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Reawakening Dapcha: Bridging Past and Present for Better Future

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Abstract— *Dapcha, a historically rich yet underdeveloped town in Nepal, faces significant socio-economic and infrastructural challenges despite its cultural heritage. This research paper, examines the current scenario and existing conditions of Dapcha through a comprehensive analysis of its historical context, urban fabric, socio-economic dynamics, and architectural heritage. The study highlights issues such as deteriorating traditional structures, inadequate infrastructure, and declining cultural practices due to urban migration and modernization pressures. By identifying critical areas of concern, the paper aims to provide a foundation for sustainable revitalization strategies that balance cultural preservation with modern development. The findings serve as a guide for policymakers, urban planners, and architects striving to create a future where Dapcha's historical essence coexists harmoniously with contemporary progress.*

Keywords— “Dapcha, Revitalization, Cultural heritage, Sustainable development, Urban preservation.”

Introduction

Dapcha Village, located in the scenic Kavrepalanchok District of Nepal, is a captivating blend of natural beauty and cultural significance. Situated about 50 kilometres east of Kathmandu, it boasts stunning views of the Himalayas and is known for its traditional Newari architecture.

Historically, Dapcha has served as a vital settlement along ancient trade routes, contributing to local governance and commerce. The village reflects traditional Nepali rural life, with an economy centred on agriculture and small industries. The community remains deeply rooted in its customs, celebrating festivals that uphold Nepal's rich cultural heritage.

However, Dapcha faces challenges such as population decline, as younger residents migrate to urban areas for better opportunities, leaving an aging population behind. The infrastructure, while adequate, needs modernization to enhance residents' quality of life.

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Literature Review

Rural Design

Rural design focuses on applying design thinking to tackle rural issues and connects urban and rural development. It aims to understand the interactions between natural and human systems, promoting sustainability by integrating humans, animals, and the environment. In a rapidly changing world, rural design is vital for bridging urban and rural futures, enhancing economic resilience, social interaction, and celebrating diversity in art and culture.

Creating sustainable and modern rural areas is challenging due to a lack of systematic theory and practical guidance, resulting in various issues in rural development. To tackle standardization and refinement problems in rural designs, the following dimensions are considered.

Ecological Dimension

Urbanization's prioritization of economic growth has harmed rural environments through improper waste disposal and excessive chemicals. To combat this, we need to raise ecological awareness, adapt sustainable agricultural practices, and integrate rural ecological values into society for a healthier countryside.

Industry Dimension

Urbanization often neglects rural ecological concerns, leading to environmental damage and waste. Outdated farming practices contribute to improper waste disposal and excessive chemicals. Promoting awareness and sustainable technologies is essential, prioritizing long-term environmental health over short-term profits to preserve the countryside.

People's Livelihood Dimension

Rural life focuses on village planning and ethics, prioritizing essential services like education, healthcare, transport, energy, and sanitation. It emphasizes governance for rural communities and the preservation of traditional culture

while adapting to modern lifestyles, ultimately enhancing the living environment and quality of life.

Spiritual Dimension

Village design ethics are closely tied to spirituality, with public order and customs shaping behaviour and reinforcing traditional values. Stagnation in rural development has hindered farmers' individuality and innovation. Rural design seeks to integrate the region's history and culture into architecture and daily life, preserving rural heritage.

Revitalization

Revitalization is the process of encouraging growth and success in areas like urban planning and personal development. It has become more prominent due to challenges such as blight, decay, and inequality in urban areas. Urban revitalization focuses on restoring neglected neighbourhoods, boosting struggling economies, and fostering inclusive communities. By addressing issues like economic downturns and poor infrastructure, it aims to enhance residents' quality of life and reclaim the vibrancy of urban life through sustainable, lively spaces for everyone.

Key components of revitalization:

- **Physical Redevelopment:** Improve roads, transport, utilities, and green spaces for better functionality and connectivity.
- **Economic Development:** Create jobs, attract investments, and support local businesses to strengthen the economy.
- **Affordable Housing:** Offer diverse housing options to promote social equity and prevent displacement.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve residents and stakeholders to align revitalization efforts with community needs.
- **Cultural & Environmental Preservation:** Restore historic sites, promote cultural events, and adopt green infrastructure.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate across sectors to mobilize resources and ensure accountability.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Set benchmarks, track progress, and adjust strategies for effective outcomes.

Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse in architectural revitalization is a transformative approach that breathes new life into old or

historic buildings by repurposing them for contemporary uses. The adaptive reuse of cultural heritage holds significant potential for fostering cultural and social innovation creating productive networks, and contributing to sustainable development [4]. This approach respects the architectural and cultural significance of structures by combining historical preservation with modern innovation. As a result, adaptive reuse addresses the growing demand for sustainable development, economic revitalization, and community enrichment. It serves as a testament to the creative potential of architecture, showcasing how the past can be seamlessly integrated into the present to shape a vibrant future.

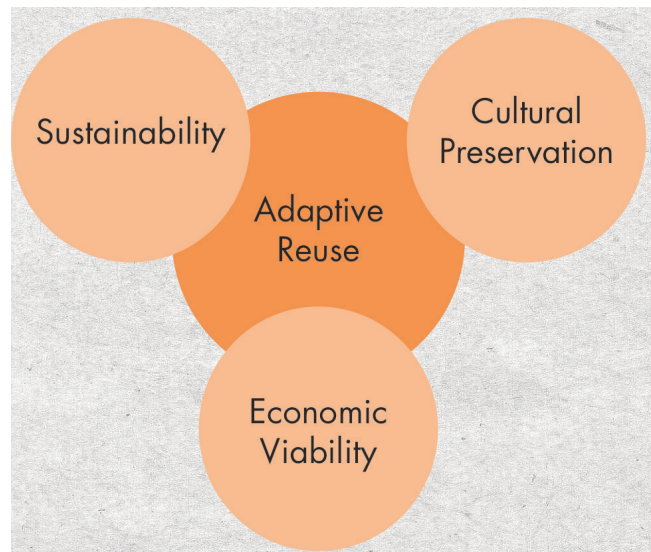


Fig. 1 Benefits of Adaptive Reuse

1) *Benefits of Adaptive Reuse*

- **Sustainability:** Adaptive reuse significantly contributes to sustainability by conserving the embodied energy in existing structures and reducing the waste and environmental impact associated with traditional demolition and new construction. Repurposing buildings minimizes demolition waste and carbon emissions while allowing for the integration of energy-efficient systems and materials, enhancing overall sustainability.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Adaptive reuse supports cultural preservation by maintaining historic buildings that serve as community landmarks. This approach fosters a sense of identity and continuity, connecting residents with their history and enhancing the cultural fabric of communities.
- **Economic Viability:** Adaptive reuse is often more cost-effective than new construction since it requires

less investment in materials and labour. It can boost property values, attract businesses and residents, and stimulate local economies. Additionally, many projects qualify for tax credits and grants for preserving historic buildings, making it an attractive option for developers and municipalities focused on revitalization and economic growth.

Community Revitalization through Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse is essential for community revitalization, transforming abandoned areas into vibrant spaces. By converting old factories into mixed-use developments, communities can attract new businesses and residents, enhancing aesthetic appeal and fostering social interaction. This process builds community pride and ownership, encouraging further investment and development.

Key Consideration in Adaptive Reuse

- Building Assessment
- Design and Planning
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Financial and Legal Considerations

Contextual Study of Dapcha

Dapcha, situated in the Chhatrebajh ward of Namobuddha municipality in Kavrepalanchok, is an ancient Newari settlement, about 50 km southeast of Kathmandu. In the past, Dapcha served as a crucial trade route to Kathmandu Valley. The village was initially established as a market along the existing trade route, resulting in the linear layout of the houses. As a thriving economic hub along the trade route, Dapcha enjoyed prosperity for many years, until its downfall. The primary cause of its economic decline was the construction of the B.P Koirala highway, which provided a faster and more convenient route to Ramechhap, Rampur, and other neighbouring settlements to the east, bypassing Dapcha. Additionally, the nearby settlement of Phulbari gained popularity, diverting attention away from Dapcha. Consequently, many residents migrated to urban areas like Banepa and Kathmandu, resulting in Dapcha becoming a semi-deserted settlement, a stark contrast to its previous bustling state.

Location

Dapcha is a village located in Kavrepalanchowk district of Nepal. It lies at 27.55°N and 85.63°S. It is 53km South-West of the capital.



Fig. 2 Location of Dapcha

Distance from major cities:

- Kathmandu: 53km (2hr)
- Bhaktapur: 42km (1hr 20m)
- Dhulikhel: 30km (1hr)
- Panauti: 14km (30m)
- Namobuddha: 4km (10m)
- Bhakundebesi: 7km (20m)
- Tindhare Jharana: 17km (1hr)

Topography

Dapcha Bazaar is situated in a hilly region of Nepal, characterized by its undulating terrain. The topography includes a mix of steep slopes, terraced fields, and narrow valleys, typical of the mid-hill region of Nepal. Its elevation ranges from 1619 m to 1723 m above sea level. The elevation provides panoramic views of the surrounding hills and valleys, contributing to the area's scenic beauty. The main road of Dapcha lies on the ridge line. The bazaar itself is perched on a ridge, with settlements and shops spread along the slopes, creating a distinctive layout influenced by the natural contours of the land.

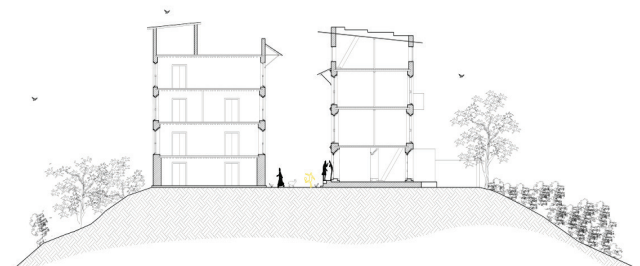


Fig. 3: Section of bazaar area of Dapcha (Mountain Architecture, KU, 2018 batch)

Population

The majority of population of Dapcha comprises of Newar community. Other communities include Tamangs, Brahmins, etc.

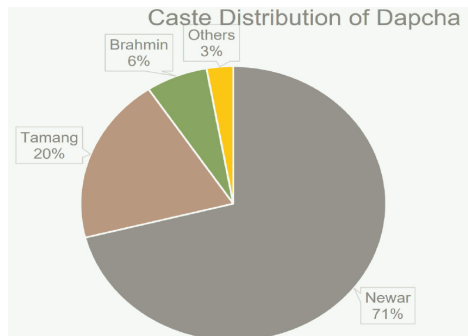


Fig. 4 Caste Distribution of Dapcha

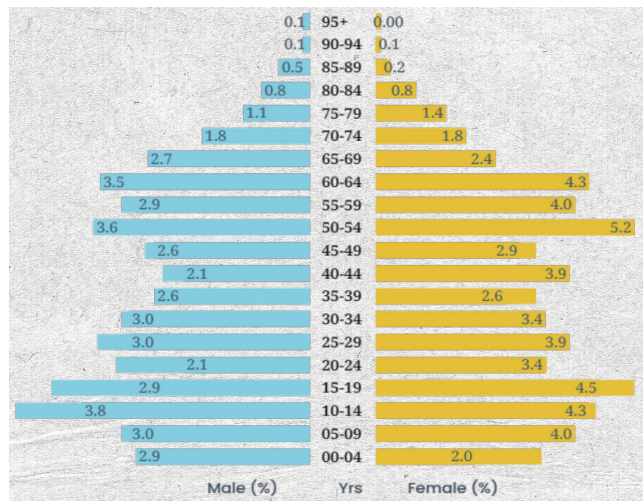


Fig. 5 Population Pyramid of Ward no.9

Festivals

1) Lakhey Nach

Performed by two 'Lakhey' and two 'Nakheycha', the dance is staged during the daytime of 'Sasthi' in the month of August or 6th day after the full moon in Bhadra. People have varied opinions as to why this dance is performed. However, it is generally accepted that the dance is about the Lakhey demon coming to create troubles for people during the daytime. Following Lakhey Nach, Devi Bhairav Nach is performed in the evening symbolizing the elimination of evil spirits and powers.

1) Devi Bhairav Nach

The Devi Bhairav Nach is performed on the evening of Lakhey Nach or two days prior to Shri Krishna Janmashtami Jatra which is a major festival for the people of Dapcha. The Devi Bhairav Nach is performed by seven gods and goddesses (humans wearing colourful dresses and masks

of different deities). Although some of the dances are performed alone others are performed as a group.

The performance is inaugurated by Bhairav followed by Kali (Mahakali), Barahi, Devi, Bishnu, Kumari and Ganesh respectively. Accompanied by the sounds of various instruments, the nach is performed an hour before midnight.

2) Shri Krishna Janmashtami Jatra

Shri Krishna Janmashtami Jatra is celebrated on the day of Krishna Janmashtami or the 8th day after the full moon of August. Women of Dapcha perform fasting all day and worship Krishna at midnight wishing for husbands like Lord Krishna or long life of their husbands in case they are already married. On the day of Navami (9th day after the full moon of August) people celebrate the birth of Krishna by carrying 'Khata'. Hence, it is also known as Shri Krishna Janmashtami Ratha Yatra. There are three Krishna Ratha, one in each place; Tallo Hatiya, Kotkali and Dapcha Bazar. The people of Tallo Hatiya carry out the Khata in the morning whereas the people of Maslo hatiya (Kotkali) carry out the Khata during the day.

3) Gai Jatra

Locals used to celebrate Gai Jatra in Dapcha in the same manner as they would in Bhaktapur. However, this festival is no longer celebrated in Dapcha. Now, people go to Bhaktapur to celebrate this Jatra.

4) Maula Parva

Started during the Rana Regime, a buffalo is sacrificed on the day of Nawami of Dashain in Maula Pokhari, Kotkali. This festival is still celebrated to this day.

5) Ganthya Muga

Celebrated by Newar community on 1st of Shrawan, Ganthya Muga or Luto Falne Jatra is celebrated by burning 'Ghantakarna'. This festival is a celebration of victory over mythical demons, chasing the evil spirits and bringing good fortunes. One can observe this festival being commemorated in street junctions with the accompaniment of traditional music.

Etymology

Long ago, there lived a king known by the name of Shankheshwar. One day, Shankeshwar was asked for land by a yogi. The king then conceded that all the land that shall be covered by the yogi before the sundown shall belong to him. The yogi had already begun his journey when he

suddenly realized he had lost the handle of his 'Khukhuri' or 'Dap'. Subconsciously, he let out the sound 'Dap Ja' which came to be the name of his land. However, due to the phonetic change over the period of time, the place is now called 'Dapcha'.

Furthermore, the origin of the word 'Chatrebanjh' comes from the umbrella shaped tree of 'banjh' (Oak) which was located at present day Krishna Madhyamik Bidhyalaya. Translated in Nepali from the word Umbrella, 'Chata' combined with 'Banjh' became 'Chatrebanjh'. Nonetheless, the name is also believed to have originated due to exemplary business of the Chatra Ram lineage. Thus, in present day, we know ancient 'Dapja' by the name of 'Dapcha Chatrebanjh' or occasionally as 'Dapcha Chatrabas'.

History

Dapcha Bazar, or Dapcha, was a bustling hub attracting traders from eastern regions, essential for the Kathmandu Valley's supply of grains, ghee, and livestock. During Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher's era, merchant Kul Bahadur pledged food for a thousand soldiers, highlighting Dapcha's economic autonomy. This thriving economy led to infrastructure development like schools and roads and enriched the cultural and religious aspects of society. Ancient structures like temples and traditional Newar houses with intricately carved windows reflect Dapcha's historical prosperity and cultural diversity.

Licchavi History

According to an inscription found in Bhakundebesi, during Licchavi period evidences of practice of taxation, post services can be found. In the same inscription, the place has been addressed as 'Dipring gram'.

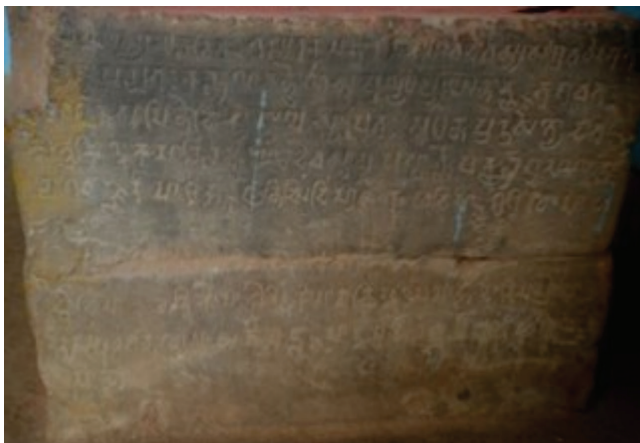


Fig. 6 Licchavi Inscription found in Bhakundebesi

Some archaeological artifacts, coins, etc. are also said to have been found around Bhakundebesi. But due to lack of knowledge on their importance, such ancient historic artifacts were not taken care of.



Fig. 7 Licchavi coins found around Dapcha

Arrival of Newars

The inscription found in the Tallo Hatiya Buda Bhimsen temple/pati provides evidence that the people from Bhaktapur were living in Dapcha during 1660 B.S. Newars of Dapcha are believed to have migrated from valley to Dapcha during the Malla Regime for trade and business purpose.

Dapcha acted as an entrepot city connecting Kathmandu valley with the east. People from the eastern towns like Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga, and Bardibas, usually traders, would often visit Dapcha. A typical trader would spend up to 3 days trading their merchandise.

When the Newars arrived in Dapcha, they formed a settlement named as puranogaun. The family of puranogaun expanded and built houses for their own clan. Other people out of the clan started to migrate from different places and started a new hatt bazar.

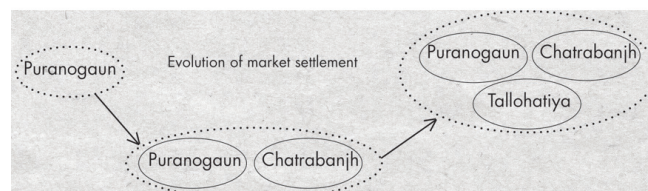
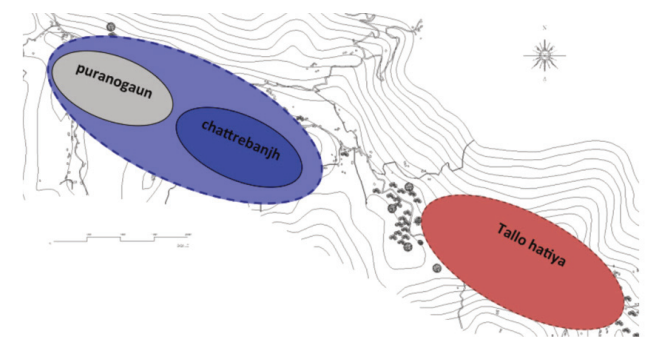


Fig. 8 Evolution of market settlement

After Unification

In divya upadesh King Prithivi Narayan Shah has mentioned Dapcha as one of the strong fort entering Kathmandu valley.

“..... Don't go there (down) to fight with them. Let them come here (hilly region) and fight with them. If we could do so they can easily be beheaded at the crossings of the chure hills. If we could do so we will be able to collect arms and ammunitions which could suffice for our 4 to 5 generation and we will be able to extend our border up to Ganga River. If they could not fight with us, they will try to come here by means of lolo poto (tricks) or any other types of conspiracies.

This is a Thakhat (suitable place /natural fort) of Nepal. If they (English) get this fort they will win over all the 4 emperors of the world. In fact this state itself is a fort created by the god himself. It doesn't need any human touch on it. Prepare 7 strong forts in these places namely Shivapuri, Pulchauki, Chandragiri, Mahadevpokhari, Palung, **Dapcha**, Kahule

According to this Dapcha was one of the important fort during Prithivi Narayan Shah's times. Remains of the fort is still present inside Namobuddha Resort.

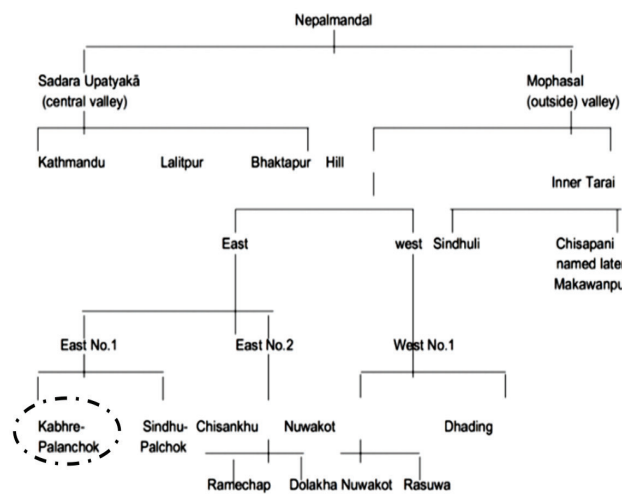


Fig. 9 Administrative division after unification

Decline

The main reason behind decline of Dapcha as market town can be categorized into 3 main reasons:

1) Construction of new roads and highways

Dapcha road was pedestrian from its ancient days. After the construction of BP highway, People who used the Dapcha - Sindhuli route began using the BP highway because of the availability of buses and trucks.

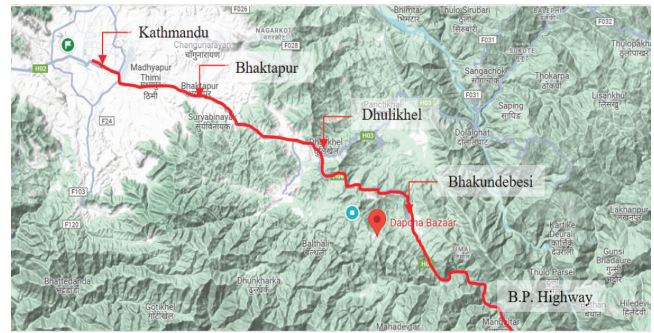


Fig. 10 Construction of BP Highway

Similarly, with the advent of Arniko Highway, people from Ramechhap, Dolakha, Okhaldhunga, etc. stopped using the Dapcha route. Trade centre shifted from Dapcha to Bhakundebsi. Better economic opportunities, higher studies, infrastructures and better lifestyle were the attractions which Dapcha could not provide. So, Dapcha was abandoned both by its people and prosperity.

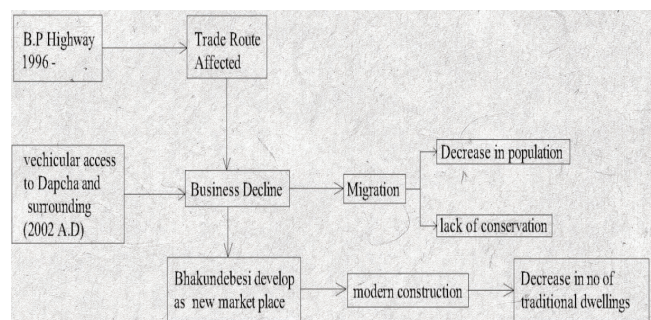


Fig. 11 Impact of Vehicular access

Formation of new market centres

After 1990 B.S. Rana regime lost its power and small vendor shops started to evolve. Those vendor shops were mostly in places like Mangaltar, Tallohatiya started direct business with Banepa and Bhaktapur without linkage with Dapcha. After 2030 -2035 B.S. Dapcha started to slowly lose its catchment area and other small markets came into power.

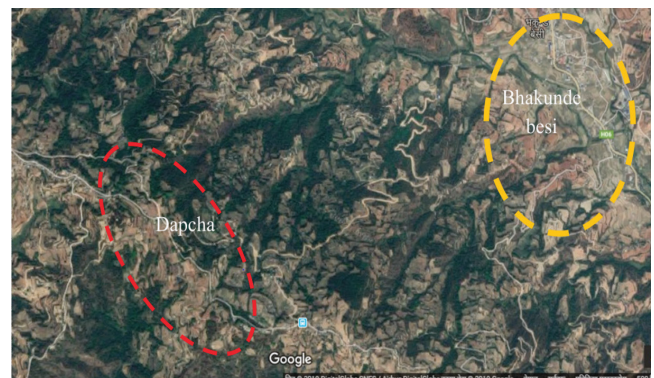


Fig. 12 Image showing Dapcha and Bhakundebsi

6) Migration and population change

Younger generations headed towards other cities for higher education leaving Dapcha with only older generation. As per data provided by population of Namobuddha municipality shows declining state. But while analysing the fact that only certain people live in the houses while there is festivals and jatras so this data doesn't match with what's in the paper. The average change in population is -2.97% in 2001 to -0.97 % in 2011 to -1.20% in 2021.

Table i

Aagr and population change in 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021

Population				Between 1991 and 2001		Between 2001 and 2011		Between 2011 and 2021	
1991	2001	2011	2021	Change in pop.	AAGR (%)	Change in pop.	AAGR (%)	Change in pop.	AAGR (%)
28,284	32,489	29,519	26,160	4,205	1.39	-2,970	-0.96	-3,359	-1.20

Settlement of Dapcha

The settlement in Dapcha is characterized by its traditional Newari culture and architecture, with most inhabitants being from the Newar ethnic group. The town has a rural setting, with houses typically made from local materials such as brick, mud, and wood.

It is a ridgeline settlement with buildings flanking both side of the main road.



Fig. 13: Measured Drawings of Settlement of Dapcha (Mountain Architecture, KU, 2018 batch)

Buildings of Dapcha

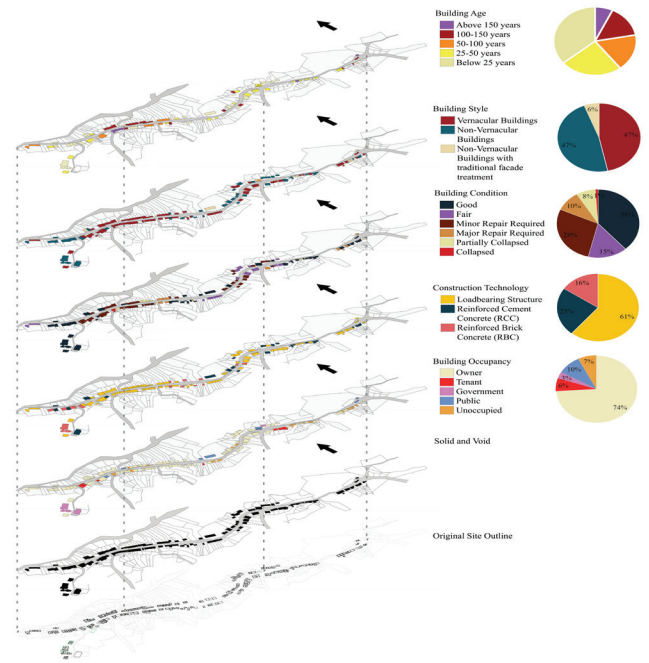


Fig. 14: Thematic Analysis of Settlement of Dapcha (Mountain Architecture, KU, 2018 batch)

Results and Discussions

Cultural and Historical Context

Dapcha is historically significant as a trade route in Nepal, rich in Newari heritage. Festivals like Lakhey Nach and Devi Bhairav Nach reflect the community's spiritual traditions. However, demographic changes are threatening these cultural expressions, making it crucial to preserve this intangible heritage for Dapcha's identity.

Socio-Economic Challenges

Dapcha faces socio-economic challenges, including a declining population, limited opportunities, and poor infrastructure. The shift towards Bhakundebesi has marginalized it as a trade centre, leading to urban migration and an aging population. To address these issues, policies should focus on economic diversification through sustainable tourism, small industries, and heritage-based entrepreneurship.

Architectural and Urban Decay

Dapcha's architectural assets are deteriorating, particularly its Newari-style buildings with intricately carved wooden facades, which are facing neglect. Many structures are in

fair to poor condition, with some being structurally unsound. An architectural conservation framework is essential for their preservation.

Sustainability through Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse balances heritage conservation with modern development. By repurposing old structures into museums, community centres, and boutique lodges, Dapcha can attract tourism while preserving its architectural integrity, reducing waste, and promoting eco-tourism.

Policy and Governance Recommendations

The future of Dapcha relies on policy reforms for cultural preservation, infrastructure development, and community initiatives. Local governance should create heritage zones and guidelines for new construction that honour traditional architecture, while public-private partnerships can help secure resources for infrastructure improvements.

Conclusions

Revitalizing Dapcha presents a complex challenge that must balance heritage conservation with socio-economic development. It's crucial to preserve its unique cultural identity while improving infrastructure and the economy. Policy frameworks focusing on cultural tourism, adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and community engagement are essential for a sustainable future. Prioritizing the preservation of Dapcha's historical assets involves collaboration among government bodies, academic institutions, local communities, and private stakeholders. By applying architectural conservation principles and sustainable urban design, Dapcha can become a living heritage site that harmoniously blends history with modern innovation.

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