



## Restoration of the Kal Bhairav statue, the Kageshwar Mahadev Temple, and the Lakshmi Narayan Temple in Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square, Kathmandu

**C**rammed with temples built under royal sponsorship since the 16th century, Durbar Square in the heart of Kathmandu has long been used for ceremonies symbolizing the power of the King. It also serves more informal purposes: as a marketplace, an area for social interaction and a venue for speeches and demonstrations.

It is also the site of three major projects under the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.

Unfortunately, pollution, poor maintenance and unregulated development in recent decades substantially degraded Durbar Square and other monuments in the Kathmandu Valley, now recognized collectively as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The valley is also in a seismic zone; poor restoration work following major earthquakes throughout the 19th century and in 1934 left some monuments weak and vulnerable to the elements.

A comprehensive plan to restore the temples in the square, known as the Kathmandu Durbar Initiative, began in 2000. The work is managed by the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, the only non-governmental organization in Nepal registered in the field of heritage conservation. With local and international support, the trust has rescued more than two dozen significant monuments, collected data and provided training in conservation.

Every day at dawn, people gather in front of the statue of the Kal Bhairav to pray, burn incense, and make offerings of flowers and rice. The black-skinned, three-meter tall demonic figure inspires awe

and devotion as he crushes a prostrate foe beneath his feet and wields a sword in one of his six hands.

"Bhairav is an incarnation of Shiva. There are many different forms of the deity, but this one is associated with justice. People would come here to resolve disputes," says Rohit Kumar Ranjitkar, the preservation trust's conservation architect, who oversaw the statue's restoration, substantially funded by a grant from the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation in 2003-2005.

The stone statue was discovered during excavation work for a water supply system in the 17th century and installed in the square by King Pratap Malla. It is believed to be about 800 years old. Part of the restoration work involved removing inappropriate recent additions to the site, including concrete and marble walls added in the 1980s. Using historic photos as a guide, restorers removed brickwork that had been done to repair damage caused by the 1934 earthquake and replaced it with more authentic stone.

The U.S. Ambassador's Cultural Preservation Fund entirely paid for restoration of the nearby Kageshwar Mahadev Temple in 2004-2005. Built in 1711 by Queen Bhuvan Lakshmi in memory of the late King Bhupalendra Malla, the temple was probably originally a pagoda-style structure in the distinctive local Newari style. Kageshwar, a Hindu deity in the form of a crow, is an incarnation of Shiva. The temple is unusual because its pagoda-style ground floor is surmounted by a Shikhari-style dome. Rohit Kumar Ranjitkar says that this was probably added after the temple was damaged in an earthquake in the early 19th century. Poor restoration work after the 1934 earthquake led to further degradation of the Temple. The timbers, roof and walls had to be renovated. Mud mortar was reconstructed to reduce vulnerability to future earthquakes, and further structural strengthening was carried out. Inappropriate red wash was removed from the walls and the original wood carvings were restored.

The Lakshmi Narayan Temple, a small shrine adjacent to the square's oldest monument, the 16th century Jagannath Temple, was also reconstructed by the U.S. Ambassador's Cultural Preservation Fund. The original temple was destroyed by the 1934 earthquake and rebuilt in a simpler style that did not match the original, so the new one was constructed according to photographic records. Particular attention was paid to the carved wood decoration on the doors, door frames and cornices.

The restoration of Kal Bhairav, the Kageshwar Mahadev Temple and the Lakshmi Narayan Temple represent a significant contribution to the rejuvenation of Durbar Square, helping preserve Nepal's rich history and identity.

