

## Buddhist Cultural Heritage of Lo Manthang and Satellite Settlements, Mustang, Nepal

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### Abstract

This paper reads upper Mustang area from the cultural perspective. While doing so it excavates the history of the area and its people's cultural practices for their identity. The ethnic community copes with adverse natural adversity and embedded with the land. Apparently historicity refers the past events happened on the people and places in the course of time. It mainly focuses on the actors who caused the events happen and the consequences of the actions either political or economical or social or cultural facets of the society. This paper primarily reads Mustang and her people how they lived, practised the culture and sustained their independent identity fighting with the fair and adverse weather. The world is under the influence of identity politics. People whether locals or immigrants are raising the voice for their sovereign identity that establishes the social and cultural recognition of the people. The language, culture, social mores, lodging style and food stuffs consumed by locals as well as clothing style set up the identity of the people. In Mustang area most of the people save the government personnel's have the same way of life and language which denotes the formation of ethnic community.

### Background

The Kingdom of *Lo* is commonly known as *Mustang* and is located within the border of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Mustang is one of the 77 district administration divisions of Nepal for the smooth functioning of the administrative and governmental activities. It is located in the trans-Himalayan region of the Dhaulagiri Mountain adjoining to Tibetan Autonomous Region of China in the north. In the ancient days this was one of the important trade routes to Tibet. Mustang is unique in its climate and geographical outlook. It is a cold desert with greenery in the areas of settlement in the corner oases of the Kali Gandaki River bank. Kali Gandaki River flows from Mustang from north to south with its several tributaries making the deepest gorge, passes, and rocky hills on the way. Mustang is populated by the Tibetan origin people known as Lo-pa in the north, She-rib-pa in *Baragaule* (twelve villages) area in the middle and Thakali in the south along with some migrants from south part living in the southern region of Mustang. According to the *National Population and Housing Census* of 2011, the total population of Mustang is 13,452 in 3,354 households. The Tibetan origin people, *Baragaunle* (12 villagers) people, Thakali people are the people historically linked to Mustang. The population of Lo-pa people living in Lo-tsho-dun is 2,512 but in the same area some people have kept their surname Gurung but they are Lo-pa community people and their population is 2,885. The Thakali population is 2,535.<sup>1</sup>

Mustang is divided into two broader cultural and geographical categories: Upper Mustang and Lower Mustang. The district headquarter of Mustang is Jomsom located in the

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<sup>1</sup>The population of Mustang District as a whole and the ethnic group is taken from the "The National Population and Housing Census 2011 (Village Development Committee/Municipality) Vol. 02, NPHC 2011 and National Population and Housing Census 2011 (Caste/Ethnicity and language) NPHC 2011".

Lower Mustang but the ancient kingdom of Lo incorporated both lower and upper Lo with the capital situated at Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang. Lo Manthang is the central settlement of *Lo Tsho Dun* within the medieval walled City known as the Kingdom of Lo. In this way deduction can be made that place is about human experience or lets say about human dwellings. After discussing the fact and peoples' data let's rely on Promod K. Nayar's (2008) statements about place and people how they are integrated to formulate the semiotics of the place. He states, "Space is not simply land and built area. Space is made into place by everyday activities of people. Place is socially constructed through social relation" (185). There are seven major settlements in Upper Mustang known as *Lo Tsho Dun* in Tibetan language with local *Lo skad*<sup>2</sup> as the regional dialect. The settlements of *Lo Tsho Dun* are: Lo Manthang, Tsarang, Chonup, Chosser, Yara-Gara-Dhi, Dhey-Tangye and Ghami-Gilung. The settlements are the medieval type of settlement with some modernization in living buildings, food, lifestyle, road (trail), and transportation due to the opening of the restricted area of Upper Mustang for tourists in 1992. Tourism, now a global phenomenon of 'ethno-scape' has brought both positive and negative impacts in the preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritages of the Kingdom of Lo. The settlements of Mustang are compact and dense in style with flat roofed buildings to suit the climatic condition of the region. The buildings are made up of ramped mud and wood as an adjustment with the nature and natural elements. The architectural designs of the buildings are directly harmonious with the nature. The settlements are accompanied by forts known as *Chortens, Mani Walls, Kangnyis, Gonpas, Caves, Lhakhangs*, etc., which are the elements of the living heritage of the Himalayan region with the practice of Buddhism deeply rooted to Tibetan cultural geography. The cultural heritages both tangible and intangible have been dilapidated due to their regular clash with the impacts of globalization and global warming with environmental changes taking place. These tangible and intangible heritages must be preserved to sustain them for the future generation as the gift of the ancestors who created these cultural elements and practiced in their lifestyles to set up their own ethnic identity.

### **Scope of the Paper**

This paper is related to the conservation activities related to the Buddhist cultural heritages of Lo Manthang and surrounding satellite settlements of Mustang, Nepal in general and *Lo Tsho Dun* in particular in reference to the case studies of *Lo Manthang, Tsarang, Chosser and Chonub, Dhey-Tangye, Gami-Gelung* and *Yara-Gara Dhi* village settlements of Lo. These villages are selected for this paper due to their antiquity of history and the unique cultural practice of Tibetan Buddhism with their linguistic affinity which bring them close to the mainstream politics and social acknowledgement. This paper is an important activity for the understanding of the nature of conserving the Buddhist cultural heritage of Lo Manthang and surrounding satellite settlements of Mustang, Nepal because people living in that area have their local heritage and different cultural practice that ensure their identity.

### **Methodology**

The methodology of this paper is based on the fieldwork as well as library based qualitative methodology. The fieldwork was accompanied by interpretation and commentary

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<sup>2</sup>*Lo skad* is the local language of the Kingdom of Lo-Mustang spoken by the Tibetan origin *Lopa* communities living in Lo and the surrounding villages.

from the subject experts so as to make detailed analysis and understanding of the history, context, style and the cultural connection of Mustang to the *Ngari* Region of Western Tibet. The discussion with the local communities, authorities, youths, monks, conservationists, nuns and the agencies involved in Lo Manthang was an important tool of gathering the information and making the research lively and inclusive with participatory approach. The collected information are interpreted and later further supported by the secondary sources related to Mustang. The books, articles, internet websites published before the initiation of this paper are raw materials for the completion of the paper.

### **Introduction of Mustang in a Nutshell**

Mustang, historically referred as the Kingdom of Lo, is one of the Himalayan districts of Modern Nepal located in the bordering areas of Tibet geographically but the cultural geography is totally Tibetan in nature. The communities living in this region have been practicing their way of life for centuries. Mustang came to exist as an independent state only after 1440 AD, when the then head of the army and the local chieftain Ame Pal declared free from *Gung-thang*. The territory has always been a place under the control of various ruling centres of the Tibetan regions. According to various scholars studying the history of Mustang, Mustang is as ancient as the other Himalayan territories. According to Ramesh Dhungel in his book, “The Kingdom of Lo (Mustang)”,<sup>3</sup> the existence of the region gets connected to seventh century AD under the greater *Zhang-Zhung* territory. As Dhungel further supports his argument in reference to various works of scholars like A H Francke, David Jackson, Sharat Chandra Das, etc. According to the scholars like Roberto Vitali<sup>4</sup> and Ramesh Dhungel, Mustang including the southern part of Thak Khola region and the present *Baragaun* (Twelve Villages) area was under the Western Tibetan Empire, *Ngari Kor Sum* area. This area has been referred to some of the major events of 705 AD and 709 AD in reference to the Southern *Sheribpa* as mentioned in the *Dun Huang Annals*. Mustang has always remained under the Tibetan cultural region since its history where it was under the practice of Shamanistic tradition known as Bon, the pre-Buddhist practice of whole *Zhang Zhung* and later after the propagation and the expansion of Buddhism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and after it turned to practice Buddhism.

This can be supported by the documents discovered in various caves of Mustang and the rituals performed by the *Lopa*, *Sheribpa* and *Thakali* communities living in the district. The oral records mention the visit of great master Padhmasambhava from Uddiyana to consecrate the land for the propagation of Buddhism in Mustang and Tibet. The oral stories record that Padhmasambhava consecrated the land and controlled the local spirits, deities and turned them to the protector of the Dharma by subjugating them. Mustang was one of the important areas of the control of the Tibetan empire upto the 10th century until Tibet fragmented into smaller territories but it came under the *Guge-Puhrang* centre of Western Tibet (Richardson 29-30, as quoted in Dhungel).

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<sup>3</sup>Ramesh K Dhungel. *The Kingdom of Lo: A Historical Study*. Kathmandu: Jigme S.P.Bista for Tashi Gephel Foundation, 2002.

<sup>4</sup>Roberto Vitali. *A Short History of Mustang (10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Century)*. Amnye Machen Institute, 2013.

The travels of Atisha Srijnana in the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century, Lama Sange, Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo, Tulku Lato Marpo and the Yogi Milarepa and various other Tibetan practitioners like Lama Rong-gom, who was the disciple of Sa-Chen Kungas Nying Po visited Mustang. In another document of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the visit of Mahapandita Shakyashribhadra of Kashmir is described. In the documents of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the local influential figure from Lo, Lama Sherab Rinchen is described elaborately. In the time between 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mustang came under the territory of *Ngari*, *Khasa*, *Gungthang* of Tibet and in the Mid 15<sup>th</sup> century it emerged as an independent state but again after in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century it came under the territory of Nepal when Jumla was annexed during the unification of Nepal. Mustang was under political control of Jumla, came automatically under Nepal when Jumla was annexed in 18<sup>th</sup> century by Shah Dynasty.

The communities living here started following the Tibetan cultural practice due to their origin, history, linguistic and religious similarity. Thus, the ethnic history of this area is similar to the Tibetan people. The people started building the important cultural heritages for the continuation of their life in harmony with the nature. This dun area is mostly covered by snow and blizzard like big wind blows in this area. To cope with this natural adversity the lodging and fooding, and clothing of the people apply their own way living that is different from the livelihood of tropical people. They started to construct important buildings for their living, walls for security, *dzongs* for the safety and ruling, palaces for the king. They also started to enjoy their cultural practice through certain cultural festivals like: *Tiji* and *Yartong*.

They also started to construct Buddhist institutions like: *Dzong (Forts)*, *Chorten*, *Mani Walls*, *Kangnyis*, *Gonpas*, *Caves*, *Lhakhangs*, *Phodrangs*, Cave Monasteries for the practice and preservation of cultural lineage in various forms of Tibetan Buddhism. Those important cultural spaces after a long continuation have turned out to be the cultural heritages since they represent their history of the medieval society and it is therefore the duty of the present generation to preserve these important monuments for the future generation. It is good that the conservation activities are taking place in different places of Mustang for the renovation of the various cultural heritages due to the excessive damage and ruined condition of those places due to exposure and regular tussle with the natural forces. The conservation activities taking place at various cultural heritages are noteworthy for their effort in making the life of the old historical artefacts living for generations. There are many conservation agencies involved in the conservation of Mustang and among them some are important.<sup>5</sup> Annapurna Conversation Area a governmental agency is doing well to conserve the local history and identity.

### **A. Tangible Buddhist Cultural Heritage of Lomanthang**

The International agency involved in the protection of the cultural heritage of the world is United Nation's UNESCO which defines cultural heritage in a broader sense linking to different categories of monuments, groups of buildings, and sites. UNESCO defines monuments as:

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<sup>5</sup> The conservation Agencies are American Himalayan Foundation, HimalAsia Foundation, John Sandy Associates, etc.

Architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; groups of buildings are groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; and sites are the works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.(16)<sup>6</sup>

Therefore the cultural heritage is the cultural symbol related to a group or society in the form of physical features and intangible characteristics transferred from generations to the present generation by practice hence must be handed for the benefit of future generations. This act of handing over safely the ancestral cultural heritage to the future generations is the main objective of the safeguarding and conservation of the cultural heritages.

The tangible cultural heritage includes buildings and places, monuments, artefacts, etc. with their historical, cultural, traditional connection to a particular group of people. These include innovative, traditional and ethno-knowledge in the form of archaeology, architecture, science or technology related to the specific culture.

The tangible cultural heritage artefacts are in a constant risk of being threatened due to the globalization, modernization and industrialization in this rapidly changing world. Therefore, understanding of the tangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of tangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The tangible cultural heritage represents both inherited traditions from the past along with the contemporary rural and urban world in the form of physically existing objects. These tangible elements of the cultural heritage contribute to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large by connecting themselves to these physical artefacts.

There are certain modalities for the safeguarding of tangible cultural heritage for making them relevant to cultures practiced within communities from generations to generations. There are various international institutions involved in maintaining the cultural diversity through the safeguarding of the tangible cultural heritage through international cooperation. The international agency of United Nations working for the conservation and safeguarding of the tangible cultural heritage under UNESCO has formulated a Convention through the General Conference of UNESCO “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972”, which establishes unique international parameters for recognizing and protecting both the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value. Later in 1992 this Convention became the first international

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<sup>6</sup>Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972).

legal instrument to protect cultural landscapes and later the World Heritage Site became powerful in the world.<sup>7</sup>

### **1. Choede Monastery, Lo Manthang**

Choede Monastery is located in the northwestern part of the walled city of Lo Manthang. This monastery belongs to *Ngor Sakya* clan of Tibetan Buddhism. This monastery is historically linked to the propagation of Buddhism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the then king Sabdung Rabten invited his religious teacher Jamgon Ngawang Kunga Sonam to Lo (Mustang). Kunga Sonam stayed in the monastery of the lamas and introduced the popular festival ritual of *Tiji (Ten Chihi Rimdo)*. The monastery runs a monk school, monastery activities and antique Museum. The Museum needs restoration and preservation to conserve the antique objects from being destroyed. The Museum is rich in collection of the antiquity of the arts, sculptures, scriptures, copper wares related to the ancient civilization of Lo and whole Mustang. The monastery must undergo some important restoration activities for the conservation and preservation of the Museum objects, monastery itself and some other tangible and intangible cultural heritage linked with this monastery.

### **2. Jampa Lhakhang, Lo Manthang**

*Jampa Lhakhang* is located in the Jampa Thang area in the walled city of Lo Manthang. It is one of the oldest Buddhist temples of Lo Manthang constructed in between 1447 and 1449 AD by Agon Zangpo and consecrated (Rabne) by Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo during his third visit. According to Roberto Vitali, “Jampa Lhakhang and the royal castle were the nucleus of the Walled City of Lo Manthang”(Vitali)<sup>8</sup>. Later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1663) 8<sup>th</sup> king of the dynasty Samdrub Palwar renovated it. This temple has the throne of Maitreya Buddha (the future Buddha) so is also known as Maitreya Vihara. The temple complex is three-storied complex with mandala paintings on the wall. The wall paintings were done by the masters (Newar artists) from Kathmandu and Dolpo and the temple was completed under the donations of the chieftains of *Gungthang*. Among them the most important artists is Rupa Teja Pala from Manjushri Naka bahi Vishwokarma Mahavihara, who worked in this temple and also artistically wrote the *Asta Sahasrika Prajna Paramita* text. His name is mentioned in the inscription of the temple. This temple belongs to the *Ngor* clan of *Sakyapa* school of Tibetan Buddhism. American Himalayan Foundation is conducting the restoration activities.

The courtyard is full of open space and corridor in all the directions supported by wooden pillars. The pillars are well decorated in *Ranjana* script: “*Om Namah Ratna Traya*” standing for the three jewels of Buddha’s teachings: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The entrance gate leads to the courtyard and the covered corridor with wooden pillars carved in Tibetan and Newari style. The *Dukhang* is located in the center of the temple, which indicates

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<sup>7</sup>Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972).

<sup>8</sup>Vitali, Roberto. ‘On Byams Pa and Thubchen Lhakhang of BlosMos Thang’. *Tibet Journal*, vol. 1, 1999.

that this monastery was constructed in Nepalese style. In the inner shrine room known as *Bar Khang* has four sections: main teaching hall, kitchen, and two storerooms. The walls are painted with beautiful paintings.

The *Lhakhang* is one of the important cultural heritages of whole Himalayan region including Tibet therefore the ruined condition of the inner walls and the wall paintings including the statues and other important of Himalayan Buddhism must be conserved. The conservation activity must try to appropriately preserve the antiquity of the temple by historically conducting the restoration and conservation activities.

### **3. Thubchen Gonpa (Lhakhang), Lo Manthang**

*Thubchen Lhakhang* is located in the Potling area of Lo Manthang. This temple was constructed during the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> King of Lo Tashi Gon. Thubchen Lhakhang was built 25 years after the construction of Jampa Lhakhang in the 1470s. The evidence of the reference of the great religious council organized in 1472 states that this temple was already constructed in this date. This is one of the important cultural heritages of Lo with its collection of art, architecture and paintings. The temple is a single storied building complex with some attached rooms and halls for various purposes of the temple. 49 pillars support the temple. The inner pillars are decorated with various paintings and religious *mantras*. Similarly, the murals are well painted and the walls are decorated with Kalachakra and various other Sanskrit *mantras* and protecting lions.

The temple is going through its restoration activities under American Himalayan Foundation. American Himalayan Foundation is conducting the conservation of the temple and its inner wall paintings by training the local people under the leadership of Mr. Luigi Fieni, who has been working for last 16 years in the restoration activities of Lo Manthang. In an interview with this paper writer Mr. Fieni elaborated the techniques of restoration applied in Upper Mustang. The new modality of the restoration and conservation is unique and tries to bring forward the contemporary vernacular art by yet preserving the originality and historicity in the wall paintings. The team is working rigorously for the conservation by training the local painters and the skilled painters of the Himalayan region and trying to paint on the ruined spaces and retouch the places where there are traces of ancient paintings in the walls.

The art seems to have been created in Newari Style developed in the late 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century. The restoration activity is carried out by American Himalayan Foundation under Luigi Fieni, the Director of the project. Luigi explained that the program was initiated with the cleaning of the wall paintings that were in ruined condition. They started with the architectural reconstruction. The temple is full of the detailed mandalas painted exclusively on the walls. The restoration at this temple as Mr. Fieni explained, also created some alterations to the ancient styles in order to fill up the vacant spots of the wall where the wall paintings were destroyed. Mr. Fieni further stated that in the past he looked from the western standard perspective but at present he thought in local way to the conservation activities being carried out. For him this method opened up the possibility of incorporating the local participants for the conservation activities. He also said he is open to the criticism. According

to him, this is the example of new approach of participatory conservation where the locals are trained to conserve their cultural heritage.<sup>9</sup>

### **B. Intangible Buddhist Cultural Heritage of Lo Manthang**

Intangible cultural heritage is a fragile concept but is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the age of globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for social groups within a state and the world population. Intangible cultural heritage represents both inherited traditions from the past along with the contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups participate in reference to the cultural unity. These intangible elements of the cultural practice contribute to social cohesion, encouraging a sense of identity and responsibility which helps individuals to feel part of one or different communities and to feel part of society at large. Intangible cultural heritage is not merely valued as a cultural good, on a comparative basis, for its exclusivity or its exceptional value. It thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities. Intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups or individuals that creates, maintain and transmit it.

Intangible cultural heritage is constantly changing and evolving, and being enriched by each new generation by being traditional yet modern in this rapidly changing world. Many expressions and manifestations of intangible cultural heritage are threatened by the rapid globalization and cultural homogenization, and also by a lack of support, appreciation and understanding. The intangible cultural heritage is at risk if proper care and conservation is done urgently. If these intangible heritages are not conserved they might get lost and the present and future generation may vanish without any identity and cultural belongingness. It is the duty of the present generation to conserve various aspects of the intangible heritages and pass it on to future generations, so that the culture gets strengthened and remains alive for the time immemorial.

There are certain modalities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage for making them relevant to cultures practiced within communities from generations to generations. There are various international institutions involved in maintaining the cultural diversity through the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage through international cooperation. The international agency of United Nations working for the conservation and safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage under UNESCO has formulated a Convention through the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003, which is the first international treaty to provide a legal, administrative and financial framework to safeguard the cultural heritages both tangible and intangible. This convention has been agreed upon under international law

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<sup>9</sup>Interview with Conservator Mr. Luigi Fieni on the conservation and restoration modality and the conservation activity.



and is practiced globally by establishing the rights and obligations to the concerned parties.

The 2003 Convention aims at safeguarding intangible cultural heritage that is in step with international agreements on human rights and that meets requirements of mutual respect among communities and of sustainable development.<sup>10</sup> This is very important in reference to the cultural practices of Mustang. The cultural elements of Mustang that do not have physical appearance but are practiced in rituals, ceremonies, dances, songs and many other indigenous knowledge are in threat due to globalization therefore they must go through conservation.

### 1. *Tiji* Festival

The original name of the *Tiji* festival celebrated in Lo Manthang, Mustang is *Tenpa Chihi Rimdo*, which stands for the worshipping conducted to flourish the teachings of Buddha in the world to drive away the evil spirits. Later it was called *Tenchi Rimdo* by tradition of abbreviating but later it got corrupted and came to be known as *Tiji*. In the ancient time it used to be celebrated in the last month of the lunar calendar in the month of February but at present it is celebrated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the Tibetan Lunar Calendar, which falls in the month of May for convenience.

The chronicles related to *Tiji* festival mention that this festival was initiated by the 8<sup>th</sup> King (Gyalpo) Samdrub Rabten of Mustang when the Sakya Trijin Ngawang Kunga Sonam came to Mustang accepting his invitation in around 1650 AD. This festival was named in the past as *Phur Dog* meaning the expulsion of negativities through *Kila* (*Phurba-Dagger*). *Tiji* is celebrated twice a year: one for public in the month of May and one for Lamas of Choede Monastery in the month of Bhadra.

The master of the mask dance is known as *Dorje Sonnu* and he has to complete the retreat of three months in the monastery. *Dorje Sonnu* comes to the public *Tiji* ceremony and performs various ritual dances by leading the group of lamas from Choede Monastery of Lo Manthang in mask. Therefore this dance is also known as Mask Dance.

The main ritualistic ceremony is centered on the subduing of the devil/ evils by *Dorje Sonnu/Dorje Phurba* (*Vajra Kumara/Vajra Kila*). This act of the subduing the evil forces and protecting the territory is the major event of the ceremony through the performed dances. This ceremony lasts for three days with one-day prior preparation by making the *torma* in *Jampa Lhakhang*. On this preparation day all the representatives of the seven villages of Lo collectively known as *Lo Tsho Dun* gather at *Jampa Lhakhang* and contribute for the preparation of the *torma* necessary for the celebration of the *Tiji* Festival.

On the first day, they unfold the big *thanka* of Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche in the wall of the palace of Lo Manthang Mustang. The local *Lopa* communities of *Lo Tsho Dun* observe the festival with traditional respect for the cultural symbol by showing respect to the *thanka*. After this the lamas perform the preliminary dances in front of the people of Mustang. This lasts for a couple of hours and they perform one set of dance.

On the second day, the main function of subduing the devil/evil spirits by *Dorje Sonnu* is done in front of the audience. The master of the dance leads the other members of

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<sup>10</sup>2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage UNESCO.

the mask dance and they perform the re-enactment of various other dances known as *Dungmar* and *Cheumar*. This is the main day of the spiritual celebration of this festival.

On the third day, the *Choho* subjugates the *Mara* with the *phurba* therefore it is called *Phur Dok*. After this the king leads the procession following the activity of the *Choho* (master of the dance), all of them go to the near by places and throw the evil symbolized in *torma*. They perform rituals at three points of location of the evil spirit as decided by the *Choho* and finally destroy the evil force at the most powerful place and destroy the *torma* symbolically. This activity symbolically represents that the evil and the negative forces are thrown away for the establishment of the Teachings of Buddha and the spread of Buddhism in this region.

In between the *Tiji* festival all the people gather in their houses and enjoy the feast by celebrating the merry making occasion of killing the evil. They eat their cultural foods, drink and dance and sing songs and enjoy their best among the communities by coming together culturally and socially. This festival is mainly the lama dance so here the lamas perform and the people observe this dance.

This is the living intangible heritage of the whole Himalayan region. The lamas of *Choede* Monastery perform this dance and they perform the same dance for the lamas in the monastery in the fifth month of the lunar calendar inside the monastery. *Tiji* is the celebration and reaffirmation of this myth. Throughout the festival the events and story of the myth are re-enacted. The festival is timed to coincide with the end of the dry season (late winter/ spring) and ushers in the wetter monsoon season. The *Tiji* festival is a three-day ritual known as “The chasing of the Demons”, centred on the *Tiji* myth celebrated in Mustang. *Tiji* tells the story of a deity named *Dorje Sonnu* who must battle against his demon father to save the Kingdom of Mustang from destruction. The demon father wreaks havoc on Mustang by creating a water shortage, which, in this extremely arid land, is the most precious life-sustaining resource. *Dorje Sonnu* eventually defeats the demon and banishes him from the land.

## 2. *Yar-tong* Festival

The *Yar-tong* festival is one of the other most important Buddhist festivals of the Himalayan region celebrated in the end of the rainy season, which the name ‘*Yar-tong*’ itself stands for the end of rainy season. This festival is celebrated after harvesting the crops. Different villages around Upper Mustang and Lower Mustang and other Himalayan areas celebrate *yar-tong* at different times. In the Lo Manthang of Upper Mustang the people celebrate *Yar-tong* on the full moon Day of the eighth Month of the lunar calendar, which falls in the month of Bhadra (Aug/Sep). The date is not fixed and is therefore to be decided by looking at the auspicious day. The people go out of the village and gather in one open space in different tents and enjoy this festival as outing.

This festival goes on for three days, but locals gather in different parts of their villages and entertain themselves by drinking *Chyang* indulge in feasts for three days. This tradition of drinking *Chyang* and eating food is known as *Ten-drel*. Singing and dancing is also included in this type of get-together. This festival is celebrated as a means of saying goodbye to monsoon and the welcoming of winter is celebrated by the locals as a means of saying goodbye to hard work in the fields for the whole year. They dress up in beautiful clothes and

drink *airag* and *Chyang* and eat many types of food. But sometimes after they are drunk old enmities and rivalries come up and there are fights.

The game of horse racing continues till the evening. Singing and dancing also goes on simultaneously in different places. After the entertainment is over, the horse riders return to their settlements in a procession accompanied by songs and music like before.

The three days of *Yartong* in the Lo Manthang of Upper Mustang is divided for three different aspects of the communities: the First Day is the King's *Yartong*, the second Day is the Queen's *Yartong* and the Third Day is the Lama's *Yartong*.

The first day is known as King's *Yartong* and on this day, the King goes on a horse with his royal symbol followed by the *Kudragpa* and male relatives to the same open space and celebrate in similar manner by eating, drinking, singing and dancing. The people entertain the King through their performances of songs and dances.

The second day is known as the Queen's *Yartong* and on this day, the Queen with her woman relatives and friends go in horse to the open space and enjoy the outing there by drinking, eating, singing and dancing. The friends of the Queen entertain her through various performances of songs and dances.

Similarly, the third day is the Lama's *Yartong* and on this day, the Lamas of Choede Monastery go to the same field and eat drink and enjoy but they don't sing and dance. The game of horse racing continues till the evening. Singing and dancing also goes on simultaneously in different places. After the entertainment is over, the horse riders return to their settlements in a procession accompanied by songs and music like before.

This festival goes on for three days, but locals gather in different parts of their villages and entertain themselves by drinking *Chyang* indulge in feasts for seven days. They also organize horseracing and enjoy the contest.

The main *Yar-tong* is celebrated in Lomanthang with cultural unity. In the past, the kings and the local administrators had a great hand in making a festival grand. That is why the festivals that were celebrated in places where these rulers lived were the grandest<sup>11</sup>.

## **B. Cultural Heritage of Chosser Village**

*Chosser* village is located towards the northeastern part of Lo Manthang. This village is one of the major settlements of the whole *Lo Tsho Dun*. There are various important cultural heritages in the forms of caves. There are *Gonpas*, the ancient cave settlement connecting to the pre-historical settlement civilization of the whole Mustang people. There are many important monuments of cultural value and among them the most important are: *Ghar Phug Gonpa*, *Nub Chhog Ling*, *Dzong Phug*, etc.

### **1. Gar Phug Gonpa**

*Gar Phug Gonpa* (Monastery) is located in the northeastern part of Lo Manthang in *Choser* Village. According to the *Karchag* of this Monastery, Lama *Siji Gyatsho*, who was a lama from Kham of Tibet of the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, constructed this monastery. This monastery

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<sup>11</sup>Dhungel, Ramesh K. 'Mustang Jillako Lomanthang Ma Manaine Yar-Tong Parva (The Yar-Tong Festival of Lo-Manthang)'. Text in Nepali. *Nepal Past and Present*, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 31–39.

was completely further developed by third lama of this monastery, Rig-Zin-Tshewang-Norbu during the time of Tenzin Wangyal, who was ruling Mustang. The monastery was reconstructed later and the present building of the monastery was constructed recently by shifting from its original place to this place under the time of Lama Tenzin Norbu. This monastery was originally connected to the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism but now it is associated both with Kagyupa and Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. The art, architecture, wall paintings and the sculptures of this monastery are of various time frames. The Buddha idol of this monastery seems to have Newar style that was influenced by Pala and Gupta School of art and might be as old as of 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century. The time of the sculptures found in this *Gonpa* can also be traced to the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century. The monastery is restored in various time but the restoration activity has brought the alterations in the monastery like the *Mani* has covered the area of the wall paintings and the construction of the new monastery building has completely destroyed the antiquity of the monastery. The wall paintings are new of around 180 years to 200 years.

## **2. Nub Chog Ling**

The name of the small cave located in *Chosser* village is *Nub Chog Ling*, which means the cave area located in the west. The cave has mandala paintings and the thousand images of Buddha and Bodhisattvas but the images are destroyed completely due to the lack of conservation. The ceiling is full of Mandala Fresco paintings painted in probably 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century. The flower decorations of the mandalas refer to the 13<sup>th</sup> century style of decorating the mandalas. In the wall the paintings are painted in two layers. There are layers in the paintings of the ceiling and the cave wall areas. The process of drawing fresco paintings in the walls or ceilings is very unique in nature and is one of the important cultural histories of the refined artistic development of the human settlement. The fresco paintings are drawn only in the wet plaster so that the paintings and the wall dry together and the paintings seem lively and last for a long time. The walls and ceilings need lime wash before the painting begins. The frescos have different layers in the sense that they are touched in one time but if they have to paint in the other spot after it is completed they have to create another plaster. Therefore there are patches of plasters added in the wall to finish the paintings once and start the other. The layers in the cave give the impression that the paintings were done in different times during the renovations done in the past. Similarly, there are supporting rods of wood marking the construction of the wall to make it safe for living. The wall paintings are in ruined state therefore it is the urgent need of the conservation of the small cave paintings for the conservation of the cultural heritage of Mustang.

## **3. Dzong Phug**

The cave of the *Chosser* area, which is five storied is known as *Dzong Phug* meaning the Fort Cave. This cave was probably the place of shelter for the early dwellers of this area. There are different cabins in the cave. The caves are all organized as that of the rooms of the modern house. The cave gives the impression that when people of this area used to live in the caves they discovered this cave to be safe and protected them from other tribes so it might

have worked as fort. This is one of the ancient cave located in the whole Himalayan region that connects to the history of the pre-historical development of human civilization. The *dzongis* one of the important cultural heritages of Mustang and it needs conservation for the preserving of this ancient monument of the historical connection.

#### **D. Buddhist Cultural Heritage of *Chonub* Village**

*Chonub* Village is located in the northern part of Lo Manthang of Mustang. This village covers the area of *Thenkar* and *Namgyal* settlements of the Lo Tsho Dun area. The settlements have unique *gonpas*, *chortens*, *mani*, forts and summer palace at *Thenkar*. These important cultural heritages are in ruined conditions and therefore they need the conservation activity for the preservation of their uniqueness and historical originality. The major cultural monuments of this area are: *Namgyal Gonpa*, *Thenkar* Palace, etc.

##### **1. *Namgyal* Monastery**

*Namgyal* Monastery is located in *Namgyal* village of *Tshonub* Village Development Committee situated towards the northwestern side of Lo Manthang. Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Rigzin is the chief Abbot of *Namgyal* Monastery. The historical chronicles refer that Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo constructed the monastery in the village in the fifteenth century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the bad condition of *Phuphag Samten Ling*, *Rising Domsun Ling* and *Jampa Shedrup Ling*, they were merged to *Namgyal* Monastery. This merger added many idols and important collections of Buddhism at *Namgyal* monastery. *Namgyal* Monastery belongs to *Sakya* school of Tibetan Buddhism under *Ngor* clan where they worship to lamas and Buddhist deities and various sister deities. The monastery is rich in sculptural idols but the paintings are of recent past due to the reconstruction of the main monastery buildings twice. The paintings in the wall are of around 50/60 years old. But the metal and clay idols are of 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century.

*Namgyal Gonpa* is one of the historically old and culturally unique monument of Mustang therefore it is the responsibility to preserve it for the future generations. The monastery is in ruined condition and therefore the conservation is the urgent demand. The restoration of the monastery must be done by preserving the originality and historicity because it is already in the ruined condition.

Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Rigzin has already been discussing with various agencies involved in the conservation activity of Mustang for the conservation of the monastery. The plan of Khenpo is to construct a new *Gonpa* in place of the old monastery complex due to its small size and partly destroyed stage by the leaking water on the walls. But the construction of the new *Gonpa* creates the lack of the antiquity and authenticity so the restoration activity of the *Gonpa* must be done by conserving its unique heritage for the auspicious purpose of local recognition and historicity. The restoration of the monastery is to conserve the cultural heritage with its originality and antiquity. For this the construction of another building around the main *Gonpa* like an envelope can preserve the monastery from the effects of the climate change. *Khenpo* further clarified that he wanted to construct the new monastery by using the ramped soil by consulting the local experts from *Muktinath* area<sup>12</sup>. Another way of the

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Rigzin in the field visit carried out by the researcher

restoration and conservation of the monastery is to conserve it by constructing another building as an annex building without destroying it since it is the cultural heritage of this area. The new building can be constructed in the open space in the front part or at the back part.

This *Namgyal Gonpa* is one of the unique and historically ancient cultural heritages of Mustang therefore it is the responsibility of the present generation to preserve the monastery through restoration and conservation.

### **E. Cultural Heritage of *Tsarang* Village**

*Tsarang* village is located in the southern part of Lo Manthang and it is one of the important cultural heritages of the whole Mustang region due to its history of being older than Lo Manthang. Before King Ame Pal moved the capital to Lo Manthang, *Tsarang* was the center of the rule of Lo area under *Nagri*, *Gungthang*, *Yartche* rules. *Tsarang* is one of the central places of Mustang as there used to be the capital before it got shifted to Lo Manthang. In the references of *Gunthang* and the *Ngari* chronicles there is the name of *Tsarang* as the ruling (*Dzong Khar*) fort of the Mustang region. *Tsarang* was the administrative centre of the Mustang region until King Ame Pala came in power and shifted the capital to Manthang. The important historical monuments of the area are: *Tsarang* Palace, *Tsarang Gonpa*, *Lo Gekar Gonpa*, etc. Most of them are in ruined condition therefore they urgently need the restoration and conservation for the future generations.

#### **1. *Lo Gekar Gonpa***

*Lo Gekar Gonpa* is located in the *Lo Gekar* village in the western part of *Tsarang* village and is known as *Ghar Gonpa*. This *Gonpa* is believed to have been constructed by Guru Padmasambhava from Uddiyana before the construction of the *Samye Gonpa* in Tibet. The oral history states that this was constructed in the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century. This is in reference to the arrival of Buddhism in the Himalayan region. Therefore this *Gonpa* is believed to be the first monastery of the whole Himalayan region including Tibet. This *Gonpa* is one of the first of the 49 pilgrimage sites related to Padmasambhava as recorded in the treasure text known as *Terma*.<sup>13</sup> The *Bemchag* of *Tsarang Gonpa* records that whole Mustang was turned to Buddhism by subjugating the local Himalayan demons and spirits who were the chief deities of the pre-Buddhist Bon practice prevalent in the whole Himalayan region.<sup>14</sup>

*Lo Gekar Gonpa* is one of the Nyingma *Gonpas* of Mustang region. This is the common cultural heritage of the whole Himalayan region therefore it is necessary for the conservation of the monastery. The *Gonpa* faces towards the east with one *labrang* (monk residence) attached to the south. The monastery is painted with red mud and the monk residence with the white mud. There are four *chortens* in four directions of the monastery. There are many *Mani Khorlos* around the monastery.

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<sup>13</sup> This is the summary of the section related to Lo Gekar in "Upper Mustang: Cultural Heritage of Lo Tsho Dun" written by Elke Selzer.

<sup>14</sup> Uryen Padmas-de-Srin-bTul-Pah'-Gnas. Gangs-Chan-ldzongs-kyi-mchog-gyur-sTong-Kyi-ch. sMon-Thang-She-bya-rGyal-pohi-pho-Brang-der as quoted in Sharma, Prayagraj and Jagaman Gurung. 2056. "Blo Mustangko Sanskritik Sampada" (The Cultural Heritage of bLo (Mustang). Research Center for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

The main *Du Khang* is decorated with artistic wall paintings. There are the images of sister deities, related masters and other important Buddhist symbols painted on the walls. There are the statues of Padhmasambhava and other Buddhist masters in the central shrine of the monastery.

There is one shrine room above the *Du Khang* and it is known as *Lhakhang*. There are various images of Padhmasambhava, lamas, Mahakalas and many animals and birds carved in stone. They are decorated in the wood and managed so beautifully. There is another room in the third floor, which is known as *Mani Lhakhang*, where the images of *Mani Padma Lokeswora* are carved in the stone slates.

## **F. Cultural Heritage of Ghami-Gilung Area**

*Ghami* and *Gilung* area of Mustang is one of the important settlements of the *Lo Tsho Dun* area and is located in the south of the Lo Manthang. It is the southern most settlement of the *Lopa* communities of Mustang. The *Gilung* village has important *gonpa* located above the village in the hill while the village is in the down flat area. Likewise, *Gami* is another historically important cultural heritage with its unique and regular tussle with the Kingdom of Lo at times.<sup>15</sup> The historical chronicles mention that this was mostly under the rule of the Kingdom of Lo but at times it fought for independence and was ruled by the local ruler as well. There is one of the old palace of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, one ancient monastery and a village settlement of around 100 households.<sup>16</sup>

### **1. Mani Wall of Gami**

The most important cultural heritage of *Gami* area is the Mani Wall, which is believed to be the longest of the whole Himalayan region. The Himalayan region has many *Mani* walls but the *Mani* Wall of *Gami* of Mustang is one of the important cultural heritages that need conservation. *Mani* Walls are constructed by constructing the walls in intricately carved stone tablets, most with the inscription “*Om Mani Padme Hum*”. These walls are circumvented from the left side, the clockwise direction in which the earth and the universe revolve, according to Buddhist doctrine by the Buddhist followers and therefore it is one of the cultural markers of the Himalayan region.

They are constructed close to a temple or *chorten*, sometimes completely isolated and range from a few meters to a kilometre long and one to two meters high. They are built of rubble and sand and faced with *mani* stones engraved in the elegant Tibetan script. The *mani* stone wall are made of stone plates, rocks or pebbles inscribed with syllabled *mantra* of Avalokiteshvara.

## **G. Cultural Heritage of Yara Gara Dhi Area**

*Yara Gara Dhi* area is one of the major settlement areas of the *Lo Tsho Dun*. The settlement is settled by the *Lopa* communities living in Mustang region. This area has very important cultural heritage like *Luri* Cave Monastery. The monastery is in ruined condition and needs conservation for future generations.

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<sup>15</sup>Dhungel, Ramesh K. *The Kingdom of Lo: A Historical Study*. Kathmandu: Jigme S.P.Bista for Tashi Gephel Foundation, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> This is the summary of the section related to the Background of Selter, Elke. *Upper Mustang: Cultural Heritage of Lo Tso Dhun*. Kathmandu: UNESCO, 2006.

## 1. *Luri Cave Monastery*

*Luri (klu-ri-dgonpa) Cave Gonpa* is common monastery of the *Yar-ra GaraDhi* area and is located in the eastern part of Mustang in the bank of Kali Gandaki river. This is rock-cut temple structures located near trade routes and became stopovers and lodging houses for traders. The interiors became more and more elaborate as its endowments grew. *Luri* cave has a notable trait of rock-cut architecture crafted of rock imitating the timbered and carved wood. This Cave temple has been well preserved due to its hidden location in difficult high cliff.

Largely this cave stands for the community as a whole with the dexterously engraved painting. This outstanding cave goes with the associational literature of the Bhote community living here. With reference to associational literature and art Thomas King, a post colonial critic in “Godzilla and Post-colonial” says,

Associational literature, most often, describes the native community... it avoids centering the story on the non-Native community... concentrating on the daily activities intricacies of native life.... In addition to this flat narrative line, associational literature leans towards the group rather than the single isolated character . . . (570)

The *Luri Cave* is a hub to some very early and well-preserved wall/ceiling paintings that decorate the walls and ceilings and date from the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century AD. The *Luri Cave* is known as *Luri Gonpa* and contains some of the earliest and most beautiful Buddhist mural paintings in the Mustang region. The mysterious *Luri Cave Monastery* in Upper Mustang is the 12<sup>th</sup> century cave monastery located in the east of Lo Manthang. Mary Slusser, in an article on *Luri* cave temple, wrote in 1999 that other scholars “had sought (this temple) in vain following an American trekking guide’s signal sometime after 1992, the year Mustang was opened to foreigners.”<sup>17</sup> *Luri Gonpa* is associated with the *Nyingma* and *Kargyupa* school of Tibetan Buddhism.

The entrance to the *Luri Cave* is a low, narrow tunnel to the left of the ledge and the smaller cave. *Luri* cave is rounded about four to five meters across, four to five meters tall, and hand carved inside the mountain. This cave has a single entryway with one small window overlooking the valley to the left of the entry. The walls and ceilings of the cave temple are covered in plaster and are attractively painted. In the centre of the cave is a beautifully crafted *Chorten* surrounded by sufficient floor space for circumambulation. This is designed in the exact structure of the stupa Mandala basing on the format of this type. The base of the *Chorten* is approximately 2.5 meters across, consisting of a series of staggered 12-cornered tiers. The terracotta spire of the *Luri chorten* rises about three meters from the floor and is crowned by a canopy. The *Luri chorten* is ornamented with small paintings around the different tiers of the base and four larger frescoes on the upper dome. The exterior of the *chorten* is covered with an unusually smooth and hard ceramic-like glazing. *Luri Cave Monastery* is in bad condition due to the excessive blow of wind and the lack of care and conservation therefore it is in the need of conservation for the future generations.

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<sup>17</sup>Slusser, Mary Shepherd and Lilla M. Bishop. “Another Luri: A Newly Discovered Cave Chorten in Mustang, Nepal”. *Orientalia* Vol.30.2, February 1999.



## H. Cultural Heritage of *Dhey Tangye* Area

*Dhey Tangye* area is located in the south-eastern part of Upper Mustang and is one of the major settlements of *Lo Tsho Dun* area. The village is one of the unique cultural heritages of Mustang with *Gonpas*, *Chhortens*, small fort, caves, etc.

After discussing beautifully carved caves and the skills of the native people living in the area who have sustained their oral and mural culture these caves in the terms of King provides,

For the non-Native reader this literature provides a limited and particular access to the Native world, allowing the reader to associate with the world without being encouraged to feel a part of it. It does not pander to non-Native expectation concerning the glamour and/ or horror of Native life... it especially avoids media phantasm- glitzy ceremonies yuppie shamanism... (570)

This means native literature has its unique feature that is associational to the native people that ignites the glory of the traditional history with the tenacity of culture though it is limited for the outsiders.

### Conclusion

The cultural heritages (both tangible and intangible) of Lo Manthang and surrounding settlements of Mustang are the important factors of the historicity and the originality of the *Lopa*, deemed to be known as Bhote, communities living in this region. The conditions of the cultural heritages of the region are in dilapidated condition and therefore it is the duty and responsibility of the present generation people, institutions, agencies involved in the conservation to preserve the medieval cultural settlements for the future generations. The paper concludes that world community and locals must realize the inevitability to restore these 'archaeology of indigenous knowledge' for the recognition and identity of the native Mustang people by dint of preservation activities in outlying Mustang that are historically genuine and full of antiquity of the Himalayan cultural region.

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