

Reflection of Hindu-Buddhist religious harmony in Nepali Temples

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Abstracts

Religious harmony is essential for preserving harmony and peace in a multi religious nation like Nepal. If the issue of harmony is not resolved, there may be religious conflict in society. Although Nepal is a secular nation with a preponderance of Hindus, Buddhists play a significant and integral role in Nepalese society. They have coexisted in harmony with religion in Nepal. At this time, there were no religious conflicts or hostilities between Buddhists and Hindus. According to the Principle of Religious Syncretism, religious ideas will be shared when two cultures come together and interact, with the dominant culture prevailing in the exchange. Syncretism of cultures and customs developed in Nepal for a number of reasons. Buddhism became a fundamental component of society due to its social acceptance and respect in the community. Buddhism is seen by Hindus as a part of Hindu philosophy, and vice versa. They have, however, made an effort to stand apart in recent years by religiously rejecting decades of harmony and peace. This study aims to examine the crucial elements fostering religious harmony in a multi-faith setting and how religious syncretism is reflected in Nepali temples. An in-depth interview and library research methods are used to study the issue of religious harmony. This article's goal is to examine the essential elements that support religious harmony in a multi-religious society as well as how religious syncretism is reflected in Nepalese temples. The causes of harmonic syncretism in the context of temples are also discussed in this study. The objective of this research is to create a long-term vision of religious peace between Nepal's Hindu and Buddhist communities. They might be motivated to keep healthy relationships by the findings.

Keywords: *Nepali Temples-Religious Harmony- Hindu- Buddhist relations- Religious understanding- Conflict- Acceptance.*

Introduction

If we look at the Nepali national population, different religious groups are living together from Himalaya to Terai in harmonious environment (CBS, 2001). There are several different ethnic groups in Nepal. Many castes, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups can trace their ancestry to this region. Most people in Nepal are Hindu, making up the major share of the population. There are additionally other religious people in Nepal. There are 126 caste/ethnic groups and 123 languages spoken as mother tongues, according to the 2011 census. Nepali is the primary language of 44.6 percent of people. There are ten different categories for religion, according to the 2011 census. Buddhism (9 percent; 2,396,099), Islam (4.4 percent; 1,162,370), Kirat (3.1 percent; 807,169), Christianity (1.4 percent; 375,699), Prakriti (0.5 percent; 121,982), Bon (13,006), Jainism (3,214), Bahai (1,283), and Sikhism

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are the major religions that adherents follow after Hinduism (609)(<https://mofa.gov.np>).

The blending of many religious rituals and beliefs is known as religious syncretism. It is the mingling of beliefs, cultures, traditions, and concepts from several places. According to the Principle of Religious Syncretism, religious ideas will be transferred when two faiths come together and interact, with the dominant culture winning out in the process. Syncretism of cultures and customs developed in Nepal for a number of reasons. Hinduism is a highly cosmopolitan religion that has gained popularity all over the world.

The Maurya king Ashoka may have embraced Buddhism in an effort to reunite his nation under a common religion (Sen, 2023). Religious harmony manifests itself in an intriguing way in Tibet, where the old Bön religion coexisted with the teachings of Buddhist missionaries. According to the Principle of Religious syncretism, Chinese Buddhism developed to the point where the Sanskrit word dharma was replaced with the Chinese word dao. In Nepal, the Licchavi era was a heyday for religious synthesis. The Licchavis are solely Hindus, yet they hold Buddhism in high regard (Puri, 2019). The Licchavis and Malla kings built a number of religiously fusionist temples.

When it comes to harmony, Nepal goes beyond religious tolerance; one could even call it religious acceptance among the many communities. Along with their clan or family deities, people of many ethnic and religious backgrounds worship a number of common deities. Each faith honors and values the traditions and culture of the other (Puri,2019). Many Hindus frequently go to Buddhist Shrines because they consider Buddha to be an avatar of Vishnu and celebrate Buddhist holidays as Hindu holidays. Holidays are given for all significant religious celebrations of many religions (Ojha,2016).

Theologically, Buddhism and Hinduism are at odds. However, as shown by the temple architecture and Nepalese art, Buddhism is a part of Hinduism and is regarded in Hindu civilisation as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. Such problems have not yet been extensively investigated. Hindus and Buddhists coexist peacefully in various places across the world. Despite the fact that their sects and geographical locations may have different beliefs and practices, they all practice Buddhism. Theravadis in particular made an effort to set themselves apart from Hindus, despite the fact that other sects accept Hinduism as their own religion, as evidenced by Nepali art.

The religious concord between the Buddhist and Hindu religious communities and how it affects temples has not received enough attention from academics and has not yet been studied in depth. Many of these issues have been addressed by the numerous academics who were part of the literature study. The gap left by the previous researcher is the primary topic of this study.

This study's aim is to identify unrecognized problems with religious harmony in Nepali temples. It attempts to address the following question:

1. The beauty of Nepali society is its religious understanding between the Hindu-Buddhist religious groups.
2. Nepali temples reflect interreligious harmony between Hindus and Buddhists.

Before delving into the issue, it is prudent to explore previously published material on various elements of religious harmony. The inquiry is confined to religious harmony in Hindu-Buddhist temples. A comprehensive survey of the literature in this area became helpful in identifying research problem and the current state of the field of study.

No comprehensive study on religious syncretism in Nepal has been published, with the exception of those by K.M. Shrestha, Uddav Puri, Niranjana Ojha, Mohd Ikhwan Izzat Zulkefli, and Charles Taylor. All of these sources are assessed prior to the research being conducted. Academics and other scholars have not focused on the topic of religious harmony in Nepali temples while identifying research problem. These researches are general and don't deal with harmony in Nepali temples. All of these published and unpublished references are evaluated prior to doing research.

K. M. Shrestha (2005). Religious syncretism between Hindu and Buddhist religious institutions discussed in depth in "Religious Syncretism and Context of Buddhism in Medieval Nepal." The focus of this essay is mostly on religious coexistence in medieval Nepal. Nothing about it relates to temples. M.I. Zulkefli, M.N. Endut, M.R.T.L. Abdullah, and A. Baharudd (2018), the situation of religious harmony in the state was discussed in the article, "Towards ensuring inter-religious harmony in a multi-faith community of Perak." This study does not address syncretism in temples, but it does stress the significance of elements like acceptance, understanding, cooperation, and right and justice in maintaining religious peace in a multi faith community. Puri, U. (2019) in his article "Religious and Cultural Syncretism in Nepal Based on the Nation's Laws" explores the ideas of religious and cultural harmony between Hindu and Buddhist religious groups in Nepal. It merely evaluates the main laws in the country that lead to religious syncretism. Puri, U. (2019) explores the socio-cultural syncretism between Hindu and Buddhist religious communities in "Religious and Cultural Syncretism: A Study of Swoyambhu." It only focuses on how two religious communities approach worship. T. Charles (2020), "A Revisitation of Religious Syncretism in Twentieth Century Yemen," which emphasizes religious syncretism in Yemen but leaves out religious syncretism amongst various religious groups in temples. "Inter-religious Harmony between Hindu Muslim Organizations in Nepal," Ojha, N. (2021), focuses on the syncretic connection between Hindu-Muslim religious groups in Nepal, as well as the syncretic character of diverse religious groups in Nepal, but does not address syncretism in Nepali temples in Hindu-Buddhist religious society.

These diverse themes give significant information on numerous facets of religious harmony, but prior research had not addressed the reflection of harmony in Nepali temples. As a result, the research gap created by prior studies has been adopted as the research challenge in this study. These materials do not provide answers to the research's issues, but rather serve to bridge theoretical gaps.

Method and Materials

This study is based on descriptive and analytical method. It has used primary and secondary sources. Maximum importance has been given to the field study, in-depth

interview to get primary data. Side by side, the researcher has consulted various articles, books, reports and other printed materials as well as many local social/religious groups and organizations, scholars for the information. Emphasis has been given to primary sources. For the purpose of the collection of first hand data observation, interview and discussion method was made with concerned stake holders. Emile Durkheim's religious theory has been adopted for theoretical frame work in this research. For secondary information basically library research method is used. Relevant books, journal articles, online websites and related publications have been used properly. Primary sources have received special emphasis. With the intention of gathering first-hand information, interested stakeholders were engaged in observation, interviews, and discussions. For this research, all of the data was categorized, coded, analyzed, and some reflection has been given. This research is restricted to the historical study of religious harmony between Buddhist and Hindu temples in Nepal. The social, political, legal, economic, and other dimensions of religious harmony and other religions are not included in this work.

Discussion

There are numerous castes, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groupings in the tiny Himalayan nation of Nepal. Most people in Nepal are Hindu, making up the lion's share of the population. Additionally, Nepal is home to numerous religious minorities who practice various religions. The bulk of the temples in Nepal are devoted to various sects of Hindu deities, as can be seen by looking at them. There are very few Buddhist temples in Kathmandu and elsewhere. At these temples, believers worship their gods in accordance with their own religions (Puri, 2019). While a Buddhist worships the same God with his or her Buddhist deities, a Hindu worships the God housed within a temple as the Hindu God. It is used all around Nepal, not just in the Kathmandu Valley.

Buddhism was much more common in Nepal during the Licchavi kingdom. The traditional Hindus are the Licchavis, who also hold Buddhism in great esteem. In Kathmandu, numerous Buddhist temples were built around this time. The integration of Buddhism into Hindu art at this time was its main draw. Numerous temples built during the Licchavi era display this combination (Ojha, 2016).

Religious harmony in Hindu- Buddhist Temple

The shrine of the mythical Majushree Bodhisattva, a Buddhist shrine to Buddhist and Hindus worship the shrine as that of Devi Sarasvat, the goddess of wisdom, is located in the western part of Kathmandu. Not only Buddhists, but also Hindus, revere the shrines in the Swoyambhu complex. Swoyambhu Stupa was erected by Vrishava Deva, a Hindu Licchav King, according to historical sources (Puri, 2019). Swayambhunath is a well-known Buddhist sacred place in Kathmandu Valley. Shoyambhunath, also known as Simbhu in local language, is derived from the term Singgu, which means 'self-sprung' (Ojha, 2016). It is one of the most holy Buddhist pilgrimage places for the indigenous Newars. It is the second most important sacred location for Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhists after Boudha.

The complex includes a stupa as well as a number of shrines and temples (Ojha,2016). The iconography of Swayambhunath is derived from the Vajrayana school of Newar Buddhism. However, the structure is also significant to Buddhists of many schools and is adored by Hindus. According to the Gopalrajvamsabali, it was founded at the beginning of the 5th century CE by King Vrishvdeva, the great-grandfather of King Mnadeva (464-505 CE). This appears to be verified by a broken stone inscription discovered at the site, which suggests that construction was ordered in 640 CE by King Vrisharvadeva (Puri, 2020). This Temple displayed a syncretistic reflection.

Another popular Kathmandu temple is famous for Lord Vishnu- the Hindu God and was built during the Licchavi period by the ruler Jisnu Gupta named as Buddha- Budha-Nilkantha (locally called Budhanil Kantha) (Ojha,2016), also known as the Narayansthan Temple, is located below the Shivapuri Hill at the northern end of the Kathmandu valley, in Budhanilkantha Municipality. Lord Vishnu is honored at this temple. The main figure of sleeping Vishnu at the temple is the biggest stone temples of the Licchavi era. If we look closely at the statue of sleeping Vishnu, we may see Buddha's forehead in the Vishnu temples. As a result, it is seen as a merger of Hinduism and Buddhism in a single figure known as Buddha-Budhanilkantha (Ojha,2016). If we look at the outside of the temple, Lord Vishnu is in a sleeping pose in Shesh Saiya, but if we look closely, we can see the forehead of Buddha in the Vishnu temples (Tamang, 2022). The Bhirav is another prominent Shiva form in Nepal. Different elements of Bhairavs play significant significance in Kathmandu Valley celebrations. Bhairavs are primarily revered as the valley's defender and Shiva's wrathful avatar. Hindus all around the world worship Shiva as a vegetarian God, however in Kathmandu, both Hindus and Buddhists worship Lord Shiva as a non-vegetarian God under the name Bhairab (Ojha,2016).

According to Hindu belief, Lord Vishnu will incarnate on Earth 10 times, each time as a new incarnation or avatar. He has appeared as Matsya (a fish), Kurma (a tortoise), Varaha (a wild boar), Narasimha, Vamana (a Brahmin), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki (who will appear at the end of the Kali Yuga). His animal incarnations are fish, tortoise, and wild boar, and Hindus revere those creatures as Lord Vishnu's incarnations. All Hindus and those who believe in rebirth, pre-birth, and Mokshya or Mukti (Nirvana) thought that visiting a temple eased all sufferings and sorrows (Mukti=Nirvana, Nath=God). This temple is a symbol of Hindu-Buddhist religious coexistence (Khatiwada and Dahal, 2010). The temple's priest is Hindu, and the temple's caretakers are Buddhists known as Jhumas. Muktinath is worshiped as an avatar of Vishnu by Hindus, whereas Guru Rimpochhe is worshiped by Buddhists (Ojha, 2016).

The well-known Bhimeshwor temple found in Dolakha Bazar of the Dolakha district. The primary statue at this temple is of the deity Bhim, also known as Bhimsen or Bhimeshwor. Bhim is regarded as the second Prince of Panch Pandav and is particularly revered as the will god of merchants. The idol of Bhim Sen is a rough stone triangle form in Dolakha under the roofless temple. This idol is known as Bhim Sen, although it has three reincarnations: Bhim Sen, Goddess Bhagawati, and God Shiva. Animals were slaughtered at this temple for Goddess Bhagawati, but no blood was sacrificed to Lord Shiva. However, three Gods are worshiped differently at this temple three times a day (Bajracharya, 2022). Palanchwok

Bhagawati Temple in Kavre district is one of the most well-known goddess shrines among Buddhists and Hindus. Both faiths worship the same Goddess, the Hindu Goddess Durga and the Buddhist Goddess Tara (Ojha, 2016).

Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha and a World Heritage site, is an important pilgrimage site for Buddhists. Swayambhunath (the Monkey Temple) and Bouddha Nath are two more important Buddhist sites in Kathmandu. Similarly, Namobuddha of Kavre and Vajrayogini of Sankhu are well-known Buddhist pilgrimage sites(Ojha,2019). In Nepal, Buddhism is practiced in a variety of ways. Theravada Buddhism is practiced by the local Newars, particularly the Maharjans, Dongols, and the Jyapu group. Vajrayana Buddhism is practiced by the Shaky, Vajracharya, and Manandhar communities, whilst Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism is practiced by the Tamang and Sherpas. Within Tibetan Buddhism, there are also Shakyapa, Nigmapa, Kagyupa, and Geluk sects (Lama,2022). Acharya Padmasambha, also known as Guru Rimopche in Tibetan, is regarded as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautam, who was born on 534 B.C. at Lumbini in the southern Terai, was the Hindu Prince (Khatiwada and Dahal, 2010). These Buddhist temples are also significant to Hindus. Hindus pray to Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu in these temples, while Buddhists pray to Lord Buddha in the same temple. There are several additional temples in and around Kathmandu that are historically significant as well as the best instances of Hindu-Buddhist religious harmony (Tamang,2022). Many Hindus visit Lumbini, Bouddha, and Shoyambhunath to worship to Buddha as an incarnation of God Vishnu, while Buddhists visit Pashupati and other temples to pray to Buddha.

What one observes in Nepal goes beyond religious tolerance; it may be referred to as religious acceptance among the many communities. People from many ethnic and religious origins worship certain common deities in addition to their clan or family deities. Each religion values and respects the culture and traditions of the other. Many Hindus visit Buddhist Shrines on a regular basis, believing Buddha to be an incarnation of Vishnu and celebrating their celebrations as Hindu festivals. Temples, paintings, and even sculptures have portrayed religious harmony.

Inter-religious harmony between Hindu- Buddhist religious groups

Buddhism, along with other minor religions, existed in ancient Nepal. Hindus surround them in almost every location where they dwell. It clearly has a stronger influence on culture and belief systems. Buddhists and Hindus disagree theologically (Bajracharya,2022). However, Buddha is revered in Hindu society as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, and Buddhism as a component of Hindu religion, as seen by Nepalese art and architecture, as well as temple . Followers; whether Hindus or Buddhists, respect one another in terms of faith.

Most Hindu worshippers' visit Buddhist shrines and Buddhists do the same. Other religious people are not permitted to worship at Hindu temples except the Buddhist. Normally, Buddhists are opposed to animal sacrifices, which Hindus do, however in Kathmandu Valley, Buddhists perform animal sacrifices as well as offer wine and non-veg goods at temples (Lama,2022).

Ganesh is the most visible example of religious harmony in Nepal between Hindu and Buddhist religious groups. Hindus worship Ganesh as a vegetarian God and bring him sweets, although Kathmandu's Buddhists (the Newars) offer wine and non-veg meals and perform sacrifices in the same temple where the priests are Brahmins. On the same row, Hindus serve sweets and Buddhists serve alcoholic beverages and non-vegetarian meals, as well as perform sacrifices. They are both at ease when worshipping to Ganesh (Bajracharya, 2022)

Reasons behind religious harmony

Social acceptance

The Hindu majority recognized Buddhism as a component of Hindu religion, while Buddhists, despite their doctrinal differences with Hindus, regarded Buddhism as an integral element of society. People from many ethnic and religious origins worship certain common deities in addition to their clan or family deities (Tamang,2022). Each religion values and respects the culture and traditions of the other. Many Hindus visit Buddhist Shrines on a regular basis, believing Buddha to be an incarnation of Vishnu and celebrating their celebrations as Hindu festivals. All important religious festivals of various religious groups are awarded holidays. Temples, paintings, and even temples have portrayed religious harmony (Bajracharya,2022).

Mutual Respect

Buddhists were honored by the monarchs and given high ranking positions in the palace during the Monarchical period, whether it was ancient, medieval, or modern Nepal. There was a Buddhist chief secretary to the Hindu King from the Bajracharya family. Buddhists were offered high-level posts in all aspect of society, not only the palace. Buddhists assist society in many capacities as public workers, medical professionals, engineers, and university professors (Bajrachary, 2022).

Co-operation

The notion of cooperation is critical in developing positive relationships amongst religious groups. They will appreciate and tolerate various religions if this aspect is present in their lives. Cooperation may be demonstrated in their actions, such as honoring religious festivities, customs, and beliefs in their society. Both Hindus and Buddhist celebrate Buddhapurnima, Dashain and other festivals as their own holiday (Ojha,2016).

Equal Rights

The Nepalese constitution grants Buddhists equal rights without discrimination for their status as a minority. From the outset, Buddhist has had equal rights to their Hindu counterparts in areas such as civil rights, political rights, freedom of expression, and property rights (Bajracharya,2022). Buddhists have even occupied positions of power. The proportion is not disheartening. Many renowned Buddhists are parliamentarians, ministers, higher-ranking public servants, academics, attorneys, scientists, medical practitioners, engineers, and so on. They have both contributed to the development of the country.

Conclusion

It is crucial to understand that living in a tranquil society free from conflict and tension is essential for the advancement of the country. Nobody wants to live in a world where there is strife, conflict, or war. Therefore, religious communities must strengthen their solidarity and unity in order to create a harmonious society. Interreligious harmony should be built on mutual respect and trust amongst various faith traditions. Religious acceptance among the many communities is what one sees in Nepal, which is different from other countries. Along with their clan or family deities, people of many ethnic and religious backgrounds worship a number of common deities. As can be seen in the following, each religion in Nepal values and respects the traditions and culture of the others. The Nepali temples are a symbol of Hindu-Buddhist religious harmony in Nepal.

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