



INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PRACTICES IN SACRED GARDEN OF LUMBINI

Pashupati Nyaupane

Center Department of Nepalese Culture, History and Archaeology, TU, Kathmandu, Nepal

Corresponding Email: pashupatinyaou@gmail.com

Received: 2nd Oct., 2023

Revised: 12th Jan., 2024

Accepted: 22nd Jan, 2024

Abstract

Similar to Mecca or Bethlehem, Lumbini is a significant pilgrimage center. UNESCO World Heritage Site Maya Devi Temple, which is situated close to a holy pool. This site has the archaeological remnants of brick structures built by Ashoka in the third century BC, as well as the discovery of a timber shrine from the sixth century BC. The ancient monastic remains at Lumbini, the sacred Bodhi tree, an ancient bathing pond, the Ashokan pillar, built by King Ashoka in 249 BC, and the Maya Devi Temple encompass the holy site. The sacred Bodhi tree, the Ashokan pillar, the Mayadevi Temple which is believed to be the place of the Buddha's birth and the remains of previous monasteries may all be found at Lumbini, a holy site. At the location, pilgrims from different nations chant and meditate from early dawn till early evening. Moreover, The Lumbini monastic zone is a model of meditation and spiritual living, enclosed away during its picturesque surroundings. The lessons of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, are repeated in this place by the rhythm of devotion and reflection through life. The intangible cultural heritage of Lumbini, the sacred place of Lord Buddha's birth, is a living collection of rituals, ceremonies, and traditions. Spiritual practices such as ancient meditation processes, lively folk dances, oral traditions, and sacred ceremonies are examples of these cultural intangibles. Lumbini's intangible heritage demonstrates to the vast spiritual and cultural heritage of Buddhism, connecting and encouraging gratitude among Buddhists worldwide.

Keywords: Intangible, heritage, Oral traditions, manifestations, commemoration, pantomime.

Introduction

This study investigates Lumbini's intangible cultural heritage with a particular emphasis on the technique used. This study aims to identify the multidimensional system of intangible cultural practices in Lumbini through the use of a mixed-methods approach that incorporates ethnographic fieldwork, stakeholder interviews,

and archived analysis. Similarly, researcher utilized the grounded method. respects the community's opinions and viewpoints, making sure that the final understanding has strong roots in the circumstances and experiences of the Lumbini people. By using this approach, scholars may develop a more diversified and culturally aware knowledge by gaining a

thorough and authentic realize of Lumbini's intangible cultural heritage. With the goal of offering complex insights into Lumbini's intangible heritage, the technique focuses on explaining the transmission, maintenance, and modern importance of cultural practices inside this sacred place. The study aims to identify, understand, intangible aspects of this heritage, such as traditional music, dance, rituals, oral traditions, and craftsmanship that have been passed down through generations.

The Lord Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was born in 623 B.C. inside Lumbini's well-known gardens, which gradually became into a destination for pilgrims [1]. The Indian emperor Ashoka, who built a memorial pillar there, was one of the pilgrims. Archaeological relics connected to the birth of the Lord Buddha are a key component of the site's development as a Buddhist pilgrimage center. The Ashokan Pillar, several ruined stupas and monasteries, as well as the temple itself, could be located inside the sacred grounds [2]. According to history, the Indian Emperor Ashoka traveled to Lumbini in or around 249 BC and port a sandstone pillar bearing an inscription to mark the event [3]. It is the most notable monument and has the earliest epigraphic evidence pertaining to the location of Lord Buddha's birth [4, 5]. The birthplace's veracity is confirmed by the inscription that Emperor Ashoka left intact. These monuments are venerated, circumambulated, and honored by a large number of Buddhist devotees and

followers as a representation of Buddha. Domestic and foreign Buddhist devotees visit these premises and engage in a variety of Buddhist-related ceremonial activities throughout the year, including worship, meditation, and circumambulation [5]. Since, Lumbini is located in low-land of Nepal and experiences high summer temperatures, generally tourists visit Lumbini in the winter.

Tangible Cultural Heritage' refers to physical artefacts produced, maintained and transmitted intergenerationally in a society. It includes artistic creations, built heritage such as buildings and monuments, and other physical or tangible products of human creativity that are invested with cultural significance in a society. 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' indicates 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their Cultural Heritage'[6]. Examples of intangible heritage are oral traditions, performing arts, local knowledge, and traditional skills. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), made up of all immaterial manifestations of culture, represents the variety of living heritage of humanity as well as the most important vehicle of cultural diversity. Traditions and living manifestations that are passed down from generation to generation are referred to as intangible cultural heritage. Oral traditions, performing arts, social

practices, rituals, special occasions, knowledge and practices about nature and the universe, and knowledge and abilities to manufacture traditional crafts are all examples of intangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is a critical component in preserving cultural diversity in the face of globalization According to UNESCO [7]:

The Intangible Cultural Heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith- that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”[7].

An extensive analysis of the many elements that go into creating Lumbini's unique cultural character is necessary to understand its intangible cultural heritage fully. Folklore, myths, and stories passed down through the years are all included in oral traditions, which scholars' study. The vibrant culture of Lumbini is reflected in large part because of performing arts, including traditional dances and musical performances. The social customs and practices of a society provide light on the shared values

and beliefs by providing insights into their everyday lives and ceremonies. Noteworthy events, distinguished by unique festivity and celebration, are essential to comprehending the region's collective character. Moreover, the investigation covers beliefs and customs about the natural world and the cosmos, exposing the folks.

Oral Traditions

Oral traditions are passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and are not written down. It is the first and still most widespread form of human communication. It is the oral medium, which is dynamic and forever evolves, stores and transmits the knowledge, ideas and skills. Generally, it is passed down from the old generation to the young generation. Oral traditions have their proper place among the holy grounds in the sacred precincts of Lumbini, where the echoes of antiquity connect through time. To discuss ancient tales, myths, and spiritual lessons handed down through the ages, elders and custodians of nearby villages assemble. These stories act as a living tapestry that connects the region's cultural diversity. The deep knowledge of the Buddha himself, as well as the fundamental principles of the religion of Buddhism, has been preserved and passed on through oral traditions, ensuring that the teachings continue to inspire and direct people from all over the world. In this area, oral tradition refers to the verbal transmission of Buddhist texts, tales, and teachings from

generation to generation. Lay practitioners, nuns, and monks carry out this oral transmission of Buddhist wisdom, guaranteeing its continued existence. The oral tradition encourages a feeling of community by maintaining the core of the Buddha's teachings and creating a solid bond with the historical and spiritual foundations of Buddhism in Lumbini.

Performing Arts Performing Arts

The performing arts range from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung verse and beyond. They include numerous cultural expressions that reflect human creativity and that are also found to some extent, in many other intangible cultural heritage domains. While Lumbini is widely recognized for being a sacred pilgrimage site, it also serves as an homage to the outstanding performing arts that derive from the area's spiritual and heritage culture. Traditional dance and music performances are frequently included in the rich tapestry of events in and around Lumbini. These creative works serve as a way to communicate Buddhism's rich history, mythology, and spiritual tales. Local and international performers collaborate to demonstrate their abilities, giving pilgrims and guests an exciting time that enhances the serene surroundings.

Social Practices, rituals and festive events

Rites or rituals are a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to the prescribed order. It is

a set of fixed actions which can be the part of life or a part on a yearly calendar that should be performed by everyone following any particular tradition. Social customs, religious ceremonies, and seasonal celebrations all play a significant role in Lumbini's spiritual significance. Here, pilgrims come from all over the world, creating a vibrant tapestry of cultural interchange. The circumambulation of the sacred Maya Devi Temple, during which worshippers give prayers and light incense, is one of the most treasured ceremonies. It fosters a feeling of harmony and awe [8]. Additionally, many tourists' spiritual journeys revolve around meditation exercises and quiet reflection beneath the Bodhi tree, which is said to be a descendant of the original tree at Bodh Gaya. Numerous celebrations are organized at Lumbini in commemoration of the life, enlightenment, and the passing of Lord Buddha, such as Buddha Jayanti [9]. Prayer flags blowing in the air, lively processions, and offerings of flowers and incense all add to the festive atmosphere during this time.

Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

The topic comprises spirituality and world view, ecological wisdom, indigenous knowledge, knowledge about local flora and fauna, traditional healing, meditation, Yāga, cosmology, shamanism and visual arts. Modern-day Nepal's Lumbini, deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings, has a significant place in the natural and cosmic universes. Siddhartha Gautama, later known as

the enlightened Buddha, was born at this honored location, which is why it is significant. Buddhist philosophy places a high value on respecting the environment [9]. Lumbini's beautiful surroundings, magnificent gardens, historic Bodhi trees, and peaceful ponds serve as a live example. The Buddha's teachings strongly emphasize one's relationship to nature, calling for kindness, respect, and harmonious interactions with all living things. As a spiritual center, Lumbini exemplifies these ideas by promoting reflection and enlightenment via interaction with the elements of nature, which was the source of all knowledge for the Buddha. This holy spot draws both pilgrims and seekers who want to meditate on their role in the cosmos, find comfort in the rhythms of nature, or pursue a more profound knowledge of existence.

Traditional craftmanship

It refers to a broad variety of imaginative and creative activities that are connected to creating things with one's hands and expertise, including work with fabrics, moldable and stiff materials, paper, plant fibers, and so on. It is a traditional primary sector of craft creation. Traditional handicraft is alive and well at Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha and a valued UNESCO World Heritage site, as a memorial to the region's rich cultural history. A variety of time-honored crafts are produced by skilled craftsmen in Lumbini, reflecting the profound spiritual significance of this holy site. Thangka

paintings exhibit a mastery of detail and dedication via their detailed representations of Buddhist deities and sacred situations. Woodworkers create elaborate carvings that bring Buddhist symbols and venerated characters to life. Statues and ceremonial items are made of metal and imbued with spiritual devotion by metalworkers. Another essential trade is stone carving, which produces magnificent sculptures and ornaments used in temples and monuments. These crafts express a spiritual link to the teachings of these ancient teachers while also preserving cultural customs.

Mayadevi Temple

The mother of Prince Siddhartha, who eventually became the Buddha, Queen Maya Devi, is honored at this significant temple, which has great religious significance for Buddhists worldwide. It is a destination of pilgrimage where devoted individuals congregate to pay homage and ask for favors. Unwritten cultural traditions passed down through the years are alive and well around the temple. These rituals include chants and hymns, ceremonial offerings, and contemplative activities. Pilgrims perform these rituals to foster a sense of connectedness with the spiritual energy that surrounds Lumbini. From many Buddhist nations, visitors and pilgrims travel to Lumbini. Thai, Sri Lankan, Myanmar, Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, Tibetan (autonomous area of China), Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese pilgrims are just a few nations with sizable

Buddhist populations regularly sending people to Lumbini. The Buddhist traditions in these nations are strong, and practitioners from these areas greatly respect Lumbini [10]. They pray,



Figure 1: Mayadevi temple complex.

Lumbini is divided into three zones in accordance with its master plan: a spiritual zone (where Lord Buddha was born), a monastic zone (where numerous monasteries from Buddhist countries are located), and a physical zone (where visitors facilities are available). There are now 17 Mahayana sect monasteries and 8 TheraBand sect monasteries operating in this regard. The head of these monasteries welcomes



Figure 3: Meditation

The indigenous ethnic community from the area visits this location during Chaitra Purnima, the full moon of Chaitra. Those locals were given a designated site to worship 200 meters to the southwest of the precise location of the Buddha's

meditate, circumambulate, lit lamps and engage in ceremonial actions in accordance with their country's Buddhist traditions.



Figure 2: Mayadevi temple complex.

Buddhist nuns and monks from their respective nations, as well as followers, and they preach about Buddhism, Buddhist ceremonies, and Buddhist philosophy in this area.

In a same manner, during the full moon, the head and related heads of these monasteries from the Lumbini master plan visit the spiritual zone and light the lamp, pray, meditate, and circumambulate.



Figure 4: Light oil Lamp

birth by the Lumbini Development Trust. As a Hindu deity, Mayadevi (the mother of Lord Buddha) is worshipped by visitors to this area. They come from other religious communities; that are not Buddhists [11,12]. They prepare

delicious meals and engage in personal ceremonies of worship. These ceremonies are referred to as *kadai chalaune* locally (worshipping system). They arrive at the precise

location of Buddha's birth and circumambulate it after finishing their devotion, offering gifts, food, and prayers.



Figure 5: Chanting Infront of Mayadevi Temple

Marker Stone

Marker stone which is similar like Buddhist footprint was installed by Emperor Ashoka during 249 BC to allocate the exact birthplace of Buddha. The marker stone was found in 1996 after the sanctum sanatorium had undergone

careful excavation. The stone is precisely 70 cm by 40 cm by 10 cm large[12]. Glass that is bulletproof now covers it. Numerous Buddhist followers worship it and honor it with gifts like flowers, milk, oil, rice, and other items.



Figure 6: Marker Stone inside the temple

Nativity Buddha

The statue of Mayadevi, sometimes referred to as the Nativity Sculpture, was created in the fourth century AD and shows the Queen

supporting herself by clutching a branch of a tree in her right hand. At the time of birth, Gautami Prajapati, her sister, is standing next to her in a supportive position. Siddhartha, the freshly born

prince, is being welcomed by two celestial beings while standing straight on a lotus pedestal. This statue is placed above the Marker

stone which is attached over to the wall of Nativity Sculpture of Mayadevi temple.



Figure 7: Nativity Buddha

Conclusion

In Lumbini, followers began contributing to intangible cultural assets for purposes of devotion and meditation. Lumbini is evidence of a wide variety of customs and traditions that have been handed down through the ages. Lumbini symbolizes Buddhism's spiritual core, from the colorful festivals honoring the birth of Lord Buddha to the ageless practice of meditation by the monks in the consecrated landscaped areas. The principles of compassion, peacefulness, and enlightenment that have stood the test of time are transmitted to us across Lumbini's living and expanding intangible cultural heritage. In addition to providing the local community with a sense of identity and continuity, this intangible legacy is valuable globally, providing a window into the profound knowledge and cultural richness that know no geographical boundaries. Understanding, tolerance, and appreciation for the many cultural legacies that contribute to our common human legacy must be preserved through the

preservation and promotion of these intangible aspects. A closer relationship to the spiritual and historical significance of the Buddha's birthplace is fostered by the continual development of intangible cultural festivities, which visitors to Lumbini may expect to continue. On the full moon day in April or May, people celebrate Buddha Purnima, a celebration commemorating the life, teachings, and demise of the Buddha. Around the world, pilgrims and Buddhists gather to Lumbini during this time for unique prayers, processions, and festivities. Pilgrims engage in a variety of rites at the Maya Devi Temple, including going through the garden of sacred contemplation, meditating there, and presenting offerings.

References

- [1]. R. Chowdhury. A. E. Coningham. The Archaeology of Buddhism. In T. Insoll (Ed.), *Archaeology and World Religion* (pp. 61–95). London: Routledge, (2001).
- [2]. C. Allen. *The Buddha and Dr Führer: An Archaeological Scandal*. London: Haus

- Publishing, (2008).
- [3]. D. C. Sircar. Inscription of Asoka, Publications Division. New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, (1967).
- [4]. G. Giri. Tourist Heritage of Great Lumbini. Kathmandu: Author (2012).
- [5]. G. Giri. Bibliography of Lumbini. Kathmandu: Author. (2007).
- [6] UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: (2003) .
- [7] Y. J. Joury, A Brief on the Lumbini Development Project, April 1969. Kathmandu: UN Resident Representative Office (1969).
- [8] S. Chattopadhyaya, S. (1977). Bimbisara to Asoka. Calcutta: (1977).
- [9] B. Maharjan. Lumbini, Historical and Archaeological study. Kathmandu: Author (2005).
- [10] B. Bidari. Lumbini A Haven of Sacred Refuge. Kathmandu: Author (2004).
- [11] H. D. Rai. Lumbini the supreme pilgrimage, Kathmandu: Holy Ashok Tour and travels Pvt. Ltd. (2010).
- [12] T. N. Mishra. The Archaeological activities in Lumbini during, Ancient Nepal. Kathmandu: Department of Archaeology, HMG, No.139 (1996).