

**The Sacred Complex of Halesi:  
A Hindu, Buddhist and Kirata Spiritual Interface**

**Draft Final Report**

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South Asia has been a cradle and storehouse of natural surprises, cultural diversities and an excellent example of ethnic pluralism and historic wonders. In the past two years, the broad and overarching theme of – Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Expressions ... sponsored by SCC has created deep concern among the scholars of this region and has also encouraged quality research across academicians of different age, academic background, geographic areas/location and a wider variety of training and disciplines.

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Prem Khatry  
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## Chapter – I

### INTRODUCTION:

#### Problem, Place and People

##### 1.1 The Problem

Nepal's map is dotted with a network of sacred places in the form of caves, hills and mountains, rivers, confluences and holy *ghaats*, holy lakes and religious shrines of historical and archeological significance. They preserve people's faith, old traditions, customs, aesthetic tastes and talents and promote cultural-religious-social harmony across the length and breadth of the nation. The man-made boundary of religion, caste and ethnicity converge in such spiritual power centers. For the devotees, visiting such places is like taking a dip in the big holy waters collectively.

In Nepal's cultural context, these places are considered to be the repository of subtle energy emanating to develop spiritual beliefs and practices, specifically the awakening of religious - cultural faiths in the society. Traditionally, such places are regarded as meeting points between gods and all the benevolent spirits on the one hand and the earth and its inhabitants on the other. Nepalese believers following any faith of their choice strongly believe that holy places with the spiritual environ, paraphernalia and activities taking place there always negotiate between the seen and the unseen, the mortal and the celestial. In the more mortal sense, they bind the people of the north and the south, the east and the west, the valleys and the plains, the Nepalis and the non Nepalis together in the spirit of fraternity and togetherness.

Halesi, located in the district of Khotang in east Nepal hill, is a wonderful and picturesque cave shrine, below the Mount Everest and Gauri Shankar mountainous ranges about 200 km east of Kathmandu. It is a well-recognized and revered spiritual power center for the people of different philosophies and faiths. This sacred place is considered an abode of deities of three major religious faiths – Hinduism, Buddhism and *Kiratdharma* along with several local cults and traditions.

Halesi has developed as a focal point for many religions for the last two thousand years. The Kirats, as ardent followers of Shiva Mahadeva, a dweller of the Himalaya, have been closely associated with the Halesi shrine as native residents of the region and the immediate areas. They moved to the eastern hills of Nepal after the downfall of their regime in Kathmandu in the beginning of the Christian Era. For the Hindus, Halesi is a sacred place glorified by the presence of the Mahadeva or the Great God in the form of *linga*, the phallus, and the symbolic stone images of Parvati and the *vasaha*, the bull as the carrier of Shiva.

According to the popular Buddhist legends, Padmasambhava, a Buddhist *guru* who lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD and originally hailed from the Swat Valley in Pakistan, came to Halesi and meditated inside the cave, gaining the power to live long. Since then, the cave became popularly known as Halesi-Maratika among the Tibetan Buddhist community. The Buddhists of the region thus see the place as the earthly abode of

Padmasambhava and visit it in their lifetime to honor the saint, enhance the amount of merit, seek long life and finally, Nirvana or salvation.

There is another interesting story connecting Jainism with Halesi. According to one information, Jaina *guru* Bhadravahu, a great teacher and scholar, came to Halesi along with his followers from north India about 4<sup>th</sup> century A D and spent his time here in meditation (**Prapannacharya, 2005: 27**). But unlike the Hindu and the Buddhists, the Jainas have not maintained relation with the cave and the visit of Bhadrabahu remains neglected or unknown.

The two major caves of importance, situated in the central rocky, tree-covered hillock of Halesi bazaar, represent a typical rock formation with many cavities usually observed in areas consisting of limestone or carbonate rock. After the discovery of the cave shrine in ancient past the images and amazing structure of the cave caught the attention of the people far and wide. The Hindu-Buddhist-Kirata myths further popularized the place and glorified it as a spiritual power center for people of different ethno-cultural backgrounds. Thus, Halesi Mahadeva became popular as a god of fulfilling wishes and giving boons to the devotees. It has now emerged as a sacred place where people of different religious backgrounds both from home and abroad come to celebrate the major cultural events throughout the year. A small size township is growing around the cave mound to cater for the needs of these pilgrims and casual tourists.

The cave shrine offers equal opportunity for all as the Buddhist Lamas are seen performing Buddhist rituals at one corner of the sacred complex while in another corner, there are people taking part in the Hindu *Brahmanic* rituals, *rudris* being very popular rites. This site thus makes a strong case highlighting the forces of diversity demonstrating the case of unity. Together, the people – indigenous Kirata and migrated non-Kirata - play their role in maintaining the spiritual environment atmosphere generating spiritual energy that they share without any feeling of conflict and competition. Like other forces of nature like forest, land, and water contributing to their survival, the status of Mahadeva also serves as spiritual resource for the people.

The most distinct feature of Halesi is that several clans, castes, religious and cultural groups live in harmony in the area known for the rugged mountains and scarce resources. The shrine has actually created and maintained a special bond among the followers of different faiths and traditions.

At a time when religious tolerance, harmony and peaceful coexistence of different faiths and followers stand as urgent need of the hour, identification and protection of such multi-dimensional cultural heritages and national assets become the nation's important agenda for peace and progress. Keeping these problems in mind, this study is based on finding valid answers to the following research questions:

- a) When and how did the site come into prominence and what assimilative and integrative role has it played in the *majhkirat* area with diverse ethnic groups and cultures?
- b) How can the popularity of the place be enhanced and preservation of the social, religious and ritual structures maintained through the effort of the people living in the area?
- c) How has Halesi offered the opportunity for the continuity of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural experiences?

## 1.2 Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

- a) First, explore the origin and history of Halesi Mahadeva in order to understand the assimilative and integrative role it played in the region with diverse ethnic groups and cultures over the span of time.
- b) Second, bring new or unknown facts to light and highlight the importance of the shrine in the life of the local people and extension of its impact in the region.
- c) Third, examine the role of various factors for the promotion and preservation of social, religious and cultural structures to maintain peace and harmony among the people living in the area.
- d) Fourth, find out the role of Halesi for the continuation of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural experiences.
- e) Fifth and final, provide the workable ways to physically protect the site and conserve its sanctity for the future.

## 1.3 Review of Literature

Attachment to sacred place is defined as the emotional and affecting bond established between people and places. In a traditional society like Nepalese, such places bring people closer to religious ideals, spirituality, community and peace and also foster attachment, devotion, ethos and worldview in the followers of different faiths and practices. Study of such sacred places is getting increased attention in the last few years. There is a very limited stock of literary sources available on the subject.

The following section presents brief review of relevant literature.

*Religion and place attachment: A study of sacred places* by Majumdar & Majumdar (2004) has presented a vivid picture of the religious place and sentiments of the people in a scientific perspective analyzing its basic features and dimension. This study provides an objective outlook to the present researchers as the present study is designed to analyze the spiritual interface among various religious groups in a sacred place of Halesi.

*Community attachment: Local sentiment and sense of place* by Hummon (1992) has attempted to investigate the spiritual relationship between local people and sacred place. This approach of studying the sacred place and sentiment of the people is useful for the present study, which is basically focused on the role of Halesi played in the region with diverse ethnicities and cultures.

Sharma's research paper entitled *Nepal: Hindu-Tribal Interface* (1978) has offered a historical analysis on the formation of Nepali society with a long tradition of harmonious living and interaction between the Hindu castes and the tribal groups. This has been a special feature of Nepali society with a longest history in the Indian sub-continent. Over a long time of interaction in history certain form of relationship developed between these groups in Nepal. This paper has offered a historical base of Nepali society and this interpretation is helpful to understand the psyche and sentiments of Nepali people of different religious backgrounds who meet together without any conflict and competition in the sacred complex of

Halesi. In fact, the title of the article was adapted by the researchers as it was a very meaningful assessment of the situation the writer talks about and the nature of this research.

*The Halesi-Maratika Caves: A sacred place claimed by both Hindus and Buddhists* by Buffetrille (1994) has focused on the investigation of the origin of Halesi, the conflicts and cohabitation of the Hindus and the Buddhists and the myths of the submission of Shiva, the Hindu god into Buddhism. This paper has offered Buddhist perspectives on Halesi in the light of contemporary and ancient written and oral traditions. This research helps understand the context of the sacred place and give an analytical approach on the Hindu-Buddhist relationship that has lived through different stages of development.

Gohen's paper entitled *The Exchange of Halesi: A Sacred Place and a Societal Context* (2008) has attempted to investigate the societal and religious context of Halesi in the light of the decade long Maoist conflict and changes over time. This paper has tried to explore out the social dialogue and different issues that have emerged in Halesi in the last few years. This paper is helpful to analyze the ways how the this particular holy place has and will continue to affect the lives of people in Halesi.

Halesi has relatively scanty sources published in Nepali language. *Khotang Jillako Halesi ra Halesvara Mahadev* (The Halesi and Halesvara Mahadev of Khotang District) by Radheshyam Bhattarai (1997) has presented an analysis of the various aspects of Halesi along with its origin and history. This article has provided some useful information to peep into the historical context of Halesi and also helped to understand the present scenario developed in Halesi. An article entitled *Halesi Mahadevko Utpati ra Aviskar* (Origin and Discovery of Halesi Mahadev) by Shrestha (2013) has given an analysis on the origin of Halesi through scientific/geological perspectives. This is useful to understand the formation of Halesi cave shrine due to the geological transformation of limestone or carbonate rock in the area. Outside this cave there is a range extending few miles east to west with similar rock formation and small caves all over the mounds. Halesi is the biggest single hill top with large cave formation.

*Holesung Ra Halesi* (Holesung and Halesi) by Bhogi Raj Chamling (2013) has attempted to correlate and justify the name Halesi with the Kirat king Holesung who ruled over the area during medieval period of Nepal's history. This article is found helpful to understand the Kirat perspective on the origin of Halesi.

*Nepal Nirukta* (Etymology of Nepal) by Nepal (1983) has provided some historical account on the origin and growth of Halesi and also published the documents of royal grants given by the Shah Kings to manage the ritual activities of the holy complex. This information has been very helpful for the present study to understand and analyze the historical facts supported by authentic documents regarding the historicity and management of Halesi complex.

Swami Prapannacharya's book entitled *Milkiyeka Jhilkaharu* (trn. neglected fire flashes, 2005) has explored new information on the visit of Bhadravahu, a great teacher of Jainism to Halesi along with his followers from north India in 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This is the only source of information to know about the connection of Jainism to Halesi complex.



*Nepalko Rastriya Samikaranma Shiva-Buddha Darshanko Bhumika* (The Role of Shiva-Buddha Philosophy for the National Cohesion in Nepal) by Gurung (2001) has analyzed the role of Saiva and Buddhist philosophy in the religious and cultural make-up of Nepali society. This paper has given many instances of the psyche and sentiment of Nepali people to show equal respect both for Hindu- Buddhist deities in many occasions. Once a year, Lord Shiva, a Hindu God is worshiped by the Buddhists as the incarnation of Buddha while in another occasion, Padmapani Bodhisattva, a Buddhist God, is worshiped by the Hindus as Matsyendranatha. This paper has been useful to analyze the religious syncretism developed in Nepal that enhanced the harmonic relationships among people of different cultures.

The above mentioned books, research studies and articles are very useful as a feed back for the present study. But with the lack of specific and more detailed studies on the spiritual interface of various religious groups in the sacred complex of Halesi, there still remains a gap and missing some important issues that are expected to be fulfilled through the present study.

#### **1.4 Research Design and Methodology**

This is a study concerned with a historically known but less publicized spiritual complex. As stated above, the history of holy complex connects it with at least three major religious faiths – Hinduism, Buddhism and *Kiratdharma* – and other minor faiths and beliefs. One major approach is to see the evolution of the complex from historical perspectives. This is a field based project as there is dearth of written documents about the complex. The research has been carried out with the combined form of descriptive and exploratory research design focusing on the assimilative and integrating role of the holy site in the Hindu, Kirata and Buddhist cultures of the immediate area.

The main bulk of data has been drawn from first hand study in the field by following the standard methods mentioned below:

##### **1.4. a. Interview**

Semi-structured interview method has been followed with predetermined questions as it could help gather 'additional' and 'deeper' data by asking more questions based on interviewees answers. Information on related area was derived from Hindu priests, Buddhist Lamas (priest), Kirat experts and few key informants, helpers, and administrators responsible for the management and protection of the site.

Informal interview have also been carried out with the visitors, villagers, believers and local leaders.

##### **1.4. b. Observation**

The research team led by the principal researcher visited Halesi twice and observed the various activities and events held in the shrine complex. One of the major events like *Balachaturdashi*, a Hindu festival where people sprinkle grains in the name of the dead was observed. During two field visits, the daily worship rituals, special rituals associated with

Hindu, Kirata and Buddhist communities have been observed to assess the significance of the holy place.

The data received from observation have been used in various sections of this paper.

#### **1.4 c. Group discussion**

The research team met and had several discussion sessions with the members of Halesi Development Committee, Halesi Temple Management Committee, teachers of local higher secondary school, elementary school and local college. Also, informal discussions with local people of different categories were also held.

On several such discussion sessions HDC members and local people expressed their faith and practices organized at the family and community levels. Discussions also focused on the promotion of the site as a pilgrimage destination, need of infrastructure to attract tourists and make the site a true pilgrimage for different faiths. However, people were concerned about the growing unclean environment in the temple premises.

#### **1.4 d. Consultation**

The team also had consultation meetings with stakeholders and local activists. Such meetings were held with scholars, religious experts, sociologists, planners and other involved in the ritual and development activities in Kathmandu and on the site.

#### **1.4 e. Collection of Oral history**

Collection of oral tradition has been done through tape-recorder with the permission of participants for the later transcription purposes. One such depository of oral tradition was Jitman Rai, 71, a resident of Durchim VDC is an expert in oral history and Kirata *mundhum*. The *mundhum* is a Kirata oral literature focusing on Kirata origin, Kirata deities and means to solve problems using Kirata cosmology and indigenous knowledge. Rai was consulted and asked to throw light on their oral history and cultural tradition.

### **1.5 Data Processing and Analysis:**

Information acquired from semi-structured interview, observation and group discussion is aggregated to derive a composite picture. In the analysis of data and information for the present research, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been followed. Different types of tables, diagrams and charts are used in order to illustrate and interpret various points in analysis.

### **1.6 Research Setting**

Nepal is horizontally placed along the Himalayas, precisely between the great centers of human civilizations, India to the south and Tibet autonomous region of China to the north. The country has been divided into three natural sub-divisions corresponding to the drainage basin of Karnali in the west, Gandaki in the center and Koshi in the east. Halesi lies in the eastern (Koshi) region of Nepal.

Halesi, where the holy cave shrine under discussion is located, lies slightly below the mountainous ranges in the eastern mid-hills of Nepal (approx 200 km east of the capital city of Kathmandu). Halesi is a small, but growing market locality located in a remote area of the District of Khotang in Sagarmatha (Mt.

Everest) Zone. The geological structure in the form of typical rock formation including host of caves of Halesi area offers interesting views for the observers. Besides, the ethnic- cultural mosaic with dominant population of native Kiratas living together in close proximity provides a distinct phenomenon for the researchers.

The inhabitants of Halesi are mainly Rai, although there is a substantial community of other Hindu castes as well. At present Halesi represents heterogeneity of population consisting of different caste and ethnic groups like the Rai, Brahman, Chhetri, Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Newar, Bhujel, Kami, Damai, Sarki and other communities with the total population of 3254, of them 1691 are male and female are 1563. A small number of Tibetan Buddhist communities are also residing there with the representation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and few *stupas* in and around the Halesi complex.

Below is a demographic picture of Halesi Mahadeva VDC.

**Table 1- Caste/Ethnic Groups in Halesi\***

S.No	Caste/Ethnic Group	Male	Female	Total	Percent	Remarks
1	Rai	1083	985	2068	63.55	Janajati
2	Bahun	73	71	144	4.42	Hindu high caste
3	Chhetry	222	226	448	13.76	Hindu ,,
4	Kami	144	144	288	8.85	Low caste
5	Damai	79	60	139	4.27	,,
6	Sarki	3	2	5	0.15	,,
7	Bhujel	35	30	65	1.99	Janajati
8	Gurung	5	1	6	0.18	Janajati
9	Magar	11	10	21	0.64	,,
10	Newar	3	3	6	0.18	,,
11	Others	33	31	64	1.96	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1691</b>	<b>1563</b>	<b>3254</b>	<b>99.65</b>	

**\*Source: Village Profile/ Halesi Village Development Committee**

The table shows that Halesi is a Kirata as well as other jana jati (ethnic minority) major VDC in terms of population structure. There are three untouchable castes – Kami (iron worker), Damai (tailor) and Sarki (leather worker) in the VDC. Similarly, Hindu high castes occupy second position in terms of population whereas the Kirat-Rai segment forms the largest group. It is interesting to note that the Newar is a well known business caste in Nepal and despite its majority in the district headquarters, the town of Diktel, Halesi has the smallest representation of the Newar.

With the increasing number of various caste and communities in the area, Halesi is becoming more and more plural in terms of ethnic composition. Halesi represents diversity of social tradition and customs. Hinduism, Buddhism, Kirat *dharma*, Shamanism, Animism have become the main guiding force reflecting

the heterogeneity in the socio-cultural and religious life of Halesi people. The presence of different ethnicities and religions points towards a composite culture with influences coming from far and wide producing a far greater familiarization and intimate social- cultural interaction and bond in the village of Halesi.

From the point of view of faith and following, the people of Halesi VDC represent Hinduism, Buddhism, Kiratadharma, Animism and Christianity as shown in the table below.

**Table 2 - Religious Groups in Halesi\***

<b>S. No</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1	Hindu	1730	53.16	
2	Animism	1306	40.06	
3	Buddhist	92	2.87	
4	Kiratdharma	68	2.08	
5	Christianity	60	1.84	
	Total	3254	100.01	

**\*Source: village profile/ Halesi Development Committee**

Finally, this chapter introduced the study with a problem statement, objectives, review of relevant literature, study methods, research setting, and a table showing the distribution of population of Halesi. It has been found that both Nepali and foreign scholars are taking interest in introducing the holy site of Halesi.

## Chapter – II

### The Context:

### The Cave Site, Historical-Cultural-Social phenomena

#### 2.1 Site Location and Features

Nepal is interlaced with three important mountain ranges called the Alpine Himalayas, the Mahabharat Range and the Shiwalik Mountain. They stretch everywhere from west to east and are cut by the rivers of perennial water, and they have created many fertile valleys and long terraces for villages. The sacred complex of Halesi comes within the ranges of Mahabharat and situated on the lap of Snowy Mountain called Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest), Gaurishankar, among others. The landscape of Halesi looks so beautiful and magnificent surrounded on all sides by a panorama of mountains, mule-tracks, mountain paths and breathtaking white peaks of Himalayas. Halesi, overlooking the holy Rivers Dudkoshi (the river of milk) to the right and Sunkoshi (the river of gold) to the left, villages, the green lush forest and the fertile lowland around, holds special religious significance of all the sacred palaces of Nepal. In the rocky terrain around Halesi, there are many caves and pot-holes that seem to have been created by the nature to offer peculiar objects that have generated a host of interpretations for spiritual people for meditation and other religious observances.

The site is accessed through an incomplete road connecting Halesi with Kathmandu, and other eastern hills and Tarai town such as Katari leading to the Indian border area. Lamidanda is the nearest airstrip from Kathmandu to reach Halesi by air in about 35 minutes flight.

#### 2.2 Geological Formation

The cave shrine of Halesi offers a very amazing geological phenomenon to the visitors. In the rocky terrain around small town of Halesi there are many caves and pot-holes with naturally formed cavities, producing rock structures of various forms and shape. From a geological perspective, two major caves of importance situated in tree covered hillock Halesi bazaar, represents a typical rock formation usually observed in areas consisting of limestone or carbonate rock (**Shrestha, 2013: 2**). Geologists are of the opinion that the carbonate rock formation was occurred on the earth around 60 million years ago with the uprising of the Himalayas. The acidic rain water contributed to the loosening of calcareous rock and resulted in many cavities with different types of rock structures. There are many narrow passageways between two stalagmites inside the Halesi caves formed through the natural process of geological transformation. These narrow passageways have now turned into *paapdvāra*, *dharmadvāra*, *garbhadvāra*, *svargadvāra* and *karmadvāra* to judge the fate and purity of the pilgrims who want to pass through these passages. In many other parts of Nepal, such astonishing geological formations have been identified as mysterious signs from the divine and these places have obtained the status of spiritual power centers. This holds true for Halesi, too.

### 2.3 The discovery of the cave

The Halesi cave as it has now emerged as one of the most popular shrines with immense spiritual power in Nepal, was discovered at an undetermined point of time (approximately two thousand years ago). Due to lack of authentic materials, it is not easy to trace out the early history of Halesi in order to know the various stages of development and its impact on the life of the people in the region. There are oral traditions recounted by both local Rai people and Hindu informants regarding the discovery of Halesi cave **(Bhattarai, 1996: 35)**.

According to the agreed version of the oral tradition, Bagbangsi Rai, a local hunter famed for his skill, once went to the jungle for hunting with his dog. His dog chased a golden deer but suddenly disappeared in the thick forest. The hunter lost sight of both dog and deer and went back to his village. For three days, he returned looking for his dog. This time he saw an opening behind some trees. He managed to go down into the cave where he found his dog dead. But looking around he was astonished as what he saw: there were strangely stone images around, some of them with emanating light. He returned to the village and told all that he had seen inside the cave to the villagers. The villagers followed him to the cave and became stunned when they happened to see those amazing images inside **(Ibid: 35)**. Gradually the discovery of Halesi cave caught the attention of the people far and wide and obtained the status of spiritual power center in the region. The episode on the discovery of Halesi cave seems to be true since the region was populated mostly by the Kirat/Rai people from the ancient time.

### 2.4 Origin of the Name 'Halesi'

Different etymologies have been given for the origin of the name Halesi. As a country of diverse linguistic communities and multiple religions, there are different orientation and interpretations on the name of Halesi.

The Kirata/Rai people as the natives of the place have rich oral tradition on their religion and the sacred places scattered around. According to the Kirata version, the term Halesi was coined after the name of Holeysung, a Kirata king who ruled over the region during medieval period. According to the Kirata oral history expert Jitman Rai Holeysung was the feudal chief and given authority to handle the administration of that region by the king of Sena dynasty of Vijayapur, a petty kingdom that was existed in eastern Nepal during medieval period. Holeysung once offered his help to the King of Vijayapur when there was a rivalry between the kingdom of Vijayapur and Makwanpur in 1671 AD.

Some Kirati scholars believe that in the old days, the palatial area of Holeysung (currently Durghim VDC) was known as Halesi. People used to address the present Mahadevsthan in the name of *matha, pati*, and *madevsthan*. Later the word Halesi was added to Mahadevsthan, and the sacred complex came to be known as Halesi Mahadevasthan **(Chamling, 2013: 70)**. In due course of time the recollection of real Halesi was lost and Mahadevsthan became popular in the name of Halesi **(Ibid)**. This interpretation has attempted to justify the close connection between Halesi and Holeysung, and has received well attention

from the academia. Rai described that Mahadeva is the ancestral deity of all the Kirati clans of Halesi and entire east Nepal and therefore they have long and strong emotional as well as spiritual bond with Halesi.

A popular Hindu legend suggests that Lord Shiva came to Halesi to hide from the potentially fatal attack of a demon named Vrsasura, who wanted to kill him. Vishnu tricked the monster and killed him as Shiva broke through the ceiling of the cave and fled to other hideouts. Here, the two words Hari (Vishnu) + *Isvara* (Shiva) when combined together that formed another word as Haresvara. Halesi or Halesvara was the distortion of Haresvara as the sounds *ra* and *la* are often mixed up and one sound used for the other (**Bhattarai, Ibid: 36**). A big foot print dug on the wall ceiling near the big hole is supposed to be of Shiva Mahadeva as he stepped on the wall before disappearing from the hole.

According to the Buddhist tradition, the origin of the name is related to an event where a Tibetan Buddhist visited the place and said *holyasso*, a Tibetan word meaning a place of wonders. The word *holyasso* later distorted and people started to address the sacred place as Halesi.

K. Buffetrille writes-

Padmasambhava's biography describes Maratika as a place where a "rain of flowers constantly falls. Enveloped in a dome of rainbows, the scent of incense permeates the air. It has a grove of sandalwood trees and is blessed by Lords of the Three Families" (Tsogyal 1999, pp. 45). Mandarava's biography describes Maratika as a "sacred power spot where the outer, inner, and secret mandalas were complete... a wish fulfilling jewel that surpasses any other sacred place in India for the practice of spiritual attainment" (Chonam and Khandro 1998, pp. 152). Padmasambhava came to Maratika with his consort, the Indian Princess Mandarava, to perform the practice of vidyadhara longevity. After three months of practice they had a vision of the Buddha of Long Life, Amitayus. Buddha blessed them, pouring from a "nectar-filled vase of immortal life" into their open mouths (Tsogyal 1999, pp. 45). He made them "immortal pure awareness holders" (Chonam and Khandro (1998, pp. 153). Following this they practiced the Hayagriva Mechar Cycle on the union of Hayagriva and Vajravarahi in order to eliminate any further obstacles. Upon successful realization, Mandarava "compiled a treasury of more than a thousand extensive and concise longevity 7 methods, including essential pointing-out instructions" (Chonam and Khandro 1998, pp. 153).

This is the reason why Mahayani Buddhists pay homage to Halesi, their Maratika, and consider worthwhile to visit the cave shrine once in their life.

The Hindu and the Buddhist versions on Halesi seem to be legends than real stories. They are based on oral traditions and not supported by any authentic evidences. In the absence of authentic documents, such oral history could be understood as a way to promote one's religion by people of different religious backgrounds. Yet, sometimes, they do highlight certain events and contain a grain of truth.

The Kirata argument on the other hand offers some logical points because there are many place names in Nepal that are derived from the name of the people who inhabited it (**Malla, 1981: 7**) Some Kirata

scholars have been working on the history of Holeysung dynasty that could help explore more logical and authentic interpretation in regard to the connection between Holeysung and Halesi. There is still need of more scientific studies to come to a logical end on the origin of the name Halesi.

Last, but not the least there is one local version of folk legend circulating among the Kiratis about the naming of the site. The elderly Kirati informants tell the visitors that the name 'Halesi' comes from a rare bird called 'haleso', a native of hill and tarai regions of Nepal. It is considered a 'medical kit' of the village. Its fat is number one medicine, the beak, feathers and other parts also work for rheumatism, locals say. This site had big forests in the ancient time and the bird enjoyed this area, especially the cave and thick bush above. Hence the name of the site, they say.

## **2.5 The Social-Cultural Context**

The discovery of the sacred complex of Halesi was connected to Kirat Rai people that give pride of place to the Rai community (**Buffertrille, 1994: 13**). The Rai people are the natives of place and as the follower of Kiratesvara Mahadeva they have close affinity with the Halesi cave which is recognized as an abode of Mahadeva.

As shown in the table 1, the Kirat/Rais are the main inhabitants of Halesi area. It is quite phenomenal since the Kirats are believed to have migrated to the Nepal hills in the earliest time. The Rais and Limbus of eastern Nepal are collectively known as Kiratas to this day. Kirata legends suggest that eastern Nepal was mainly populated by a series of expansion of early Kirats moving west along the Tarai before penetrating the Arun Valley and other route into the hills (**Whelpton, 2005: 19**). From the very earliest time, the Kiratas have been regarded as the inhabitants of the Himalayas who later on ruled over Nepal valley for a period of more than 1000 years (**Regmi, 1969:22**). With the emergence of Indo-Aryan Lichhavis, the Kirat rule ended and they were forced out towards the east, which was familiar with the name of Kirata Pradesh (the Kirata region) later on. The Kirats were the non-caste Saivite who practiced the tradition of animistic worship.

As one of the ancient tribes in Nepal, the Kiratas influence continued in the eastern hills even after the downfall of their regime in Nepal Valley. Nepal witnessed many twist and turns in its political developments twelfth century onwards. The process of the division of the kingdom took momentum and many petty states came into existence with its own independent rulers. During period of sixteenth to eighteenth century, for about two hundred years, Nepal's hills remained crowded with these small principalities. Their relationships were affected by a feeling of distrust, constant political rivalry and an ambition to make territorial gains at the expense of one another (**Shah, 2001: 64-65**).

In the eastern part of Nepal, there were three petty kingdoms- Makawanpur, Chudandi and Vijayapur. The eastern hills were under the domain of Chudandi and Vijayapur, but the local feudatories mostly from the Rai and Limbu communities exercised the administrative and judicial power in their areas. The noble feature of the political set-up in Vijayapur was the acceptance of its ruler's authority by the



autonomous Kirata units in the hills in return for appointment of hill-based Kirata ministers by the Hindu king in the Tarai (**Whelpton, Ibid: 23**). Holesung, a Kirati Chieftain, was given authority to rule Halesi area with the same understanding.

The socio-cultural structure in the eastern hills remained almost homogenous with predominantly Kirat (Rai and Limbu branches) population with few other groups till the unification of Nepal. The Kirat people held the land under the *kipat* system, a communal form of land tenure by which "in exchange for their submission and the payment of small lump-sum levy, the various segments of the clan, represented by their hereditary chiefs, retain their inalienable rights over their territory and a large degree of administrative and judicial autonomy" (**Gaborieau, 1978:109**). This communal form of land tenure made the Kirati people more strong and powerful in the region.

After the success of the unification campaign in 1769 AD, some significant changes began to take place in the eastern hill region. Gradually people of other ethnicities such as the high caste Brahman and Chhetris and low or occupational castes also started to move and settle in that area and social mobility became possible.

The popularity of Halesi Mahadeva grew further after the migration of Hindu high and other castes in the region. However, the cave site remained under the care of local Kirat/Rai for a long period of time. The Kirata oral traditions suggest that the cave was the home site of the Kirata ancestors during the prehistoric times. They could have used the cave site to stay inside the huge floor of the *vasaha* cave as it had the access of water and the thick forest around for game hunting. The pre-historic Kiratas may have initiated the cave culture in and around Halesi. There are plenty of evidences of earliest occupation and settlement in the caves in the high mountains of Nepal Himalaya. The archaeological excavations carried out in different parts of western Himalayan region reveal that the early people initiated the cave systems for burial, residential, storage and ritual purposes (**Simons, 1994: 120**). Also, the caves provided maximum protection against strong winds, from the predators and also provided shelter during attack by the enemy bands.

The Kirat/Rai of the region worship Halesi as an ancestral deity of the community. The Kirat *mundhum*, a rich oral tradition of the Kirats, manifests that their ancestor Raichhakule (Khokchilipa) also known as Hetchhakuppa used to stay inside the Halesi cave in the remote past. For that reason, the Kirat/Rais consider Halesi as their ancestral place and show close affinity with the sacred complex (**Chamling, Ibid: 71**). Halesi was the holy place the Rais even before the discovery of the caves. Some Rai shamans from Okhaldhunga and Kulung in the north guide their dead towards Halesi, in accordance with their mythology which states that their ancestors came from the south. These ritual journeys evoke ancestral history and express a emotional link with the area where they used to live (**Buffetrille, Ibid: 15**). During the Kirat regime, king Sankhohang and Khamsohang had offered some lands for the management of the Halesi cave (**Limbu, 1954: 100-101**).

The access of Hindu community to Halesi became possible only after the unification of the country in 1769 AD. King Rana Bahadur Shah, the grandson of Prithvinarayan Shah, the founder of unified Nepal, had offered a trust (*guthi* in Nepali) to manage the ritual activities of the holy complex in 1786 AD (**Nepal, 1983: 334**). A royal decree was later issued to Manorath Acharya of Khotang in 1790 AD for offering holy leaves of apple wood to Halesi Mahadeva once a year. Rana Bahadur Shah again wrote a letter to Manorath Acharya in 1790 AD to offer a copper sitting place to Halesi Mahadeva (**ibid**). Further, king Grivanyuddha Bikram Shah, the son of Rana Bahasur Shah, also continued the royal support to Halesi and granted land under the *guthi* system to Mahanta Manohar Giri, a priest, for carrying out the rites of the sacred complex (**ibid**). The royal charter engraved in the copper plate (*tamrapatra*) in 1805 AD is presently kept in the house Bhawani Shanker Giri. The Giris established themselves due to the state support.

With the presence of the Giri priests, supported by the royal order of Hindu Kings, Halesi cave became a holy place for both – the native Rais and the migrant Hindu groups around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (**Buffetrille, ibid: 14**). The Giris belong to the Dasnami Sannyasi sect of Saivism and are known as the disciples of Sankaracharya (**Sharma, 1992: 72-73**). From then onwards, the Mahanta Manohar Giri and his descendants were entrusted to handle the management and daily rites and rituals to be done at Halesi Mahadev. The dynamics of Halesi started changing with increased inflow and activities of Hindu people in the cave shrine. For a long time, the Mahanta-led priestly tradition remained unchallenged and the Giri *pujaris* entertained the land grants and all the earnings of the temple as private property. They even exercised certain judicial powers and started levying taxes on land-revenue from the local residents (**Buffetrille, ibid: 19**).

Buddhist affiliation with Halesi has been mentioned in many Buddhist versions of pilgrimage guides in Tibetan language. Tibetan tradition provides the narratives on the hidden lands where men take refuge from danger and where men do not die (**Macdonald, 1971:365**). Tibetan oral traditions suggest that Padmasambhava, who introduced Tantric Buddhism to Tibet, meditated in the hidden land of Halesi and got the power of immortality. Buddhists believe that the lower cave known as *vasahathan* where Padmasambhav defeated the *mara*, the demonic forces that caused trouble during his meditation. For Buddhists too, the Halesi Mahadeva in the form of *linga*, the phallus, is their *dharmapala*, guardian of religion and a large rounded rock imagined as Parvati is *ayukalasha*, the holy pitcher of immortality. The hillocks around the Halesi are believed to be the holy places once touched by Avalokitesvara, Manjushree and Vajrapani, the great Boddhisattvas. It is interesting to note that when the Kirati-Rai and the Hindu believers take the cave as the abode of Siva-Mahadeva, the Buddhists do not mention the name of Siva at all.

Buddhist presence in Halesi with a Tibetan Nyingmapa monastery was initiated when a Sherpa Lama from Kulung area in north-eastern Nepal. Later the site was known as Maratika and Buddhist presence became more distinct as a Solu based Lama arrived in Halesi in 1980 AD. The story favoring the Lama's special

interest in Halesi was circulated after this date. It is said he was born 82 years ago after his parents had made a pilgrimage to Halesi to ask for children (**Buffetrille, Ibid: 20**). After the construction of the monastery overlooking the entrance to the main cave shrine, many Tibetan Rinpoches visited the Halesi cave, meditated there and gave teaching. The monastery became the center for Buddhist teaching with the hostel facility for few students too. As the monastery was built over a very fragile structure of the limestone conglomeration above the cave, the government planned to move it to another place by giving some money for compensation. But the government never succeeded and the monastery remained in the same place. Maratika Lama sent pilgrimage guides for this holy site to Bhutan, Sikkim, and even Lasha and other countries, and then the volume of Buddhist devotees from these areas dramatically increased (**Ibid: 22**).

## **2.6 Management of the Halesi complex**

As discussed above, from the very earliest time, the sacred complex of Halesi has given proper care on the part of the rulers. The Kirat kings provided lands for the management of the shrine. But no authentic documents are available of that period. From the time of Rana Bahadur Shah, the royal decrees are documented and first time the Shah Kings appear to grant some lands to manage the ritual activities of the holy complex. King Rana Bahadur Shah's son King Grivana had two copper plates made in favor of Manohar Giri granting land to carry out the rites of the god, using the products gained from this land.

Manohar Giri was the first *mahanta*, a priest to handle the management and perform daily rites and rituals in the sacred complex. This system was entirely based on the hereditary concept. After the death of Manohar Giri, his son Parath Giri got the role of *mahanta* and after him the role handed over to his son Kanchan Giri. From the time of Raj Bol Giri, certain changes had taken place in the hereditary *mahanta* practices. Raj Bol Giri had three sons in the line of being a *mahanta* of the temple. So the role of *mahanta* held for a year in turn by each of the three families descended from Raj Bol Giri (**Bhattarai, Ibid: 40**).

In the hereditary system, the *mahantas* were all in all and enjoyed monopoly on the offerings and earnings of the temple, and yet did nothing for the benefits of the community. But some remarkable changes have taken place in the management and ritual practices of Halesi in the last few years. The Maoist movement threatened the monopoly of the Hindu priest in the temple management and offered sporadic assistance in Halesi. In line with the political changes in the country in recent times, many ethnic groups have raised their voices for cultural reorientation and rights. As a result, the local Rais and people of other communities started seeking equal rights in the management of Halesi. Presently, there are two inclusive committees called Halesi Mahadeva Temple Development Committee and Halesi Temple Management Committee working for the management and development of the Halesi temple. The income of the temple is now handled by the temple management committee. Previously, those earnings were the private property of the *mahanta* priests. For the last few years, a local college also receives a certain share of the temple income. The committee looks after the maintenance of the temple and manages annual celebration events.

## 2.7 Halesi and kings of Nepal

The monarchy of Nepal came to an end in the year 2007. With this also came the cultural role of monarchy. But there are occasions when kings took special interest in the promotion and preservation of religious, historical and cultural sites. In the year 1861 (1804 AD) King Girvana Bir Bikram Shah issued a Lalmohar (royal decree) in the name of a Saivite priest- Manohar Giri of Khotang entrusting Giri with the role of the high priest in the Mahadeva shrine of Halesi. Since that time the Giri family is the principal care taker of the holy complex.

From this time onward, the Giris became fully responsible for the *puja* and other religious activities on regular basis. They were also the sole owners of the income generated through such activities and the land donated by the devotees. The income would come in the form of small to high amount cash, goods, landed property and usable commodities such as rice, vegetables, fruits, other edibles. The Giri formed and maintained a spiritual power base second only to the Mahadeva himself with strong and visible political clout. Soon they became a distinct class due to their role in the puja rituals and the income they made. With the growth of the Giri households and the population, there were several Giri families by the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The family continues as priests till date.

Halesi has a record of another royal interest after King Girvan. In fact, (Late) king Birendra's visits to Halesi mark important page in the recent history of Halesi. While visiting Eastern Zone of Nepal, the king used to make these trips from Biratnagar. One such trip made in 2039 BS (1982) brought Halesi to light officially. The king took interest in the preservation of Halesi. As a result, a Master Plan with an immediate effect was formed. The slum type shops and houses were evacuated and compensated by the government to make the holy site free from immediate encroachment and the unhealthy environment created by the unplanned households. However, the government did not work effectively to monitor the ground situation nor did it employ any local agency to do so. Then change came in the status of the king – from absolute monarch to a constitutional one in the new democratic structure and with the fall of monarchy in 2007 people took advantage of the situation. People began to reclaim the once compensated land property, buy and sell them, challenging the authority and decision of the government. Soon, there was the same old crowd approaching the cave shrine from the south, north and the eastern sides.

To conclude, this chapter discussed the history of Halesi with special focus on the rise of Hindu high priest, the Giri family, with the royal charter given them by King Rana Bahadur Shah and King Grivanyuddha Bikram Shah. This royal protection and occupation of the site by the Hindu high castes paved the way for the Giri family to firmly establish themselves as the priests of Halesi Mahadeva, only to face challenge to their monopoly and danger of losing the job with the end of monarchy seven years ago

## Chapter III

### The Spiritual Interface: The Holistic and Integrative Role of Halesi

#### 3.1 The overarching theme – Indigenous knowledge and expressions

The early vedic culture describes Siva Mahadeva as a great healer. The tantric healers of Nepal worship Siva as their guru and visit Siva pilgrimages situated in different parts of the country. Gosainkunda in Rasua, north of Kathmandu is one such place where healers go on Sravan Purnima and with this ritual duty done, they feel renewed and recharged with new power for one more year. In the same vein Siva followers visit Halesi Mahadeva in order to worship him as part of their *bhakaal* or promise to get rid of some problem people suffer from. Such pujas are performed by Hindu priest and/or faith healers. In the greater Halesi area, Kirati and other groups have such expert healers serving the society.

Halesi is also known for other caste and ethnic group specific skills. When Brahman priests are skilled in astrology, priestly works and story-telling, one branch of Kirati here in Khotang-Diktel area known as Sunuwar, is skilled in manufacturing bamboo products for domestic use such as baskets, storage vessels, dairy vessels, etc. A little encouragement for this skill would make them producers for tourist items also

The Brahman Pandits have excellent skill and qualification to recite the highly popular Bhagawat and other *puranas* (religious story telling) for the Hindu clients. They also function as family and clan priests. Such kind of story telling has been very popular to raise fund for local development projects – e.g. for school roof and building, for a new school or a college, and other social works and only Brahmin priests can do this.

The *dalit* or low caste community nationwide possesses skills in making and playing musical instruments on special occasions such as birth and marriages. This group also has a monopoly in fabricating metal weapons, pots and pans for the kitchen and a wide variety of tools for the farm. They also did the mining and smelting in earlier decades.

The Newar people are professionally famous business entrepreneurs of Nepal. With the unification of Nepal, they spread all over the district headquarters and gave birth to towns in the hills and plains of Nepal. One category of the Newar works in metal producing household goods mainly in bronze and copper. Newar elders are store house of traditional music, songs, dances, festivals, art, architecture, and a host of festivals. Halesi, Diktel and Khotang towns have a significant number of Newar shopkeepers and artists like other towns and cities of Nepal.

Kirati indigenous knowledge also has a long history. In a typical Kirati Rai village there are some healer-experts called 'Bijuwa', Dhami, and Guru. Few of them are *mundhum* experts who possess knowledge

about their ancestry, ancestral deities, rise and fall of Kirati-Rai kings, among other information. One section of Kirati-Rai in the broader Halesi-Okhaldhunga-Bhojpur area, there is one special religious cult named the 'Josmani cult.' It is different from the newly established Kiratidharma that derives some features from Josmani. The Josmani emphasize on vegetarian diet, worship of Hindu gods, live a peaceful life and promote understanding among all faiths and practices. These qualities of peaceful life can be further highlighted and used as a tool to bring Krati and non Kirati people together in the spirit of sustainable peace, mutual understanding, respect to other faiths and cultures, broader participation and fraternity.

Finally, Halesi is a place where people belonging to different faiths, castes, ethnic groups, and culture come together for a purpose – the organization of a festival, *puja*, and other events. With better planning, encouragement and support their skills mentioned above, expertise and the spirit of collective cultural property, their traditional knowledge, experience can be valuable storehouse for the nation and society now and for the posterity tomorrow. Halesi is the right place to have these cultural expressions and experience to be appreciated, expressed and preserved as cultural assets to cherish, use and share with others. Time may come when these assets can be shared as commodities and alleviate poverty.

### **3. 2 The unique pilgrimage**

Halesi, also called 'the Pashupati of the East', has played a very unique role in attracting people from various regions and faiths prevalent in east Nepal. The ethnic, social and cultural character of the region is pluralistic. This feature is also universal in the national context. In fact, for centuries Nepal is known for its diverse ethnic groups, their distinct cultures and faiths all contained in a relatively small territory and maintaining peaceful and harmonious style of life. This chapter discusses the harmonizing role of Halesi as a pilgrimage center of the East is playing in uniting and rallying the believers of different faiths and traditions.

In Nepal, old urban settlements like Kathmandu have shrines belonging to different faiths. But the hills and mountains of Nepal do not have many built-in structures as places of worship. The reason for this difference is that it is not easy to manage necessary resources, materials and skilled manpower for quality construction of such monuments. In the urban setting, multi-purpose construction becomes a common phenomenon. Second, the majority of the people in rural Nepal worship nature such as hills, forests, mountain tops, rivers, confluences, caves and rocks as divine gifts and power centers. Where there are permanent settlements with long history, sound economy, seats of rulers and townships, built-in shrines are made to cater for the spiritual needs of the settlers. Several districts of Karnali and Mahakali regions in the mid and far west Nepal are examples of this.

Halesi cave shrine, the subject matter of this study, is a naturally built complex where people belonging to several faiths come together for worship, attend the fairs and festivals, and organize family as well as community rituals. The most important and distinct feature of Halesi is that the site has been a common

heritage for the followers of Hindu, Buddhist, Kirata faiths. Each of them has its own interpretations of history and association with the Mahadeva of Halesi as discussed below.

### 3.3 The Hindu Connection

From the Indus Valley to the Vedic – Puranic period and later to the historic periods, Shiva Mahadeva became very popular in the Indian-subcontinent. In Nepal different names of Shiva, such as Pashupatinath, Mhadewa, Shankara, Bholenath, among others became very popular. With the rise of Hindu monarchy many hills, valleys and plains of Nepal occupied by the Hindu rulers became known as shiva pilgrimages. The Skanda Purana mentions several places in Nepal where Shiva and his consort Uma or Devi are worshipped. Halesi is one such place where Haleswara form of Shiva is popular among the Hindus and the Kiratis.

#### 3.3.1 Major Hindu festivals at Halesi

The sacred complex of Halesi has appeared as a common meeting place of three major religious faiths and several other local cults and traditions. It seems like a galaxy with many planets. Apart from the daily rituals, Hindus perform this pilgrimage four times a year - a)at the time of *Sivaratri*, the great Siva festival that falls in the month of Phalgun (February-March), b)at *Ramnavami*, the festival of Rama in the month of Chaitra (March-April), c) at Teej, the women's festival in the month of Bhadra (August-September) and d)at the time of *Balachaturdashi*, a festival where people throw away the grains in the name of the dead that falls in the month of Mangsir (November-December). During the time of *Bolbam*, a difficult journey dedicated to Shiva, the devotees sprinkle the holy water taken from the River of Ganga in India in the sacred complex of Halesi. People of all religious backgrounds come and celebrate these festivals with equal enthusiasm.

Below is a brief introduction to some major festivals celebrated at Halesi-

a. **Maha Shivaratri:**

This is one of the major festivals to be celebrated in Halesi. It is celebrated in honor of Lord Shiva on the dark moon day in the month of Falgun (February-March). A large number of devotees make a pilgrimage to Halesi on this occasion; every neighborhood in every town celebrates it by organizing a campfire near their local Shiva Temple. In the morning, people offer fresh cow's milk to Lord Shiva. Children in groups beg for firewood or even decamp with things made of wood.

b. **Ram Nawami:**

This festival falls on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March). This occasion marks the birthday anniversary of Rama, the hero of the epic of the Ramayana. Rama is the husband of Sita, daughter of King Janak of Nepal.

c. **Teej (the fasting festival for women):**

This occasion falls on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the bright half of the month of Bhadra (August/September). Women observe this festival with a view to ensuring a long and healthy life for their husband, if married or, if unmarried, to finding an ideal husband. On the third day of this festival, they

worship Lord Shiva, and then take food. For this is also a festival in which women dance and sing, often making up songs to articulate the problems they face at home. This festival reminds the worshippers of the travails of Parvati in finding her husband, Lord Shiva.

d. **Balachaturdashi:**

This is observed on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the dark moon fortnight in the month of Mangsir (November/December). This day is observed in memory of near and dear ones in the family who are no more in this world and to honor Bala, a demon. On this day, the devotees take a holy bath near the stream of *vasaha* cave and also sprinkle a variety of seeds in the Halesi Temple complex as they go round. This is done in the belief that the dead relations may reap the fruits of this merit in the next world.

Apart from these festivals, Brahmans and Chhetris and followers of Hindu religion organizes various smaller rituals and *pujas* (worships). They include Satyanarayan puja, Swasthani puja, Rudri, Bhagavat, and the like. Sometimes, the devotees offer one hundred thousand holy threads and leaves of wood apple by performing special prayer and *puja*.

e. **Bol Bom festival**

The year 2014 was very special in the recent history of Hindu celebration at Halesi. The Bol Bom religious festival connects several Siva pilgrimages of Nepal and India. Clad in saffron, Siva devotees walk barefoot with holy waters from famous pilgrimages/rivers and offer the water to several holy Siva shrines and pilgrimages. They start the walk from Baijanath in Bihar, India and go to Koshi river and Barahakshetra-Chatara dham in Nepal, then to Pindeswar Mahadeva of Dharan and finally to Pashupathnath in Kthmandu. All the holy waters collected will finally be offered to Pashupatinath. This year they started their yatra/travel at different Siva places such as Walung, Syangja of west Nepal and Halesi of East converging the crowd finally at Pashupatinath. Local people hope the Bol Bom crowd will visit Halesi next Shrawan also.

### 3.4 The Kirata/Rai Connection

Shiva Mahadeva has been the commonly worshipped deity for the people of the Himalayas, valleys, hills and plains of Nepal. In fact, archaeologists believe Shiva is as old and venerable guardian deity as the Indus Valley civilization. The pre-Aryan image of Shiva became a household name in the cultures of the Himalayan region and beyond. From Kailash Manasarovar to the east border of the Himalayas, Shiva is worshipped by Hindus, Buddhists, animists, and others in different forms. The Kiratis, whose ancestry also goes beyond Indus and up to Greece and Central Asia, were the followers of Shiva. With the passage of time, the big Kirati clans remained away and unconnected with each other. In Nepal they have a long history going back to several thousand years before CE.

Besides being Saivites, Kiratis worship nature and ancestral deities. The main highlights of the dharma are rites and rituals, oral traditions, *muddhum*, festivals, strategies to balance the seen and unseen forces, ancestor worship, regulation regarding food and drinks, and respect to nature.



Today, the Kiratis of east Nepal organize several religious and ritual festivals and occasions according to the teachings of their gurus of the past and the present. Meat and alcohol are forbidden for the followers. A new religious culture seems to be developing within the umbrella of the *Kiratadharmā*. In Kathmandu also the Kirati people organize a host of clan and other rituals, dances and *pujas* related to the *dharma*. There is also a dress code for the Falgunanda followers. During religious festivals and puja, both male and female followers wear specially designed long white robe and a peaked hat that is associated with saints.

The *Kiratdharmā* has its own religious text called *samjik muddhum*. Kirati rituals are performed according to this text. The *sewa-sawa gurus* perform these rituals as they are the only experts in this field. This *muddhum* is written in the *Srijunga* script of the Kiratis. The *Kiratadharmā* followers avoid animal sacrifice and idol worship. There is a custom of lighting 108 or 1008 oil/butter lamps in the *Manghims* on important occasions such as *Mangsewa Puja*. They chant the mantra 'WOT ...WOT....' while performing the *puja*. (Chawegu, 2058:809). The last Guru Falgunanda flourished and made east Nepal his spiritual territory. Today, Halesi and surrounding areas of Khotang and Bhojpur have followers of Joshmani cult which contributes much to what Kiratis today have in the form of *Kirtadharmā*.

The Kirat/Rai perform this pilgrimage during *Ubhauli*, a festival of rice planting in the month of Baisakh (April-May) and *Udhauli*, a festival of harvesting that falls in the month of Mangsir (November-December). A special ethnic dance called *Sakela* is performed near Halesi during these celebrations. The Kiratas celebrate some important festivals at Halesi on annual basis. The *Sakela (Ubhauli)* dance at Toyachung near Halesi draws a large crowd from many parts of Khotang and neighbouring districts and villages. The Buddhists follow the Tibetan calendar of festivals and perform this pilgrimage for *mahasadhanapuja*, religious dance, *pranidhan* in Lohsar, a New Year celebration, Buddha Jayanti, *ayusadhana*, meditation for immortality, among others.

### **3.5 The Buddhist Connection**

The early history of Halesi is a checkered one. There are no archaeological evidences about the origin and growth of the settlement around the cave. Neither are there any old documents regarding the importance of the cave itself.

Padmasambhava (Indian name) also known as Guru Rimpoche was respected as Guru Rimpoche in the Tibetan Buddhist texts and tradition. Born in the Swat Valley of Pakistan in the seventh century Padmasambhava attained the highest level merit a mortal could attain in his/her life. Many hill caves of northern Nepal are associated with his name and fame and are thus regarded as the holiest of the holy just because of his name and contribution for the development of Mahayana school of Buddhism. According to a legend, in his previous life Padmasambhava was a king of Tibet. Later in his life Buddha enjoined him to go to Maratika (Halesi) and perform Ayupuja of long life *puja* for the welfare of human kind. Such a puja is normally performed along with deep meditation for seven years. Now at least for a contracted period of seven days is considered the norm and following the footpath of Guru Rimpoche

Buddhist priest and believers come to Halesi Martatika to perform such a *puja*. Even after Padmasambhava left the place completing his *puja*, meditation and other activities, Halesi remained popular for the Buddhist priests, householders and believers. The *aayupuja* became a feature of Buddhist culture at Halesi.

Writing about the importance of Halesi-Maratika Katia Buffetrille writes:

*Padmasambhava in Halesi Specifically Buddhist history in Halesi begins with the story of Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche as he is referred to by Tibetan Buddhists. Compared to the story of Shiva this is relatively recent time, in the time of humans. There exists both a biography of Padmasambhava and Mandarava that describe their experience in the cave of Maratika, its Tibetan name.*

That is, Padmasambhava came to Maratika-Halesi with his consort Mandarava to perform the longlife puja and meditation. Buffertrille further adds:

*For Buddhists, Halesi cave is most famous as a special spot for long-life practices. This is particularly true of the site of the Parbati stone, called Chhepuma in Tibetan. The water that drips from the stones in several places throughout these caves, originating from the rock itself, is collected and considered to be the equivalent of the Amitayus long-life nectar. It is called umbrit in Nepali, the anti-poison. It is also called jal, holy water, and is valued by Hindus as prasat, a god-blessed substance. The lamas at Maratika prepare a pill with this umbrit and call it the "Maratika Long Life Pill ('Liberation of Tasting')."*

According to the legend, Padmasambhava had married a princess of Tibet. Her name was Manadarwa and together they had spent years in the Maratika cave and mastered the philosophy of *ayupuja*, the worship for long life. The god of *ayupuja*, Tsi-wa-mi is the main object of veneration of such occasion. Padmasambhava not only mastered this *puja* philosophy he also gave sermons and discussions to his pupils who had accompanied him here about the importance of the *puja* rite.

The real story of Padmasambhava in Nepal is still to be researched and written but the legends and traditions are so overwhelming that Buddhists historians do not cast any doubt on his visit and contributions he had made as a resident monk for several years. In fact, Nepal's religious history, art and literature demonstrate his influence on the life the Mahayani Buddhists of Nepal in general and the Himalayan region in particular. Cave shrines like Pharping in Kathmandu, Pangboche and Thame in Solukhumbu and Halesi in Khotang draw crowds of visitors just because of the name and history of Padmasambhava.

Sonam Sherpa, a resident Buddhist monk and a teacher at the *Maratika* Gompa run international school throws further light on the importance and history of Halesi-Maratika. According to Sherpa, the name Halesi was derived from the Tibetan word – Holesya! This means a place of surprise. The cave thus generated 'surprise' and curiosity among the early Buddhist saints and followers. According to the legends narrated by Sonam Sherpa there were several visits made by early Buddhists saints and their

followers to Halesi. First of all, Kisun Devchan sent his guru to India to find Guru Rimpoche Padmasambhava. Guru Trigunanatha spoke to his followers about the importance of Halesi-maratika and made the forecast that Padmasambhava would come to visit the site later. And, accordingly, that had happened- Padmasambhava had come.

The Tibetan tradition also maintains that even Manjushri Buddha had visited Halesi in the previous years. Then Buddha Amitayusha blessed Padmasambhava with *Maranavimukti* (freedom from death) which would mean that Padmasambhava was to attain nirvana. Similarly, Guru Dgrab Dorje had also come from Tibet and meditated here. Ven Bu Wo Padma developed *Athatantra* or *dirghayutantra vidhi* to be followed and practiced by the Buddhists.

During his teaching and meditation at Halesi Padmasambhava is said to have transferred the 'Long Life' *shastra* to his students, who then gave it to their pupils. That is how the *tantra* tradition, like any other classical knowledge would hand down to posterity. Padmasambhava completed the Long Life *sadhana* and preached it to his disciples and left. But this part of history of Halesi is unclear. Obviously Buddhists from different part of Nepal visited the cave shrine. But only in the recent centuries did the history come out to unfold. Many Buddhists see Padmasambhava as an incarnation of Buddha despite the fact that Buddha spoke against such as event like re-birth. He said – This (present) birth will be the last of *tathagata*.

Visitors are from Buddhist countries or people who like to trek and travel in the Himalaya or people who like to have some preliminary lesson on Buddhism along with basic meditation lessons provided in the Maratkia Gompa. Once at Halesi, they learn more than books could provide them. For many such pilgrims one time visit to Halesi is not enough. People also come back repeatedly. Interviews during the field work indicated that their previous link with the Gompa teachers and/or with friends encourages them to visit Halesi.

### **3.6 Impact of Spiritual Interface**

- a. **Religious Tolerance** - People of different ethno-religious background were to be seen participating in the major events such as the Balachaturdashi, a Hindu festival, significant number of the Kirata Rai people, the Tharus from the Terai plains, the Tibetan Buddhist community from Nepal and Buddhist believers from Laddakh, India, Bhutan and several European nations were equally celebrating the festival with deep sense of devotion to Padmasambhava or Guru Rimpoche. The local Rai people were seen observing their ritual practices with the officiating Brahman priest in the holy site whereas the Buddhist Lamas were seen chanting their *mantras* and observing the Buddhist rituals at the same time when the Hindu rituals were observed inside the shrine complex. Informants described that major festivals such as Sivaratri, Ram Navami, Balachaturdasi and Teej

of the Hindus, Udhaui-Ubhauhi of the Kiratas and Buddha Jayanti of the Buddhists are celebrated here with equal zeal and collective or interfaith participation.

- b. **Integration:** Halesi has become the integrated focal point of attraction on several special and general occasions marked by fairs and festivals. On such occasions, people of different faiths and philosophies come and celebrate the events with equal enthusiasm. As a religious center, Halesi draws a large number of people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds throughout the year. In major events, a temporary but a big *haat bazaar* comes up where traders from far and wide gather for 2-3 days for the occasion and set up temporary stalls and tented shacks near the shrine complex to sell their goods for 10 days. The goods range from woolen rugs and herbal products such as *yartsa* (the Himalayan 'viagra' and now a very expensive herb in international market) and musk-deer skin and yak tail from the Himalayas to cooking pots and pans from the Terai and a wide variety of citrus fruits from the local villages. Locally brewed alcohol becomes as common as tea or coffee in the cities. This event called '*mela*' becomes an added feature of Halesi. The pilgrims of all the regions, ethnic groups, castes, sects, and religions come here for the pilgrimage of Halesi and generally a nice understanding without any discrimination of any kind has been noted among them.
- c. **Preservation of Traditional Knowledge:** Traditional knowledge has been defined as "a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual, spirituality and worldview." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/traditional\\_knowledge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/traditional_knowledge)). This knowledge is passed from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has been the basis for agriculture, food preparation, health care, education, conservation and the wide range of other activities that sustain societies in many parts of the world.

There are varieties of sacred performances at Halesi; similarly varieties of ritual specialists belonging to various faiths are also found in Halesi. All of them help the pilgrims and the devotees to complete their sacred rituals and make them feel happy in the end. The sacred specialists have thus transmitted the sacred tradition and preserved traditional knowledge at Halesi in full vitality.

All the human beings have desires of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa* and the sacred complexes have the power to fulfil them. That is why, the human beings worship and take part in different religious celebration and perform ritual practices for the fulfillment of their various kinds of desires. A large number of people are involved in the sacred practices at Halesi throughout the year. This way the traditional knowledge have been transmitted to the new generation and preserved for the future.

### 3.7 Factors of Unity

Like other regions of Nepal where cultural diversity is a norm and reality, there are several factors that play important role in unifying Nepalese society. Some major factors are discussed below.

### **3.7.1 Religious Cohesion**

The Nepal Himalayas have long provided a contact zone for diverse religious groups and interaction among these groups helped develop certain form of intimate relationship. A distinctive trait of Nepali culture, historically, is its power of synthesis and assimilation. It has blended and harmonized even the opposing philosophies and dogmas reaching its territorial shores (**Sharma, 1978: 1**). The cohesive nature of Nepali society was the result of the combination, integration, exchange, and overlapping of the languages and cultures of the various groups of people. Nepal represents the syncretism of different cultures, religions, languages and races (**Shrestha, 2000: 209**). Buddhism and Hinduism, for example, have been fused in Nepal to a remarkable degree whereby their sectarian distinctiveness is often obscured. This becomes clear by looking at some of the religious life of the Hindu and Buddhist Newars who have lived and shared the same cultural milieu in the Kathmandu Valley for hundreds of years (**Sharma, 1989: 140-141**). In scores of instances, their public festivals and popular rites are devoid of any strong sectarian overtones.

Popular Hindu and Buddhist deities such as Ganesa, Bhairava, Mahakala, Kumari, Ajima, Vajrayogini and Guhesvari are worshipped, as much by the Hindus as by the Buddhist. The most outstanding instance of this spirit of religious syncretism is represented, perhaps, by the popular god, Matsyendranath. As a vast section of the Hindus looks upon Matsyendranatha to be a Natha ascetic and teacher of Gorakhnatha in the *Kanphatta* order of Saivism, to the Buddhist, however, he is the Avalokitesvara Padmapani, the Boddhisattva, who has an abounding compassion for all creatures of this world (**Locke: 1980**). Once a year, Lord Shiva, a Hindu God is worshiped by the Buddhists as the incarnation of Buddha while in another occasion, Padmapani Boddhisattva, a Buddhist God, is worshiped by the Hindus as Matsyandranatha.

In the western hills of Nepal, a non-Hindu culture called *masta*, was later associated with Hinduism and Buddhism and became popular in the form of Lama Vishnu. The relation of the *masta* with Lama (Buddhist) and Vishnu (Hindu god) is one of the striking features, which indicates the cultural interaction among different religious dogmas thereby enhancing cohesive attitude in Nepali society. The *masta* represents a symbiosis of composite culture with a harmonic combination of indigenous beliefs, Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism (**Shrestha, 2000: 170**). This backdrop of Nepali society provided positive ground to flourish cohesive attitude that can be seen in Halesi as it was evolved as an integrative power center for the people of different philosophy and faiths.

### **3.7.2 Language**

There are about half a dozen languages spoken in the greater Halesi region – Nepali, Kirata, Sherpa, Tamang, Newar and Sunuwar. Nepali being the *lingua-franca* of Nepal it binds the whole population of

the region. When people attend festivals, rituals and fairs they speak Nepali among themselves. Hindu priests, Buddhist Lamas, Kirata Bijuwas or *mundhum* experts all use Nepali while addressing people outside their own language speaking area and practices. Schools – from primary to higher secondary levels – use Nepali as medium of instruction. Children with different language and culture background speak Nepali when they have to interact. Music and songs are composed and sung in Nepali. Famous Kirata writers write in Nepali and have earned name and fame. Kirata, Tamang, Sherpa and Newar musicians and singers use Nepali in their works. Rajan Mukarung, a native of Bhojpur and a speaker of Bantawa Rai language won Nepal's prestigious Jagadamba Shri Award for his Nepali novel. These are few examples how language is the source of unity.

### **3.7.3 Pilgrimage**

In a traditional society like Nepal, holy sites play important role as pilgrimage where devotees make it a point to visit them in their active life. Halesi, among several other holy places plays important role in uniting people in the spirit of fraternity against competition, peace against violence, harmony against distrust and conflict, progress against status quo. Halesi is a reasonably small place but its influence across many ethnic groups and regions is wide and growing. With the road and limited infrastructure, the number of visitors is growing over the years. Once in Halesi people converge into one large conglomeration of devotees. This is important to generate the feeling and emotion of oneness and ownership of Halesi. All major fairs and calendar festivals taking place in the holy complex have the strength of uniting a wider variety of people with divergent ethnic, cultural and regional backgrounds.

### **3.7.4 Multi religious nature of Halesi – then and now**

The history of a harmonious assimilative style of living of the local Kiratas and the host of non kirata population of the area is as old as the Christian Era. The fall of the Kirata rule in the hands of the Hindu rulers the Lichhavis and their collaborators – the Koliya, Vrijji, Gupta, Verma among others paved the way for the non Kiratas to move towards east along the major basins of the tributaries of Koshi – e.g. Tamakoshi, Dudhkoshi, Arun, Tamor, Bhotekoshi, and plenty of small rivers.

As discussed in the paper, there are three major faiths directly involved in the ritual activities of the cave shrine from the beginning of its fame as a holy and popular site. People gather here on various occasions following the Hindu ritual and festival calendar. But devotees also come here on their own outside the calendar and worship the deities following standard rules mentioned in the texts. Often they also bring their family priest so he can guide them.

Situated in the District of Khotang, Halesi has been a holy meeting place for people living in the neighboring districts such as Okhaldhunga, Bhojpur, Udayapur, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Kavre, Solu Khumbu in the hills and mountains. In the other circle are districts such as Kathmandu, Sindhupalchok, Siraha, Saptari, Morang, Sunsari, Bhojpur, Mahottari, Dhanusa, Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, and Chitwan. A

quick survey of people visiting the site on special occasions like Balachaturdashi and interview with the priests and committee members displayed this record.

### **3.7.5 A Center of Faiths and harmonious living**

Devotees and pilgrims coming from wide geographic locations and visiting Halesi to attend festivals and/or perform special rite there meet each other, exchange greetings and worship together. Not all of them bring their priests for such *pujas* etc and borrow each other's experts. This is also a common phenomenon in other sites such as Barahakshetra and Chatara in Sunsari, Manakamana in Gorkha, Siddhakali and Siddhapokhari in Sankhuwasabha district, Pathibhara in Taplejung, Chhintang Bhagawati in Dhankuta, Budha Subba in Dharan, among others. Many of these sites had local, mostly non-Hindu names before the unification and migration of the Hindu high and low castes

### **3.7.6 Peace in anticipation**

After a long war, peace has been the main concern of the people of Nepal. Halesi has negotiated the aspiration of the people to live in peace. Last decade saw break of law and order - emergence of civil war - lives lost, ensuing political instability, hegemony, brief stunt of King Gyanendra - all seen with all its religious-ritual paraphernalia. Now in places of pilgrimage like Halesi one can see participation of people of different faiths in rituals and activities which symbolizes peace, harmony and participation in each other's festivals, rites and rituals.

Will this state of peace, harmony among faiths and people continue once the federal state under the Kirati is formed? This is a question almost everybody is asking as there are debates about the nature of the federal system. Non-Kirati people have fears and apprehension about the future of their faith and culture. However, despite a small section of extreme political and ethnicity-based ideology represented in the area, no specific conflict and confrontation seems in the offing.

Katia remarks-

*Whenever Kirant people discuss the State they are always sure to say that there will be no discrimination. The main purpose of the State will be to preserve Kirant culture, religion, and language, mainly through programs in public schools. Many Kirant people in Halesi are conscious that their culture is being forgotten and lost. They want to do something about it.*

(website information)

### **3.8 New Discourse on the Future of Halesi**

In line with the political changes in the country in recent times, the local Rais and people of other communities started seeking equal rights in the management of Halesi. The Kirata/Rai people envision Halesi as the future jewel and center of their Kirant State. Most non-Kirant people in Halesi are familiar with the general concept of the Kirant State and do not mind that idea. As long as there is no caste discrimination then they are fine with it, they say.

According to Buffetrille (1994) two local youth clubs - Jana Jyoti Club and the Panchawati Pragati Youth Club - consider preserving the Kiranti culture one of their missions to maintain their cultural identity. She adds - 'It is ironic that these same Rai officials pushing for a Kirant State are members of the Maobaadi party. One young member invoked Lenin as he espoused his belief that dharma is like an addiction. He was followed by the impassioned retort of his friend and peer from the Jana Jyoti club, "Culture is the identification of a people. So we preserve it." In the changed political context, the bottom line is that the Maobaadi is dependent on the support of the people. This is why during the insurgency period the Maoists never took steps to hurt traditional faiths and practices. Their feeling is that even from an antireligious perspective Halesi temple is valued as an attraction promoting tourism and economic gain for the locals.

Regardless of whether or not the Kirant vision succeeds, it is accepted by many people that Halesi is evolving into the new regional center in a natural that will require no governmental intervention. Already, Halesi is a local area attraction because its shops sell a wider variety of goods than any other village nearby. Most of these shops have been built a maximum of seven years ago, many within the year. When walking around Halesi new construction is visible everywhere. People are moving to Halesi by the day because they see economic opportunity there. One man observed that owning a shop is a lot easier than working fields and everyone wants to try their hand at some such business. Pack mules are a common feature of Halesi's streets, a business that arrived only two years ago and can greatly accelerate the rate of business. Most goods come via Jairam, a small town on the Dudh Koshi that is the last stop on a vehicular road that can eventually reach Kathmandu (and even that road is somewhat recent). There is only a walking path now, but a vehicle road connecting Halesi to Jairam is nearing completion. This new mule business will become obsolete with the even greater ability of trucks to move people and goods. The road will be the first ever road connecting Halesi to Kathmandu.

People say that Halesi will soon become a large town, if not a city one day. There are some fears. People mention the inevitable pollution that will accompany unplanned urbanization, the vulgar dress and attitude of urban youth.

One informant expressed his fear that following the infiltration of foreign values he will lose control of his sister and daughter in the presence of so many outside boys. Despite these fears the positivity and hope that accompanies this vision of a 40 growing Halesi far outweighs the bad. People in this small village are excited by the prospect of development and modernization that growth will bring.

Another informant during the interview added to this vision of Halesi as a modern town, hoping that Halesi would become a place of culture and scholarly research. He expressed the need to advertise about the power and history of Halesi temple because, even though the word is spreading, it is still relatively unknown. One man, after explaining the inevitability of these changes, then explained to me the reason why.

"It is all because of Halesi temple," he said and added that "nobody would ever harm Halesi temple because Halesi temple is the fortune and hope of so many people."



All this will happen in Halesi, but only because the temple is here. It is the blessing, or curse, of Shiva that will carry Halesi into a different kind of struggle from years past. For the people of Halesi there will be new advantages, but there will be new challenges as well.

The Kirati informants of Halesi are believe that once the new constitution is written there will be a Kirati Federal State in this region. They do not fail to mention that days of ancient glory of the Kiratis will ultimately dawn again here with the emergence of a 'Kirata or Khambu State.' Halesi will be the main cultural-spiritual center once the Kirati State is formed. Only the new constitution will define the role and relationship of the large number of non-Kirati population living in the region.

To conclude, Halesi temple is a point of cultural pride for the Rai people of the East. It is their own discovery and one of the most powerful temples in the country. Some Kirants argue that a Kirant *pujari* is necessary at this temple, though not all Hindus would be ready to accept this change. More facilities are required now in order to bring such devotees and pilgrims. This is important for the popularity of the holy site, for the development of services and facilities, for employment generation finally promote Buddhist education. Buddhist pilgrims visiting Halesi also become aware of the other monasteries along the northern range, especially in the Solu Khumbu region below Mount Everest.

## Chapter- IV

### Preservation Strategy for the Halesi Shrine Complex

#### 4.1 Main challenge: unique structural phenomenon

This chapter concerns the issue and need of preservation of the host of naturally made and/or installed icons inside the open cave complex that is considered by the people as a shrine. Such an association of names, feeling and emotions has a history of hundreds of years. Thus, caves of all sizes, standing or hanging icons and naturally formed holes and imprints all have meanings and interpretations. In order to respect the feeling of the people the whole complex with these icons need preservation.

In fact, there is now growing concern among the local elites and activists about the preservation of Halesi Mahadevs cave shrine. The concerned agency of the government is also making preparation to proceed with the work.

In fact, the monuments of sacred complex and the religious images associated with them are the greatest treasure of human civilization. They glorify the history, culture and identity of a community and a nation. There are various natural and unnatural factors that cause decay or damage of the ancient monuments and antiquities. Invaluable rare antiquities are slowly disappearing from the world on account of human negligence, lack of knowledge on their significance and need for preservation or through natural decay or disaster. Such objects and sites need to be properly conserved and preserved in order to protect the monuments and artifacts at risk. Through the scientific process of preservation they survive for longer period despite heavy damage caused them by the human and natural agencies.

In the last few decades the people of Nepal have become very much conscious and they want their nation's heritage to be preserved properly so that the sound of the ancient religious and archaeological assets existing in their premises may continue to be heard in countless centuries to come.

As discussed in earlier sections, Halesi is a naturally formed sacred site with unusual rock formation to be seen in the two major caves, situated on the same hillock, one at the foot and other on the top. The third one is also there that is not open for the visitors because of its difficult accessibility. The lower cave is known as *vasaha* (the bull, as the carrier of Mahadeva and the guardian of the cave) where the Mahadeva is believed to have encountered with a demon and the upper part of its chimney like opening through which Shiva is supposed to have fled. The Tibetan oral tradition tells that Padmasambhava became victorious when demonic forces caused trouble during his meditation in this cave. The main sanctum of Halesi is located on the top of the hill where the naturally created *shivalinga*, the phallus, the symbolic stone image of Parvati, the spouse of Mahadeva, are to be in presence. The main cave also contains five narrow passageways between two stalagmites and people consider them as test sites for judging the fate

and purity of the pilgrims. Keeping conduct in order for god-fearing people seems to be the principle behind such a tradition.

The preservation of the shrine holds greater importance for the continuity of the religious tradition, harmony and coexistence among the people of different ethno-cultural backgrounds. As discussed above, the cave shrine of Halesi represents a typical rock formation usually observed in areas consisting of limestone or carbonate rock. The acidic rain water contributed to the loosening of calcareous rock and resulted in many cavities with different types of rock structures. The main sanctum has been situated inside a fragile structure of the limestone conglomeration. Such fragile structure of the shrine needs much care for its preservation. Protection of natural beauty of Halesi has been the primary concern at this time. At this time, the whole complex remains threatened by land encroachment on all sides. A Buddhist monastery was built just above the main cave, the government planned to move it to another place by giving some money for compensation. But the government never succeeded and the monastery remained in the same place.

There is not enough open space for the cave shrine because of the construction of the houses around. The houses were already shifted once at the time of Panchayat regime. But the local people illegally occupied the paid and procured area and built the houses after democratic change. Viewing through the present condition of the shrine, there is a need for designing and implementing short and term action plan for the protection of the sacred complex and the cultures constructed around it.

#### **4.2 Role of the Government**

As regards the mechanism of the preservation of the shrine, the Department of Archaeology has to explore some workable solution in collaboration with the local people and agencies such as the Halesi Development Committee, concerned government authorities working in the district of Khotang, and other stakeholders. The government should introduce a master plan for the preservation of the temple and overall development of the entire Halesi village. Besides -

- The government must consult and respect the earlier decisions and specify the boundaries of the sacred complex with clear and separate line of demarcation acquiring at least 150 meters of land around the main shrine. Within this area, the government should develop a pool, holy garden, public space, ethnic museum, health clinic, *dharmashala* (pilgrim's rest house), meditation center, and prayer halls as designed.
- The immediate need is to carry out a geological study of the cave shrine to understand the physical situation of the structure including its tentative life and take immediate measures for the preservation of the temple.
- The monastery complex and other public houses illegally built above the cave shrine should be shifted to other areas since they had already given the compensation by the old government. Otherwise, the monastic complex could jeopardize the longevity of the main shrine.

- Basic facilities like water, electricity, and toilet and bath room are urgently required for the comfort of the pilgrims and the government should manage financial support to meet such emergency requirements around the shrine through local bodies such as the Halesi Development Committee and Halesi Temple Management Committee, among others.
- The temple development committee should be reorganized, ensuring the representation of all religious groups concerned.
- Similarly, local cultures must be preserved through a calendar events organized to promote them.
- Finally, the government must guarantee that changes of equation in the central government will not affect the development of Halesi.

#### **4.3 Role of the Local Committees**

Currently, there are two local committees working for the management and development of the Halesi temple and Halesi complex as a whole. The committee looks after the daily rituals, maintenance of the temple and manages annual celebration events. Local committees have major role to play for the preservation of the temple complex and the cultures revolved around Halesi.

The Halesi Development Committee (HDC) feels that there is an urgent need for the finalization of a Master Plan for the complex. For this and other related purposes, and plans, the development committee was formed in the year 2052 (1995) after King Birendra's visit to the site. The king had shown interest in the development of the cave complex in a planned manner. Following his instruction and interest the plan came and lands, including small building around the shrine were acquired by the government through a payment scheme. Later the government failed to continue speeding up proper legal to hold the land in the name of the shrine. Owing to the lack of actions and after the fall of the monarch people began to transfer the land ownership, sale the property taking dual advantage, big structures came up in the nearby area and shops began to come close to the shrine of archaeological and historical significance. This encroachment has damaged the purity, beauty and sanctity of the complex. The disaster continues today. The HDC now receives a sizable amount in the form of salary and does virtually nothing in order to stop encroachment including new construction and is now politically divided following the division in the political party in power then.

There are some urgent works to be done on the part of local committees; they are as follows-

- The one-way passage leading to the main sanctum of the shrine is not enough for the huge number of pilgrims during major fairs. The local committee should invest some earning of the temple to build an exit passage in the main sanctum.
- The local committee should manage a permanent and secured platform to keep the shoes of the pilgrims so that they put off their shoes before the entry to the main sanctum. Now shoes have been making the steps dirty.

- Even the pathway leading to the main shrine remains dirty with human deposits during major festivals. Temporary bathrooms should be built up in certain areas and vigilance should be heightened to keep the complex tidy and clean and enhance the physical grandeur of the holy shrine.
- The local committee should be careful for the drainage of the public area to be diverted into other place and ensure that the holy caves of *vasaha* and *bhairava* should remain safe and clean from the drainage.
- Adequate drinking water, garbage disposal, security of pilgrims should be main concern of the Temple Committee and local clubs.

#### **4.4 Role of Guthi Samsthan**

The Guthi Samsthan (GS, the National Trust Corporation) of the government of Nepal is responsible to regulate and administer the landed property donated by the devotees to their family/clan deities in Nepal. Such land plots are normally farmlands and portion of the production of which would go to the God/shrine. With the passage of time the tenants would ignore their duty and claim the whole production ignoring the share of the owner, the God. Later, they would even register the land in their own name knowing the god would not go to the court.

The Mahadevasthan of Halesi, like other famous religious places of the country, has land property in the form of trust. However, the exact size of land could not be ascertained during the study. The GS needs to keep track of the property of Halesi Mahadeva and do the needful to first find out and then claim the ownership of the shrine.

#### **4.5 Role of Nepal Tourism Board**

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) is a semi-autonomous government agency to look after the development of tourism in the country. It works in direct collaboration with the related private agencies. Halesi is gradually coming to light in the tourism world. Thus NTB can play important role for the promotion of tourism at Halesi in the spirit of Public-Private-Partnership. Halesi is now visited by thousands of devotees from Nepal, SAARC countries and abroad. More facilities are required now in order to bring such devotees and pilgrims. Nepal Tourism Board in collaboration with other stakeholders should formulate workable strategies for the development of basic infra structure at Halesi. There is need to spell out and link tourism firmly with culture and cultural preservation.

Finally, this chapter discussed the need of preservation the site and culture. Role of stakeholders was also discussed in brief. The focus was on the need to maintain the sanctity of the complex and make the site more attractive and conducive to peace and harmony.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Summary**

This study proceeded with the major objective of exploring the true history of the evolution of Halesi as a holy and revered site for the Kiratas, Hindus and the Buddhists of the region and beyond. For more than two thousand years, that is from the end of the Kirata rule in Kathmandu Valley and their subsequent move to the east to begin their rule here, this site is being respected and its glory maintained. Halesi, like other sacred complexes scattered in Nepal, has played a vital role in the socio-cultural and religious life of the people with diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds. Halesi cave shrine is a naturally built complex where people belonging to several philosophies and faiths come together for worship, attend the fairs and festivals and organize family as well as community rituals. The astonishing geological formations of the cave shrine have been identified as mysterious signs from the divine and Halesi obtained the status of spiritual power center for many religions in Nepal.

The first chapter discussed the problem, objectives, review of literature, methodology and research setting, the holy complex of Halesi along with demographic profile of the area. The main focus of the study was to present a clear history using local legends, oral traditions and historic documents. The second chapter presented the historical and cultural profile of the holy complex of Halesi. Available data was used to compile the history of the site. The third chapter focused on the holistic and integrative role of Halesi. The argument was that Halesi cannot be looked at from one perspective; it has multi faceted significance in the life of the people. The fourth chapter was about the preservation of the site with special focus on the need and the strategy. Role of different agencies in the spirit of partnership was discussed at length. And, finally the fifth chapter has summary, recommendation and major focus to be considered in future planning.

#### **5.2 Sacred Landscape**

Halesi is located slightly below the mountainous ranges in the eastern mid-hills of Nepal. The geological structure in the form of typical rock formation including host of caves of Halesi area offers interesting views for the observers. The landscape of Halesi looks so beautiful and magnificent surrounded on all sides by a panorama of mountains, mule-tracks, mountain paths and breathtaking white peaks of Himalayas. With a serene, sacred and peaceful atmosphere, Halesi holds special religious significance of all the sacred places of Nepal. In the rocky terrain around Halesi, there are many caves and pot-holes that seem to have been created by the nature to offer peculiar objects that have generated a host of interpretations for spiritual people for meditation and other religious observances. Extremely congenial environment of Halesi has been responsible into a great extent in the development of this site into a great cultural and religious center. This is all a gift of nature to this region. The whole spectrum of the sacred geography and its role in the development of religious tradition of Halesi and the people who live in the

neighborhood of the sacred complex have contributed in the continuity of cultural tradition and harmony among themselves.

### **5.3 Legends and History**

One major finding of this study is an attempt to trace the history of Halesi. The history of Halesi can be traced from three major sources - a) Old literary sources such as the royal papers, other documents of historic importance, b) Buddhist texts and oral traditions, and c) Kirata literary tradition –both oral traditions and legends as well as written literature compiled in recent times.

The study showed that apart from the oral tradition of Hindu community (*haresvara=halesi*) on the origin of Halesi, new interpretations of native Kirata and Buddhist followers have also been in circulation for quite some time. The Kirata people associate this place with the Kirata king named Holesung, who ruled the region during the medieval period (c.15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century). The Tibetan Buddhists claim that the place name was coined after the term Holyasso of a Tibetan dialect to refer as a place of wonders. With the absence of authentic documents, such an oral tradition may be viewed as hearsay statements invented by someone with particular religious background. Yet, sometimes they do highlight certain events that contain some amount of truth.

The Halesi cave as it has now emerged as one of the most popular shrines with immense spiritual power in Nepal, was discovered at an undetermined point of time (approximately two thousand years ago). There are oral traditions recounted by both local Rai people and Hindu informants regarding the discovery of Halesi cave that gives credit to Bagbangsi Rai, a local hunter who first discovered the cave. Gradually the discovery of Halesi cave caught the attention of the people far and wide and obtained the status of spiritual power center in the region. The episode on the discovery of Halesi cave seems to be true since the region was populated mostly by the Kirat/Rai people from the ancient time.

According to both Hindu and Kirati informants and local scholars, Halesi has a history of about 2000 years and has passed through many stages of development. The early history of Halesi seems to be entirely associated with the Kirata people since they are the natives of the place. After the unification of the country in 1769, the people of Hindu background penetrated to the eastern part of Nepal and the Kirata priests were replaced by the Hindu Mahanta Giris as priests in Halesi. For a long period of time, the Mahanta priestly tradition remained unchallenged. But some remarkable changes have taken place in the management and ritual practices of Halesi in the last few years. As a result, there are two inclusive committees working for the management and development of Halesi complex that minimized the role of Mahanta priests.

One important feature of the culture of Halesi cave shrine is that Mahadeva is the creative and positive interaction among the several faiths – Hindu, Buddhist, Kirati, animistic, and others inhabiting the region and beyond. Priests from these faiths organize and officiate the rites, rituals and festivals all the year round. The clients travel long to short distances to arrive Halesi. They have some promises to fulfill and

puja to organize. The priests are always at hand to help them. Many makeshift shops in the market are always ready to cater for the need of the clients, the pilgrims. There are festivals when the dead are remembered and small rites are performed with the help of the priest.

Buddhist rituals are very elaborative, long lasting, expensive and colorful. The Long Life Puja, for example, goes on at least for a week. Buddhist Lamas arrive the complex with their followers from different parts of Nepal, India and Bhutan. The local Kirati population organizes Udhauli-Ubhauli and other events with a huge crowd gathered to watch the dances.

The Kirati population feels that Halesi Mahadeva is their clan deity. The Hindus brought Shiva Mahadeva later in history. Their oral Veda – the *Mundhum* – speaks of Paru Hang (Shiva) and Sumnima (Parvati or Devi) and links the ancestry to them. But the Hindu kings gave the responsibility of conducting worship and care taker's job to the Hindu Giri family. That provision has now been drawn into controversy. A parallel politically instituted committee has now been installed and runs counter with the legality of the Giri priesthood. The Giris on the other hand would not quit their authority. There is now litigation in the local court.

In any case, Halesi created and maintained the cultural bond among the *jatis* and ethnic groups living in the area.

#### **5.4 Integrative Role of Halesi**

Halesi cave shrine happens to be a most sacred place and is widely frequented by the people belonging to different faiths, castes, ethnic groups, and culture throughout the whole year to observe different festivals, perform *pujas*, and other events. It has played a very unique role in attracting people from various regions and faiths prevalent in east Nepal. The ethnic, social and cultural character of the region is pluralistic. This feature is also universal in the national context. In fact, for centuries Nepal is known for its diverse ethnic groups, their distinct cultures and faiths all contained in a relatively small territory and maintaining peaceful and harmonious style of life.

Halesi as a pilgrimage center of the East is playing in uniting and rallying the believers of different faiths and traditions. Since the beginning of the history, the tradition of Hinduism, Buddhism and several local cults has continued blossoming in the country till the present day. Because of this fact, the diverse religions and cultures have been alive in Nepal till today and have been contributing in upholding the social values and in promoting the social and religious grandeur in the country. Halesi as a sacred complex has been a best example for the integrative role that it has been played with religious tolerance, harmony and peaceful coexistence of different faiths and followers. The most important and distinct feature of Halesi is that the site has been a common heritage where the people play their role in maintaining the



spiritual atmosphere and generating spiritual energy that they share without any feeling of conflict and competition.

The region of Halesi possesses Hindu, Kirata, Buddhist and other popular faiths and practices. People practice agriculture, animal husbandry and horticulture. These farmers in the most part apply the local indigenous package of knowledge in their daily activities. Problems are solved through the use of local resources. When Kirati priests serve the non-Kirati neighbors using their *mundhum* and other forms of expertise, their Brahmin neighbors reciprocate them with their expertise in officiating the rites and rituals following Vedic Hindu texts and traditions. The low caste population serves the Hindu high castes and Kirati population with their traditional services. At Halesi they all meet and perform the calendar and other rites and festivals together. The God Mahadeva and his cult has created and strengthened the inter-caste and inter-ethnic bond for a long time.

### **5.5 Halesi today: State-of-the-art and Recommendations**

- There is a need to design and implement local/district level programs where participation of all *jatis*/ethnic groups is guaranteed and success of the project is ensured. This can be tourism related projects, other projects for the preservation of local intangible cultures, languages and traditions, and projects for the development of Halesi as a viable tourist and multicultural site.
- The government and local agencies must work together for the successful conclusion of calendar and off-calendar festivals, rituals and events organized under the Halesi Mahadeva name. Partisan politics must not create any negative impact on the activities.
- There is also need to create awareness related programs and workshops at this site to enhance the level of awareness in areas such as human rights, cultural rights, role of local culture and harmonious living in the proposed federal structure. On such occasions and events it is important to highlight on role of Halesi Mahadeva because the god is always playing a central role in bringing devotees from different cultural backgrounds and locations.
- The government must design and implement development plans for Halesi considering participation of all stakeholders at local level so that people feel the need to work together regardless of their caste, ethnicity, faith and other identities. For example, there can be a local museum representing local cultures, traditions and faiths.
- As Halesi stands today, there are very few important occasions celebrated by Hindu and Kirata believers. Now, Mahadeva often is drawn into partisan politics that he never experienced in history. In Nepal, the Interim Constitution of 2007 has given us a new status – secular - where 81% Hindus are supposed to take a very cozy back seat whereas the *gurus* of secularism, mostly developed countries of the west, promote and protect only one faith in their own countries.
- The Kiratas celebrate some important festivals at Halesi on annual basis. The *Sakela (Ubhauri)* dance at Toyachung near Halesi draws a large crowd from many parts of Khotang and neighbouring districts and villages. But such programmes and participation are not to be found at Halesi Mahadevsthan. The Kirata population must also prepare a ritual calendar keeping Halesi in focus and celebrate the rituals in the leadership of a Kirata priest and expert. Things can gradually improve if concerted efforts are made. Just by saying that Kiratas are the oldest, indigenous

people with a rich cultural heritage in and around Halesi simply may not work. Traditions and values must be highlighted in public so that they take deeper roots and also bear fruit.

- The tall and spacious *Maratika Gompa*, on the right hand side of the main entrance, not only stands against the general principles of archaeology, but it also reduces the natural beauty of the entire mound. One brilliant example of the helplessness of law was the Maratika Gompa built by the Buddhists of Kulung with the help from Buddhists from Nepal and beyond. A notice to evacuate the structure from the head and mouth of the cave shrine was served the chief of the Gompa but reportedly he managed to escape and evade government moves that lacked the force any way. Following the example of the Solukhumbu based Sherpa Buddhist priest, other people also ignored government decision and made profit. On the top of this undue encroachment and anti-law stance, the Gompa authority, encouraged by some Buddhist MPs and well wishers at home and abroad, the Gompa authorities are now adding new concrete wings as added facilities. They chose this time because no authorities can stop the new work due to monsoon and lack of access. But this project team (Khatry and Shrestha) did its best to stop this work. Hopefully there will be no heavy concrete work there until another investigation by the government. This is an achievement in itself.
- Today, the red colored, three-storey monastery stands intact and the chief Lama is maneuvering his moves to restructure it with more concrete and additional floors and rooms. This would mean further burden on the fragile rocky mound. The monastery is not only looking unique and tall in the middle of the mound, bush and the demarcated 26-ropani land of the cave shrine, it is dominating the whole area and the serene atmosphere. Outside the mound also it has a clandestine but well heard voice and political clout earned laboriously through exchanges of goods and services. Without appearing in the public the chief abbot of the Maratika gompa manages to represent the growing and internationally known institution and its activities through proxy, often emerges in expensive social works, such as drinking water projects, health post, and school building support.
- The whole idea of such liberal investment is nothing more than re-asserting his ownership of the most sensitive and equally objectionable monastery perched on the top of the rocky hill of Halesi caves. At the moment when the monastery is constructing a big water tank for the sacred water for the people, there is also a secret plan to repair and enlarge the existing monastery using concrete, iron and other materials, causing potential damage for the cave shrine of Halesi Mahadeva.
- There are two committees and one traditional priest-caretaker institution at work here, but they can hardly speak about how the red building and the 4,000 plus square feet of land in the middle of 26 *ropanis* of land of the shrine was registered in the name of 'a person' whose economic and political clout had no limits.
- In Halesi not all the development activities taking place are conducive to development of the holy complex. There are also unwanted developments taking place. For example, during the Maoist rule of about ten months, the party and the government tried to replace the old administrative structures and replaced by their cadres. In places like Pashupatinath Development Trust and Nepal Academy, their nominees could not survive more than a week and fled the scene. They but in

many other places like Halesi their nominees forming the Development Committees have remained as salaried agencies with no or very little works. Here, they are face to face with the old system led by the Giri priest family. The post-Maoist governments have not replaced or reconstituted these less active and lucrative places till date. The people in general are not in favor of such political nominations as they have created confusion and misunderstanding among the followers of Halesi Mahadeva. The HDC on the other hand claims that it is inclusive and is an example of harmony and common commitment for the development of the site. In essence, HDC has not been effective in discharging the duties of managing the activities effectively.

### **5.5 Major outcomes of the project in brief**

- The study has brought to light the historical role of unifying national spirits and traditional cultural values across the multi cultural population.
- The project is the first of its kind to explore the significance of the cult of Shiva Mahadeva in the life style of the people of the immediate region, rest of east Nepal hills and tarai and of India, Tibet, China and Bhutan.
- This study will help bring to light the identification of the main deity of the complex and the cultural-ritual activities associated with the cult of Shiva Mahadeva, Padmasambhava and Kirati history and culture.
- The study also highlights the need to protect the site from deterioration once tourism in its full form reaches there. It outlines the role of the government agencies, local CBOs, and local activists, specifically the Kirati activists and culture experts.
- Once published the report will be an extremely useful reference for scholars, academic programs, development sectors including archaeology and general readers.
- One main feature of the report will be a viable master plan for the conservation of the site. It is essential not only to enhance the cultural importance of the complex but also to preserve both the tangible and intangible culture of the region.
- The study has brought the major issue of debate between the old system led by the Hindu Giri pries and the Maoist initiated new system – the Halesi Development Committee and the Temple Management Committee. This issue of ownership must be concluded soon to avoid conflict and confrontation in the future, especially once the Federal government is elected.

To conclude, this study focused on the history and evolution of Siva Mahadeva culture in the region of Halesi and the east. The coming of Jaina Saint Bhadrabahu in the cave is not proved by reliable documents except scanty reference. But the visit and stay of Buddhsit saint Padmasambhava has been very popular following its mention in the Tibetan Buddhist texts and a popular oral tradition. His successful meditation and completion of the Long Life ritual along with his spouse Manadarva and his disciples has been very popular among the Mahayani Buddhists and a Maratika Mahayani monastery plus other facilities were constructed inside the cave shrine and outside it. Hindus and Buddhists celebrate several calendar and other events in the shrine annually. The Kiratis also organize few events here. Visitors come from Kathmandu, Tarai and east Nepal as well as Sikkim, Bhutan and other parts of India as far as Dharmashala in Himachal Pradesh in India. Halesi also has great tourism prospect but there are more works to be done to improve the infrastructure in order to bring more tourists, market local products and address the poverty issues through increased employment in tourism related sectors. Even in the current state of

affairs, Halesi is playing significant role in creating and promoting cultural, social and ethnic harmony and sense of pride as well as belongingness. Local people need encouragement to maintain this spirit and avoid any form of confrontation and misunderstanding in the days ahead.

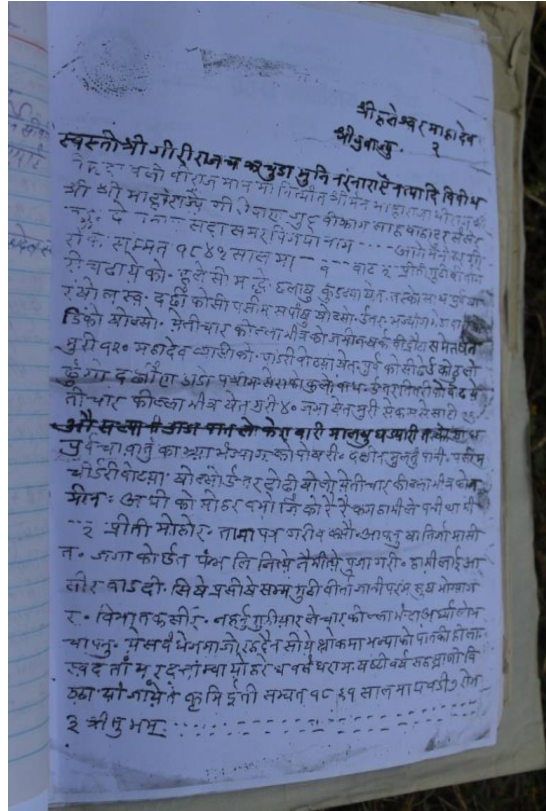
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Appendix 1

A copy of copper plate Royal Charter (1804) issued by King Grivan Yuddha Bikram Shah to Manohar Giri, the first Hindu priest of Halesi Temple



## Appendix 2

A stone slab Inscription placed on  
the wall of Halesi complex written in Tibetan script



### Appendix 3

Interview with Bhogiraj Chamling, a local scholar from Kirata community.  
Mr. Chamling is currently teaching as a lecturer in Kathmandu based campus  
also working on the history of Holesung dynasty.

#### Summary of Interview in matrix form

Questions	Specific govt. role	Local bodies role	Important task, planning to be done	Proposed federal state's role	Remarks
<b>1. Harmony and peace in future <i>jati</i> relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- inclusive policy</li> <li>- equal opportunity for language and culture promotion</li> <li>- employment generation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- help govt. in policy implementation</li> <li>- engage all ethno-culture groups for Halesi development</li> <li>- respect all cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- short term/long term planning for preservation</li> <li>- promote understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- take stock of culture</li> <li>- make and implement policy to promote harmony</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Any conflict among cultures Expected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make policy to mitigate conflicts</li> <li>- play mediatory role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- assert equal right for minorities</li> <li>- engage local experts in rituals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more power to people's committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- implement the master plan</li> <li>- preserve old sites</li> <li>- develop entire halesi region</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Maintain harmony among groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eliminate caste hegemony</li> <li>- allow local people to be a part of temple</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- assert equal right for local people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eliminate caste discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make halesi a common platform</li> </ul>	



<b>4. Means and ways to preserve site and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- comprehensive preservation plan</li> <li>- geological study of the temple complex</li> <li>- land acquisition to introduce master plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- collaborate in govt. planning</li> <li>- mobilize local resources</li> <li>- make plan sustainable</li> <li>- grow sense of ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- master plan to cover both tangible/intangible aspects of culture</li> <li>- specific plan for language and culture preservation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- develop literature, medium of instruction at schools</li> <li>- open museum</li> <li>- develop tourism</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Cultural awareness to raise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- launch awareness program</li> <li>- empowerment for minorities</li> <li>- organize events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prepare and implement awareness plan</li> <li>- seminars, interaction on regular basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint program with govt.</li> <li>- involve schools</li> <li>- promote cultural fairs</li> <li>- display cultural products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make govt. and local efforts effective</li> <li>- work for tourism promotion</li> <li>- marketing tourism products</li> </ul>	

## Appendix 4

**Interview with Radheshyam Bhattarai, a scholar from Brahmin community of the Halesi region. Mr. Bhattarai is former secretary of the Parliament of Nepal. He has written many books and articles on Halesi Mahadevsthan.**

### Summary of Interview in matrix form

Questions	Specific govt. role	Local bodies role	Important task, planning to be done	Proposed federal state's role	Remarks
<b>1. Harmony and peace in future <i>jati</i> relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- allocation of annual budget</li> <li>- equal respect and promotion of all cultural groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coordinated effort</li> <li>- active participation for Halesi development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- community participation in decision making</li> <li>- launch concrete program to promote understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fear of conflict among religious groups</li> <li>- avoid conflict</li> <li>- make and implement policy to promote harmony</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Any conflict among cultures Expected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make rationale policy to avoid conflicts</li> <li>- give due advantage to all cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- raise awareness among different culture groups</li> <li>- engage local experts in rituals and other fairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increase participation of all religious groups in decision making process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- implement the master plan</li> <li>- preserve old sites</li> <li>- develop entire halesi region</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Maintain harmony among groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eliminate discrimination among cultural groups</li> <li>- give access to all local people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- encourage participation of all groups in different events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eliminate caste discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make halesi a common platform</li> <li>- avoid biased attitude towards certain groups</li> </ul>	

	to be a part of temple				
<b>4. Means and ways to preserve site and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- launch intensive research on different aspects of halesi</li> <li>- geological study of the temple complex</li> <li>- land acquisition to introduce master plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- grow sense of ownership</li> <li>- convince the concerned people to move the monastery for the safety of halesi complex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- introduce master plan for preservation of both tangible/intangible culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- promote local cultural product and traditional dress etc.</li> <li>- develop tourism</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Cultural awareness to raise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- form inclusive committee</li> <li>- launch awareness program</li> <li>- empowerment for minorities</li> <li>- organize events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prepare and implement awareness plan</li> <li>- make calendar of festivals and introduce it in regular basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- appoint priest from all religious groups</li> <li>- involve schools</li> <li>- promote cultural fairs</li> <li>- display cultural products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make govt. and local efforts effective</li> <li>- work for tourism promotion</li> <li>- marketing tourism products</li> </ul>	

## Appendix 5

**Interview with: Sonam Sherpa Lama, age 27**  
**Position: Coordinator, Buddhist learning center, Maratika Gompa, Halesi**  
**Principal Caretaker of Maratika Gompa in the absence of the main Lama**  
**Responsible for Maratika school, facilities of the Mahayani Gompa, Construction and related works**

### Summary of Interview with Sonam Sherpa in matrix form

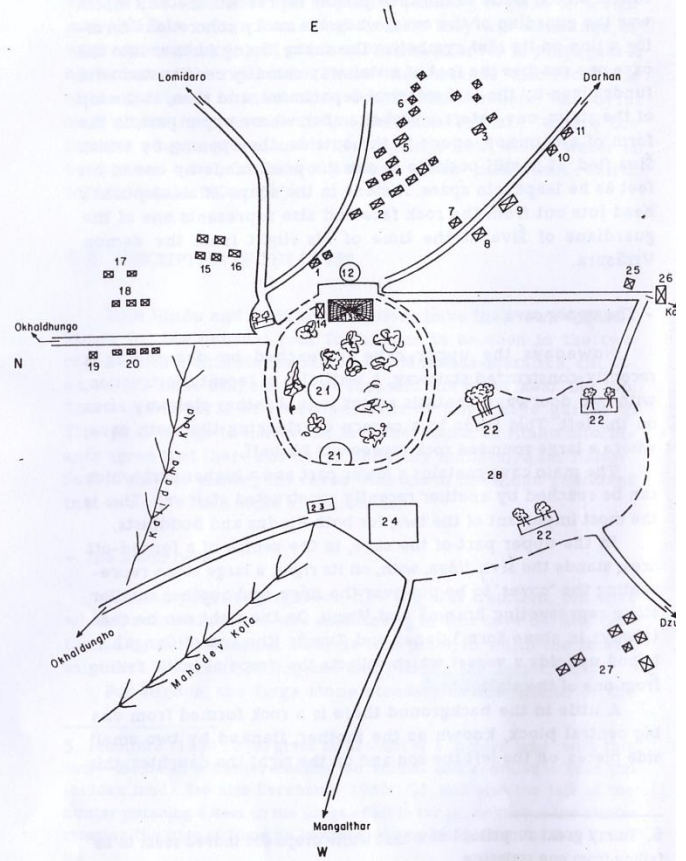
Questions	Specific govt. role	Local bodies role	Important task, planning to be done	Proposed federal state's role	Remarks
<b>1. Harmony and peace in future <i>jati</i> relations</b>	- Govt has to see the activities of the holy place, help the religious institutions	- youths and elite must work together for the promotion of Halesi but they are mostly politically organized	- there is a need to bring all faiths together for peace and understanding, - concrete planning not coming so far	- Kirati people are now politically active more than other groups - Gompa will in all types of changes in the future	
<b>2. Any conflict among cultures Expected</b>	- Buddhist is a peaceful religion, everybody needs peace in the world and also here	- local groups, such as teachers, clubs will have to make Halesi a very beautiful, peaceful place. -Maratika gompa will always be ready to do this - local Hindus and Kiratas exclude Maratika members in activities	- all must agree when common issues are there - gompa has no problem working with other people - We are bringing drinking water for all .. it is free for all	- a new plan is important now.. - old plan does not work	
<b>3. Maintain harmony among groups</b>	- local people can play important role in this regard	- mostly different religions have different events.. yet they can come together	- in the changing society, any kind of discrimination is bad.	- local people normally don't include Buddhists or Maratika gompa in activities. We feel tendency to	

				isolate sometimes	
<b>4. Means and ways to preserve site and culture</b>	- we don't have idea of what govern is planning to do here.. If we know we can also help	- sometime we feel gompa or Buddhist communities are excluded from information,planning..this is nt good	- this area of Halesi has many important cultures,, they need to be preserved	- here gradually tourism is coming but not much facilities. More facilities means more tourists...	
<b>5. Cultural awareness to raise</b>	- school and other elite group can do much to create awareness...	- gompa or Buddhists have many festivals.. we also have many Buddhists from india and other places.. Hindus have some also	Tourism is now coming.. Local people don't know much about the benefit of tourism.. This must be told	- big festivals have thousands of pilgrims.. Also international people come.. Halesi has good future for tourism	

## Illustrations (Photos)

Halase-Maratika  
 Sketch-map made with the help of Divendra Giri

- 1 - house of Emanta Giri
- 2 - house of Bam Prasad
- 3 - house of Kuldiv Giri
- 4 - house of Amrit Giri
- 5 - house of Bhawani Shankar Giri
- 6 - 8 Chetri houses
- 7 - Damai house
- 8 - Dharmasala
- 9 - house of Bhagta Kumar Giri
- 10 - Damai house
- 11 - Damai house
- 12 - Bhairav sthan
- 13 - upper cave
- 14 - monastery
- 15 - four Newar houses
- 16 - Giri (of the other lineage)
- 17 - 2 Chetri Basnyat houses
- 18 - 3 Giri houses (of the other lineage)
- 19 - Magar house
- 20 - 4 Damai houses
- 21 - lower cave and opening
- 22 - Pipal trees
- 23 - spring
- 24 - spring
- 25 - school
- 26 - Dharmasala
- 27 - 7 Rai houses (from Dzuge village)
- 28 - place where the fair is held.



*The Halase-Maratika caves in Hindu tradition*

Fig 1-Courtesy: Katia Buffetrille (1994)