

USE OF COLLECTIVE SPACE IN PATAN AND OTHER HISTORIC TOWNS OF THE KATHMANDU VALLEY, NEPAL

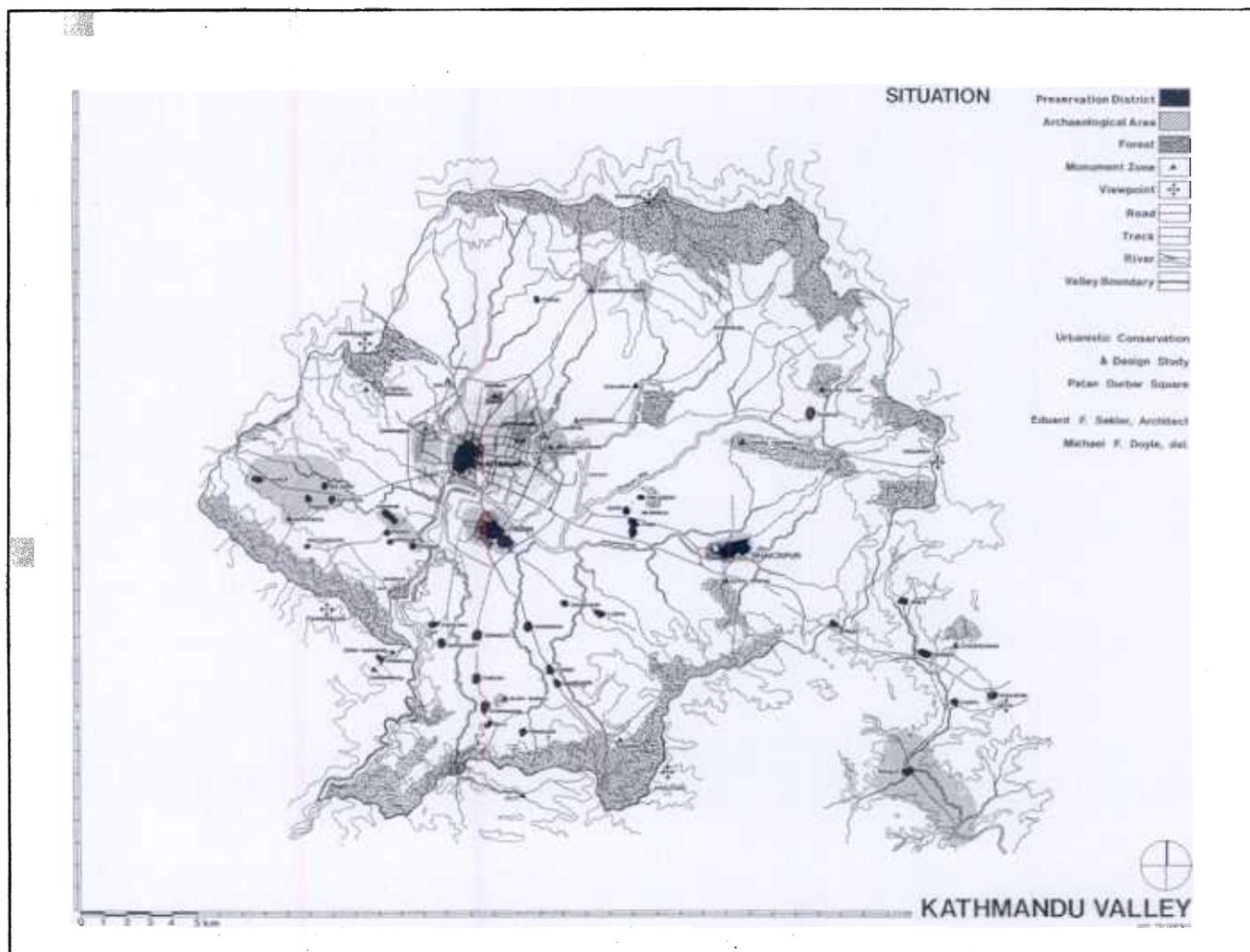
There are two main reasons why the towns of the Kathmandu Valley are of special relevance to the study of collective urban space in historic settlements. On the one hand they have preserved ancient patterns of urban space-use with a purity and intensity that has few equals anywhere in the world. On the other hand they are paradigmatic in the way they now face many of the problems that beset cities in developing countries where a pre-industrial way of life with strong traditions suddenly confronts the ways and means of twentieth century industrial society. In other words, the towns of the Kathmandu Valley with their intri-

guing parallels to the medieval cities of Europe are both an ideal field of study for the urban historian and a dramatic field of battle for the urban planner, designer and conservator¹.

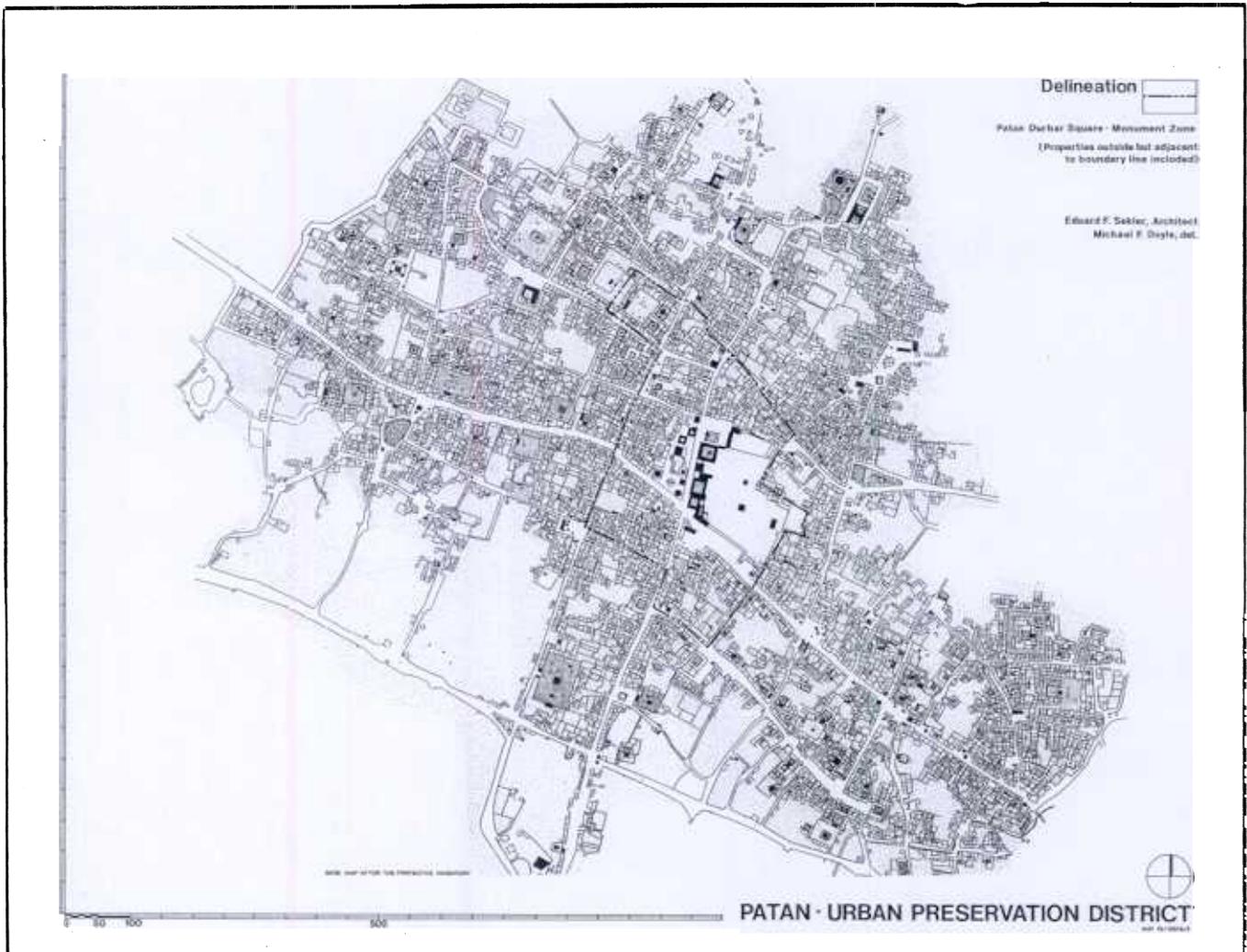
The Kathmandu Valley (longitude = 85°20' East, latitude = 27°40' North) (fig. 1) is a fertile subtropical area in the heart of Nepal, at an average

The author gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from the J.D.R. 3rd Fund and from the Milton Fund of Harvard University which made it possible to complete the urbanistic conservation study of Patan Durbar Square.

¹ In this connection the research of Gerhard Auer, Niels Gutschow, Bernhard Koelver, Wolfgang Korn, Jean Pieper, Carl Pruscha, John Sanday, Mary Slusser, David Snellgrove, the Danish Bungamati team and the French Panauti team must be mentioned. Their investigations supplemented my fieldwork that was carried out during four visits between 1962 and 1978; in addition I had the benefit of help from P.D. Shrivastava and Sons, Jabalpur, and from my former students and assistants Bharat Bansal and Michael Doyle who stayed in the Kathmandu Valley in 1964 and 1977 respectively. Without the active support of H.M. Government Departments of Archaeology, and of Housing and Physical Planning, as well of UNESCO and UNDP in Kathmandu, my work would have been impossible.



1. « Map of the Kathmandu Valley



2. - Map of Patan (Lalitpur) Urban Preservation District with delineation of Durbār Square Monument Zone

altitude of 1350 m but ringed by higher mountains and within sight of the high Himalayas. It is comparatively small with an extension of 19 km North-South by 25 km East-West; this is comparable, for example, to the greater Paris region between St. Denis and Sceaux, Versailles and Vincennes. Such a small size makes the Valley extremely vulnerable to crowding by additional construction. As it is, the landscape with its rivers and terraced hills, compact villages and towns, and dominating sanctuaries is extremely appealing and harmonious, at times of overwhelming beauty. In addition the area is studded with historic monuments; almost nine hundred are classified in the Protective Inventory of 1975². In 1971 the Valley had ca. 619,000 inhabitants with 286,000 Newars as the single most important ethnic group, closely followed by 279,000 members of the Indo-Nepalese caste system. Sixty-

two percent of the working population were employed in agriculture. Three major towns exist: Kathmandu (1971: 150,000), Patan (60,000), and Bhaktapur (40,000).

Kathmandu, because it has the largest share of modern additions, is not amenable to historic preservation measures for the entire city. However in an overall program of rehabilitation, development, and sanitary improvement, the protection and conservation of selected areas of historic, urbanistic significance has a rightful place. The H.M.G.-UNESCO Hanuman Dhoka Conservation Project was a successful beginning in this direction³.

Bhaktapur compared to Kathmandu stands at the opposite end of the conservation spectrum; here change and growth have been small. While in Kathmandu 15 % of the population worked in

agriculture in 1971 and 56 % was literate, in Bhaktapur 65 % worked in agriculture and 27 % was literate⁴. Traditions are tenacious in this predominantly Newar (99 %) and Hindu (85 %) city which possesses more Hindu priests' houses

² Kathmandu Valley, *The Preservation of Physical Environment and Cultural Heritage, Protective Inventory*, 2 vols., Vienna (Schroll) 1975.

³ J. Sanday, *The Hanuman Dhoka Royal Palace etc ...*, A.A.R.P. (London) December 1974.

⁴ These figures are quoted in the Protective Inventory, vol. 1, 15. According to the *Socio-Economic Survey of H.M.G. Dept. of Housing and Physical Planning*, based on samples taken at a different date, the figure for literacy in Kathmandu is 60% and for Bhaktapur 24%, with 68% of the working population employed in agriculture.



3. - Small public square in the NE sector of the Monument Zone. The disruptive tall building is of recent date.



4. - Village road in Bungamati during harvest time.

(Maths) than any other town. The substance of housing is of remarkable homogeneity and clearly organized by a network of paths and nodes with religious buildings playing an important role; the main temples unequivocally dominate the city which in its totality, with clearly defined boundaries, makes a powerful image. Total urbanistic conservation is feasible here and the German-Nepali Bhaktapur Development Project has gone far in demonstrating how this can be done: how at the same time buildings can be restored, spaces cleared up, and sewers and water supply provided⁵.

While Patan (fig. 2) is not as completely preserved as Bhaktapur it has kept much more of the old environment and ways of using it than Kathmandu. In 1971 36 % of the population was engaged in agriculture⁶ and 38 % was literate. The inhabitants of Patan are 83 % Newar and renowned for their craftsmanship and artistry. The town itself is considered the most ancient among the three main cities of the Valley. It is 58 % Buddhist and 42 % Hindu and has a special wealth of Buddhist monastic buildings (viharas) some of which function as important cells of urban social organization. Considerable areas of the town are still of remarkable visual homogeneity but even in the centre there are quite a few recent buildings that are out of scale and out of style with the rest (fig. 3). In addition the greatest danger exists that on the Patan side no unbuild land will be left to form a buffer zone between Kathmandu and Patan.

Patan will serve as our example for the discussion of use and arrangement of urban space, but much of what is found here can be used equally to illustrate the typical Newar settlements anywhere in the Valley which all share a trend to compactness and high density (Patan City = ca. 530/hectare⁷), organization along and around intensely utilized public spaces and a definite flair for attractive urbanistic arrangement. These features are even found in smaller villages such as Bungamati (fig. 4) and Khokana and clearly characterize a common Newar usage for which a number of reasons can be given. Among them is the tightly knit social structure with extended families, castes and Guthis⁸ — a system that circumscribed the extension of permissible areas of habitation for certain groups; there are also ritual considerations and practical necessities such as the avoidance of encroachment on good agricultural land and, in the past, defence against outsiders. It is tempting to assume that beyond all such rational reasons a particular spatial sensitivity is also involved; the kind of aesthetic sensitivity that accounts for the fact that the Newars were renowned as artists and craftsmen throughout recorded history.

Patan is centrally located in the Valley (fig. 1.) and of great antiquity. Its plan has been compared to the "chakra", the symbolic wheel, and it is clearly organized around a cross of two intersecting main roads that not only serve as practical links to the rest of the Valley and its ancient trade routes but also ritually tie the city into a greater

cosmic context. The North-South (more exactly NNE-SSW) axis in its continuation not only leads to the most important ancient sites of Deopatan and Chabahil with their sanctuaries but beyond them perhaps points in the direction of Shivapuri, the highest mountain on this side of the Valley⁹.

The four cardinal points of the axial roads are actually marked by four stupas at the boundaries of the city (fig. 5), and a fifth is said to have existed in the centre. These are attributed to the great protector of Buddhism, King Ashoka himself, and they remind us of the doctrinal notion of fivefold buddhahood with Ādibuddha in the centre surrounded by the Buddhas of the four directions¹⁰.

Early Hindu treatises on architecture and town planning¹¹ also recommend the layout of towns with a cross of oriented main streets. They equally suggest other features that, *mutatis mutandis*, are found in the physical reality of Patan; for example, a site that slopes toward North and East, regular block sizes and road widths, and a social arrangement of inhabitants according to occupation and proper caste-location, though naturally the caste system no longer prevails officially.

Like other Newari towns¹² Patan is imbedded in the spiritual landscape of the Valley in more than one way. As Nils Gutschow has pointed out¹³ the sanctuaries of the Ashtamatikas, the eight mother deities, or rather the eight aspects of the Great Goddess, form a network of protection that completely encircles the city and relates to the central temple of Taleju, protectress of the Royal

⁵ G. Auer & N. Gutschow, *Bhaktapur*, Darmstadt (Technische Hochschule) 1974; C. Kleinert, "Stadtentwicklung und Stadterneuerung in Nepal, Das Bhaktapur Development Project" in: *Internationales Asienforum*, IX (1978), No 3/4, 271 ff.

⁶ According to the *Protective Inventory*, vol. I, 15. The *Socio-Economic Survey* gives a figure of 43%.

⁷ According to information kindly provided by Mr. Shanker Man Pradhan of H.M.G. Dept. of Housing and Physical Planning the area of Patan City is 111.6 ha.

⁸ A Guthi, like a medieval confraternity in Europe, unites members of a certain group for a specific purpose that may be religious, charitable or social. The word Guthi may also describe an endowment.

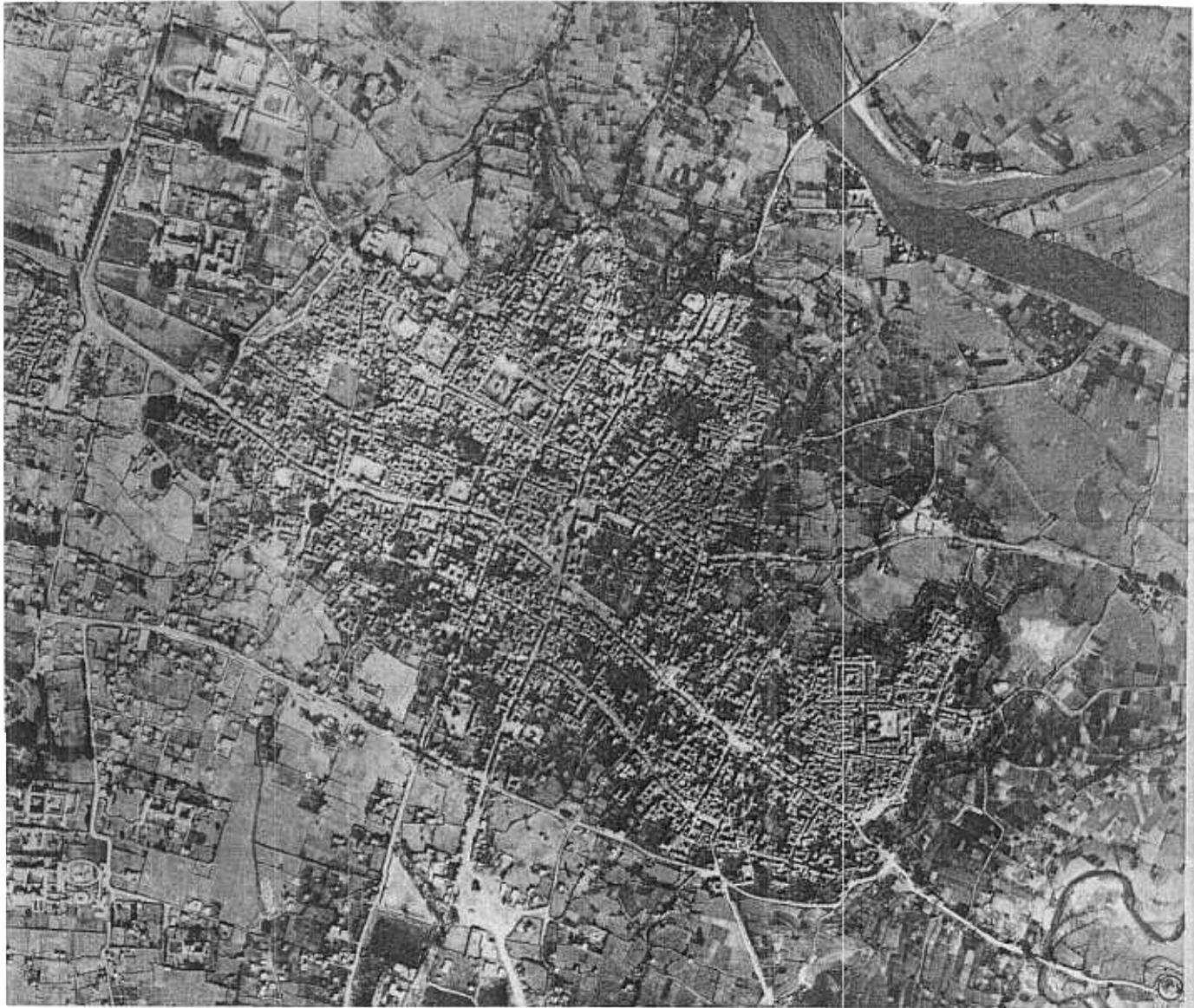
⁹ The orientation toward Shivapuri is mentioned, without indication of a source for the assertion, in R. Herdick, "Stadt und Ritual — am Beispiel der Newarstadt Kirtipur" in: N. Gutschow & T. Sieverts ed., *Urban Space and Ritual*, Darmstadt (Technische Hochschule) October 1977, 17.

¹⁰ D.L. Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford (Cassirer) 1957, 103

¹¹ Discussed by, among others, B.B. Dutt, *Town Planning in Ancient India*, Calcutta 1925; J. Pieper, "Three Cities of Nepal" in P. Oliver ed., *Shelter, Sign and Symbol*, London (Barrie & Jenkins) 1975, 52 ff.

¹² For Bhaktapur's ritual landscape see B. Koelver, "A Ritual Map from Nepal" in: *Folia Rara*, Wiesbaden (F. Steiner) 1976, 68 ff.

¹³ N. Gutschow, "Kathmandu — Symbolik einer Stadt etc." in N. Gutschow & T. Sieverts ed., *op. cit.*, 8.



5. - Air view of Patan Urban Preservation District. Where the main roads intersect in the centre the Durbar Square can be seen. Circles mark three of the four so-called Ashoka Stupas at the outskirts of the town; the fourth is not visible in this view.

House. Other ritual networks include processional routes that permit a systematic visit of all sacred sites, and various perambulations. Processions thus form an integral though intermittent part of urban space-use as they have done in western cultures during Antiquity and Middle Ages. In Patan an important procession of several days' duration occurs during the chariot festival of Rato Matsyendranath just prior to the onset of the rainy season, while another major procession occurs on the occasion of the Matya festival of lights, when the so-called 1400 Chaityas (small stupas) are visited. In view of the purpose of a Buddhist chaitya or stupa as a commemorative monument, such a festival clearly re-enacts the city as repository of collective memories.

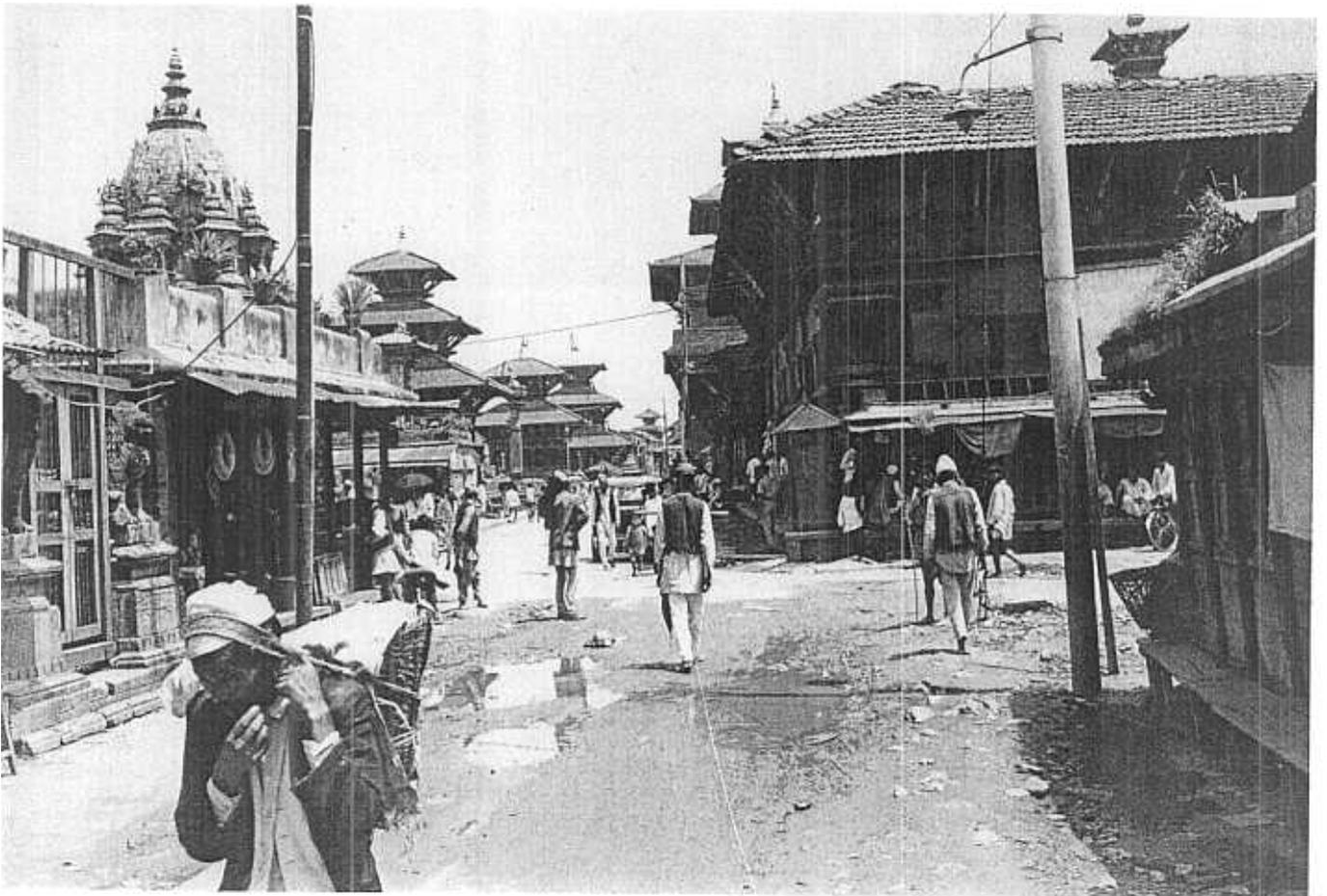
A processional route once a year also connects all Bahals and Bahils¹⁴. the Buddhist monasteries that form a complex organizational subsystem in the organism of the city where one great establishment such as the Hiranya Varna Mahavihara, popularly known as Kwa Bahal or Golden Temple, may have numerous smaller dependencies throughout the city, and a total membership of several thousand people. As a building type the Bahal is nothing but a monumentalized courtyard house and at times next to a Bahal a larger courtyard is formed that is known as Nani around

¹⁴ M.B. Joseph, "The Viharas of the Kathmandu Valley", *Oriental Art* xvii (1971), Nr. 2, 1 ff.



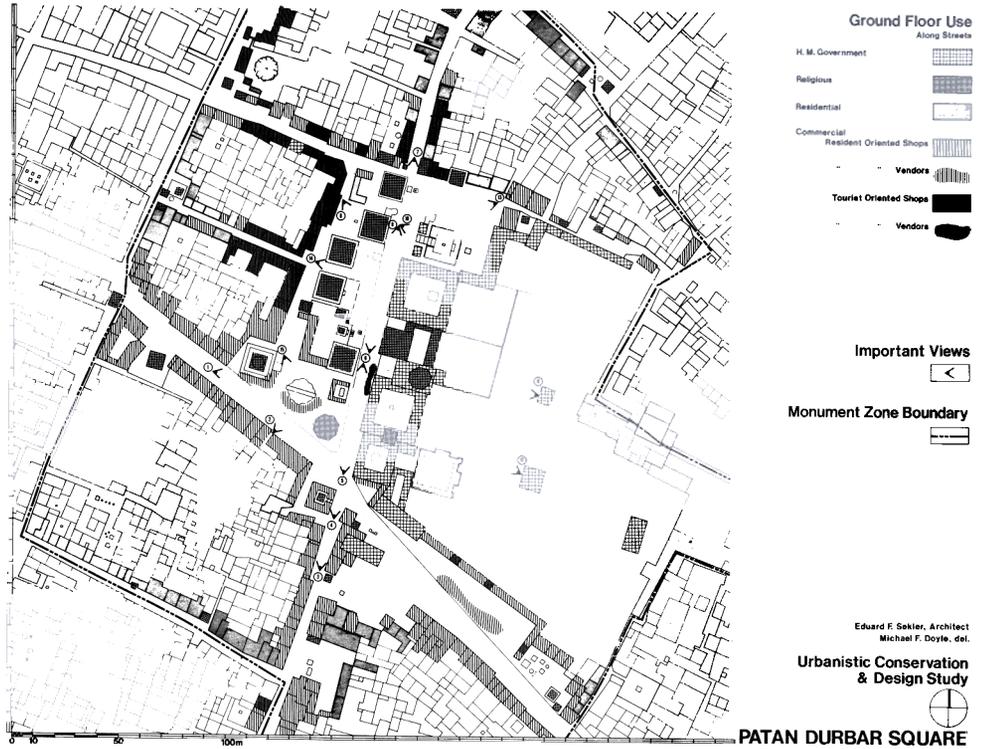
6. - The large pond in the SW quarter of Patan.

7. - Patan Durbar Square, looking N from point 4 on the plan fig. 9.





8. - Patan Durbar Square, looking S from point 9 on the plan fig. 9.



9. - Patan Durbar Square Monument Zone: ground floor use and indication of important urbanistic views.

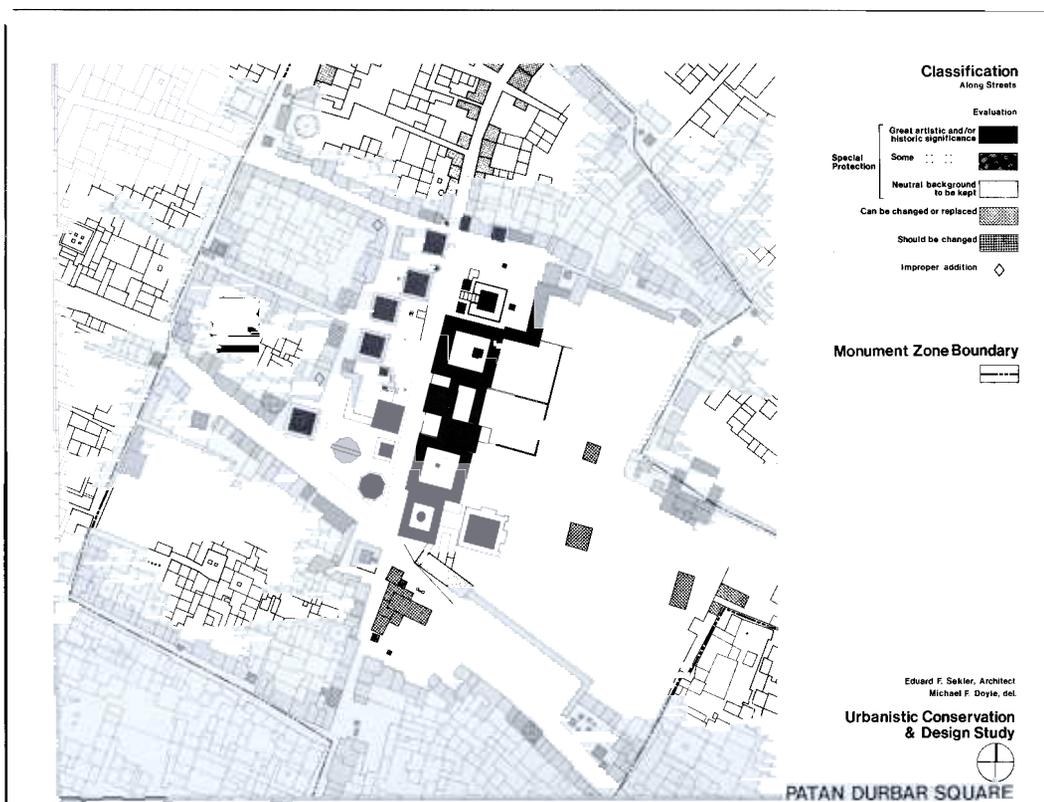
which the houses of individual families are arranged.

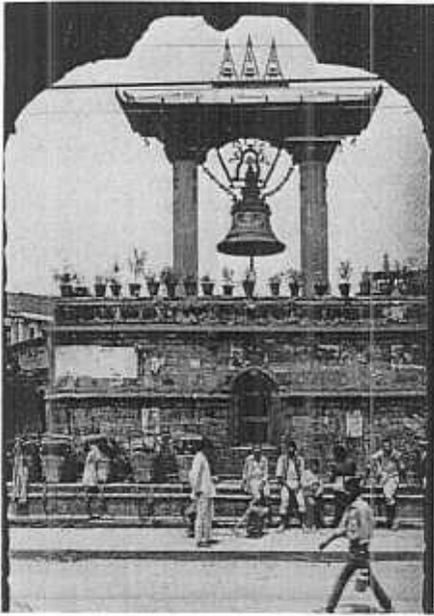
Beginning with the open shelter (Pati) and the house as smallest building units, Patan is made up from comparatively few urban elements, typologically standardized and linked by a graded network of roads and paths. The arteries of communication are mostly accompanied by three-storeyed houses with pitched, overhanging roofs (figs. 13, 16). Brick, tile, and wood are the prevailing materials with brick or stone originally used for paving where it occurs (many paths are left unpaved). As a consequence, the gamut of colors and textures that are in evidence is limited and, except for modern intrusions, (figs. 3, 17, 19) pleasantly unified.

Room sizes and heights are very small, with rooms less than three metres deep and two metres or less high which means one has to stoop under doors and beams. Everything is related to human users with minimal standards for the physical occupation of indoor space; windows and doors often appear more appropriate with children than when they frame grown-ups. The very intimate scale that results from the small size of the basic elements sets the tone for the whole city and makes it easy for the monumental buildings to appear dominant despite comparatively limited absolute sizes.

The entrance to a house may be centrally located and richly carved or it may be a mere passage that

10. - Patan Durbar Square Monument Zone: classification according to artistic and/or historic significance.





11. - The large so-called Taleju Bell in Patan Durbar Square (N° 29 in fig. 14).



12. - Children playing in Patan Durbar Square; their toy has the shape of the chariot of Matsyendranath.



13. - Heavy lorry blocking the street at the N end of Patan Durbar Square.

leads into a courtyard from which similar passages in turn lead to other courts — parts of an extensive and, to the intruder, bewildering system inside a block. Though these courts and passages are publicly accessible, they obviously form a semi-private zone, distinct from the public zone of the roads and the private zones of gardens

and upper floors. Considering the narrowness of streets and lanes and the small size of the average overcrowded house, one understands how beneficial courts and gardens are in the total habitat. Parallels to Medieval European cities easily come to mind and as in Europe there is a continuous danger that, owing to later encroachments on

these courts, the amount of open area available inside building blocks becomes drastically reduced with an ensuing increase of density and deterioration of living conditions.

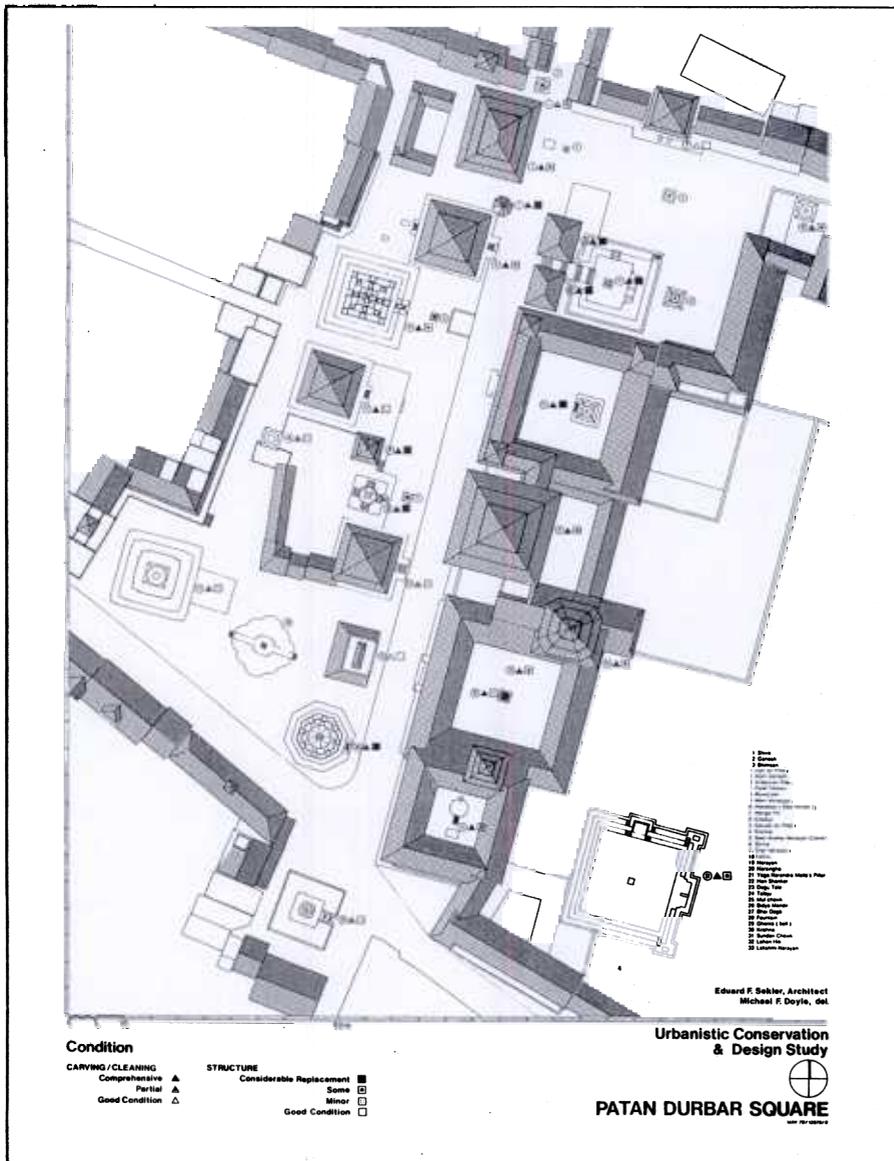
From time to time houses along a road may give way to garden walls, to a pond (fig. 6) or tank for water supply and ritual as well as practical uses, or to a communal building such as a public shelter (Pati), a public fountain sunk in the ground (Hiti) or one of the many types of religious buildings with its appurtenances. Frequently the road widens on such occasions to form a little piazza or public square (fig. 3) that may include a shrine, a Pati, a well-head and several chaityas.

Streets are more than traffic arteries in a Kathmandu Valley town. It is a familiar sight to see work including the drying, thrashing and winnowing of grain, and other agricultural chores carried out in the street (fig. 4) where at the same time animals mingle freely with people and may cause a minor stampede when, for example, one of the holy cows becomes unruly or two bulls start a fight. It is equally common to notice that the care of babies and of the own body takes place in front of the house. Many social activities also have their locale in the streets and particularly in the adjoining open public shelters, the Patis; here games and music are played, gossip is exchanged, instruction provided and business conducted; here mendicants and travelling religious men may rest and sleep. A bride and her dowry or an aged man whose special birthday is celebrated may be carried past, or a corpse on its way to the burning ghat by the river.

In all this there is a clearly marked rhythm that corresponds to the times of the day, beginning at daybreak when people go to the river and offer sacrifice, and ending after dark when the last shops and food-shops close their wooden shutters. Festival days, and there are many of them, impose a larger temporal rhythm of their own, at times lending a brief prominence to certain otherwise hardly conspicuous points in the urban fabric, at times ritually re-establishing in procession significant paths and boundaries throughout the city.

The Durbar Square with its concentration of monumental buildings — temples and the former royal palace — is the functioning core of the city (figs. 7-19). It appears to have been laid out according to a geometric ordering scheme probably endowed with esoteric significance¹⁵. It has its own set of lively activities generated by the sanctuaries, the much frequented public fountain, and such public buildings as city-hall, law court, police station and post office, not to mention all the commercial undertakings on and around it. Well-defined territorial domains can be recognized: from the local health practitioners at one corner to the silversmiths at another, or from the area of the textile merchants to that of the workers in brass and copper (fig. 9). In addition

¹⁵ A detailed publication about this scheme is in preparation.



scale, colour and texture and much too brutal in behaviour—not to mention the damage it does to the frequently weak walls and foundations of old buildings. At times no less disturbing than the car, but welcome for obvious reasons, are the many tourists that come to the Square. They form a most important component in the economic life of Patan and they have caused a number of shops to spring up along and to the NW of the Durbar Square where their habitual route takes them to the Golden Temple (fig. 9).

Mass tourism and the motor car symbolically can stand here for the whole complex of new problems that the last quarter of a century has brought to the Kathmandu Valley. They are the well known problems of a developing economically poor country, though strongly coloured by the special historic circumstances of Nepal that for a long time kept the social and physical environment free from prolonged contact with the industrialized world. This is why until recently landscape, villages and urban environment could interact so harmoniously in a balance that had been slowly achieved over centuries. It is this harmony that comes across visually and makes the Valley so unforgettable and comparable to those few enclaves in other parts of the world where equally special conditions lead to the comparable conservation of environments that mirror an integrated culture.

To preserve such enclaves is clearly in the interest of all mankind and in this sense the Kathmandu Valley takes its place side by side with Venice or the Athenian Acropolis and deserves the fullest possible instrumentation of conservation measures and techniques at our disposal. The U.N.E.S.C.O. *Master Plan for the Conservation of the Cultural Heritage in the Kathmandu Valley* of 1977 was drawn up in this spirit and has been recently adopted as official government policy. It deals with legal and organizational measures and with the actual planning and implementation of conservation in rural and urban areas, including the necessary restoration of decaying buildings, the removal of unsightly installations, the establishment of pedestrian precincts, and the improvement of infrastructure related to monuments and historic urban spaces.

All this concerns Patan very much, for it has its full share of problems; scale and harmony of the Durbar Square are being destroyed by ill-conceived recent additions (figs. 10, 17, 19) while some of its historic buildings, and many others elsewhere, threaten ruin; (fig. 14) the roof construction of the prestigious Golden Temple, for example, is dramatically losing its stability. Funds have been lacking to cope with such emergencies and at the same time disturbing new constructions keep cropping up. Around the fringes of the town a Nepali version of suburbia continues to grow, specially along a recently completed wide ring road. Another outer ring road is envisaged that may well provide new incentive for further building activity in more outlying formerly agricultural areas.

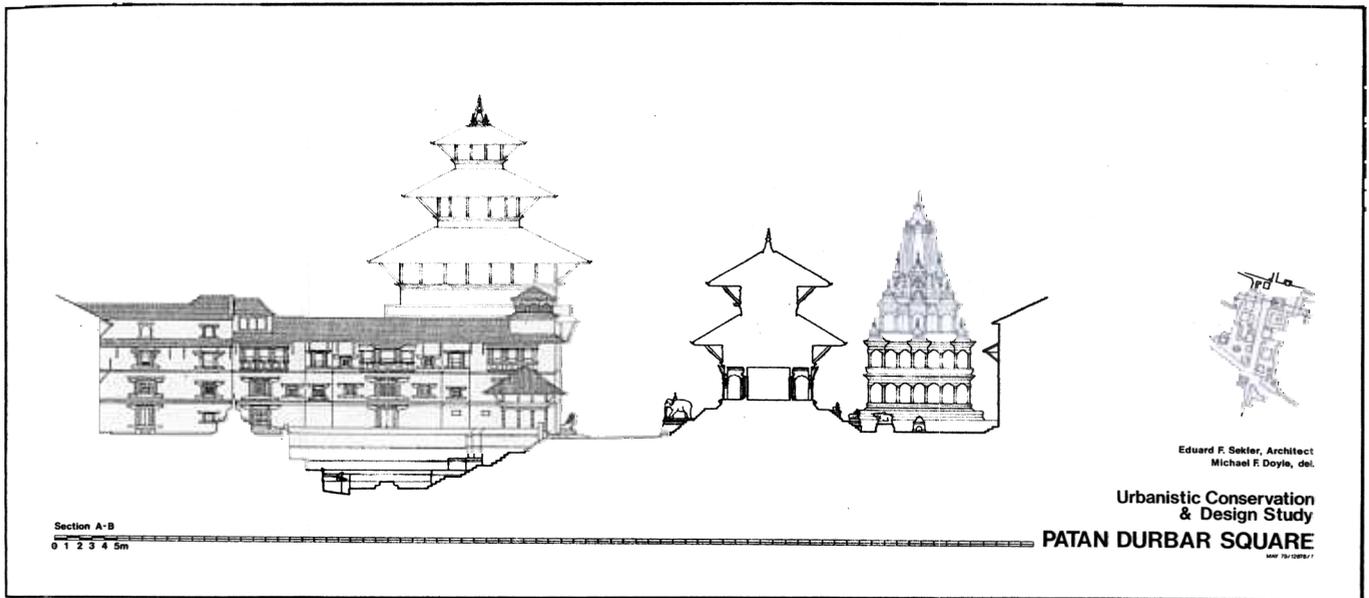
14. - Patan Durbar Square: condition of monuments and articulation of roofscape.

certain precincts, perhaps marked by a low platform, may assume special significance during a festival when a ritual dance or a ceremony of purification and sacrifice is performed.

At all times the Durbar Square is not only a place for the exchange of goods and labour but equally a place of ritual and commemoration with numerous images (figs. 7, 8) and inscriptions, invisibly surrounded by a dense web of myths and stories. It is equally a place of communication through sounds and signs, from the large bell (fig. 11) and the many smaller temple bells and wind-activated chimes to printed posters on walls and the occasional display of thankas (painted scrolls) in a

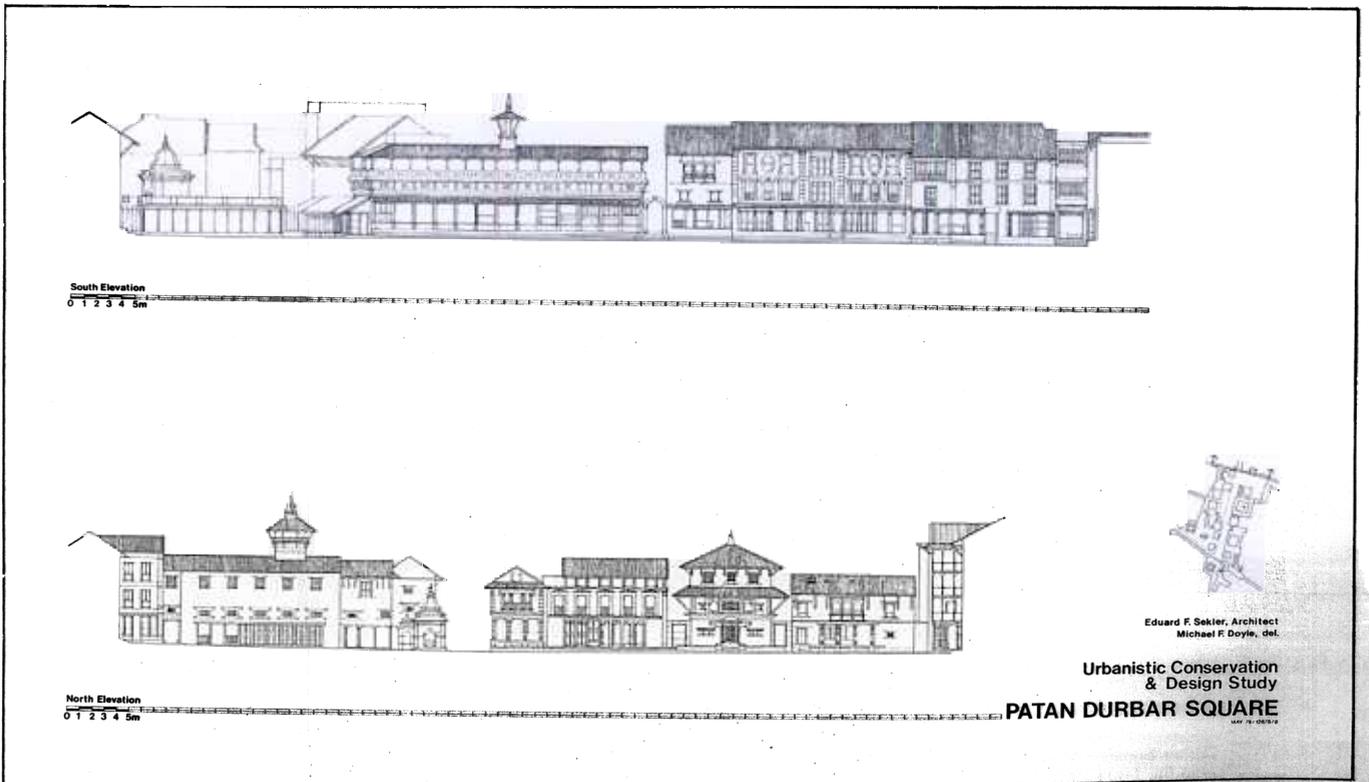
nearby Bahal. Two schools abut the Square and the young and very young play a conspicuous role in the never-ending spectacle of urban life that is performed here (fig. 12).

The intensity of activity and interchange here is not only due to the concentration of important buildings and functions in and around the Square but also to its location at literally the crossroads of the city (figs. 2, 5): in many cases the shortest or most convenient path from one end of the city to the other leads through the Durbar Square. This fact unfortunately also brings the motor car into the Square (figs. 7, 13) with increasing frequency and it is as disturbing as can be, wrong in



15. Patan Durbar Square: transversal section.

16. - Patan Durbar Square: N and S Elevations.





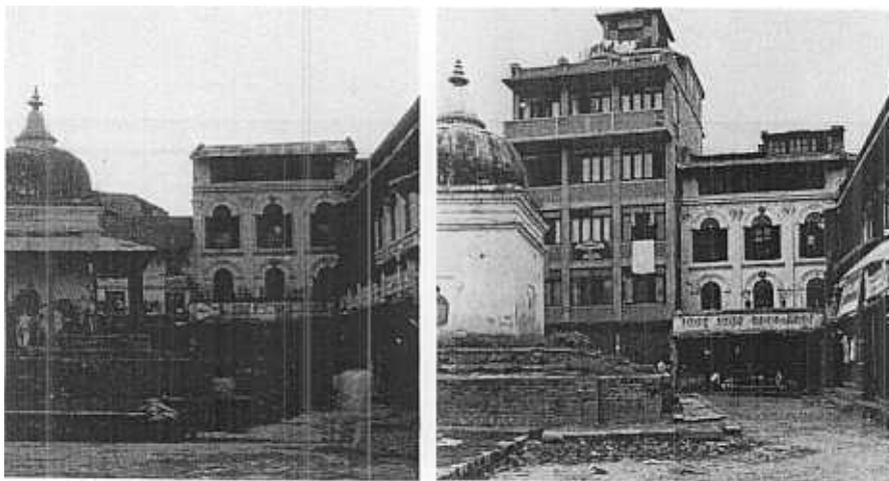
West elevation
8'3" x 4' 6"



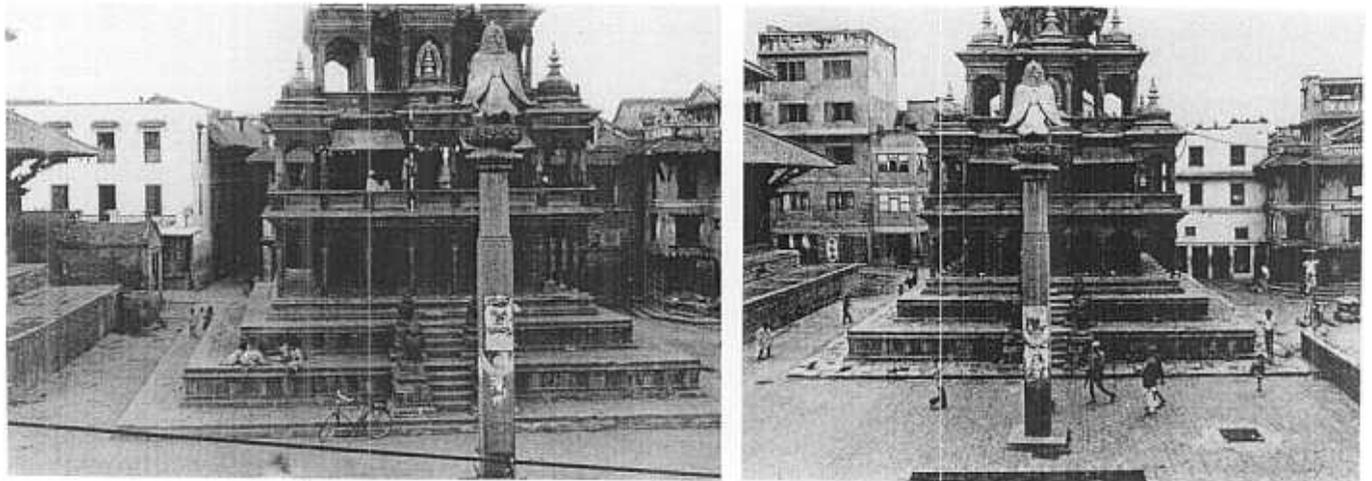
Michael F. Doyle, AIA

Urbanistic Conservation
& Design Study
PATAN DURBAR SQUARE

17. - Patan Durbar Square: W Elevation.
Buildings higher than three storeys and super-elevations above the cornice line are of recent date.



18 a, b, - Patan Durbar Square: the S end of the W side in 1968 and 1978.



19 a, b - Patan Durbar Square: houses behind Krishna Mandir (N° 14 in fig. 14) in 1968 and 1978.

These changes to the detriment of the physical environment are of course symptoms of incipient deeper-reaching changes in the structure and character of society. Urban spaces invariably make something visible and there is no urban form worth calling by that name that is not a significant form, a form that communicates something other than its own apparency. All great urban spaces — whether the Campo in Siena or the Durbar Square in Patan — are symbolic spaces. What makes the Nepalese ones so stunning is the realization that they subsume a culture that with its spiritual values and rites to a large degree is still as alive as it was when the spaces were created.

A culture changes when its basic assumptions and conditions are faced with new forces that act upon them and at that moment its environment is likely to change also unless very powerful interventions take place to prevent this. One cannot turn away from these facts of life in romantic nostalgia, and people in a poor developing country are realists, not romantics, when it comes to the environment. They want a raised standard of living and such amenities as are taken for granted in industrialized societies; pure water and proper sanitation, decent housing, ease of communication. Conservation, everybody agrees, must not occur at the expense of the well-being of local inhabitants who are affected by it and it is here where some formidable questions and contradictions present themselves as a few familiar examples may demonstrate.

Many younger people in towns of the Valley are dissatisfied with traditional living arrangements; they want more privacy than the extended family living under one roof can provide, and they object to the low room heights. But will not leaving the extended family mean the need for new housing for which land must be found, while the cumulation of even slight increments in room height over three or four storeys means a building that disrupts scale and proportions of the existing streetscape?

One of the great attractions of urban spaces in the Valley is their intensive utilization by the population which in scope differs radically from the manner in which comparable spaces are utilized in the industrialized world. But with changes in technology and culture will not much of the utilization become redundant and cease? Will not the

public fountain or well-head stop functioning as a social meeting place, once water becomes available from many taps? Will not the collectively used urban space lose much of its actuality as a locus of communication once literacy and the electronic communications media become widespread? Will not most of the work now done in public spaces disappear, so that the urban spaces of Patan would end up like the typical revitalized pedestrian precincts elsewhere that essentially serve two functions only: shopping and relaxation?

The income from tourism is a powerful argument for the conservation of monuments. But will it be possible in the long run to avoid the well-known negative side-effects of tourism? Is there not a threshold as far as admissible numbers are concerned, beyond which mass tourism would simply overwhelm the culture of the Valley by swamping it in a wave of "commercialization" and "profanation"? In 1966 a total of ca. 9500 visitors came to Nepal, in 1974 the figure was ca. 90,000, in 1978 reportedly it increased to ca. 156,000(!) — a figure comparable to the total population of Kathmandu¹⁶.

The real and imagined advantages and opportunities of urban life prove as strong in the Kathmandu Valley as elsewhere. But what will happen to the landscape once the villages at the end of tracks are absorbed into an urban agglomeration with easily travelled asphalt roads?

In summation, many desirable changes are possible in the living conditions of the Valley's population. But must their price be that ultimate nightmare: a greater Kathmandu that fills the whole Valley with its new roads and buildings, and preserves a few historic urban spaces as isolated open-air museums — useful tourist attractions and quaint reminders of a strange past?

I believe this need not be the case because the people who inhabit a historic environment can choose to keep it viable and vital as an act of their collective will and there is a reasonable chance that the right decisions will be made in the Kathmandu Valley. Many factors influence such decisions but in the long run none more than public education. Urbanistic conservation will remain a palliative unless the coming generations in the Valley can be convinced about it by their teachers — which also means convincing them

about some simple truths the industrialized world has learned or is learning painfully, truths about genuine and spurious values and about man's proper attitude toward the environment. Perhaps in Nepal there is a predisposition to accept such truths because they fit well with traditional culture.

Positive solutions can be found as answers to all the questions raised above. Needed housing can be created by filling gaps in the existing urban fabric rather than by building at the fringes. Dwelling designs can be worked out which, by very careful planning, provide greater room heights without significantly altering the existing scale and appearance of a street. Face to face contact and work in the collective urban spaces need not disappear, if some effort is made to encourage their continuation. The flow of tourism is amenable to various controls and so is the flow of investment that in the long run decides whether life in the villages can remain attractive and buildings are put in the right places and given the right form.

There are hopeful signs — new legislation and administrative measures as well as an increase in international assistance. In 1978 a pertinent agreement was signed with UNESCO and later the same year the General Conference voted to initiate an international campaign of support, and recently a model urbanistic conservation plan (figs. 1, 2, 9, 10, 14-17) has been prepared for the Monument Zone of Patan Durbar Square. But at the same time alarming signals of warning persist as the deterioration of physical environment and cultural heritage continue. As far as conservation is concerned, the future of the Kathmandu Valley and its historic urban spaces today hangs in precarious balance. One must hope that those responsible for it will resist the kinds of needlessly sweeping changes that would destroy what may well be the last historic example of its kind.

Eduard F. Sekler

¹⁶ Data from the statistics of H. M. G. Dept. of Tourism; figure for 1978 kindly provided by Mr. Shanker Man Pradhan.

UTILISATION DES ESPACES COLLECTIFS A PATAN ET DANS D'AUTRES VILLES HISTORIQUES DE LA VALLEE DE KATHMANDOU, AU NEPAL

Les villes de la vallée de Katmandou, au Népal (les principales étant Katmandou, Patan, Bhaktapur), ont conservé un riche héritage culturel et d'anciens schémas d'utilisation de l'espace urbain d'une grande pureté; maintenant, la modernisation, l'industrialisation et le tourisme posent à ces villes des problèmes aigus.

La vallée de Katmandou est très belle mais aussi très vulnérable en raison de sa surface restreinte (19 km sur 25 km). A Patan (60.000 hab.) il y a de nombreuses zones homogènes du point de vue visuel et social, mais elles sont menacées par des intrusions incongrues; de fâcheuses constructions récentes montrent quels dangers réserve l'avenir.

Patan est considéré comme la plus ancienne ville de la vallée et son plan s'organise autour d'un croisement de routes. Les points cardinaux sont marqués, aux frontières de la vieille ville, par des stupas. D'anciens rites processionnels sont encore en pratique. Les routes sont généralement bordées par des maisons de trois étages en brique et bois et aux toits pointus souvent richement décorés. La taille des pièces et leurs hauteurs sont petites et standardisées, mais les bâtiments nouveaux ont tendance à adopter des dimensions plus grandes. Les rues servent au travail et au jeu en tant qu'extension de la maison. La Place Durbar fonctionne comme le coeur de la cité, lieu d'échange, de communication, de rituel et de commémoration, riche en monuments et oeuvres d'art.

Dans le futur il sera nécessaire de trouver des solutions à des problèmes tels que celui de savoir comment construire des logements qui s'intègrent aux anciens, comment traiter l'automobile, comment conserver des espaces collectifs qui aient une véritable signification sociale, et comment empêcher l'exode rural vers la ville. En ce qui concerne la conservation historique un travail très positif a été accompli à Honuman Dhoka, Katmandou et dans plusieurs zones de Bhaktapur. Maintenant l'UNESCO a entrepris une campagne internationale de soutien à laquelle plusieurs pays ont déjà répondu, et un schéma de conservation urbaine pour la place Durbar de Patan a été proposé.

Il est cependant évident qu'il y a une détérioration continue de l'aspect de la vallée, et, face à des pressions énormes, l'avenir de ces espaces urbains historiques est des plus incertain.

1. Carte de la vallée de Katmandou.
2. Plan de la Zone de conservation urbaine de Patan (Lalitpur) avec délimitation de la zone monumentale de la Place Durbar.
3. Petite place publique dans le secteur N.E. de la zone des monuments. Le bâtiment en hauteur qui fait rupture est de construction récente.
4. Route principale du village de Bungamati à l'époque des moissons.
5. Vue aérienne de la zone de conservation urbaine de Patan. On peut voir comment les voies principales se coupent au centre de la Place Durbar. Des cercles marquent trois des quatre stupas Ashoka, comme on les appelle, situées aux confins de la ville; (la quatrième n'est pas visible sur cette photo).
6. Le grand étang dans le quartier S.O. de Patan.
7. La Place Durbar à Patan, vers le Nord, prise du point 4 sur le plan 9.
8. La Place Durbar à Patan, vers le Sud, prise du point 9 sur le plan 9.
9. La zone des monuments de la Place Durbar à Patan: utilisation du sol et indication des points de vue urbanistiques importants.
10. La zone des monuments de la Place Durbar à Patan: classification selon la signification artistique et/ou historique.
11. La Grande Cloche appelée Cloche Taleju de la place Durbar à Patan (N° 29 sur la fig. 14).
12. Enfants jouant sur la Place Durbar à Patan; leur jouet est en forme de chariot de Matsyendranath.
13. Gros camion bloquant la rue à l'extrémité Nord de la Place Durbar à Patan.
14. Place Durbar à Patan: état des monuments et articulation des toits.
15. Place Durbar à Patan: coupe.
16. Place Durbar à Patan - Elévations Nord et Sud.
17. Place Durbar à Patan - Elévation Ouest. Les bâtiments de plus de trois étages et les surélévations au-dessus des lignes de corniches sont récentes.
- 18 a, b. La Place Durbar à Patan: l'extrémité Sud du côté Ouest en 1968 et 1978.
- 19 a, b. La Place Durbar à Patan: maisons derrière Krishna Mandir (N° 14 dans fig. 14) en 1968 et 1978.

LA UTILIZACIÓN DE LOS ESPACIOS COLECTIVOS EN PATAN Y EN OTRAS CIUDADES HISTÓRICAS DEL VALLE DE KATMANDU

Las ciudades del valle de Katmandu, en el Nepal (las principales son: Katmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur) han conservado una imponente herencia cultural y esquemas de utilización del espacio urbano que son de gran pureza. Ahora, con la modernización, la industrialización y el turismo esas ciudades están enfrentadas con problemas agudos.

El valle de Katmandu es hermoso pero muy vulnerable dada su escasa superficie (19 km por 25 km). En Patan (60.000 almas) existen numerosas zonas homogéneas del punto de vista visual y social. Esas zonas son amenazadas por la invasión incongrua de molestas construcciones recientes, esto demuestra los peligros del porvenir. Se considera Patan como siendo la más antigua ciudad del valle. Su plano organizase alrededor del cruce de carreteras. Los puntos cardinales de la villa son marcados por la existencia de stupas situadas en los límites de la antigua ciudad. Los antiguos ritos procesionales continúan siendo practicados. En su generalidad las vías son bordeadas de casas de tres pisos contruidas con ladrillos y madera, los tejados son pintados y ricamente decorados. Las habitaciones son todas iguales, de escasa altura y superficie. Los edificios nuevos tienen por tendencia el agrandamiento de las dimensiones. Las calles sirven para el trabajo y para los juegos, actuando como una extensión de la casa. La Plaza Durbar cumple el papel de corazón de la ciudad, lugar de intercambios, de comunicación, de ritual y de conmemoración, es opulenta en monumentos y obras de arte.

En el futuro habrá que solucionar problemas como el de la construcción de alojamientos que se integren en lo anciano, como el de la circulación automóvil, como el de la conservación de los espacios colectivos que guarden su verdadera signficación social, como el de evitar el exodo campesino hacia la población. Un trabajo muy positivo ha sido realizado en la conservación histórica de Hanuman Dhoka, Katmandu y en diferentes zonas de Bhaktapur. La UNESCO ha lanzado una campaña internacional de sosten a la cual diferentes países han ya respondido y un esquema de conservación urbana para la Plaza Durbar ha sido propuesto.

Sin embargo es evidente que hay una deterioración continua del aspecto de la ciudad y, como presiones enormes se ejercen, el porvenir de esos espacios urbanos quedan bastante incerteros.