

Revealing What is Dear: The Post-earthquake Iconisation of the Dharahara, Kathmandu

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Abstract:

On 25 April 2015 central Nepal was struck by a magnitude 7.8 earthquake which killed over 9000 people and displaced 2.8 million. The image of the Dharahara, a nineteenth century minaret which collapsed during the quake, quickly became for many Nepalis an iconic representation not only of the disaster but also of a national determination to recover and rebuild. Edward Simpson has argued that the aftermath of a disaster is ‘a product of the longer history of a locality’ and it is the aftermath ‘that may reveal what is dear’ (Simpson 2013: 53, 50). Drawing upon media and literary discourse in the Nepali language, this presentation will ask why the Dharahara tower loomed so large in the Nepali imagination in the immediate aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake, rather than the country’s severely damaged World Heritage sites, and why it became a rallying point for a resurgence of Nepali hill nationalism.