

Study of Nepali Sculptures Reveals Hindu-Buddhist Religious Harmony in Nepal

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Abstracts

In a multi-religious country like Nepal, religious harmony is essential for sustaining peace and calmness. Religious discord in society may result if religious concord is not addressed. Despite the fact that Nepal is a secular country with a Hindu majority, Buddhists remain crucial and inseparable elements of Nepalese society. They have lived in religious harmony in Nepal. At the period, there were no religious riots or tensions between Hindus and Buddhists. According to the Principle of Religious concord, when two cultures meet and interact, religious ideas will be exchanged, with the dominant culture prevailing. Harmony in cultures and customs evolved in Nepal for a variety of reasons. Because of their social acceptance and respect in society, Buddhists have become a vital part of it. Buddhism is seen as a component of Hindu philosophy by Hindus, and vice versa. In recent years, however, they have sought to differentiate themselves by religiously violating decades of peace and harmony. The purpose of this research is to examine the critical factors that contribute to religious harmony in a multi-faith society, as well as the reflection of religious harmony in Nepali sculptures. An in-depth interview and library research technique are used to investigate the topic of religious harmony. The goal of this article is to examine the underlying factors that lead to religious harmony in a multi-religious community, as well as its reflection in Nepali sculptures. This study also looks at the elements that influence harmony in the setting of Nepali sculptures. As a result, the conversation strives to foster long-term religious harmony between Nepal's Hindu and Buddhist religious communities. The findings may motivate them to keep strong connections.

Keywords: *Sculptures- Hindu-Buddhist Relations- Religious Understanding- Conflict-Acceptance*

Introduction

Nepal is home to many different ethnic groups. Many castes, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groupings have ancestral roots there. The Hindu community of Nepal makes up the great bulk of the country's population. There are many other religious people in Nepal. According to the 2011 census, there are 126 caste/ethnic groups and 123 mother tongue languages. Nepali is the first language of 44.6 percent of the population. There are ten religion categories, 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(609) are the next most popular religions (<https://mofa.gov.np>). Different religious groups make up the Nepali national population.

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Religious harmony refers to the blending of many religious ideas and practices. It is the merging of diverse faiths, cultures, rituals, and ideas. According to the Principle of Religious harmony, when two cultures meet and interact, religious ideas will be exchanged, with the dominant culture prevailing. Cultural harmony and customs evolved in Nepal for a variety of reasons (Charles, 2020).

In India and China, religious harmony can also be seen society but not in the sculptures. During the time of Ashoka, India and China were the epicenters of religious harmony (<https://www.khanacademy.org>). In Tibet, traditional Bön religion coexisted with Buddhism but later on it has changed. In Nepal, the Licchavi era was a golden age for religious harmony. The Licchavis are completely Hindus, however they hold a high reverence for Buddhism (Shrestha, 2005). The blending of Buddhism with Hindu art was the major attraction at the period. The Malla rulers created a number of statues which respects the opposite religion and reflects religious harmony. Even during the Shah Period, religious harmony was visible in Nepali art.

What one sees in Nepal goes beyond religious tolerance; it may be called religious acceptance among the many communities. People of many ethnic and religious backgrounds worship common deities in addition to clan or family deities. Each religion recognizes and respects the other's culture and traditions. Many Hindus often visit Buddhist Shrines, believing Buddha to be an incarnation of Vishnu and celebrating their festivals as Hindu festivals (Puri, 2019). All major religious festivals of various religious organizations are designated as holidays. Religious harmony has been shown in temples, paintings, and even sculpture.

Theologically, Buddhists and Hindus differ. However, in Hindu civilization, Buddha is worshipped as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, and Buddhism is a component of Hindu religion, as indicated by Nepalese art and architecture, as well as temple sculpture. Such concerns have yet to be adequately investigated

Buddhists and Hindus coexist in distinct geographical areas. Their belief system, rites, and rituals may vary from area to region and sect to sect, yet they all follow the same religion: Buddhism (Puri, 2019). Buddhists, notably the Theravadis, strove to distance themselves from Hindus, however other sects, as seen by Nepali artwork, accept Hinduism as their own faith.

Scholars have not paid enough attention to the religious harmony between Hindu and Buddhist sculpture, and it has not yet been scientifically explored.

No comprehensive research on religious harmony in Nepali art has been published, with the exception of K.M. Shrestha, Uddav Puri, Niranjana Ojha, Mohd Ikhwan Izzat Zulkefli, and Charles Taylor. So far, all available works are concentrated only on the issue of syncretism. Academics and other researchers have not prioritized the theme of religious harmony in Nepali art when defining study concerns. These are generic studies that do not discuss harmony in Nepali sculpture. All of these literatures are evaluated prior to doing research. All of these sources are assessed before commencing the inquiry.

K. M. Shrestha (2005). "Religious Syncretism and the Context of Buddhism in

Medieval Nepal" discusses religious syncretism between Hindu and Buddhist religious groups in depth. This paper focuses on religious peace in medieval Nepal. It has nothing to do with sculpting.

"Towards ensuring inter-religious harmony in a multi-religious society of Perak," by Zulkefli, M.I, Endut, M.N.A, Abdullah, M.R.T.L, and Baharuddin, A. (2018), addressed the state's religious harmony. This research emphasizes the significance of components like as acceptance, understanding, collaboration, as well as right and justice, in maintaining religious harmony in a multi-faith society, but it does not discuss harmony in sculpture. Puri, U. (2019), "Religious and Cultural Syncretism in Nepal Based on the Nation's Laws," investigates the themes of religious and cultural harmony among Hindu-Buddhist religious groups in Nepal. It simply evaluates the key laws in the country that are responsible for religious syncretism. Puri, U. (2019), "Religious and Cultural Syncretism: A Study of Swoyambhu," investigates the socio-cultural syncretism that exists between Hindu and Buddhist religious communities. It is primarily concerned with the worshipping attitudes of two religious communities. Charles, T. (2020), "A Revisitation of Religious Syncretism in Twentieth Century Yemen" which focuses on religious syncretism in Yemen but does not address religious harmony in the sculptures of different religious groups. Ojha, N. (2021) points out the inter-religious harmony between Hindu-Muslim religious group of Nepal but don't cover its reflection on sculpture.

These diverse themes give significant information on numerous facets of religious harmony, but prior research had not addressed the reflection of harmony in Nepali sculptures and 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. This research aims at identifying a number of unidentified problems in the concerned research.

Some national and international papers and study sought to investigate the topic of religious harmony among Nepal's diverse religious sects, but they did not address harmonic reflection on Nepali sculpture.

The purpose of this study is to discover some unidentified concerns of religious harmony in Nepali sculptures.

The study seeks to answer the following question:

1. The religious harmony in Hindu-Buddhist sculptures is the beauty of Nepali society.
2. Interreligious peace between Hindus and Buddhists is seen in Nepali sculpture.

The goal of this study is -

1. To evaluate the religious confluence in Hindu-Buddhist art.
2. To look at interreligious peace in Nepali sculpture

Method and Materials

The descriptive and analytical methods are used in this study. It drew on both original and secondary sources. The relevance of the field research and in-depth interviews in gathering primary data has been emphasized. For information, the researcher reviewed different papers, books, reports, and other written materials, as well as several local social/religious groups and organizations, and experts. Primary sources have received special attention. The observation, interview, and conversation methods were used to acquire firsthand data from relevant stakeholders. In this study, the theoretical framework of Emile Durkheim's religion theory was used. The library research approach is mostly utilized for secondary information. Books, journal papers, internet websites, and relevant publications have been correctly cited. For this research, all of the material gathered has been categorized, summarized, and examined, and some reflection has taken place.

This research is restricted to a historical examination of religious harmony between Nepali Hindu and Buddhist sculptures. The social, political, legal, economic, and other dimensions of religious harmony and other religions are not included in this work.

Discussion

Nepal, a tiny Himalayan country, is home to many casts, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Nepal's Hindu population constitutes the vast majority of the country's population. In addition, there are religious minorities from different religions who live in Nepal. When we look at Nepali sculptures, we see that the majority of them are dedicated to different sects of Hindu deities (Tamang, 2022). Buddhist temples are few and far between in Kathmandu and elsewhere. Religious folks worship their deities at these temples according to their religion. A Hindu worships the God within a temple as Hindu God, but a Buddhist worships the same God as his/her Buddhist deities. It is not just practiced in Kathmandu Valley, but across Nepal (Lama, 2022).

During the Licchavi dynasty in Nepal, Buddhism was significantly more prevalent. The Licchavis are the traditional Hindus, although they have a high regard for Buddhism. Many Buddhist temples were erected and sculpture were carved in Kathmandu during this time period. The main appeal of this time was the incorporation of Buddhism into Hindu art. Such fusion may be found in numerous temples erected during the Licchavi era (Ojha, 2016).

Fusion of Buddhism in Hindu Temple and Vice-Versa

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 Licchavi King, according to historical sources (Puri, 2020). Swayambhunath is a well-known Buddhist sacred place in Kathmandu Valley. It 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, some of which date back to the Licchavi dynasty (Puri, 2019). 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 (Puri, 2019). According to the Gopalrajvamsabali, it was founded at the beginning of the 5th century CE by King Vishvdeva, 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 Harmonic reflection.

Another popular 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 sculpture of sleeping Vishnu at the temple is the biggest stone sculpture of the Licchavi era. If we look closely at the statue of sleeping Vishnu, we may see Buddha's forehead in the Vishnu sculpture. 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 sculpture (Tamang, 2022).

The Bhairav 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, 2067). 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 Rimpoche is worshiped by Buddhists (Ojha, 2016).

The well-known Bhimeshwor temple may be 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. 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 (Bajracharya,2022). 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(Ojha,2016). 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, 2067). 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 sculpture in and around Kathmandu that are historically significant as well as the best instances of Hindu-Buddhist religious harmony. 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 sculpture have portrayed religious harmony.

Religious Harmony between Hindu- Buddhist religious groups in Nepal

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. 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 sculptures. Hindus or Buddhists, followers respect one another in terms of faith (Tamang, 2022).

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)

Causes behind religious Syncretism

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. 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 (Ojha,2016). Temples, paintings, and even sculpture have portrayed religious syncretism.

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 political leaders, 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 (Lama,2022). Both Hindus and Buddhist celebrate Buddhapurnima, Dashain and other festivals as their own holiday.

Constitutional Rights

The Nepalese constitution grants Buddhists equal rights without discrimination for their status as a minority (Timilceena and Shrestha,2072 B.S.). 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 (Timilceena and Shrestha,2072 B.S.). 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 critical to recognize that living in a peaceful community free of conflict and tension is important for national progress. Nobody in this world wants to live in a state of tension, conflict, or war. Thus, in order to establish a peaceful community, religious groups must develop their unity and solidarity. Inter-religious peace should be established on mutual trust and respect among diverse faith groups. What one observes in Nepal goes beyond religious tolerance; it may be referred to as religious acceptance among the many communities. Religion is one of the pillars of national integration and social stability. People from many ethnic and religious origins worship certain common deities in addition to their clan or family deities. Each religion in Nepal respects and loves the culture and traditions of the other, as can be seen in Nepalese sculptures. The Nepali sculptures are a symbol of Hindu-Buddhist religious harmony in Nepal.

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