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Adinath Temple – An Everyday Social Dance of the Buddhist-Hindu Cultural Co-existence

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Abstract

This is an ethnographic study of the local community's relation with Adinath temple located in Chobhar, Kirtipur, and their perception and meaning making of such relation with the Adinath. This study examines how both the Hindu and Buddhist devotees visiting the Adinath temple relate their own religious and cultural identities and associations with the temple. It follows explorative and interpretive approach to gain the insider perspectives of the local residents and their meaning making in relation to their association with the Adinath. Further, it has explored the issue of Hindu-Buddhist polytropic existence based on the concept discussed by David Gellner (2005). Employing ethnographic methodology, it has examined how the local people made sense of both the Hindu-Buddhist cultural contours of the temple, the associated legends and stories, and the complex cosmology of their everyday experience with Adinath, living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

Key Words: Cultural Co-existence, Buddhism, Hinduism, Temples as Social Institutions, Adinath, Ethnography.

Reaching the Temple – the Journey

One July morning in 2023, I visited Adinath temple for the observation of its unique Buddhist-Hindu cultural associations. I got out of my hostel at Tyanglaphant, Kirtipur at around five in the morning. It took me around forty-five minutes to reach Adinath temple. The sky was cloudy, and it

was raining lightly. I had visited the temple only once before, when I was studying M.A. Anthropology in the central department of Anthropology, Kirtipur. It was an excursion around the Chobhar hills with my class fellows. It had almost been around four years since that maiden visit. Instead of taking the usual route to the temple I happened to take the less frequented and a longer route through the outskirts of the dense Panga settlement. However, this longer route seemed very much rewarding with the scenery of the dark green Chobhar hills and some scattered patches of paddy fields in between the starkly standing concrete houses. The patches of the paddy fields had really grown smaller and almost on the verge of extinction in comparison to my last visit. I asked myself, "How can I be that selfish to complain the residents for building houses in erstwhile fertile and green land and lessening my scenic satisfaction and contributing environmental deterioration?" Reflecting back, what would be my total carbon footprint; would I have a lesser or greater carbon footprint had I led a different life, say the life of a peasant? Am I not guilty of consuming more resources than many others in this country in the name of my higher education? Am I giving back something to the society or just enjoying my academic and non-academic pursuits? Despite this reflective monologue, I was really disappointed with the reduced green patches of paddy fields around Panga and Chobhar.

This alternative route took me to a narrow dirt road winding up to a small hill. There was a huge *peepal* tree and shrubs had grown thick on either side of the road. As it was a deserted path, and it was still not fully morning, a chill of fear and insecurity ran through my spine. I did not know the exact path to the Adinath, so I waited there for someone to pass by. There were no houses nearby and no sign of any people. Moments later, two people, one in their mid-fifties and the other in around 30s came by. They seemed to be in their morning walk trip. I asked them the way to Adinath, and they showed me the deserted small muddy road hidden in the overgrown shrubs. With some curiosity and a little sense of adventure, I walked up the muddy and slippery path, which soon met with another

bigger road coming down from the temple. With a sigh of relief, I walked more care freely and confidently like a small girl dancing in her new pretty dress. There were few women with "*Puja thali*" coming down from the side of the temple. I asked them, "*Mandir yetai ho*? (Is the temple in this direction?) They said, "*ho yetai bata janu, ekchoti ghumepachhi pugchh"* (Yeah this is the way, you turn once and there is the temple).

I reached the temple at around six-thirty. Now, coming to why I chose this place for the purpose of this study, in my first trip to this temple I was fascinated by two phenomena. One was the presence of the Buddhist *maane (*the metal cylinders with religious inscriptions turned by the devotees to gain religious merits) around a *Shiva* temple, and the next was the presence of huge number of brass plates and other utensils pinned to the inner walls of the temple's courtyard. Besides, in my academic engagements in the university we had discussed a paper of David Gellner (2005) on Hindu-Buddhist polytropy in Kathmandu Valley. This led me to explore for myself how this related to the actual life of the people in different places inside Kathmandu Valley, and how they gave meaning to these shared cultural spaces in their everyday life.

When I reached the hill top, where the temple was situated, I felt refreshed despite an uphill trek. The ambience there seemed serene and calm. May be my own habitus of going to temple kicked in to give me that feeling. Bourdieu (2020) talks about our social actions as becoming habitus over the period of time. So, here may be due to that institutionalization of my habits cultivated by the society I live in, made me feel the divinity and serenity of that place. But at that time, I did not think of it, and I only felt very relaxed. Besides, the natural scenery from the hill top was simply beautiful. Could we also add this issue of what is beautiful and what is not beautiful as a form of habitus of our thinking patterns? Is my agency so complexly woven with the societal structures and the social perceptions that my actions are part of the cosmology of beliefs and thinking patterns that I grew up with? Saubhagya Shah says

that we can still make our sense of agency prominent despite the social structures we live in. In his account of the women of Bhiman, he shows that the women have come together to defy the patriarchal norms to work for the social reforms (Shah, 2018). Saba Mahamood in her narration of the stories of the Egyptian women's mosque movement argues that, agency need not be seen isolation with the existing societal structures. The Egyptian women started their own mosque prayers to enhance the position of women in Islamic rituals. In this regard, the women coming to the temple including me happens in the existing societal framework dominated by patriarchal values (Mahmood, 2001). However, this relationship is complex and there are diverse manifestations of women agency in their ritualistic temple visit, which I experienced during my observation, and will narrate below.

The Temple Courtyard and its Cosmology

I entered the temple from the eastern side. As I entered through a narrow door situated in the thick wall of the outer periphery, I could see a spacious courtyard of the Newari architecture, where the devotees were going around a smaller temple in the front and a bigger one on the rear end. There was a kind a hustle and bustle yet it was not chaotic, the hustle and bustle had its own order. The bells in the temples were continuously ringing, as the devotees took their turn to ring them. Most of the women in the courtyard were carrying *puja thali* (plate filled with offerings), and were offering raw rice, flowers, sesame and barley seeds to the deities. On the right side of the eastern entrance, was a stone sculpture of a deity. I couldn't clearly see the face of the deity as there was not enough light due to the narrow walls of the courtyard. A man in his mid-thirties was greeting the deity with folded hands, as Buddhist chant was being played in the mobile in his jeans pocket. I thought that this was the sculpture of Buddha. Later, I went back to see this sculpture when there was no one offering the *puja*, I could see that it was not the Buddha's sculpture. A moment later, a woman came with her *puja thali* and sprinkled few grains of rice and other seeds over the deity. I asked her about the deity. She told

me it was the statue of Mahakal (a fierce manifestation of Lord Shiv). The man who was playing Buddhist chant in his mobile and doing the *puja* of Mahakal made me hopeful that I could get many such examples of what I presumed about polytropic condition as stated by Gellner (2005). Unfortunately, I could not talk to him, as he quickly vanished in thin air, when I was just organizing myself on how to proceed with my observation and interviews.

Picture 1: *Manes* around the Mahadev Temple. Picture by Author.

Later, I asked another lady about the deity. She said in Nepal Bhasa that it was a *dya:* (God). She did not say the name and didn't care to distinguish one deity from the other. *Puja thali* of various shapes and sizes, some full with the offerings some nearly empty indicating they had almost finished offering to the deities. Not a single man was carrying *puja thali*. Is it because of the division of labor between the men and the women? The household management of grains, food items and cooking came into the

hands of the women. It seemed the *puja thali* filled with grains and edible offerings fell in the domain of the women. Or, maybe, there are other aspects to this. Are women more devotional than men? If so, what made these women more devotional than men? Is it extended part of their devotion to their husband and family values, inculcated by the social and kinship structures? How much of this is drawn from the religious values where we try to seek the supreme god through devotion? This socio-cultural governance on the basis of religion, myths and rituals also could have influenced the gender roles. During my observation, I saw a few men lighting incense and *diya* (a small earthen oil lamp) and carrying water in the copper vessels as an offering to the deities. However, most of other males visiting the temple came empty handed and offered hand prostrations only. Some of them offered currency notes of rupees five or ten as an offering.

Temple as a Social Space

The courtyard of the Adinath had a cosmology of its own. Besides the *darshan* (seeing the deity) and *puja* of the deities, a lot of other activities were going on around the temple courtyard. The activities were a reflection of everyday lives of the people living around the temple. Some were stretching their body and performing light exercises. I asked a group of four people in their forties, who seemed to be from Hindu caste groups, if they exercised their daily? They said that it was a simple stretching after a long (morning) walk up the hill all the way from Panga. One woman in t-shirt and loose trousers said, "we come almost daily." Smiling she said, "it benefits two ways – it is good for the body and for the accumulation of *dharma* (religious merit) through *darshan* of the deity." Dahal and others focusing on cultural spaces in villages of Nepal, argue that the cultural spaces are utilized by different cultural, religious, social, ethnic, and caste groups for different activities (Bishnu Prasad Dahal et al., 2025). Three Newar women were standing on one side of the courtyard talking to each other. They all were carrying *puja thali*. They seemed to have finished their *puja* offerings and were having a casual

conversation. As like, while fetching water from *kuwa* (water well) *and dhaara* (tap), the women seemed to use this temple space as a means to share their feelings with one another. A question arises are there enough public social institutions in our society where women can participate freely? Traditionally, public works seemed to fall in the domain of the males in the Nepali societies. In the case of ethnic communities, women are allowed to trade, take part in outdoor fests and festivals, *dohori* (a cultural singing contests between male and female) and other singing and dancing occasions. The women of Newar community are also somewhat active in economic and social activities including trade and other social events. However, public social spaces still seem to be limited to these women of Nepal in comparison to the males. Here, the temple courtyard provided a space to the local women to talk and share with each other. But these women did not sit and chat, like other males. Maybe they don't have much time to sit around and talk for a longer time as they have to go back to their homes and look after the food preparation and other household works. Or, it is not taken as a good social norm for women to casually sit around in public places without any work.

There were few people in the courtyard who were feeding the grains to the pigeons flying around. After they emptied their plastic bags, I approached one of them and casually started the conversation, "*parewa harulai khuwaunu vako*? (feeding the pigeons?)." The man smiled and said, "*alikati dana haldeko ni* (yeah, feeding some grains)." He explained that the pigeons were part of the temple, the people around the temple release them for *bhakal* (a kind of religious pledge with the deity to offer something in return for the success of particular aspect of their life). The people around the temple believed in gaining merit by feeding them. This *bhakal* can be seen as a part of the social contract and reciprocity (Mauss, 1954). This reciprocity with the deity in the peasant society of Kathmandu is celebrated through the social institutions like *guthis* and religious *jatras* (festivals) as that of Machhendranath (the rain god). The Newar people of Kathmandu worship the Machhendranath asking for timely rain and good

harvest in return. The Adinath lokeshwar or Anandadi lokeshwar is also regarded as a form of the *Rato* (Red) Machhendranath.

Nature, Farming, Livelihood and Rituals

To the people of Kathmandu, Machhendranath shows the relations of the nature, livelihood, agriculture and the rituals related to nature worship. However, as the concept of nation state grew stronger, the rise of the organized religions (Justinger, 1977) led to the subjugation of certain communities in favor of the rulers. Janak Rai in his studies of Dhimals of the eastern terai (Rai, 2014) shows the relation of their rituals with the forces of nature and their livelihood patterns. Rai argues that the Dhimals were dependent on the hunting and foraging activities for their livelihood. They were not much of a farming community as whatever they cultivated was eaten or destroyed by wild animals. So, to protect themselves and their limited crops from the wild animals and other forces of nature they performed rituals for these natural forces (Rai, 2014: 93,94). The present organized religions have roots in the nature worship, and the agricultural society. However, today, the more institutionalized religions seem to have incorporated more elements of power dominance and political governance. This can also be explored in the *rig vedic* agricultural association of the Hindu religion with the deities such as Indra (Rain God), Agni (Fire God), Bayu (Air God), and Barun (water god) (Adhikari, 2012). However, more focus on the exercise of social ordering through political organization of religions seemed to have undermined the farming connection of the religions. Hofer presents an account of how *Manu Smriti* was taken as the basis of *Muluki Ain* to govern Nepal on the basis of caste hierarchy (Hofer, 1979). As we progressed in agriculture, the sense of territory, power and 'othering' (Trouillot, 2003) gradually took over our rituals based on nature, farming, and everyday social relations. As Kathmandu was regarded as one of the most fertile valleys in Nepal, the association of the rituals and religion with the everyday farming activities seems very much obvious. Adinath, the manifestation

of the rain god Rato Macchendranath provides the agricultural connection of the religion here.

Adinath Temple – A case of polytropic existence?

The Adinath temple built in pagoda style architecture is located in the western part of the courtyard. It is interesting to note that, the temple is built adjoint with other structures which are used as the quarters for the priests and their family, and for other activities. I bought a *diya* and lighted it in the altar of the main temple. There was an iron barricade which did not allow the devotees to enter inside the temple. A woman was standing behind the barricade to receive the offerings from the devotees, which she passed to the priest sitting inside the temple. The priest offered the offerings to the Adinath idol. Standing outside the barricade, I gave ten rupees note to the women as an offering, and asked her if we could go inside the temple? She said that previously there was no barricade, however due to the excessive rush the barricade was built to manage the crowd. Later, I found that even without the barricades the devotees could not directly touch either the priest of the Adinath idol.

The priest and later another devotee, Bhaikaji Maharjan (name changed) of Nayabazar, Kirtipur said that the temple was managed by a *guthi* headed by five senior and respected representatives of the local community. They are selected almost unanimously on the basis of interest, genealogical legacy, and other social factors. The *guthi* is responsible for the management of the appointment of the priest, daily administration, financial management and organization of special *jatras* (festivals). The priest comes from the local Shakya families which take their turn to act as the priest. The priest is appointed for a period of one month only, and has to live inside the temple with his family under severe restrictions of norms related to food and other moral codes. They can only eat certain things and have to restrain from others regarded as impure according to the local norms. I asked the priest about the rotation pattern of the priests, and he said that maybe it is very difficult to follow all the

rules and regulations and moral codes for a longer period of time. He also said that it is a matter of religious merit and so people want to take this responsibility despite difficult lifestyle and strict moral observations. I am not sure if it has other dimensions as well. For example, the people have their own occupations and may not be able to spare time for a longer duration, so the arrangement of rotating the priests every month. On the financial part, the offerings directly made inside the temples is taken as remuneration by the priest. Other offerings collected from the donation boxes and direct donations are managed by the *guthi* for the operation of the temple. When asked to the priest about the collection of offerings, he said that, it was valuable as *Prasad* (divine blessing) instead of any monetary value. However, an elderly Newar man, in seventies, who was going around the temple prostrating with his two folded hands said that a substantial amount of money and grains is collected in the form of offerings. Another respondent Bhaikaji Maharjan explained that the total offering at the end of the month is big. He further said that, however, there has been no conflict in the name of money and other financial issues amongst the local people. It seemed that the priests and the local Shakya clan enjoy a level of social status and power due to their position. At present due to the formalization of the governance in the form of bureaucracy and representative governments, the political leverage of these priests may not be as significant as before. However, the socio-cultural power of the priests and priest clans seems to be still apparent in the community.

In one of my later visits, there were some dogs inside the courtyard playing together and going after some people for food. When I was taking out my jotting diary from the bag, the dogs seemed to think that I am taking out some food. They came after me and started becoming friendly with me wagging their tail and sniffing my clothes. They tried to climb up to my bag for three times. One of the dogs sniffed my jotting diary. I said to them, "Why are you sniffing me, there is no food with me." Hearing me they slowly went away as if they understood what I said. When I was

talking to the dogs, the people around me were laughing. Among them was an elderly Newar lady in her sixties, who was looking at me. I went to her and asked about a smaller temple in front of the grand Adinath temple. She said, *yo deuta ho* (this is a deity), I asked her which deity, and she repeated it is *deuta* (deity). To her, all those sculptures were deities. Then I asked her why was there *mane* around the Shiv temple. She said that those *manes* were always there. For her, it was not a matter concern whether Buddhist *mane* was there around the Shiva temple. It was very difficult to tell if she identified those structures as Hindu and Buddhist. After some conversation she said to me, in the tone as if she had remembered something, there is a Buddha statue in the *bhajan* (religious hymns and songs) hall. *Bhajan* hall was on the right side of the cubic courtyard. She asked another woman who was walking nearby in Nepal Bhasa if there was a Budhha sculpture inside the *bhajan place.* The second *aama* (motherly lady) confirmed it and said there are both statues of Budhha and Krishna at the same place. I asked her, why they have kept those statues at the same place. She replied "*sabai deuta ko rakhnu parch ni* (we should keep the statues of all deities)". Then those ladies talked with each other in Nepal Bhasa saying, "अन न्हेपस्यादय: न डु" (ana nhepsyadya: na do). Due to the benefit of understanding Nepal Bhasa, I could comprehend what the mothers were talking. न्हेप (nheypa) means ear, स्या (syaa) means pain, and द्य (dya:) means god. I asked them where the deity that cured ear aches was? With an expression of surprise that I could understand their language, she pointed to a small pit filled with water in front of the Mahadev temple. The second woman explained, if we offer rice, beetle nut, and money in a small earthen pot all ear problems are cured. She shared her own experience of being cured sometimes ago. As we were standing very near to the *mane,* I took the opportunity to understand their perception regarding the placement of *manes* around a Mahadev temple. I asked them what was the reason to keep the *mane* and symbol of *bajra* (Buddhist symbol) around the Mahadev temple. One of the elderly women replied, "there is the mantra of *Om mane padme om*

inside these *manes*, if we rotate these even once we get a lot of religious merits and our sins are reduced. So, these are kept here.*"* None of them were concerned to differentiate whether any of the structures, or even idols symbolized Buddhist gods or Hindu gods. Both of them took these structures as the regular part of their religious cosmology, and didn't seem to feel they were any different. However, a local Newar Hindu, teacher by profession, shared that he had heard from other learned people that Mahadev was worshipped in Kathmandu even before Hinduism and Buddhism flourished. He guessed this might have influenced both the Hindu and Buddhist followers to worship Mahadev as their own deity. Dhanavajra Vajracharya supports the idea of Shaivism's influence before the rise of Buddhism and Hinduism in Kathmandu Valley (Vajracharya, 1996).

Similarly, I talked to the other women who also said that this was always like this. On the course of our conversation, she gave me additional information that the *jaatra* (festival) of Adinath happens every year on the month of Kartik. She had a very interesting opinion about Adinath. She shared that Adinath was half male and half female (*aadi* means half), hence the deity was named as Adinath. All other whom I had talked with gave different accounts of the nature and origin of Adinath, but this was different from all other versions, bringing the gendered notion on the nature of Adinath. Here we can not only say about the polytropic existence of Hindu-Buddhist relations but more importantly polytropic nature of understanding of one's rituals, dharma and deities as per one's own perceptions shaped by their unique social contexts. The lady explained that on the day of Asthami (eighth day) in the month of Chaitra, the feet of the Adinath is taken to Nakhkhu River beside the Chobhar hills, where the statue of the Adinath was first found. Adinath is kept in a cave for a night. During this occasion, the auspicious rite of passage rituals like *janku* (the rituals carried out in the eighty fourth year of one's life) and *bara teu* (cave ceremony for girls marking the coming of age) are performed.

Similarly, she talked about the local *Bayal deuta (deity)* which according to her is a manifestation of Buddha. This statue is taken out on the day of *Janai Poornima* (the full moon which generally falls in the months of August) and *Buddha Poornima* (the full moon which generally falls in the month of May) and procession is organized around the village. In a humorous tone she said that God cannot walk so we carry them around (laughing heartily). Before departing, she asked me to visit the temple regularly, and shared that she comes to the temple regularly; to her it had become a habit and felt uneasy whenever she missed.

Picture: 2 Idols of Buddha, Ram, and Krishna placed together in the *Bhajan* Hall. Picture by Author

Finally, I decided to go to the *bhajan hall* (a place for singing religious songs in a group) from where the sound of the *bhajan* singing was coming. It was a narrow rectangular hall of around 12 feet by 8 feet. Directly in front of the entrance was the medium sized statue of the Buddha in the sleeping position kept inside a decorated glass box. Inside the same glass box smaller statue of Krishna was also kept. Whenever anyone entered the hall, they offered their prostrations bowing down in

front of the glass box. When I entered, the men on the *Tabla* (A pair of rounded drum instruments played while seated) who had also noticed me outside called me and offered a cushion to sit beside him. I glanced around the hall, around eight people (five male, three female) were there singing and playing local musical instruments. One of the Newar men in his 40s was taking lead in singing the *bhajan* over the mike. The posters of almost all the deities of Hindu religion could be seen around the upper section of the walls. A man in his 70s gave me *jhyali* (a musical instrument played by beating together its two metal plates). I tried to play it in the rhythm as far as I could. Seeing my inability, the man in the *Tabla* showed me how to play it. The man who was singing the *bhajan* on mike gave me a *bhajan* book and turned the pages for the *bhajan* he was singing. I followed him and started singing *bhajan* reading from the book. The *bhajan* was in Nepal Bhasa.

इया:लन फ्य दया, मतजक सित

jhya:lah: fya daya, matajaka seeta

यो माँ इया: तीगु गय ? //धु//

Yo ma: jhya: tegu gaya?

The wind is coming from the window and the light goes off.

This song says that the worldly forces put out the light burning inside us. After this *bhajan* two more *bhajan* were in Nepal Bhasa, which were followed by *bhajan*s of Krishna and Mahadev (Hindu deities) in Nepali. I noticed that one of the *bhajan*s in Nepal Bhasa was about Buddha. There were at least three to four types of *bhajan* books there. One with the Buddhist *bhajan* was published by a committee in Swayambhunath (one of the main Buddhist temples of Kathmandu which is also worshipped by the Hindus as their own deity).

After a few rounds of *bhajan*, tea was offered by a caste group Hindu woman. The five males asked for milk tea, however after sometime black

tea was served. One of them satirically remarked, "thank you for the milk tea." Sipping my tea, I was wondering who the lady was and how is she related to the temple and who was paying for the tea, how was it all managed. However, I could see the involvement of both Buddhist and Hindu communities involved in the management of the temple. During tea, I asked one of the elder men about the Budhha and Krishna Statue being kept together. He explained, Buddha is *ahimsako deuta* (God of non-violence), and Adinath is also God of non-violence so these deities are kept together. He said that Adinath is a vegetarian god and non-veg items and alcohol is prohibited as an offering. He asked me to read a sign board on one side of the entrance indicating that the non-vegetarian offerings are not allowed. Talking about the history of the Adinath, he also said about the finding of the statue in the Nakhkhu river but with a little variation. He said that it was found by the local peasants.

One of the men in the *bhajan* team gave the detailed classification of the linkage between Adinath and the rain god Machhindranath linking the rituals and religious practices to the nature, farming and everyday livelihood practices. According to him, the *Buddhist mane* was there around the Mahadev temple because Mahadev is also regarded as one of the deities in Buddhism.

Similarly, in my long conversation Manoj Shakya, one of the forty-two Shakya priests who are authorized to act as the main priest of the temple on a monthly rotation basis, described how both Hindu and Buddhist groups have devotion towards the Adinath temple. According to Manoj, Adinath is associated with the *utpati* (creation) of the world. In his own words, "when the Kathmandu Valley was a big lake, known as Kalidaha, Manjushree came from Tibet and made this valley habitable." Manoj believes that the origin of this world is only explained by Buddhism. He views that Hindu Dharma do not explicitly explain the creator of the three main deities – Brahma, Bishnu and Maheshwor. According to him Hinduism later incorporated Buddha as the tenth incarnation of the God

Narayan. He cautions that Buddha described by Hinduism is Shakya Muni Buddha who is one the many Buddhas mentioned in Buddhist texts. He believes that Buddhism is ancient to Hinduism. Shakya also shared that the Hindus also pray Anandadi lokeshwar (Buddhist revere Adinath as Anandadi lokshwar) as their own deity due to their faith, and many of them pray there out of pure devotion to the lord without knowing about the deeper religious identity and association with a particular religious ideology.

Explaining the presence of Hindu deities like Ram, Krishna and others in the temple courtyard, some of the local devotees shared that the temple is for both Hindus and Buddhists which was the region for the establishment of both Hindu and Buddhist deities in the temple premises. However, Manoj Shakya without openly acknowledging that it was also a Hindu temple explained the reason for the presence of Hindu deities on account of Chobhar being a multi-cultural society. Manoj Shakya shared, "The is a mixed community. Both Newar and Parbate (high hill people) live here in Chobhar, and they have gradually established the Hindu deities in the temple. The idol of Ram and Krishna kept together with that of Buddha in the Bhajan Hall is also a recent phenomenon. The Brahmin and Chhetris living nearby also come to sing Bhajans of Budhha, Shiva, Ram, Krishna, and they have brought these images and idols with them."

Manoj Shakya further shared that when he was around eighteen years (around twenty-five years ago) of age with young blood and strong temper, he along with his friends had started a movement of removing images and sculptures of Hindu deities from the temple complexes. Later the local elders pacified the movement and he also realized that it was not good to disturb communal harmony. According to Manoj, recently there was a controversy regarding the establishment of a Narayan sculpture inside the temple premises. Pointing to the sculpture in front of his home, he said, "as there was some controversy regarding it, I gave the space in front of my home to establish the Hindu deity."

Sharing some incidents of occasional small confrontations between the Newar youths living around the temples and the Chhetri youths living down the Chobhar hill, Manoj said, "When we were young, Chettri youths living on the lower parts of the hill used to get drunk and used to create trouble during the celebration of *jatras*. To counter them, they collected some money within their community, around fourteen thousand rupees, a significant sum at that time, and prepared for the retaliatory fight with the quarrelsome Chhetri youths. The purpose was to use that money for their medical treatment during any clashes with the Chettri boys. He recalls with smile, "We were prepared, *'uniharu aailagyo ki hami pani jailagne vanera'* (if they attacked us, we were also ready to retaliate). That plan became successful and gradually the conflict subsided."

Manoj, now nearing the age of fifty puts on his judicial hat, "In Budhism we do not differentiate between religions. We practice it in the form of *gyan* (knowledge). But in the recent times, due to the politics and government's role, the people care more about my religion and your religion. But we still try not to differentiate between religions. There can even be some Buddhists who might say Buddhism is greater than other religions, but many of us still try not to differentiate between the religions. Many people these days say my religions is better than yours, which is not good behavior."

On his role as a priest, "I have been acting as priest of the temple after the age of fifteen. We, Shakya Kawals (family of first five Shakya brothers) altogether forty-two Priests of Adinath can go inside the temple after the ritual of *Bratabhanda* (a rite of passage involving wearing of sacred thread). I feel very fortunate to be born in Shakya family and to be able to touch the 'God'. Despite this sense of being born in the Shakya family, we do not discriminate as 'us' and 'them'."

Researchers' Limited Gaze and the Embedded Social Interactions

Grappling with social theories, and observing and experiencing through social immersion can give us different vantage positions to examine social relations. This is what I felt after my many rounds of observation at Adinath temple. Initially my objective was to simply observe how both Buddhist and the Hindu devotees gave meaning to their association with the Adinath temple. However, I found, they had different versions of stories to share about Adinath and had diverse purposes and methods of associating with Adinath as discussed in above sections. The concept of polytropy as discussed by David Gellner plays out diversely in the Adinath temple in the intertwined experiences and stories of relatedness of the local people. It is a difficult and somewhat a brave assumption to summarize the inwardly and outwardly associations in a single theoretical concept like polytropy. The people of Chobhar showed that people do not live their lives as per some schemes or theoretical orientation of the researcher. How we understand theoretical concepts is one thing, but how the people actually make sense of complex and embedded cosmology of their life is much more complex and webbed.

The people living around the Adinath temple, through their shared rituals and cultural practices are telling their social history or the people's history. The story of Adninath is told by the local people in various ways and has different versions. For them all of these versions have special meaning and associations to their lives. These stories of Adinath temple are complex and diverse, however they all contribute to give meaning to the shared life of the community. These meaning are complex and embedded in the lived experience of the people, which can only be brought out through thick description (Geertz, 1973, pp. 3–30). Religion as a cultural system seems to fulfill multiple necessities of the people. To the people of Chobhar, religion is not just a matter of some unseen deities, but it is a matter of everyday relationship between the people, their surroundings, nature, and their struggle for survival.

The practice of polytropic existence of Hindu-Buddhist communities, does not only have shared cultural associations, but, in fact, have also been influenced by power relations and control of the ruling class and state. The unequal treatment of religions, especially favoring Hinduism was more pronounced in the Rana and the Panchayat regimes. The rhetoric of such favoritism towards a particular religion was the 'state unity' and 'state formation' on the basis of Hindu nationalism (Burghart, 1984; Onta, Tamang, 2014). The rise of the Hindu ideology and its influence on the state politics led to the marginalization of the existing nature worshipping religions throughout the country. This harmonious polytropy seen in the Adinath temple has many layers of historical struggles of power and dominations between the people and the state. It also has the elements of religious hegemony of diverse forms using state power, control, chances of upward social mobility and other incentives (Gellner, 2005). However, this ethnographic study of Adinath temple helped me to explore and question socio-cultural relations not only on the basis of the theology and the evolution of religions, not only on the basis of the state and power dynamics, but also from the side of the people as experienced in their everyday lives, cosmology of rituals and thoughts, and the local peasant traditions and livelihood patterns.

The present social order is the output of the historical processes. There are underlying historical currents hidden in the present society. However, the Hindu-Buddhist polytropy cannot only be argued as the tool of the then state to rule the population favoring a particular religious ideology. This is a very simplified derivation lacking nuanced engagement which deprives the rich experience of the people who have been living with it. Beyond this, it is also the story of how two groups of people have been living together in a shared geography and socio-political complexities, keeping their cultural traditions and cosmology of life alive and colorful.

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