



- 1 The wooden structure is painted. It is covered with dust and dirt. The varnish had become brown with the time. After dusting with a soft brush, the dust was first attenuated with a special micro pores sponge and water. Then, the varnish was removed with a solvents' mixture composed of acetone and isopropanol.
- 2 The monks of the monastery offered to learn and work on the plastering of the damaged walls.
- 3 Large areas of wall painting were missing. The choice of motives for the full reconstruction (illusionist retouching) was made after intense study of the status of modern Buddhist art's restoration and our experience in similar temples in the Himalayas. The first step of the reconstruction is to trace the original painting. It took 26 days.
- 4 Picture showing before and after the retouching process. Retouching is done using paint which is prepared with warm animal glue and imported pigments.
- 5 Singhik monastery is located at the fringe area of the biodiversity hotspot in Singhik.
- 6 The condition of the damaged paintings before the conservation and restoration caused by the earthquake.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Buddhist monasteries and the indigenous Lepcha community of Singhik, which is a small remote village nestled in the Indian Himalayan state of Sikkim, has a long tradition of protecting the environment by integrating the ecosystem with Buddhist concepts of interdependence, of cause and effect, of dharma values and their traditional rituals of nature worship.

The project brings together Dharma, the community, a team of conservators and the forest department to preserve the environment through a heritage conservation project of an old monastery in Singhik. The monastery was established in the late 1800s, rebuilt in 1932 and was badly damaged by the devastating earthquake of 11/9/2011.

The community guided by a team of conservators is restoring the monastery by using traditional handmade architecture techniques, local materials and skills with funding support of the forest department of Sikkim.

The success of this project will play a very important role in conservation of the biodiversity in the fragile Indian Himalayan ecosystems considering the growing threats to biodiversity, the impact of climate change and unplanned urbanization. There are more than 200 old monasteries in Sikkim which needs restoration and will play a vital role in the conservation.





- 1 Most of the people in Singhik especially the women do labour intensive work but are highly skilled and knowledgeable about materials found in their immediate environment.
- 2 Most of the old structures in Singhik are load bearing structures and have been built without using any nails. They were designed and built according to the needs of their occupation and showcase immense knowledge about the materials used in this indigenous architecture.
- 3 Due to lack of knowledge and documentation with the current generation of builders in the village, there are modern constructions which uses RCC reinforced concrete which are coming up quickly in the Singhik landscape.
- 4 Shrines like these which have been erected by the local community are a common sight. They are built as a mark of respect to deities in nature and wherever they are made no one dares dirty the premises around it.

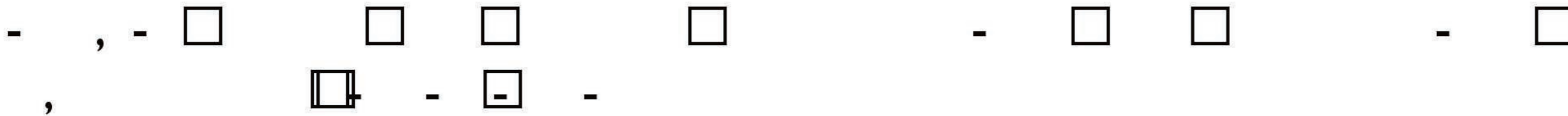
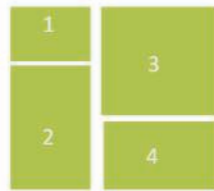


5. Facilitate the use of appropriate technologies, materials and labour adequate to local values, to the cultural specificity and responsive to the natural environment;

In the past, people in most parts of the world had a very straightforward relationship with the environment. They used the resources provided by nature as needed and due to the simplicity of their lives, rarely did great damage to the Earth. However, this has changed considerably in more recent times. Not only are our lives no longer so simple, our relationship with the environment is much more complicated and we now have tremendous power to do it harm.

The Lepcha community in Sikkim has deep and sacred connections with nature and has for long been the custodians of nature in Sikkim. This tradition has to continue, as their role is now more critical than ever before.

80% of all the material used in building the monastery was found reusable and in good condition. Most of the damaged parts, which needed restoration, were the mural paintings. In a scenario, where Sikkim falls under Zone V of the earthquake sensitive zones in India and is prone to earthquakes, traditional architecture provides sustainable and cost effective solutions in rebuilding compared to the modern RCC monasteries in Sikkim.





- 1 The team started documenting all the tangible and intangible information on architecture, culture, biodiversity, folklore etc in Singhik besides documenting the conservation work of the monastery. The documentation of the conservation work is available on www.singhikconservationproject.wordpress.com
- 2 The young monks of the monastery getting their first hand experience on conservation.
- 3 The foreign conservators explaining the young monks the conservation process and the project through a picture slideshow on her Ipad.
- 4 Even though there is serious work going on in the monastery, there is enough time for a game of football.
- 5 The young monks offer to help happily whenever there is shortage of manpower.



6. Share knowledge, promote discussion, reflection and awareness, and collaborate in the advancement of the 'social production of habitat';

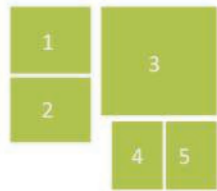


Ever since the earthquake, various efforts were made to initiate heritage conservation projects in Sikkim. There was no breakthrough because:

1. There was no documentation of traditional Sikkimese architecture, art and craft.
2. Lack of local human resources in wood and painting restoration in Sikkim was a big setback.
3. Many of the traditional aspects of vernacular architecture had eroded with the introduction of modern building techniques and materials, including corrugated iron and concrete.

This project is amongst the first heritage conservation projects in Sikkim and it will create an impact in the future development of the village through understanding of the value of heritage. It will affect the manner in which the new constructions are being carried out in Singhik.

This will encourage the community to collaborate and engage in meaningful discussions on the village development action plan which are otherwise developed by experts from New Delhi who make very little effort and spend little time in understanding the local context.





- 1 The first meeting of the conservation team with the village elders and the women community. This meeting was conducted to explain the project, the process and the importance of conservation.
- 2 The elder women in the village took the first initiative of getting involved in the conservation work. They would take turns to sieve the soil and then pound them in a wooden container until the soil is ready to be used for plastering the walls.
- 3 The multidisciplinary team of painting and wood conservators, architects, carpenters, masons, thangka painter, designers, local experts in front of the monastery.
- 4 The entire village assemble every month or on any important dates in the Buddhist calendar for prayers and meditation based activities.
- 5 Officials from the Department of Forest, Government of Sikkim inspecting the conservation work. The forest department of Sikkim is funding the project.
- 6 Members of the community and the young monks of the monastery have been actively involved in the conservation project. Here, they are plastering on the damaged walls of the monastery.

8. Support participatory, democratic, multicultural and interdisciplinary processes and approaches in strengthening community solidarity as a factor of rural and urban social development;

The design process in traditional architecture brings together the community into the act of rebuilding, planning, cooperation and collaboration with a multi-disciplinary team of conservators— local and international. The project is designed with a wholsitic systems approach for cultural continuity and sense of ownership for cultural assets of the village.

The women in the village played a very crucial role as they led the conservation work from the front volunteering for every job which was labor intensive. They believe that they are amongst the lucky ones who in their lifetime have got an opportunity to do something tangible for the monastery. The elder women were also influential in inspiring the youth of the village to participate in the restoration process. The development indicator of any developing or developed society is based on a collaborative capacity, capability and intent of a community. This project creates an environment and opportunity to foster this experience in the future.

“The far more numerous examples of human goodness are barely noticed. They are Not News. They are exceptions. Must have been a saint. Can’t expect everyone to behave like that.”

