

# **Tourism and cultural heritage management: Challenges and opportunities**

## **(A Case of the Lumbini: The Birthplace of Lord Buddha, World Heritage Site, Nepal)**

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### **Abstract:**

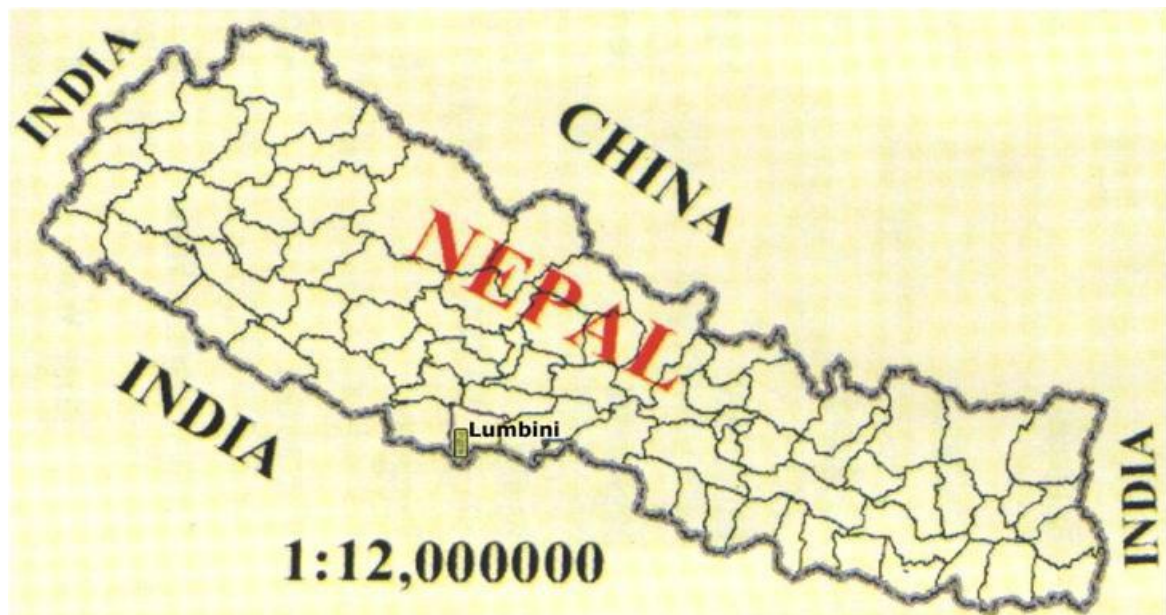
This study assesses the current practices of managing visitors and mitigating the seismic risk in the heritage site. The study was carried out in Lumbini—the birthplace of the Lord Buddha—is a sacred cultural world heritage site. Lumbini receives more than half a million visitors for different purposes. However, the growing number of visitors and their ritual activities become a challenge to manage the Heritage site management. More infrastructures to support the growing visitor population need to be created and developed. This is because "the Master Plan for Lumbini", which was started in 1978 yet to complete and the existing strategies for the Lumbini development under-appreciates the management of visitors in the core area. For this, stakeholders were interviewed and interactions were carried out. The results show that the heritage management should consider both tourism and heritage values. This will help to foster spiritual tourism in the site and help to uplift national economy. There is no denying the fact that Lumbini has an enormous potential as a world class cultural heritage saying with hub of the Peace. So, all the precious monuments and archaeological remains should be protected according to scientific standards, which need to be prepared cultural heritage management plan for Lumbini.

**Key words:** *Lumbini, Lord Buddha, Cultural Heritage, Sacred Garden, Master Plan, Tourism, Pilgrims, Archaeological Remains*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nepal, the mystical Himalayan Mountain Federal Democratic Republic is located between two giant super powerhouse of China, in the North and India in East, West and South in Asia. The total population of Nepal is currently estimated to be 26.7 million with an area of 147,181 sq. km. Nepal has more than 105 ethnic groups with diverse culture and traditions is secular state. The terrain of the country is diverse from the world highest Himalaya, having a peak of 8848m above sea level in the North, to a flat plain terrain level

up to 60m above sea level in the South. Nepal offers tourists a breath-taking experience of culture and nature. It has an incredible rich culture heritage, both built and living including Lumbini: the birth place of Lord Buddha and Kathmandu Valley (intriguing historic and monumental living cities) two cultural and two natural world heritage sites Sagarmatha National Park and Chitwan National Park fascinating millions of tourist every year.



### **A SHORT HISTORY OF LUMBINI**

Lumbini, the timeless place bears record of noteworthy international visits Famous Maurya Emperor Asoka with spiritual teacher Upagupta visited Lumbini in 249 BC. He erected a stone pillar here with inscription '*Hida Buddhhe Jate Shakyamuniti*' or "here Shakyamuni Buddha was born". Famous Chinese pilgrims- Tseng Tsai (4th century AD), Fa-Hsien (5th century AD) and Hiuen Tsang (7th century AD) also visited Lumbini.

In 1967 the then UN Secretary General- U. Thant's visit to Lumbini became a milestone in its recent development. In 1970, Thant helped in the formation of a 16-nation international committee to support the development of Lumbini through the United Nation. World renowned architect Prof. Kenzo Tange of Japan was then assigned the task of designing a master plan for systematic development of Lumbini.

### **In praise of Lumbini, the Lord Buddha said:**

*“Ananda, this place (Lumbini) is where the Tathagata was born, this is a place which should be (visited and) seen by a person of devotion and which will cause awareness and apprehension of the nature of impermanence.*

*At this place, Ananda, those who are on a pilgrimage to (this) shrine, if they should die with devotion in their hearts during the course of the pilgrimage, will after (their) death and dissolution of the body be reborn in a good destination, a fortunate celestial (deva) realm” (Mahaparinirvana Sutta).*

### **MASTER PLAN**

In 1978, the master plan designed by Prof. Tange was finalized and approved by the Government of Nepal and the United Nations. In the meantime, Government of Nepal formed the Lumbini Development Committee which started initial work and basic infrastructures. In 1985, the Lumbini Development Trust was formed. From then onwards the Trust was responsible for implementation of the master plan and the development, conservation and promotion of Lumbini and other Buddhist sites nearby. The master plan covers an area of 1×3 sq. miles, comprising three zones; Sacred Garden, Monastic zone and New Lumbini village linked walkways and canal. The master plan thus changed the face of Lumbini.

### **MONUMENTS**

**The Mayadevi Temple:** The heart of all monuments at this holy site, the complex bears testimony to several layers of construction over centuries. Main objects of worship here are the Nativity Sculpture and the exact birth spot of Lord Buddha.

**The Marker Stone:** Located deeply buried in the sanctum sanctorum was discovered during the excavation of old Mayadevi Temple in 1992-1996. It pinpoints the exact birth spot of the Buddha.

**The Nativity Sculpture:** The image of Mayadevi, also known as the Nativity Sculpture dates back to 4th CE. It depicts Mayadevi, holding the branch of a tree with her right hand for support at the time of delivery.

**The Puskarini (Holy Pond):** The pond where Mayadevi bathed just before giving birth to prince Siddhartha and the infant prince is believed to have given first purification bath.

**The Asokan Pillar:** The pillar erected by Emperor Asoka in 249 BC bears the first epigraphic evidence regarding birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha. It is regarded as an authentic documentation of the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha in Lumbini.

#### **MINI BUDDHISTS WORLD AS OTHER ATTRACTIONS:**

Monasteries representing architecture and culture of different Buddhist countries have created fascinating ambience in Lumbini. While China, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Germany, France, Austria, Vietnam and Nepal have completed construction of the monasteries at their designated sites, monasteries to represent Cambodia, South Korea, Singapore and Canada are under construction.

#### **NATURAL BIODIVERSITY**

Lumbini being the birthplace of Lord Buddha is a timeless place but it does not only promote the aesthetic value and its spirituality. In terms of biodiversity, Lumbini has reported 44 species of fish, 21 species of reptiles, 211 species of birds and 22 species of mammals. It actually attracts naturalists, botanists and zoologists with its richness. One can find wide varieties of shrubs, herbs, flowers and plants.

#### **AS A WORLD HERITAGE SITE**

Lumbini is a peerless landmark of the Buddhist world. This is the only active religious place that has been listed in the World Heritage Site by the UNESCO in 1997. Lumbini symbolized ultimate peace and harmony. The eyes of Buddha are the emblem of love and worship and kindness and compassion are the synonym of Buddhism. The Lord Buddha was born in 623 BC in the sacred area of Lumbini located in the Terai plains of southern Nepal, testified by the inscription on the pillar erected by the Mauryan Emperor Asoka in 249 BC. Lumbini is one of the holiest places of one of the world's great religions, and its remains contain important evidence about the nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centres from as early as the 3rd century BC.

The complex of structures within the archaeological conservation area includes the Shakya Tank; the remains within the Maya Devi Temple consisting of brick structures in a cross-wall system dating from the 3rd century BC to the present century and the sandstone Asoka pillar with its *Pali* inscription in *Brahmi* script. Additionally there are the excavated remains of Buddhist *viharas* (monasteries) of the 3rd century BC to the 5th century AD

and the remains of Buddhist *stupas* (memorial shrines) from the 3rd century BC to the 15th century AD. The site is now being developed as a Buddhist pilgrimage centre, where the archaeological remains associated with the birth of the Lord Buddha form a central feature.

Lumbini, was inscribed on the List of World Heritage at the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in 1997 under criteria (iii) and (vi):

***Criterion (iii):***

As the birthplace of the Lord Buddha, testified by the inscription on the Asoka pillar, the sacred area in Lumbini is one of the most holy and significant places for one of the world's great religions.

***Criterion (vi):***

The archaeological remains of the Buddhist *viharas* (monasteries) and *stupas* (memorial shrines) from the 3rd century BC to the 15th century AD, provide important evidence about the nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centres from a very early period.

## **INTEGRITY**

The integrity of Lumbini has been achieved by means of preserving the archaeological remains within the property boundary that give the property its outstanding universal value. The significant attributes and elements of the property have been preserved. The buffer zone gives the property a further layer of protection. Further excavations of potential archaeological sites and appropriate protection of the archaeological remains are a high priority for the integrity of the site. The property boundary however does not include the entire archaeological site and various parts are found in the buffer zone. The entire site including the buffer zone is owned by the Government of Nepal and is being managed by the Lumbini Development Trust and therefore there is little threat of development or neglect. However the effects of industrial development in the region have been identified as a threat to the integrity of the property.

## **AUTHENTICITY**

The authenticity of the archaeological remains within the boundaries has been confirmed through a series of excavations since the discovery of the Asoka pillar in 1896. The remains of *viharas*, *stupas* and numerous layers of brick structures from the 3rd

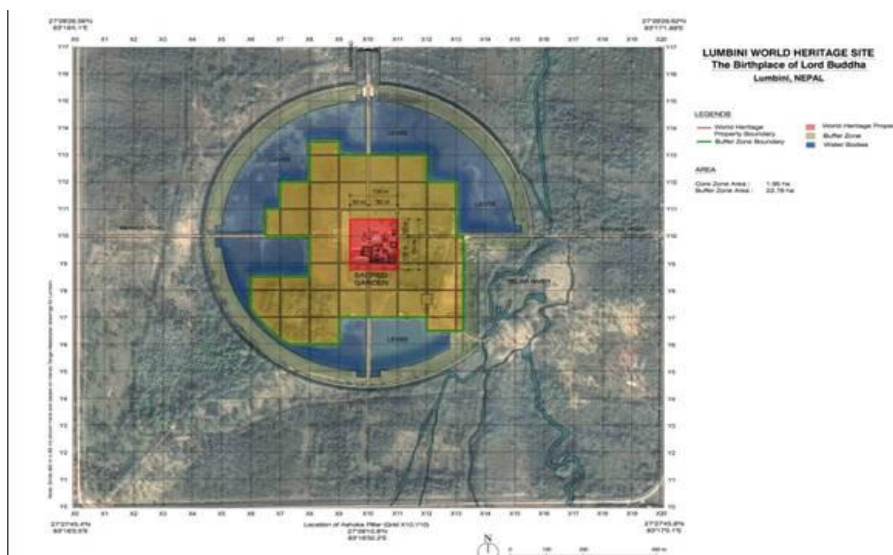
century BC to the present century at the site of the Maya Devi Temple are proof of Lumbini having been a centre of pilgrimage from early times. The archaeological remains require active conservation and monitoring to ensure that the impact of natural degradation, influence of humidity and the impact of the visitors are kept under control. The property continues to express its Outstanding Universal Value through its archaeological remains. These and the setting of the property are vulnerable to the impact of 'improvements', which need to be carefully designed.

## MANAGEMENT

The main archaeological site is protected by the Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956. The site management is carried out by the Lumbini Development Trust, an autonomous and non-profit making organization. The entire site is owned by the Government of Nepal. The site falls within the centre of the Master Plan area, the planning of which was initiated together with the United Nations and carried out by Prof. Kenzo Tange between 1972 and 1978.

The long-term challenges for the protection and management of the property are to control the impact of visitors, and natural impacts including humidity and the industrial development in the region. A Management Plan is in the process of being developed to ensure the long-term safeguarding of the archaeological vestiges of the property while allowing for the property to continue being visited by pilgrims and tourists from around the world.

## RETROSPECTIVE INVENTORY OF WH BOUNDARY



## MAJOR EVENTS HAPPENED IN LUMBINI

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| 623 BC     | Birth of Lord Buddha  |
| 249 BC     | Maurya Emperor Asoka visited Lumbini and erected famous Asoka Pillar  |
| 350-375 AD | Chinese Travelers Seng Tsai visit to Lumbini  |
| 409        | Chinese Travelers Fa Hsien visit to Lumbini   |
| 636        | Famous Chinese Travelers Hiuen Tsang visit to Lumbini   |
| 1312       | Western Nepals' Ripu Malla's visit to Lumbini   |
| 1896       | Asoka Pillar discovered by Gen. Khadga Shumser & Dr. A.A. Fuhrer  |
| 1899       | P.C. Mukherji identified Nativity Sculpture and carried out an excavation of Mayadevi Temple  |
| 1930       | Petition of Mahadan Upasak to Prime Minister for restoration work   |
| 1932-39    | Extensive digging work by Kaiser Sumsher at Sacred Garden   |
| 1956       | King Mahendra's proposal for development at the Fourth Assembly of World Federation of Buddhists  |
| 1962       | Excavation work by Devela Mitra at the base of Asoka Pillar   |
| 1967       | Secretary General of United Nations U. Thant's visit to Lumbini   |
| 1970       | Formation of UN International Committee for Development of Lumbini (ICDL) in United Nations Headquarters and establishment of Lumbini Development Committee (LDC) |
| 1972       | Responsibility awarded to Prof. Kenzo Tange for preparations of Master Plan   |
| 1978       | Approval of Master Plan by Government of and United Nations   |
| 1972-85    | Excavation by Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal  |
| 1981       | Secretary General of United Nations Dr. Kurt Waldeim visit to Lumbini   |
| 1985       | Lumbini Development Committee formed as Lumbini Development Trust (LDT)   |
| 1989       | Secretary General of United Nations Javier Prez de Cuellar visit to Lumbini   |
| 1992-96    | Excavation by LDT/DoA/Nepal and Japan Buddhist Federation at Mayadevi Temple  |
| 1996       | Marker Stone Found by LDT/DoA/Nepal & JBF (Pinpoints the exact birth spot of Lord Buddha)   |
| 1997       | Lumbini enrolled in World Heritage Site by UNESCO/World Heritage Committee  |
| 1998       | The World Buddhist Summit held in Lumbini.  |
| 2001       | The International Buddhist Conference held in Lumbini   |
| 2003       | Reopened the restored Maya Devi Temple for the public for the first time on May 16, 2003  |
| 2003       | Restoration of Mayadevi Temple by Government of Nepal & LDT   |
| 2004       | Second World Buddhist Summit held in Lumbini  |
| 2005       | UN International Committee for Development of Lumbini Meeting in New York, USA  |
| 2008       | Secretary General of United Nations Ban Ki Moon visit to Lumbini  |
| 2011       | First Gautam Buddha International Peace Award distributed   |
| 2011       | Government of Nepal formed Greater Lumbini National Steering Committee  |
| 2012       | Visit Lumbini Year 2012   |

## **CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

Most of the office bearers in Lumbini Development Trust are committed and dedicated. Despite good intention, the project could not achieve good results due to obstacles arising in the process of development from myopic but unpredictable political biases. Sometimes unnecessarily poking nose in project affairs by outsiders and so-called well-wishers have also disturbed a lot. There should be an element of trust, sense of judgment and most importantly unanimous consensus followed by coordination and cooperation between Lumbini Development Trust, monasteries, local communities, religious leaders, archeologists, conservationist, environmentalist, tourism entrepreneurs, historian, donors and common devotees.

Lumbini have a great respect for the devotion and dedication of the religious leaders who actually have made Lumbini a great place of worship. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the obsession of recreating monasteries their own niches. That may unknowingly hamper the overall cultural landscape of Lumbini. The significance of Lumbini is not restricted to the four walls of individual monasteries. What one may think right is not enough to make a rule of thumb? One has to see things from other side of fence. Living in, practicing on and creating things inside Lumbini is sensitive. Lumbini is perhaps the first and only active religious place that is listed in the UNESCO World Heritage Site. The reason that the world's most prestigious secular organization listed Lumbini in the world heritage site is not because of religious importance but because of its immense historical and archeological significance. Lumbini falls in cultural category. Cultural heritage refers to monuments, group of buildings and properties with historical, aesthetic, archeological, ethological, or anthropological value. In this classification, religion is not mentioned. Lumbini may be a holy sacred religious place, but for rest of the world, it is an outstanding place of peace, harmony, archeology and history.

## **PRESENT SITUATION**

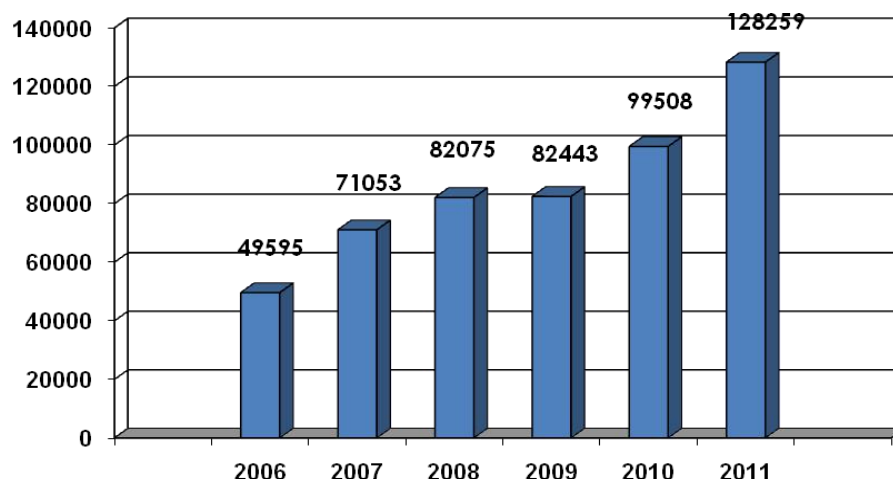
The famous Maurya Emperor Asoka guided by his spiritual teacher Upagupta made a pilgrimage to Lumbini in 249 BC .Emperor erected a stone pillar bearing an inscription stating clearly *Hida Budhe Jate Shakyamuniti* (here Shakyamuni Buddha was born). Which had already become an important pilgrimage site and the teachings of Lord Buddha and the establishment of Buddhism is one of the significant events in the development of human civilization is considered Lumbini as a Sacred site. The tourism sector plays a



major role in heritage conservation, both as a source of income as well as to gain acknowledgement for the heritage.

Without appropriate management of tourism, it can have negative impact on the property. However, tourism development shall assist in preserving the outstanding universal value of the site. Today hundreds of millions of the Buddhists around the world and among them Lumbini hosts 128259 passport holders' tourists from 92 countries, above 63709 tourists from India and above 395570 domestic tourists visited Lumbini in the year of 2011 and 60783 passport holders', 91516 Indians and 310687 domestic tourists visited January-July in the year 0f 2012 the Lumbini Development Trust record shows.

#### **Yearly Tourist Arrival (Only Passport holders except Nepalese & Indian Nationals) 2006-2011**



Source: Lumbini Development Trust Information Center

The major present activities in the Sacred Garden by visitors are pilgrimages to the sacred site, chanting prayers or mantras as their sects, lighting oil lamps or candles, burning incense, meditation, prostrating in front of the Nativity Sculpture, Market Stone and Asokan Pillar, placing prayer flags and offering robes- clothes, flowers, herbal, throwing rice grains-coins, splashing milk, water, perfume, shaving off head hair ,pasting colored powder, gold leaves and also receiving Buddhist teachings from monks of nuns and participating Buddhist rituals. The footpath, platforms for rituals, prayers and meditation are not adequate. The monuments are affected by visitors activates such as throwing coins, rice-grains, hair, splashing milk, water and perfumes.

However, a complexity has been aroused in the Heritage site management due to the growing number of visitors and inadequate infrastructure to address the needs of pilgrims

from different sects and nations. This is because "the Master Plan for Lumbini", which was started in 1978 on the auspicious of United Nations, is yet to be completed and the existing strategies for the Lumbini development under-appreciates the management of the visitors in the core area. The Lumbini; therefore, has faced challenges to conserve the monuments and archaeological remains from anthropogenic activities, and to facilitate an array of practices perform by the tourist and pilgrims from different sects. We recognized that the conservation, promotion and development of Lumbini encompasses different stakeholders such as Local Community, Department of Archaeology, UNESCO, World Heritage Center, UNDP, KOICA, ADB, IUCN, IFC, WWF, various donor agencies and Various countries as well as Buddhist Organizations, visitors, and tourism entrepreneurs. Their involvement in the conservation, promotion and development is crucial.

To confirmed the presence of early cultural levels in the Southeast Zone of the Sacred Garden Professor Robin Coningham and team from Durham University of UK under the UNESCO/JFIT project assessed their nature and preservation, and mapping them on GIS to prevent future damage, confirmed the presence of early cultural and natural levels in a sample of the un-surveyed areas of the Sacred Garden, assessed their nature and preservation, and mapped them on GIS to prevent future damage and confirmed the presence of Pre-Asokan levels in the Temple, assessed their nature and preservation, and mapped them on GIS to prevent future damage.



*Preparation for kite photography*



*Kite photography of core area of world heritage property*

## **VISITORS ACTIVITIES**

Buddhist pilgrims today visiting the Sacred Garden of Lumbini are adopting a pious behavior, wear different clothes for the pilgrimage trip which is different from an ordinary journey. They pay homage to the Buddha, recite the attributes of the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and worship the archaeological remains that mark the Birthplace of the Buddha and perform religious activities in accordance to their traditions.

Pilgrims and visitors coming in groups or as individuals to the birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini, perform different activities in the core area such as chanting religious stanzas for inspiration, meditating in group and individual, etc. Due to different activities some conflicts have already arisen in the area. Appropriate provisions are needed for each of those activities and “needs” of the pilgrims to ascertain that no negative impacts or conflicts arise.



*Pilgrims activities in core area*





*Pilgrims on queue inside Mayadevi Temple*



*View of Mayadevi Temple on full moon day*



*Ordination program in core are of Lumbini*

## **POSITIVE ACTIVITIES**

The following is the list of visitors' activities performing mostly by the Buddhist pilgrims. Some of the activities listed below have been conducting by the visitors out of faith towards this sacred site where the Buddha was born. However these activities are in conflict with the task to preserve and conserve the ancient monuments since these activities cause direct and indirect threats to the tangible values of the site.

- Chanting religious stanzas for inspiration
- Giving and listening to Dhamma talks and History of Lumbini
- Gathering of the Buddhist devotees and monastic community for special occasions
- Conducting prayer programs by the monastic community on the Full Moon days and on the days for significant occasions
- Meditating
- Circumambulating and prostrating
- Monk ordination
- Novice initiation
- Lighting candles and incenses
- Offering oil lamps
- Offering butter lamps
- Offering donations
- Offering milk
- Offering scented water
- Hanging lines of Tibetan prayer flags
- Placing flags on the grille of Asoka pillar
- Offering robes on the grille around Asoka pillar
- Offering coins to Asoka pillar
- Offering hairs to Asoka pillar
- Gilding the archaeological monuments
- Smearing red powder on the archaeological remains
- Picking Pipal leaves
- Collecting water from the scared pond
- Taking photos
- Shooting video

## **NEGATIVE ACTIVITIES**

The following visitors' activities taking place in the Sacred Garden area are enlisted as the negative activities since their unfavorable impact on the spiritual and archaeological values of the site.

- Stepping on the ancient monuments
- Sitting and relaxing on the archaeological remains
- Splashing milk to the Asoka pillar
- Splashing chemical based perfumed water to the Asoka pillar
- Throwing coins at the Asoka pillar
- Lighting candles and burning incenses very close to the ancient monuments
- Unauthorized taking away of the ancient bricks of the archaeological remains inside the Maya Devi Temple
- Unauthorized taking away of the ancient brick pieces from the monuments inside the Maya Devi premises
- Unauthorized taking away of soil from the base of the ancient monuments

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Lumbini is one of the important tourist destinations in Nepal with constantly increasing number of visitors. Tourism plays a major role in heritage conservation— as a source of income and an acknowledgement for the heritage. However, the Lumbini management faces a challenge to create a balance between pilgrims' activities and the protection of the archaeological site. The results show that the management needs to be updated to address the issues associated with increasing number of visitors. There is an immediate need to develop an Integrated Management Plan for the property considering tourism and conservation including disaster management,

The existing situations sought that the plan should consider an array of issues from developing more infrastructures to organizing awareness raising programs so that the site could accommodate increasing number of visitors and educate them to maintain the heritage site. There is also a need to improve traditional practices such as throwing coins at the Ashoka pillar, gilding archaeological remains with gold leaves, splashing milk and splashing chemical based perfumed-water if not these activities are like to have negative effects on monuments. However, to enhance sustainable heritage management, the management has to develop marketing strategy to attract more visitors. Further research

and excavation of Lumbini and other related sites can help to enhance the heritage management.

Besides a need to enhance tourism and management of anthropogenic pressure, natural hazards such as flood also one of the important aspects of the Lumbini management. Telar river is running through from the northwest to the southeast of the Lumbini creates a considerable flood problem. To address this problem, Kenzo Tange has created the levy functioning as a water reservoir as well as flood control pond. At the same time, levy plays a crucial role of preventing the intruders from outside and adds the tranquility to the landscape surrounding the Sacred Garden.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study comes up with several recommendations in order to improve the Lumbini management. These are:

- Recommend immediate Integrated Management Plan for the site incorporating Disaster Risk and Tourism Management issues
- Provide more and suitable spaces for the visitors inside the Maya Devi Temple: The different groups of Buddhist pilgrim's sufficient space and access to pay respects to the nativity sculpture and the exact birth spot of Lord Buddha, the Marker Stone
- Provide more protection for the ancient monuments: According to the LDT security staffs some Buddhist pilgrims are illicitly taking brick pieces from the ancient monuments within their reach while accessing to the place of the Marker Stone
- Promote spiritual values of the site by providing signage to request decent physical and verbal behavior also encourage decent clothing and decent behavior of recreational tourists and control unnecessary noise pollution
- Encourage pilgrimage groups to limit the usage of loudspeakers that would cause unnecessary noise pollution in the Sacred Garden area
- Urgently recommend heritage impact assessment and monitor inappropriate activities of the visitors and encourage them to respect the irreplaceable archaeological remains which express the authenticity of the site
- Strengthen heritage awareness on the cultural heritage issues to improve balance between heritage protection and quality of experience of pilgrims

- Provide more information on the excavated archaeological remains to the visitors
- Balance pilgrim's activities and archaeological conservation. A clear decision should be made as to whether Lumbini should be promoted as a multi-disciplinary tourist destination for pilgrims, historical, cultural, archaeological, spiritual and eco-tourism or purely as a spiritual destination
- Provide covered spaces of worship in the Maya Devi Temple premises for the pilgrims who visit during the rainy season and in cold weather
- Closely monitor the negative activities: Increasing the management capacity of the Lumbini Development Trust could solve the existing problems that threaten the environment of Lumbini. Wildlife and their habitat should be strictly protected. Also necessary for the protection of poaching of endangered animal species
- Cultural Heritage can no longer be seen in isolation, it needs to be main-streamed into a sustainable development process.
- Control flooding, study on protection of river eco system and suggest emergency evacuation plan and procedures for the evacuation of tourists and also recommend to install general emergency equipment, alarm system, fire hydrants, sprinkler and signage
- Seismic risk of the property is high, which needs to be done vulnerability assessment as well as hazards level to safeguard the archaeological vestiges
- Recommend conservation plan to enable zero ecological footprint by the visitors and manage ecologically balanced local development aspirations

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