

Living in Lomanthang: An Earthen Walled Settlement in the Trans-Himalayan region of Nepal.

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ABSTRACT

Lomanthang, symbolically cultural capital of the Upper Mustang region (Northern part of Mustang District) of Nepal, is a walled settlement built entirely of earthen construction. Established in 15th century as then capital of the Kingdom of Lo, Lomanthang is one of the living sites of Tibetan Buddhist Culture.

At an altitude of about 3800 meters above mean sea level; Lomanthang demonstrates the tradition of age-old vernacular earthen building construction along with its centuries old monuments. An isolated and actually ‘forbidden Kingdom’ before 1992 due to its status as restricted area, Lomanthang and the whole Upper Mustang region have been a hidden Shangri-La for the world. After its opening for limited tourism in 1992, this region is passing through a transition phase in quest of development; and the need for a conscious development with adequate efforts of conservation of nature, culture and heritage has been felt.

The paper will set the context of preservation and development needs by introducing Lomanthang in its historical, cultural context; and the reflections based on authors’ self-experience of living there. These contexts and present day aspirations perhaps could suggest some measures for conservation and development in order to ensure a better future for such an example of historic earthen settlement.

KEY WORDS

Trans-Himalayan region of Nepal, Lomanthang, Earthen architecture, Walled Settlement, Conservation, Development