalya Amatya and Dr Saphalya Amatya, then Director General, Department of Archaeology, Kathmandu, 1993
(Photography by Suresh Shrestha)

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On 25 May, HRH Prince Charles will host a luncheon for 120 people at Clarence House, London, in support of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) and in particular to launch the 'International Campaign to Restore the Patan Royal Palace Complex'. The KVPT's project is to restore the remaining structures and extend the museum. Project costs are estimated at US\$2.3 million over eight years: major grants by the Robert W. Wilson Challenge Grant Program (to provide matching funds of up to US\$400,000 for those raised by the campaign) and by private donors Ludwig Kuttner and Beatrix Ost (who have pledged US\$100,000) will be announced at the launch. A small exhibit called 'Selections from the Nepal Architecture Archive' will be on view at Clarence House.

On 7 June, KVPT will be holding its annual benefit 'New York for Nepal' at the Greenwich Village residence of Andrew Solomon and John Habich followed by dinner at Da Silvano Restaurant. Lord Camoys will serve as Honorary Chair, and KVPT's executive director, Erich Theophile, and the board will honour Prabhakar S.J.B. Rana for his support of cultural heritage preservation in Nepal.

Contact info@kvptnepal.org or see www.kvptnepal.org for further information.



Patan Darbar Square and Royal Palace