

A quick report on my experience of the 2015 Earthquake in Nepal

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A powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015. The epicenter was about 80km North West of the capital Kathmandu. It was just a normal Saturday in the morning. After a weeklong working day, it was the day to do the wash-ups, cleaning rooms and surroundings. After breakfast, I had started cleaning my rooms first. I did all the dusting, changed my bed sheets, pillow covers and sorted all the mess in the room. Lastly, swept the room which is on the third floor and I thought I'd dispose all the trash from the rooms and had many other plans to do after I was done with the room. When I was about to finish the sweeping, suddenly it felt like shaking. I didn't care much but then my daughter came running to me screaming. By then even I felt the shake and the earthquake alarm also started beeping. Very quickly we rushed down the stairs and found that our kitchen helper knowing not what was going on was coming up the stairs to ask me what it was. I didn't speak a word to her and pulled her by the arms and rushed out of the door. Outside the house, we were staggering from one side to another because of the shaking. With lots of efforts we could climb down the stair outside the house. Looking for a safe place we were just standing there. Soon people from nearby also joined us. I had nothing with me (mobile phone, cash or bag) but my daughter had her mobile phone with her. So, we tried to call my husband and my mother. My husband was working at his site 10 km away from us. My mother had gone to the Shechen Monastery with other people to attend a sacred empowerment by Yangthang Rinpoche from Tibet. There were nearly 8000 people attending this puja. When we were all standing at the so-called safe place, we could see that the 3 storeyed building in front of us was swaying like a tree in a strong storm. Suddenly building's one side of the terrace's wall broke and all the bricks and concrete fell over the slum hut but fortunately there were no one in the house. Everyone was very shocked and frightened. People were shouting, crying and panicking. Till late in the afternoon we didn't know that the nine storeyed pillar (Dharahara) had fallen off and some 400 people died in it. Then we left our house and started living in tent (Fig. 1). We also heard a five storeyed and a 7 storeyed house fell down in our neighborhood and at that time we had no idea how many people had died and were injured. Later we discovered that 16 and 80+ people had died in those respective collapsed building.



Fig 1.



Fig. 2

At Hostel

It was a great luck of us that the school was off on that day. Injuries and casualties might have occurred due to stampede when children and teacher gets excited and shocked while rushing down the stair. At hostel, our hostel in charge Mr. Prem Rai said that all the children were in the TV hall watching a movie on that day. Suddenly, when it started shaking, children started screaming and crying but to prevent them from falls and injuries, he kept them all in the room till it stopped shaking for a while. Then everyone came down slowly and stood at the safest area in the compound (Fig. 3). Due to the wisdom of the hostel in charge, all children were safe without a scratch. After that, we all worked together to set-up a temporary shelter (fig. 4) as it was shaking continuously but at lower magnitude. So, nobody could attempt to go inside the building. Some children looked very frightened but some were not. We all had our lunch at 5 p.m. only. The next day some of the children went out of the hostel with their guardian but children coming from the mountain had to stay in the hostel. Later, we improved the shelter using tables as a bed and we brought tarpaulin sheets. Children and staff spent 3 months in that shelter. Although it was hard to live that way but at least it was safer.

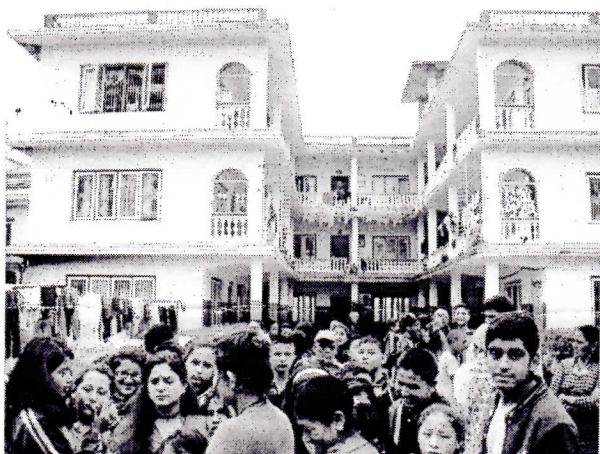


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Damaged caused by Earthquake to school building

There are four blocks of building including the hostel block. All buildings are made of concrete and steel. The school block and the administrative block are twenty years old whereas the hostel block and auditorium are younger than that. The earthquake of April 25 has caused falling of approx. 12 m compound wall at school and 10 m at hostel (fig. 5 and 6). The water tank on the concrete slab has fallen down, which also caused damage to the roof of the auditorium. The first tremor didn't harm the building much but the 2nd one on May 12 shook the building causing minor cracks all over the 3 blocks at school and major cracks in the toilet block and the administrative block. There weren't much damage in the hostel block which was quite a relief. Days later, different groups of engineers came to check the condition of the school and how much damages the tremor had caused to the buildings (fig. 7 and 8) and one group organized by Nepal Army from Israel also visited who declared that the buildings were safe to use (fig. 9). But later an engineer sent by the MOE (Ministry Of Education) labeled the main building with "unsafe" sticker. He explained that the stair case needs to be retrofitted or an optional stair to be installed. After all these we were puzzled, we didn't know what to do. So, we talked to a

consultancy and hired engineers to officially check the buildings. After a thorough checking of the building they provided us a report with a suggestion that the building needs to be retrofitted and the stair was not safe. So, we had to make an iron stair on the other end of the building.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

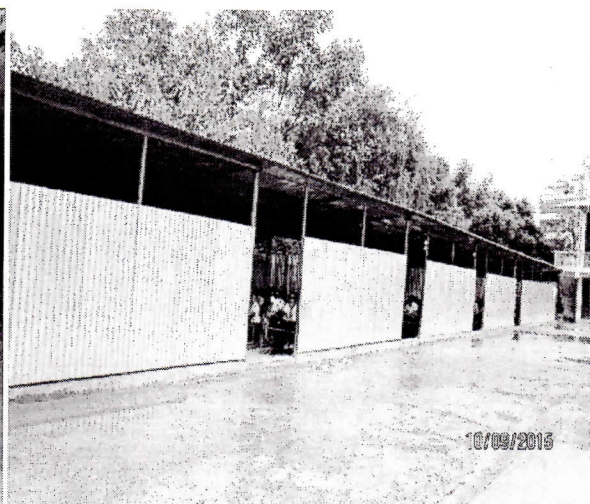


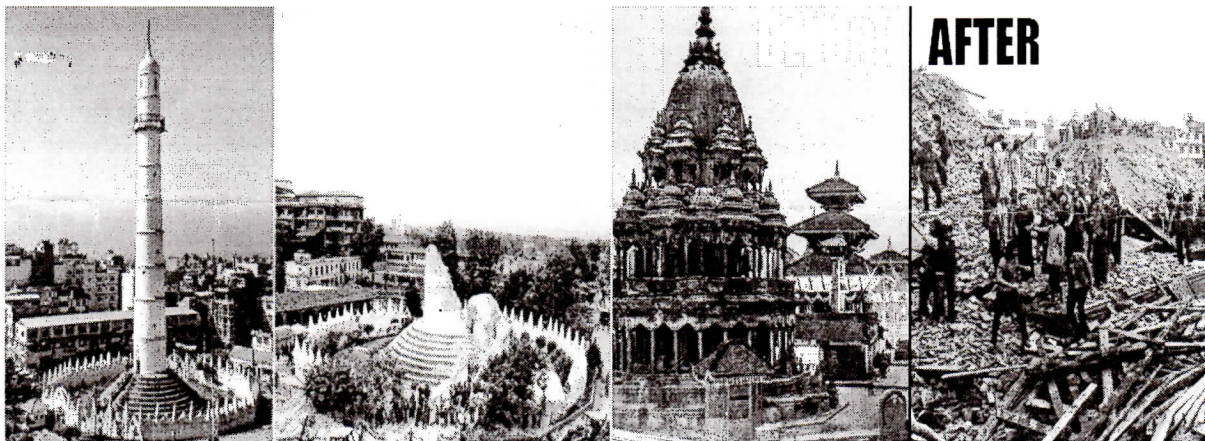
Fig. 10

Over-all damages made to Nepal by the earthquake 2015

The earthquake has caused extensive damage to buildings and thousands of deaths and injuries and was felt even in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Many of the historic buildings were collapsed, temples have been ruined and the roads destroyed. The quake was followed by more than 350 aftershocks with different epicenters and magnitudes equal to or above 4 Richter scale. The earthquake killed more than 8800 in Nepal and injures more than twice as many. More than 450000 people were displaced. The rural death were comparatively low as the villagers were outdoors working in their field when the quake hit. This earthquake even caused avalanches on Mount Everest and atleast 19 died with 120 injured or missing. The earthquake was followed by landslides in different part on the country. Thousands of houses were destroyed across many districts of the country, with entire village flattened, especially those near the epicenter. Even the Tribhuvan International Airport serving Kathmandu was closed immediately after the quake, but was reopened for relief operations later on the same day.

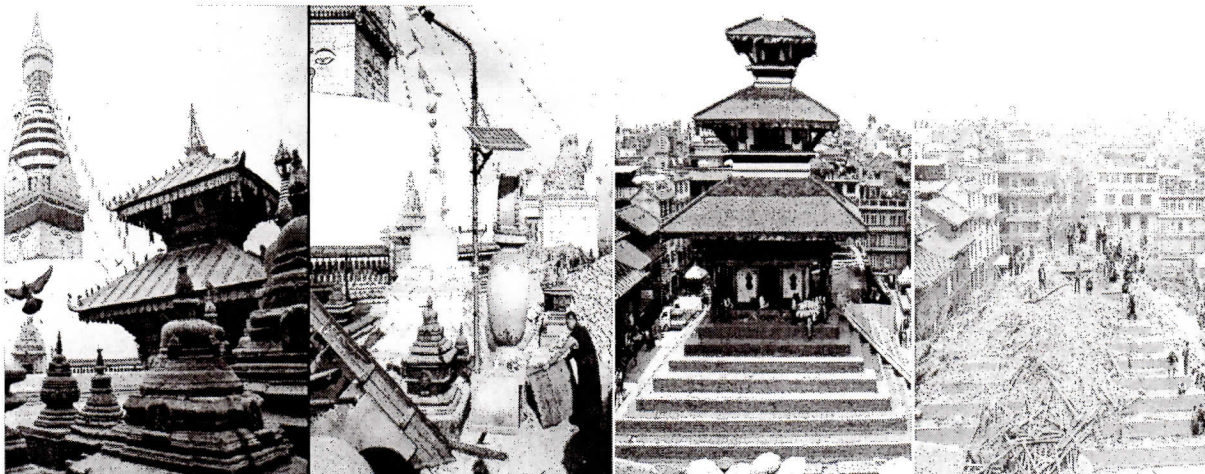
Here are some of the before and after pictures of Nepal showing the extent of the devastation:

a. Dharahara Tower b. Patan Mandir c. Swayambhu Nath Temple d. Kathmandu Durbar Square



a.

b.



c.

d.

Repair work and its cost

Nearly ten days after the first tremor, it was felt necessary to construct the compound wall again because, seeing it open trespassers started harming school property. It was very hard to find mason and labors but Jampal assisted us to find them and started the work. We had almost erected the wall but another tremor hit. Thanks to god this time the wall did not fall. Then we started working with the hostel wall, water tank, roof of the hall, water pipelines, temporary classrooms, temporary toilets, crack seals, white washing, etc. Here's the actual account of the repair and reconstruction work so far. As suggested by the engineers, retrofitting the buildings was not possible for the time being due to lack of resource and time.

	Description	Amount(Rs)
1.	Temporary classrooms and toilets	810000
2.	Crack repair + compound wall erection	156000
3.	Sanitary + Fitting (Plumbing)	96939
4.	Paints + White washing	41480
Total		1104419

Come-back of students to school

The schools in the valley were closed for 35 days after the 1st earthquake went. Long time after the quake, the government declared that all school must re-open on May 31st. So before that, I thought it was better to prepare the teacher's mindset first. So we had a teacher's meeting before the school re-opened. To my surprise I found the teachers were strong and determined, although several teachers lost their house in the earthquake. They were also given training on how to deal with traumatized frightened children. We decided that we will not have lessons in the first week. The children had easy and comfortable time during the first week, no lesson, watching visual of cultural show and other things, playing, doing interesting project works, etc. When we found them ready, mind and body, we slowly started normal lessons. In the beginning the presence of the students was very low. But gradually it started to grow and by the end of the first week 80 percent of the students started coming to school. We managed all class-rooms in the ground floors and the temporary class rooms only (fig. 10), since no-one wants to be in the upper floors. We even used the ground floor at the hostel as most of the hostel students had left. For the first few days small children had classes in the open spaces. Every day needs to be planned and prepared. Slowly it turned to be better and normal in spite of those aftershocks.

Students and their family were still living in the tents. Some students went out of Kathmandu valley and didn't come back. Above all these I am very glad that no one among the staff, teachers and students had received any casualties, bad injuries or loss of life. I am very thankful to god.



Lesson taught by earthquake 2015

1. Lesson to the whole country: Town needs to be managed properly. There must be open spaces, parks and wide streets in every community. Building rules need to be implemented strictly.
2. Lesson to the public: Houses must be built as per the norms and values of the government rules. People should build safe houses. They should not compromise with the quality and quantity of materials. People must build small houses and earthquake resistant houses. And the most important lesson learnt is about humanity, because people realized that man's life is uncertain and anything could happen anytime. Therefore as long as they live, one should be kind and helpful to others. The constitution of Nepal is the result and proof of this lesson.
3. The silver lining of this devastation has been that it has allowed us to socially integrate in the time of crisis and see how much strength we have together as a nation. This earthquake has showed us the strength we can find if we work together and it has taught us to be grateful to be alive. It's become one of the perfect example for the saying that recites "United we stand, divided we fall".

Hopefully all Nepalese recover from this distress and soon rebuilding and reconstruction of the nation may be done for better days in future. Thank you