

Exploring the Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī in Hindu Folklore and Scriptures

A Research Report Submitted to Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus

Saraswati Sadan, Kathmandu

By

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Saraswati Sadan, Kathmandu

July 2024



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Tribhuvan University

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पत्र संख्या/ Ref.No. :-

Date: July 14, 2024

Approval Letter

I hereby confirm that the research report titled "Exploring the Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī in Hindu Folklore and Scriptures," authored by Dr. Damaru Chandra Bhatta and submitted to Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, is praiseworthy regarding its scope and quality. Thus, without any reservations, I approve it for further evaluation.

Prof. Dr. Nilam Shrestha

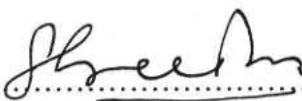
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Letter of Recommendation

I examined Dr. Damaru Chandra Bhatta's research report titled "Exploring the Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī in Hindu Folklore and Scriptures." His meticulous research report presents an insightful analysis. His findings on Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple from mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological viewpoints are intriguing and add a new dimension to the existing body of knowledge. Hence, I highly recommend his research report for approval and evaluation.



Prof. Dr. Shreedhar Gautam

Expert

Former Head of the English Department

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2 July 2024

Date:



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Letter of Recommendation

I certify that Dr. Damaru Chandra Bhatta has completed his research report titled "Exploring the Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī in Hindu Folklore and Scriptures" under my supervision. It provides an in-depth analysis of the mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological importance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and her temple located in Silgadhī, Dotī district. The study leverages both primary sources, such as mythological stories from "The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya," and secondary sources, including field observations and interviews, to present a comprehensive view.

The research highlights the mythological origins of the temple and the goddess, emphasizing the narratives from Hindu scriptures. It recounts the story of Goddess Pārvatī and Lord Śiva, who were worshipped as Ardhanārīśwara (a composite form of half goddess and half god), symbolizing the spiritual equality of men and women.

The study also notes the visit of Lord Ram during the Tretā Yuga, which adds historical depth and cultural richness to the temple's significance.

The temple is depicted as an archetypal embodiment of creation, energy, and equality, which is pivotal in understanding its spiritual and cultural relevance. This aligns with the Hindu belief in the divine balance and unity between masculine and feminine energies.

The historical narrative is enriched with geographical context, providing insights into the location and its importance. The connection with significant historical figures and deities enhances the temple's prestige and allure.



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The archaeological significance is touched upon, although it might benefit from a more detailed exploration of the physical evidence supporting the temple's ancient roots.

The study describes the rituals and festivals held at the temple, which are integral to the local folklore and community practices. This highlights the living traditions and the continuous cultural relevance of the temple.

The potential for tourism development is well articulated. The paper suggests that promoting the temple's mythological and spiritual significance through mass media could attract a large number of visitors, thereby boosting the tourism industry in Nepal and fostering better ties with India.

The inclusion of field observations and interviews adds a layer of authenticity and immediacy to the research, grounding the mythological narratives in contemporary cultural practices.

The emphasis on the preservation of national identity underscores the temple's role in cultural heritage. The suggestion to use mass media for publicity is practical and aligns with modern strategies for cultural tourism.

In conclusion, the study by Dr. Damaru Chandra Bhatta effectively intertwines mythological, cultural, historical, and geographical narratives to underline the significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and her temple. It provides a compelling argument for the temple's preservation and potential as a cultural and tourist landmark, while also emphasizing the spiritual messages of equality and unity central to Hindu philosophy.



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I commend the researcher for undertaking this project, as it will generate interest among readers who are keen to learn about temples of mythological importance. Therefore, I wholeheartedly recommend that his research paper be approved and assessed.

Prof. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Mishra

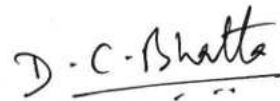
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Date: July 07, 2024

Declaration Letter

I now declare that this research report titled "Exploring the Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī in Hindu Folklore and Scriptures," submitted to Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, is my original contribution completed under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Mishra. It fulfills the requirements for the research report. I understand that I will be solely responsible if any evidence contradicts my statement.



.....
Damaru Chandra Bhatta, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of English

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Date: July 2024



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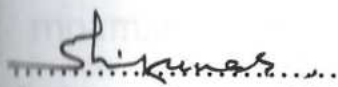
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Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Nilam Shrestha, the Campus Chief at Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, Saraswati Sadan, Kathmandu, who permitted me to research on “Exploring the Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī in Hindu Folklore and Scriptures” and also approved my research report. Similarly, I am obliged to Prof. Dr. Shreedhar Gautam, the Former Head of the Department of English at Patan Multiple Campus, for reviewing and refining my research report as an expert and recommending it for approval and evaluation.

Also, I am thankful to Prof. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Mishra, the Former Head of the Department of English at Patan Multiple Campus, for guiding me as a supervisor. I revised my research report as per his constructive comments and feedback. I could not have accomplished this research report without his constant support.

I thank Professor Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, the Head of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, for his inspiring feedback that helped refine my work.

Similarly, I am equally grateful to Prof. Dr. Shreedhar Prasad Lohani, Prof. Dr. Mohan Lohani, Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi, Professor Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Prof. Dr. Arun Gupto, Prof. Dr. Ananda Sharma, Professor Dr. Ram Chandra Paudel, Prof. Dr. Bijay Rauniyar, Prof. Dr. Rebati Prasad Neupane, Prof. Dr. Dhruba Bahadur Karki, and Prof. Dr. Susmita Talukdar, and Prof. Dr. Pradeep Kumar Giri, the Head of the English Department, Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, for their kind support to me while writing this research report.

I appreciate my wonderful spouse Kalyani Bhatta, a Lecturer of English at Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus, and my cherished children Umanga Bhatta and Utsah Bhatta for encouraging me to write this research report.

Abstract

This study explores the mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple in Silgadhi, the headquarters of Doti district, from the perspectives of folklorism and Hindu scriptures. This study is primarily based on the mythological stories of *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* ("The Glory of Śaileśwarī"), and secondarily on field observation, and interviews. The myths or mythological stories, rituals, and festivals are related to folklore.

This study concludes that the temple is an archetypal embodiment of creation, energy, and equality and that as Śiva and Pārvatī are equal so also are men and women equal spiritually. Hence, its preservation is crucial for national identity and tourism growth in Nepal.

The temple serves as a bridge between Nepal and India, as Lord Ram of Ayodhyā from India visited the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī with His spiritual teacher Vasiṣṭha, sages, his brother Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumāna, the god of monkeys, during the Tretā Yuga. Before Lord Ram, His fifth ancestor King Dilīp had visited Dilīpeśwar Mahādeva at Dipāyal, which is mythologically linked to the temple.

The temple's story begins with Pārvatī, the daughter of the Himalayas, marrying Lord Śiva. After their marriage, they lived in Candana Parvata, where Brahmā (the Creator) found them and prayed to Her. They were later known as Ardhanārīśwara, an image of half Goddess and half God. Today, Siddhas, sages, deities, and saints secretly worship both Śiva and Pārvatī over their single stone image.

The temple's popularity can be attributed to its mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance and its daily worship and

annual carnivals.

Publicizing the multiple significance of the temple including its mythological and spiritual ones through mass media could attract thousands of national and international devotees, pilgrims, and tourists, helping to develop the tourism industry in Nepal and strengthen the Indo-Nepal relationship.

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Chapter One

The Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī from the Perspectives of Hindu Folklore and Scriptures

This study explores the mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple, which is situated in Silgadhi, the headquarters of Doti district, from the perspectives of folklorism and Hindu scriptures.

The mythological story of Goddess Śaileśwarī is found in *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* ("The Glory of Śaileśwarī") as mentioned in the "Mānas Khand [Chapter]" of *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa* written by Veda Vyāsa. He was one of the twenty-four incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu, who wrote almost all the holy Hindu scriptures (Śruti and Smṛti) in the Sanskrit language in the Dwāpara Yuga, the third of the four Yugas, about 5,200 years ago. Śaileśwarī is known as the self-originated Goddess, who fulfills Her devotees' desires.

According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, Goddess Śaileśwarī has got various names such as Dakṣiṇakālī, Kāmākṣī, Guhyakālī, Ugratārā, Nīla Saraswatī, Eka Veṇī, Ṣodaśī, Pañchadaśī, Bālā, Tripurā, Kullukā (1.18-19), Parameśwarī (3.4), Bhuvana (Bhuvaneśwarī), Kāmākhyā, Durgā, Pārvatī, Śiladevī, Paśupatipriyā, Siddhidātrī, and Bhairavī (5.13-20). Besides these names, Goddess Śaileśwarī has ten other great names, known as Daśa Mahāvidyā, such as Kālī, Tārā, Ṣodaśī, Bagalā, Bhuvaneśwarī, Dhumāvatī, Chinnamastā, Mātangī, Bhairavī, and Kamalā (1.19). These ten great names of the Goddess are found in the scripture of Tantra as well.

The temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī is situated at the altitude of 4,500 feet at Silgadhi, the headquarters of Doti district, Seti zone under the Far Western Development Region, Nepal. The temple is one of the popular temples of that Region

such as Tripurāsundarī of Baitadī district, Baijanātha of Achhām district, Ugratārā of Dadeldhurā district, Surmādevī of Bajhāng district, and Badīmālikā of Bājūrā district.

The temple has its own unique mythological, religious, spiritual, cultural, and historical significance. Lord Ram from Ayodhyā, India, visited the temple in the Tretā Yuga ("the second of the four epochs of Hindus; the Silver Age"). The story of Śaileśwarī goes back to the pre-historical period. It was the time after the marriage of Lord Śiva with Goddess Pārvatī according to the "Mānas Khand ["Chapter"]" of *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa*. There are some *janaśrutis* ("hearsays" or "folklores") and folklores, which also means myths or mythological stories, about the origin, energy, and benevolent nature of the Goddess among the local people. The local people observe some kinds of unique, rich, traditional rituals, worship, and festivals, which have shaped their community identity over time.

Hundreds of people from Nepal come to visit this temple and observe its festivals yearly. After visiting the temple, the devotees and tourists can go to the Khaptad National Park, situated at an altitude of 10,010 feet, where His Holiness Khaptad Bābā penanced for more than 50 years in a cave-like hut. By the publicity of these religious areas, we can attract tourists from Nepal and abroad (i.e., India), and we can develop them as tourist centers as well. If done so, it will assist the local people to prosper financially. Thus, it will ultimately help to develop the tourism industry of Nepal.

The significance of the temple lies in the fact that Goddess Śaileśwarī is situated in the form of a round black stone (known as *prastara piṇḍa* in Sanskrit), which was not established by any human beings or sages. Rather it originated after Pārvatī disguised as the round black stone, according to *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa*. Against this background, this study has been proposed to examine the spiritual and

cultural significance of the temple of Śaileśwarī, who is the Goddess of the whole universe.

Problem Statement

The temple of Śaileśwarī keeps its own unique mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance. But this fact is not known yet to the multitudes of people in Nepal and abroad. So, it is a need of time to examine and publicize its significance to enhance the tourism industry of Nepal.

Research Questions

Keeping in mind the problem statement, the following research questions are formulated to examine the study:

- What is the mythological and cultural significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī?
- What is the historical, geographical, and archaeological significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple?
- How can the multiple significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple enhance the tourism industry of Nepal?

Hypothesis

The mythological significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple goes back to the pre-mythological period when Lord Śiva married Goddess Pārvatī after the death of His first consort Satidevī, according to *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa* written by Veda Vyāsa.

The cultural significance lies in that the Lord Ram from Ayodhyā, India, came to worship the Goddess. The local people worship Her by performing different sacred activities, such as worshipping, praying, and singing every day and on special days, to fulfill their desires. The devotees from different parts of Nepal come to

worship Her occasionally with the hope of fulfilling their desires. It is believed that Goddess Śaileśwarī fulfills Her devotees' desires.

Besides, the local devotees celebrate different kinds of festivals of the Goddess with belief, faith, hope, and devotion. The temple holds a special historical, geographical, and archaeological significance, so Silgadhī, the headquarters of the Dotī district, is popular in the Far Western Region of Nepal (See Appendix VI, VII, VIII, IX, X).

Suppose we can spread these matters of mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance related to Goddess Śaileśwarī. In that case, we can attract thousands of devotees and tourists from home and abroad, especially from India. There is a close relationship between mythological and cultural significance like nails and flesh or fish and water. One cannot exist without another. Human flow increases economic transactions. From this viewpoint, the publicity of the multiple significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple can enhance the tourism sector of Nepal.

Objectives

Corresponding to the research questions, the objectives of this study are to:

- explore the mythological and cultural significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple.
- explore the historical, geographical, and archaeological significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple.
- suggest how the multiple significance of Goddess and Her temple can enhance Nepal's tourism industry.

Significance of the Study

This research report about the temple of Śaileśwarī will help to expose the secret, esoteric knowledge of its mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance to the public in Nepal and India. Eventually, it will assist in developing the tourism sector of the local area and Nepal as a whole by attracting religious devotees and tourists from home and abroad. Besides, this report will be useful for culture, history, and sociology students.

This study is associated with the national priority of Nepal. It will contribute to promoting the following points:

- Promotion of Domestic Tourism and Economic Condition

If the publicity of the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī could be done by highlighting its mythological and cultural significance, it would attract devotees and tourists from different parts of Nepal and abroad, especially from India. It will eventually promote the economic condition of Silgadhi, the headquarters of the Doti district.

- Preservation, Conservation, Safeguarding, and Development of National Heritage

This study will help to preserve, conserve, safeguard, and develop the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī, which is a great asset of the national heritage of archaeological importance.

- Preservation and Conservation of Folk Musical Instruments and their Art

This study will help to preserve and conserve folk musical instruments that are used for Goddess Śaileśwarī during special festivals. These instruments have their unique significance. If the instruments are damaged or lost, the art or skill to make them and to play them is also lost.

- Promotion of Inclusiveness and Social Transformation

If the festivals of Goddess Śaileśwarī could be kept alive with their traditional and cultural values, it would help to promote inclusiveness and social transformation for social harmony and unity among diversity. Festivals are occasions when all kinds of people of different casts and classes come together and celebrate the festivals without reservations and discrimination.

- Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge and Vocation

The indigenous people's musical instruments, their knowledge about making and playing them, and their vocational skill of playing instruments by which they can earn money could be promoted by the implementation of the study and suggestions of this research report.

Limitations and Delimitations

This researcher could not go beyond the existing primary and secondary sources; nor could he go beyond the field visit and interviews as a part of ethnography (the use of observations and interviews for collecting data). These are the limitations of this study. Similarly, this researcher did not study the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī from a scientific and logical viewpoint about the credibility of the mythological story related to the temple. The religious book *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* was mainly used as a primary text. These are the delimitations of this study.

Definition of the Term

In this research report, the mythological stories mean *paurāṇik* stories. The term “mythological” is used for *paurāṇik* (“very ancient”). *Paurāṇik* is an adjective, which is a Sanskrit word. There are no equally corresponding English words for Sanskrit words in English because the historical, cultural, religious, and sociological backgrounds of oriental and occidental countries are different from each other. According to Hinduism, Hindu religious books are not myths. So, they are not

mythical or untrue. Rather they are true spiritual scriptures. From this perspective, the mythological stories of Hindu scriptures are supposed to be true ones related to the very ancient past. In contrast, the mythological stories of English literature are supposed to be untrue stories of the ancient past in the context of Western culture and civilization.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Some writers, who can be counted on the fingers, have written about the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī in the Nepali language. The available writers' articles and books are reviewed here to find out the research gaps.

Śiva Shrestha Malla remarks in his article that "Somebody can argue that the Hindu myths described in the Purāṇas are not real. But they are real. People can find proof of their existence in the mythological period if exploration is done. In this line of argument, the mythological story of Goddess Śaileśwarī goes back to the end of the Satya Yuga ("the first of the four epochs of Hindus; the Golden Age") when Śiva was penancing due to the loss of His consort Satidevī. The myth of Śiva and Pārvatī (See Appendix XIII) is not imaginary. There are many references in the different scriptures about their existence in the Himalayas and Kailāś respectively. Lord Ram came to visit Śaileśwarī and worshipped Her for nine days in the Tretā Yuga" (my trans.; 44-67). Thus, from Malla's viewpoint, the roots of Purāṇas are very ancient, which are real. So, it is a wrong practice to translate Purāṇas as *mythical or untrue stories of the very ancient past* (my italics).

According to Vladimir Propp, folklores and belles-letters represent reality; reality is depicted with an equal degree of accuracy in both of them (16-38). Folklores try to explain supernatural and mysterious events and cultural traditions.

Malla in his booklet entitled *Shrī Śaileśwarī Māhātmya Ra Kotihom Paramparā* argues that "Lord Ram might have established the tradition to perform Lakṣa and Kotī Havan ("sacred oblations into sacrificing fire") or *yajña* in the Śaileśwarī temple. The tradition of Lakṣa Havan and Kotī Havan is still being observed even nowadays" (my trans.; 23). There is a *havan kuṇḍa* in the middle part

of the temple inside, which is supposed to have been used by Lord Ram to perform the Lakṣa Havan.

Mani Raj Joshi assures us that Śaileśwarī is one of the various *pīthas* ("self-originated, divine natural stones") of Jaganmātā Durgā Bhagavatī [the Goddess Mother of the Universe]. She has been fulfilling the desires of her devotees since the mythological period (Foreword).

Gopal Prasad Joshi writes that the Śaileśwarī *Pītha* ("the stone image with the divine power of Goddess Śaileśwarī") is one among the thousands of *archāvatāras* (incarnations in the forms of stones) of the Goddess Mother. Every devotee has realized the grace of Goddess Śaileśwarī. When prayed with a true heart, She solves the problems of her devotees in any way (125).

Janak Raj Bhatta highlights that Umā-Maheśwar (Pārvatī and Śiva) are the images of Prakṛti ("Nature") and Puruṣa ("Consciousness"). Though Goddess and God are far from the influence of natural qualities such as birth, action, name, form, merits, and demerits, they play different roles concerning this world and the transcendental world for the benefit of humankind. They play various *līlās* (plays, sports) to perform the actions concerning creation, protection, and destruction. Among these *līlās*, the story of Śaileśwarī is one played against the background of the Candana Parvata ("the mountain of sandalwood"), where Her temple is situated now (202).

In a eulogy to Goddess Śaileśwarī, Jaya Raj Pant comments that the next name of Śaileśwarī is Śildevī in the local dialect. Her temple is in the middle part of the Silgadhī bazar. The importance of the Dotī district is maintained due to the temple. As the Dotī district is important from historical, political, administrative, and commercial viewpoints, the temple is also important from a religious viewpoint for everyone in the district (1-2).

Similarly, Arjun Bahadur Deuba argues that the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī has united all the devotees who are in the different parts of the world and who have faith in and respect for Her (73). Since the story of Śaileśwarī goes back to the pre-historical period at least 21 lakhs and 65 thousand years earlier, i.e., the Satya Yuga, there are possibilities of finding pre-historical instruments and relics if the area of the temple is explored and excavated scientifically (74, 78, 81-82). Thus, the temple holds great significance from different angles: religious, spiritual, historical, archaeological, social, natural, economic, and tourist as well.

Research Gap

Thus, it is found that some limited writers have written about the significance of the Śaileśwarī temple in Nepali medium for Nepali readers. No research-oriented work in English about the temple has been noticed to my knowledge so far. In this context, this research work will examine the mythological and cultural significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple along with its historical, geographical, and archaeological significance for mass audiences living in Nepal and abroad who do not know the Nepali language.

No writers have suggested by referring to the mythological story of Śiva and Pārvatī residing in the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī that man and woman are equal spiritually. No one has suggested how the publicity about the Goddess and Her temple can unite the Nepalese and Indian devotees through its mythological, cultural, religious, and spiritual attractions, how this publicity can strengthen the age-old religious relationship between Nepal and India, and how the publicity will promote the regional tourism sector of Nepal eventually. This is the research gap.

Chapter Three

Methodology: Folklorism and Hindu Scriptures

Study Design, Method, and Tools

Methodology, the theoretical framework that supports the methods chosen for data collection, was based on the values of the Hindu philosophy such as the Upaniṣad. The principles of Western and Eastern folklore were used as tools to study the research. Internet search engines were also used as tools. Besides, a field visit was made. Data analysis was done on the ground of the findings derived from the studies of the primary and secondary sources, and the field visit. According to Norman K. Denzin and Y. Vonna S. Lincoln, "critical qualitative inquiry inspired by the sociological imagination can make the world a better place" (14). Critical qualitative inquiry can involve an interdisciplinary approach. So, this type of critical qualitative inquiry also was used as far as possible for the data analysis of this study.

Primarily, a descriptive qualitative study design was used for this study. The method of data collection included primary and secondary sources. This study conducted a field visit (See Appendix XIV) and interviews and used library and internet materials to examine the mythological and cultural significance of the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī of Dotī district along with its historical, geographical, and archaeological significance.

The *paurāṇik* ("very ancient") stories of Goddess Śaileśwarī written in the Sanskrit language are translated into English by this researcher wherever appropriate in this research report.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Folklorism or Folkloristics and Hindu Scriptures

Folklorism or folkloristics has been used to develop the analytical tools for the theoretical/conceptual framework of this study. Both Folklorism and folkloristics mean the study of folklore. The myths or mythological stories are related to folklore. Quoting Russian scholar Victor Gusev's broad view, Guntis Šmidchens writes that folklorism is a "process of adaptation, reproduction, and transformation of folklore" (52). Alan Dundes in his brief essay "What is Folklore?" argues that not only peasant, rural groups, or people from the past have folklore but also the urban people have folklore. Folklore is not dying out. Rather folk are creating and recreating it to suit new situations (Dundes 2).

Dundes argues that "folk" can indicate "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language, or religion—but what is important is that a group ... have some traditions that it calls its own" (Dundes 2).

Dundes mentions various types of folklore such as folktales, legends, myths, ballads, festivals, folk dances, and songs, children's counting-out rhymes, food recipes, houses, barns, fence types, and latrinalia (informal writings in public restrooms) as well as the sounds traditionally used to call specific animals (Dundes 3).

Folklorists study different types of folklore created by the human mind and their relationship to political, religious, ethnic, regional, and other forms of group identity.

As argued by Jonathan Roper, it was William John Thoms who coined the English word "folklore" using the pseudonym Ambrose Merton in August 1846, taking credit in a letter to the periodical *The Athenaeum* (211-12).

According to M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, the term "folklore" is "applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed

down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth and example rather than in written form. Folklore developed, and continues even now, in communities where few if any people can read or write. It also continues to flourish among literate populations in the form of oral jokes, stories, and varieties of wordplay" (138).

According to Abrams and Harpham, "the following forms of folklore have been of special importance for later written literature": folk dramas, folk songs, and folk tales which "include myths, fables, and tales of heroes (whether historical like Johnny Appleseed or legendary like Paul Bunyan), and fairy tales" (139).

Chudamani Bandhu, a scholar of Nepali literature, argues that "the word 'folklore' includes not only folk literature, folksongs, folk drama, folk epic, proverbs, and riddles but also folk manners, folk tradition, folk religion, folk art, and so on" (my trans.; 13). "Some Nepalese litterateurs prefer to use the term 'folk culture' to the term 'folklore'" (my trans.; 14). "There are different methods to study folklore. They are: the descriptive and historical method, comparative method, the whole-story-oriented method, anthropological method, historical-geographical method, psychological method, constructive community method, communist thinking method, literary method, and referential method" (my trans.; 57-86).

Similarly, Kapildev Lamichhane comments that "folklore and folk culture are being used synonymously. Folk culture includes those oral materials which we have received through language in the folk tradition: folksongs, ballads, folk poems, folk epics, folk stories, proverbs, rural stories (*gāunkhāne kathā*), and epigrams or idioms" (my trans.; 54). "It is said that land or physical property can be re-earned or re-gained after it is destroyed but tradition and culture or folklore once disappeared or lost cannot be re-gained in the same form" (my trans; 49).

The notion about the credibility of myths is different in the West and the East. According to *Merriam-Webster's* online dictionary, myth is "a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon" such as "creation myths." The West treats Hindu myths as fictitious or imaginary stories, though they imply profound truth about the world, people, and their culture, tradition, and conventions. Contrastingly, the East, especially Hinduism, treats Hindu myths as true, real, actual, or factual ones.

The oldest scripture in the world is the *Ṛg Veda*, the greatest scripture of Hinduism, which was in the oral form since time immemorial or since the creation of the universe. It was written on parchment by the great sage Veda Vyāsa about 5123 years ago in the Dvāpara Yuga ("the Bronze Age"). He divided the *Ṛg Veda* into four parts: *Ṛg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. Almost all the Hindu scriptures were in the oral form in the beginning. They were recorded in written form later on. The mythological stories of the Purāṇas were also in the oral form in the beginning. Veda Vyāsa wrote them to save them from being lost from the memory of humankind in the Kali Yuga ("the Iron Age") (Gibson 10-12).

Who created the Vedas, Purāṇas (myths), and histories such as *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*? According to the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, the last part of the *Yajur Veda*, no person created them. Even God did not create them. They came out of the exhaling breath of Brahma or Paramātmā (2.4.10, 4.5.11). First of all, Brahmā (the Creator) received (saw and heard) them from the Supreme God/Viṣṇu (*Śvetāshvatara* 6.18).

It is also said that Viṣṇu went into the heart of Brahmā and revealed the knowledge of the whole Veda into His heart. Then, Vaśiṣṭha and other sages heard

them from Brahmā and transmitted them orally to others. Similarly, later on, some sages, too, self-realized (saw and heard) the mantras of the Veda and told them to other sages. Therefore, the Veda is called Śruti (the scripture which was heard first). In this regard, quoting Yāskāchārya in the *Nirukta* (2.11), Ram Chandra Bhatta writes that the sages self-realized or visualized the mantras (23).

Thus, the Veda is called "*apaurusheya*," not created by any person, neither by God, nor by sages, nor by any human being. It is eternal and immortal. So, the Hindu religion directed by the Veda is called *sānātana dharma* ("eternal religion"), which is a way of life. This indicates that all the Vedas, mythological stories, and histories came from the oral tradition. They were recorded in written form by Veda Vyāsa and the other sages later on. They are supposed to be true because they all came from the exhaling breath of the Personal (i.e., having a Form) Brahma (i.e., Lord Viṣṇu or the Supreme God). It is also said that the mythological stories and histories explain the esoteric and secret messages of the Vedas.

Besides, in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the last part of the *Sāma Veda*, sage Nārada boldly declares to Sanatkumār, one of Brahmā's ever-young four mental sons, that history (the *Rāmāyaṇ* and the *Mahābhārata*) and the Purāṇa are the fifth Veda (7.1.2). This declaration signifies that they have authenticity; they are no more imaginary fabrications. They are not myths, i.e., fiction or fantasy, but true.

Regarding the authenticity and reliability of the Purāṇa, it is written in the *Matsyapurāṇa* 53.3 and the first chapter of the *Padmapurāṇa* that Brahmā, the Creator, remembered the Purāṇas first of all the scriptures; then the Vedas came out of His mouth.

In this line of argument presented above, we can say that the mythological story of the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī is related to a type of folklore and the

Purāṇa, which hold great importance for a certain group, cult, community, or society of people.

Chapter Four

Mythological and Cultural Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī

According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, Śiva married Pārvatī in the Himālayas. After their marriage, while passing from the Himālayas to Mount Kailāśa, the abode of Śiva, the newly-wed couples Śiva and Pārvatī came to the beautiful area of Candana Parvata (now known as Śaileśwarī area), surrounded by tall and dense trees, echoed with the melodious sounds of birds, and swept by the faint wind of the Setī River. Then, they stayed there to enjoy the divine conjugal bliss (1.5-8).

Meanwhile, Brahmā (the Creator), Viṣṇu (the Protector), Indra (the deity-king), and the other deities were waiting for the birth of Śiva and Pārvatī's son Swāmī Kārtikeya, who could kill Tārakāsura, a very powerful demon. After a lapse of some time, they started searching for Śiva and Pārvatī to see them. Newly-wed Pārvatī felt shy to have seen them unexpectedly amid the dense beautiful jungle of the Śaileśwarī area and, therefore, She disguised herself into the Round black stone, which is still now worshipped as Śaileśwarī or Śilādevī. Seeing Brahmā ready to pray to Him, Śiva instead hinted that He (Brahmā) should pray to Pārvatī to please Her (1.9-12).

Pleased by Brahmā's prayer (See Appendix III), She appeared in front of them decked with many divine ornaments, bearing divine weapons such as a conch, a discus, a mace, and a lotus in the eighteen-armed body, wearing divine garlands and red clothes, daubed all over with divine sandal-pastes, full of all wonders, and seated on a lion. Then She blessed and convinced them (Brahmā and the other deities) that She would fulfill her devotees' desires who would recite the prayer uttered by Brahmā. "After giving the blessings, Śiva and Pārvatī each left their half-power over the round black stone and set off for Kailāśa (Mount Meru, the abode of Lord Śiva)

with the deities. Secretly, sages, gods, and saints worship Goddess Śaileśwarī even today” (my trans.; *Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* 1.22-43).

Therefore, the round black stone is also regarded as a semi-image of Lord Śiva and the Goddess Pārvatī. Semantically, Śaileśwarī means the Goddess of a mountain: and Śilādevī means the Goddess in the form of a round black stone. Since Lord Śiva gave more importance to Pārvatī to please Her, the worshipping and significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī happened to increase over Lord Śiva. However, He is also worshipped with Her equally by devotees. The Goddess is very kind, forgives their offenses, and fulfills their desires. “Though a son can be bad, yet the Mother can never be so” (my trans.; "Devyaparādha Kṣamāpana Stotram" 226).

When we pray to Her with this pious sense, She becomes happy immediately. “Lord Śiva also becomes happy simply with [prayers], *bilva patras* (a type of green leaf; aegle marmelos; also known as Bengal quince, golden apple, Japanese bitter orange, stone apple, or wood apple), fruits, or only with water. Nevertheless, it is surprising that people are suffering from misery due to lack of this knowledge and [devotion]” (my trans.; *Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* 4.21).

According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, in the Tretā Yuga, Lord Ram, His brother Lakṣmaṇa, His servitor Hanumāna ("the god of wind"), and the sage Vasiṣṭha visited Śaileśwarī after performing *aśwamedha yajña* ("a great ritual performance"). Ram worshipped Her as Bhuwaneśwarī, one of the divine forms of the Goddess Durgā (5.7-12). The divine form of Bhuwaneśwarī is like this: “I pray to the Goddess who dwells on a lotus seat in the center of the heart, who is radiant like the morning sun, who bears a snare, a hook, and a blessing posture and a securing posture of hands, who has three eyes, who wears red dress and, who fulfills devotees’ wishes like the divine cow of Kāmadhenu” (my trans.; "Shrī Devyatharva Śīrṣam" 49-50).

Pleased with Lord Ram's worshipping, Goddess Śaileśwarī appeared in Her physical form and blessed Him saying that those devotees who would recite His prayer to Her would receive the fruits of performing *aśwamedha yajña*, would receive eight kinds of *siddhis*, i.e. "self-actualization," "successes," or "achievements," and would attain the abode of the Goddess after their death (5.30-32). Since then the significance of the temple has been increasing. And people have been worshipping Her with reverence and devotion (*Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* 5.4-42).

According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, at the end of the Tretā Yuga, Puṇya Kīrti, a rich Brāhmaṇ from Bareilī, India, and Soma Śarmā, a poor but pious Brāhmaṇ from Gujarāt, India, came to the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī. The poor Brāhmaṇ worshipped the Goddess with holy water, *bilva patras*, and husked rice. The rich Brāhmaṇ worshipped Her with a variety of rich things. But, alarmingly, he hated the poor Brāhmaṇ. After two months of the rigorous test of the poor Brāhmaṇ by Goddess Śaileśwarī, the poor Brāhmaṇ witnessed the presence and blessings of the Goddess on the night of Māgha Śukla Aṣṭamī. The Goddess reassured him that her devotees who would recite his prayer to Her would get their desires fulfilled; they would not face calamities any time; they would not be poor, diseased, and be free from the fear of kings, enemies, ghosts, dead spirits, and fearful animals like lions (2.3-13).

Contrastingly, the rich Brāhmaṇ became sad not to receive the Goddess's grace and presence in front of his eyes. After some months, a yogi told him in a dream to go to the poor Brāhmaṇ to get spiritual help from him. The rich Brāhmaṇ did the same and attained divine knowledge by the grace of the Goddess (3.12-27).

This story about Śaileśwarī indicates that the Goddess is pleased with the one who, despite being poor economically, worships Her with a simple heart without hatred, jealousy, or pride. In fact, "Those in whose heart there is abundant devotion to

God or Goddess, they are spiritually very wealthy, blessed, or lucky even though they are inferior materially in the entire universe” (“*Śrīmad Vāgavata Māhātmyam*” 3.73). Thus, for devotees, worldly things do not matter. They are happy even without the earthly things. They are pleased when they have the wealth of devotion to God or Goddess.

The *Rudrahryadaya Upaniṣad* glorifies the importance of Śiva and Pārvatī. It says that all the masculine creatures that are in the creation are Maheśwara, another name of Śiva; all the feminine creatures are the Goddess Umā, another name of Pārvatī, all the insentient and sentient things are the forms of Umā-Maheśwara; all the manifest world is the form of Umā; and all the unmanifest world is the form of Maheśwara (660).

A Beautiful Story of Two Brāhmaṇas — Poor and Rich

According to the second chapter of *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* (“*The Glory of Śaileśwarī*”), a poor old Brāhmaṇ named Soma Śarmā came from Gujarāta, which lies in India, to the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī. He was hated by another rich Brāhmaṇ named Puṇyakīrti, who was from Vāraṇāsvata (known as Bareilly now, which lies in India). Soma Śarmā worshipped Goddess Śaileśwarī for two months with strict religious rules and rituals. Then, one day at night of Māgha Shukla Astamī (the coldest day of winter), a yogi and a Yoginī came to Soma Śarmā when he was about to have fruits after fasting throughout the day. Soma Śarmā welcomed them by giving his fruits to them. But they did not eat those fruits. Instead, the Yogī told Soma Śarmā that his Yoginī was feeling very cold because she was wearing a torn-out dress and that she needed fire first then.

Then, Soma Śarmā went to the nearby fearful jungle at night without any fear to collect a bundle of firewood. At the same time, a lion caught him, took him to the

deepest jungle, stood under a tree, and started roaring. Again, at the same time, a female demon appeared suddenly. She caught both Soma Śarmā and the lion in each of her hands, danced, and giggled several times. Then, Soma Śarmā told her about his purpose in coming to the jungle. He told her he wanted to return to the jungle with a bundle of firewood to give to the Yogī and Yoginī to fulfill his promise. So, he requested her not to eat him now until he came back from them. He further told her that one is destined to die one day according to the divine rules. So, was is not afraid of death.

Pleased with Soma Śarmā's honest statements and adherence to truth, the female demon disappeared with the lion suddenly. He was surprised to see that the female demon did not eat nor did the lion eat her.

In a reply to the question asked by Skanda (Swāmī Kārtikeya), the Sage Agastya says that the Yogī and Yoginī were no one but Śiva and Pārvatī themselves. Similarly, the lion and the female demon were no one but Śiva and Pārvatī themselves.

Finding Soma Śarmā successful in passing the rigorous test, Śiva and Pārvatī suddenly appeared in their physical forms mounting on their respective carriers (a bull and a lion).

At the same when Soma Śarmā witnessed Śiva and Pārvatī in front of him, the sage Nārad told this very surprising news to the gods, sages, and celestial singers, and all of them visited Śiva and Pārvatī, prayed to them, and the celestial nymphs started dancing in an ecstatic mood. The place became like a heaven.

Meanwhile, both Śiva and Pārvatī held Soma Śarmā's hands. Then, he became overjoyed and started praying to them. Pleased with his prayer (See Appendix IV),

they blessed him with divine knowledge. This event took place on the night of Māgha Śukla Aṣṭamī. Even now, sages see miracles on every night of Māgha Śukla Aṣṭamī.

After getting the divine touch and blessings of Śiva and Pārvatī, Soma Śarmā went back with a bundle of firewood to the jungle near the phallus-shaped stone of the Goddess where he had left the Yogī and Yoginī but, surprisingly, he found no one there. Then, he realized that these Yogī and Yoginī were no more than Śiva and Pārvatī themselves.

Surprisingly, the rich Brāhmaṇ Puṇyakīrti who always hated Soma Śarmā could not get the grace of Goddess Śaileśwarī even by worshiping Her with rich materials, doing yagna, giving donations, and feeding rice pudding to 125 Brahmanas daily for several months. Meanwhile, he knew that the poor Brāhmaṇa Soma Śarmā witnessed the physical form of the Goddess by being blessed with spiritual knowledge, so he became very sad. Then, perhaps he realized that he could not get the blessings of the Goddess until he became *akincana* (“without any wealth or possessions”) because, according to the *Srimad Bhagavata*, the God or Goddess is *akincana* and to be blessed by her one also needs to be *akincana* (10.60.14, 37).

Therefore, he renounced his property by distributing it to his followers and sending them back to Vāraṇāsvata (Bareilly, India). Then, he started to worship her with a single devotion. After some months, one night a yogī came into his dream and told him to surrender to the poor Brāhmaṇ Soma Śarmā to get spiritual knowledge. He did the same and was enlightened by the grace of the guru (i.e. the enlightened poor Brāhmaṇ Soma Śarmā).

The above-mentioned mythological story of the two Brāhmaṇas’ tests taken by Śiva and Pārvatī suggests that the God and Goddess love the poor, pious persons but not the rich, self-centered ones who hate the poor. Goddess Śaileśwarī is Śakti

(“Power” or “Energy”). She embodies two types of Śakti in Śaktism: ParāŚakti (Nirguṇa Nirākāra—attributeless and formless) and AparāŚakti (Saguṇa Sākāra—with name and form).

ParāŚakti is Supreme Power or Energy. It is unconditional, pure consciousness, divine awareness, and spiritual essence. It represents the ultimate, transcendental power, energy, strength, or force. It is beyond the material world. It is regarded as the cosmic goddess or mother, the source of all substance and creation.

AparāŚakti is Material Power or Energy, which is illusory consciousness. It embodies the material aspect of energy, the physical universe, including all forms, matter, and phenomena. The active power, energy, or force molds and rules the world. It refers to the goddess Śaileśwarī, who embodies creation, energy, courage, and protection.

Śiva cannot do anything without Śakti (“Energy”) and Śakti cannot exist without Śiva (“Consciousness”). They are inseparable from each other. So, they are equal spiritually. According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, Śakti manifests herself as a man and a woman to create the world. Then, she sustains the world as an earth (1.20). This suggests that men and women are equal because they are not different from each other, rather they are the two kinds of manifestations of the same Goddess.

ParāŚakti (“Spiritual Power”) and AparāŚakti (“Material/Mundane Power”) co-exist within us. We can achieve Śakti through Nirguṇa and Saguṇa Upāsana, (“two forms of spiritual and religious practices”) leading to bliss, happiness, and pleasure. We need to harmonize these spiritual and material powers within ourselves to attain spiritual realization and worldly success. Worship, prayers, chanting, and meditation are often practiced to attain both types of Śakti.

A Center of Faith and Devotion

Culturally also, the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī holds great significance. The local people have a lot of faith in and devotion to the Goddess. In this regard, Lava Prasad Shrestha writes that the Bhatta Brāhmaṇas of Silgāun worship Goddess Śaileśwarī daily. Devotees come to the temple to worship and pray to the Goddess in the morning and evening. They chant hymns with musical instruments daily. For this purpose, there is a special house known as "Kirtan Kuñja Bhavan," which is used to deliver spiritual discourses also (96-97).

The priests of the temple take a bath with natural water flowing from an old stone sprout situated at Silgāun and bring a pitch of water every day for Goddess Śaileśwarī. The local people believe that the Goddess Herself goes to this stone sprout riding on a tiger in the *brāhma muhūrta* (one hour and thirty-six minutes before the sun rises; around 4 O'clock; the time of Brahma or God; if one gets up and meditates on Brahma during this time, they get the power and knowledge of Brahma). One day, the priest's ancestor went to the stone sprout early in the morning as usual. She saw the goddess riding on a tiger returning from the stone sprout. That is why the stone sprout is culturally and historically significant (Damaru Chandra Bhatta 32).

The nearby people say that a tiger very often comes to the temple and moves around it at midnight still now. It is prohibited from taking a photo of the round black stone of Goddess Śaileśwarī as in the temple of Paśupatināth in Kathmandu. The temple remains open early in the morning till 9 am and again early in the evening for one hour every day. In the temple, a sacred flame flickers all the time, a beacon of hope and devotion (Damaru Chandra Bhatta 32). The similar kind of the round black stone of Goddess Śaileśwarī found inside the temple is outside before the temple's entrance gate. Its image can be seen in Appendix XI. It shows Śiva Liṅga in the

middle of the Yonī outside the premise of the temple of Śaileśwarī. The Liṅga is a symbol of Śiva and Puruṣa (“Consciousness”). The Yonī is a symbol of Pārvatī (“one of the divine names of Goddess”), Śakti (“Energy”), and Prakriti or the Universe. The universe came from the divine union of Śiva and Pārvatī or Puruṣa and Prakriti. Here, the Sanskrit word “Liṅga” does not mean a penis. For the penis, the right Sanskrit word is “Śiśna.” Similarly, the Sanskrit word “Yonī” does not mean a female’s secret sexual organ. However, it is true that in a non-scriptural context, the word “Liṅga” can mean a penis, and “Yonī” can mean a female’s sexual or reproductive organ.

Near the image of Śiva Liṅga under the yellow trident and the bull (See Appendix XI), we can see a wooden image of the Goddess holding a conch and a lotus in her two hands each and standing without any dress, exposing her Yonī (See Appendix XII). This kind of erotic image which we find in the old temples of Nepal, such as in the Paśupatināth Temple, and in India, such as in the temples of Khajurāho, is not taken negatively or obscenely. Rather it is taken positively and religiously. This kind of erotic image suggests that *kāma* (“sexual desire including many more such worldly desires”) is one of the four greatest goals to achieve in life. The four goals include *dharma* (“duty to fulfill according to the Hindu religion”), *artha* (“money”), *kāma* (“desires”), and *moksha* (“permanent liberation from the cycle of life and death”). So, sex or sexual activity, if done according to the scriptural rules of Hinduism, is not considered a sin. One of the general rules is that one can establish sexual relations with his or her spouse only at night. If one does so, he or she is also called chaste.

In life, one has three debts to pay off. One of them is to reproduce children. Regarding this concept, the *Srimad Bhagavata* declares, “A twice-born comes into this world with a threefold debt—debt to the Devas, to the Rishis and to ancestors.

These debts are repaid by performance of Yajna, through study of the Vedas, and by begetting a son to continue the line. If one abandons the life of action without discharging these debts, he is liable to spiritual degradation” (10.84.39).

In stark contrast, in Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, sex or sexuality is considered to be a sin. Christianity, especially Victorian morality, relates this sinful concept to the Fall of naked Adam and naked Eve from the Garden of Eden due to their disobedience to God. This is known as “the Original Sin.” So, Christian morality does not approve of the naked sexual images of gods and goddesses carved on wood, stone, or metal. In the context of Nepal and India, erotic sculptures are considered one of the types of architectural art. Besides, they are considered religious and symbolic as well.

Festivals, Rituals, and Social Unity

Culture is slightly different from religion. Religion is what is directed by the *śrutis* (Vedic scriptures) or *smṛtis* (scriptures of *Purāṇas*) whereas culture is developed by a certain group, society, or nation. Festivals fall under the category of culture. Some festivals related to Goddess Śaileśwarī are observed from time to time. They have helped to maintain social unity among the regional people. Such three remarkable festivals are Lakṣa Havan, Kotī Havan, and Śaileśwarī Jātrā.

In response to my interview, Prem Shankar Bhatta, who is the President of the Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee as well as the priest of the Śaileśwarī temple, Ram Shankar Bhatta, another priest of the temple, Jhapat Dhami, the *bhaṇḍārī* (“storekeepers”) of the second *bhaṇḍāra* (“storehouse”) of the temple, and the other local people tell me about the history, myths, legend, and rituals of the temple (See Appendix XV).

As informed by them, the Śaileśwarī is a *Śakti Pīṭha* (a holy pilgrimage site of the Goddess), famous since the mythological period. In every 12 years, Lakṣa Havan is performed. During the Lakṣa Havan, a mixture of ghee, sesame, and barley seeds are put into a burning fire in the name of the Goddess amounting to one hundred twenty-five thousand times from Māgha Śukla Pancamī to Pūrṇimā (approx. 25 Jan. to 6 Feb). And in every 12 Lakṣa Havans (12 X 12= 144 years), Kotī Havan (i.e., "oblation of barley seeds, sesame seeds, ghee, etc. into a burning fire for the Goddess ten million twenty-five thousand times") is performed. One Kotī Havan was observed from 28 January to 7 February 2003 AD. The then King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev came to the temple of Śaileśwarī to receive the holy *tilak* and *prasād* in *caitra* 2059 BS some days after the completion of the Kotī Havan (115, 118-19). Similarly, the second Kotī Havan was observed from Māgha 11 to 20 in 2071 BS (i.e., 25 Jan. to 3 Feb. 2015).

According to the legend, on the auspicious day of the Gāṇḍī/Gāṇḍī festival (see Appendix VIII), the Gāṇḍī is taken up to the Mālikāmāṇu temple of Nācanthalī passing through the temple of Goddess Bhwāntākūrā. The Gāṇḍī is kept at Nācanthalī for some minutes. She is worshipped there. At that time, it is believed, that Goddess Śaileśwarī in the form of Gāṇḍī bows down in those directions where Her nine sisters including the elder ones are situated. These nine Goddess sisters are Tripurāsundarī of Baitaḍī, Devī of Dehimāṇḍau, Ningalāsainī of Baitaḍī, Devī of Talliswarāḍ, Melaurī of Baitaḍī, Devī of Purchaundī, Ḍilāsainī of Baitaḍī, Baḍimālikā of Bājūrā, and Ugratārā of Ḍadelḍhurā. Baḍimālikā is the youngest sister of all. Dugdhadhārī Masta Devatā (a form of Lord Shiva, who drinks milk only), is the elder brother of Goddess Śaileśwarī. This Masta Devatā is also known as Gurumasta because the Dhāmī of this Masta Devatā had taught

the Veda to Garbhu Bhatta, the first ancestor of the present Bhatta priests of the Śaileśwarī temple.

Inside the temple, there is an *agni kuṇḍa* (a place where barley seeds, etc. are poured into the fire), supposed to have been used by Lord Ram, in which sacred fire is burnt and Havan is performed occasionally during special occasions. According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, Lord Ram, the spouse of Sītā, worshipped Goddess Śaileśwarī for nine days after He witnessed Her physical presence and received Her blessings as a result of His prayer (See Appendix V) (5.26-34).

The three Sanskrit *stotras* ("prayers") done by each of Brahmā, Soma Śarmā, and Lord Ram to Goddess Śaileśwarī are given with their English translations in Appendices III, IV, and V respectively in this research report.

Once a year on Kārtik Śukla Pūrṇimā (approx. 11 Nov.), Śaileśwarī Jātrā ("carnival") is celebrated. This Jātrā is preceded by a 4 days-long festival. That is, the preparation for this Jātrā starts from Kārtik śukla ekādashī. On this Jātrā, a long flat staff covered with silver is decorated as a figure of the Goddess with the silver and gold images or idols of the Goddess, with pieces of jewelry, black wigs, red saris, garlands, and a golden spire at the top.

Then, a priest sprinkles holy water over the divine figure and worships it amidst the holy sound of conches, bells, and other musical folk instruments such as *damāhās* (traditional drums), *bhokaras* (a type of brass instruments), *jhyālis*, *narasingas*, and flutes. When their sounds create a type of hypnotic or magnetic trance, *dhāmīs* (i.e., "spiritually-enlightened people supposed to have a power of oracles") shiver their bodies by getting a power of the Goddess and carry Her figure around the temple and the town areas. In the past, as directed by the tradition, it was forbidden to take a photo of the divine figure or image but anyone was free to catch it

in their eyes and hearts mentally. Nowadays, it is allowed to take the photo of the divine figure.

On the night of *Kārtik Śukla Caturdaśī*, just one day before the Jātrā, the local men and women or boys and girls play *ratyauḍī*, also known as *ratyaulī*, *rateulī*, or *ratelī*, in two groups. During that *ratyauḍī*, each group can sing the *deudās* by praising the glory of Śiva and Pārvatī of the temple of Śaileśwarī. Or they can sing the songs of love and affection of husband and wife or lover and beloved. The female singers put on special red dresses (*colo* and *ghāgrī*, also known as *ghā~gar*) while singing *deudās*.

Process of Visiting the Śaileśwarī Temple

The beautiful, religious places worth visiting near the Śaileśwarī temple, as told by Swāmī Kārtikeya to Agastya Muni in *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* (1.45-53; 2.6-22; 5.12, 37-42), is as follows:

First, we should take a bath in the Setī river flowing through the Dipāyal area, perform daily religious rituals like *sandhyā* and *tarpaṇa*, and visit the deities around that area such as Yogeśwar, Dhruveśwar (It is a Liṅga of Mahādev inside a cave where Dhruva penanced and worshipped the Mahādev so, it is known as Dhruveśwar, also known as Dudheśwar), and Dilīpeśwar. There is a place called Dhruvbakuṇḍa, where Dhruva would take a bath. We can take a bath there also. Then we should climb up the Navak hill and take a bath in Gaurīkuṇḍa (the natural pool where Goddess Gaurī had bathed), and Uttarāyaṇa Dhārā ("a natural spout") situated over there.

After that, we should worship Candeśwar Bhairav and Candeśwarī Bhairavī (i.e., the guard-deities of Goddess Śaileśwarī) by offering gifts and sacrifices of fruits and then seek permission from them to visit Goddess Śaileśwarī.

Afterward, the temples of different local deities should be visited—first the temple of Ganesh (“the deity of Wisdom”), then the temples of Batukanātha or Siddheśwar Bhairav, Vetāl Bhairav, Hanumān (“the deity of Strength”), and Gaṇe Devatā.

Finally, we should worship the two parts of the entrance door of Goddess Śaileśwarī and enter Her temple. Inside the temple, we can worship Lord Śiva and Goddess Pārvatī with the sixteen methods of worshipping. After that, we should sit outside the temple on the six *mandaps* ("raised altars") of *Bhakti* ("Devotion"), *Jñāna* ("Knowledge"), *Vairāgya* ("Detachment or Dispassion"), *Mukti* ("Liberation"), *Yoga*, and *Siddhi* ("Superhuman Success"), and utter the sacred *mantras* such as *Om* (salutations to the Indestructible Brahma), *om namaḥ śivāya* (salutations to Lord Śiva) or *hṛm* (salutations to the Goddess Durgā), which is the one-syllabic mystical *mantra* of Goddess Śaileśwarī. These *mandaps* give their fruits as per their names. Lord Ram had chanted the sacred *mantras* sitting on these *mandaps*.

Process of Pancakośī Pilgrimage

Pancakośī pilgrimage is a special process or package of five kinds of worshipping to please Goddess Śaileśwarī. According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* (1.44-54, 2.5-10, 5.34-42) and Jagannāth Bhatta (64), the process of visiting Śaileśwarī temple is as follows:

Firstly, the pilgrims or devotees should take a bath at Tapta Kuṇḍ ("a well named as Tapta"), which is a meeting point of Godare Gād (Godāwarī river) and the Setī River, which is known as Sīta River in *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*. Then they should worship the Goddess Durgā at that place by reciting the *mantras* of *Durgā Saptasatī*. Also, they should worship Tedi, a local deity, and recite the *mantras* of *Rudrāstādhyāi* [*Eight Chapters in Praise of Lord Rudra*]. They should spend that night thereby

remembering the Goddess with devotion. According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, the main cause of success is devotion alone (my trans.; 1.55).

Secondly, early in the morning of the second day, the devotees should take a bath at the Dilīpeśar Kuṇḍ, worship Dilīpeśar Mahādev, and recite the mantras of *Rudrāstādhyāī* and *Śiva Sahaśranām*. They should remain vigilant by doing religious activities concerning the Goddess on the second night.

Thirdly, early on the third day in the morning, the devotees should take a bath in the Yogeśwar Kuṇḍ, worship Yogeśwar Mahādev, and recite the mantras of *Rudrāstādhyāī*. Then they should take a bath in the Dhruveśwar Kuṇḍa, worship Dhruveśwar (also known as Dudheśwar) Mahādev ["Śiva from whose stone milk pours out"] and recite the mantras of *Rudrāstādhyāī*. Then they should take a bath in a confluence of *Dwārikā Kholā* (also known as Dwārigād) —a natural stream— and the Setī River. After that, they should perform Tīrtha Śrāddha for the departed souls on the cremation ground on the bank of the river. At last, pious Brāhmaṇas should be fed with rice pudding.

Fourthly, on the fourth day, devotees should depart from there for Navak Parvata ("a hill known as Navak"), which is at the height of Silgadhī. There is Gaurīkuṇḍa, well-known as Gaurī ("one of the names of the Goddess"). They should take a bath there, worship the Goddess Gaurī, and recite the hymns of *Devi Kavac*. Then they should worship Tedi known as Ratnagrīb, a local deity, at Thāpla. After that, they should take a bath in the Rasod Kuṇḍa known as Uttarāyaṇa Dhārā ("a natural spout") at Dhāmī Gāun, a small village. Then, they should climb up, worship Candeśwar Bhairav, and recite "Batuka Bhairav Stotra." There are some deities around the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī. The devotees should worship them, namely,

Gaṇeś, Bhairav, Vetāl, Gauṇe, Hanumān, and 64 *Yoginīs* (accompanying goddesses of the Goddess Durgā) in the eastern part.

Then, the devotees should worship the two parts of the main gate of the temple of Śaileśwarī. Inside the temple, they should worship the Goddess, and recite Her *navārṇa mantra* ("om aiṃ hr̥m klīm chamuṇḍāyai vicce"). The mantra means "Salutations to you, oh! The Great Saraswatī, who is the form of Consciousness, oh! The Great Lakṣmī, who is the form of Existence, oh! The Great Kālī, who is the form of Bliss, and oh! Candikā, who had killed two demons called Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa; we meditate on your divine forms to get the knowledge of Brahma; and make us free from the cords of ignorance and illusion." Afterwards, they should recite *Durgā Saptaśatī*. Then, Havan ("sacred oblations into a sacrificing fire") should be performed at least 108 times. After that, they should worship six *mandaps* ("raised altars") of—*bhakti* ("devotion"), *jñāna* ("knowledge"), *vairāgya* ("detachment"), *yoga*, *siddhī* ("the power to fulfill all desires"), and *Mukti* ("permanent liberation from the wheel of life and death").

Fifthly and lastly, the devotees should climb up Baglekha hill, bathe in the Vārāhī Kuṇḍa, worship the Goddess Vārāhī, and recite Candīpāṭha. By doing so, the special pilgrimage of 5 days comes to an end.

The Fruits of Worshipping Goddess Śaileśwarī

In *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, Goddess Śaileśwarī says, "My devotees will become *Siddhas* ('saints full of spiritual powers') and world-popular, full of eight *siddhīs* (superhuman powers), spiritually enlightened, erudite, omniscient with a power to travel anywhere, and will find all his desires to have been fulfilled" (my trans.; 1-38, 3.10). She says ahead, "They will receive the fruits of *aśwamedha yajña*,

which is a great ritual performance, various pleasurable things, and at last the Eternal Abode of the Goddess Durgā after their death" (my trans.; 5.31-32).

Goddess Śaileśwarī should be worshipped with the following *mantra* to fulfill human desires as Lord Ram did in the Śaileśwarī temple:

I pray to Goddess Śaileśwarī or Śīlādevī, accompanied by Lord Śiva, sitting amid the mine of gold, having pleasing appearance, and ready to give blessings of superhuman powers" (my trans.; 5.19-20).

We can recite the prayers of Goddess Śaileśwarī as uttered by Brahmā (the Creator), Soma Śarmā (a pious Brāhmaṇ of Gujarāt, India), and the Lord Ram of Ayodhyā, India, to please Goddess Śaileśwarī as mentioned in *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa*. By doing so "your all desires will be fulfilled" (my trans.; 3.9) by the grace of Goddess Śaileśwarī as assured by Her.

We can find the prayers for Goddess Śaileśwarī in the book entitled *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*. We can buy books and CDs consisting of Goddess Śaileśwarī's hymns, rosaries or the beads of *rudrākṣas*, and other things at the premise of the Śaileśwarī temple. Devotees perform different religious activities and offer different things made of gold, silver, brass, copper, and iron for the fulfillment of their desires. These things are recorded as public property in the Office of Revenue. The devotees burn millions of lights, perform Havans (the oblations of ghee, barley, and sesame into the burning fire), and have *Rudrābhiṣeka* and *Saptaśatī* recited by Brāhmaṇas.

According to the *Kaivalya Upanishad*, the sages or the holy men attain the highest Lord ("Śiva") and Umā ("Pārvatī") or their Ardhanārīśwara ("Śiva who is half Goddess and half God") form through the meditation on Śiva, who is sacredly united with Umā. Śiva is powerful, three-eyed, blue-necked, tranquil, the source of all, the witness of all, and beyond darkness (7). This implies that Uma is a symbol of

Brahma-vidyā ("the knowledge of Brahma"). And the holy men can attain Śiva, who bestows permanent liberation, through this Brahma-vidyā.

Highlighting further the significance of the highest Lord, the *Kaivalya Upanishad* 9, 10 says, "He is Brahmā, He is Śiva, He is Indra, He is the Immutable, the Supreme, the Self-luminous, He alone is Vishnu, He is Prana, He is Time and Fire, He is the Moon. He alone is all that was, and all that will be, the Eternal; knowing Him, one transcends death; there is no other way to freedom" (Madhavananda 75-76).

Chapter Five

Historical, Geographical, and Archaeological Significance of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her Temple

Historical Significance

Tracing the mythological and historical background, Lava Prasad Shrestha writes that the headquarters of Dotī district is Silgadhī, which was named after Śilādevī or Śaileśwarī. The district falls under the Setī zone, which was named after the Setī River (known as the Sītā River in *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa*). In 1714 BS, before the unification of the Nepal kingdom, the first Pahādī Śāhī, the King of Dotī, so known as Doteli Rajā also, gave Sadaśiva Bhatta, the then-priest of the Śaileśwarī temple, some lands as a trust to worship Śaileśwarī institutionally. Later on, the kings of Rājapur and Jumlā districts also contributed to the development of the temple. After Dotī was annexed into one large kingdom of Nepal, the Governor General of the kingdom of Nepal Puṣkar Śāha appointed for Dotī reconstructed the temple with a permanent slated roof supported by stony walls in place of the wooden temple and built an inn and a pond (called as Rānī Pokharī) near the temple (15-27). This information is confirmed by Śiva Raj Shrestha also in his booklet entitled *Shrī Śaileśwarī Māhātmya Ra Koti Havan Paramparā* [*The Praise of Goddess Śaileśwarī and the Tradition of Offering Oblation Ten Million Times*] (28-29).

The Śaileśwarī Temple is related to the Setī River and some gods which are in Dipāyal, from where the temple is half an hour's distance by bus. Based on the *Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, King Dilīpa, Lord Ram's fifth ancestor, came to the Setī River and worshipped Dilīpeśwar Mahadeva, which is situated on its bank. Since Dilīpa established and worshiped the Liṅga of Mahādeva, it was called Dilīpeśwara Mahādeva. Dipāyal, through which the Setī River flows, was named after King

Dilīpa. There is also a high school named Dilīpeśwar High School, which was named after King Dilīpa, the fifth ancestor of Lord Ram. When we trace the noble lineage of Lord Ram of the Ikṣvāku dynasty, a branch of Suryavanśī (“the descendent belonging to the Sun God), we find the following family tree in his dynasty:

- King Dilīpa (also known as Dīrghabāhu): Khatvānga’s son
- King Raghu: Dilīpa’s son
- King Aja: Contemporary of Candravanśī King Yayāti
- King Daśaratha: Aja’s son, contemporary of Videha King Janaka
- King Lord Ram: King Daśaratha’s son

Viśṇu Puraṇa, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, and Mahābharata describe Lord Ram’s ancestral lines or dynasty, also known as Raghuvanśa. According to Ram Shankar Bhatta, a priest of Śaileśwarī temple, King Dilīpa must have visited and worshipped Goddess Śaileśwarī, though it is not written in the *Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, because it is and was the tradition to first bathe in the Setī river and then to visit Goddess Śaileśwarī for worshipping Her.

According to the *Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, Lord Ram with his followers came to the temple of Śaileśwarī, worshipped Her for nine days, worshipped Dilīpeśwara Mahādādeva at the bank of Setī River after his father Dilīpa, and stayed there for one night near the Mahādādeva while going back to Ayodhyā. Since that time, the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī became popular on earth (5. 40-42).

In my interview, Ram Shankar Bhatta, a 75-year-old priest of the Śaileśwarī temple, responds that five kings have ruled Dotī and contributed to the development of the temple. Among these kings, the first is Bhote Rajā Khadāsalla (the King of the Bhota area). He made the stone sprout of the Silgaun area, where the present priests of the temple take a bath every morning and use its water to offer to the Goddess of the

temple. Then Sijāpati Mahāraj, known also as Jumlī Rajā (the King of Jumlā) offered some images of silver, brass, and iron to the Goddess, introduced a new system of making the festival of the Goddess known as Jāta or Gāja/Gāja (See Appendix VIII) and another new system of Dhamīs who shiver with the tune of the musical drums on the day of the Jāta festival. The third king Pahādī Shahī Rajā, also known as Dotelī Rajā (the King of Dotī), removed the temporary structure of the temple made of wood and dry grass and instead built a permanent structure of the temple with the help of wood and stone. He used the slates for the roof of the temple. He also gave some government land as *dānapatra* (a kind of religious trust) to the priest to worship the Goddess of the temple daily morning and day institutionally. The fourth King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shaha Dev contributed to installing the roof of copper in place of the slate roof in BS 2028. Then, the fifth King Birendra Bir Bikram Shaha Dev also contributed to the decoration of the temple by replacing a copper *gajura* (looking somewhat similar to a spire or steeple) with a golden one.

Ram Shankar Bhatta, during my interview, informs me that there was a system of worshipping the Goddess of the temple by the elder son of the family till Gauri Shankar Bhatta. However, since the time of his three sons (Hari Shankar Bhatta, Umakanta Bhatta, and Jagannath Bhatta), the system changed from BS 2012. Thus, the system of worshipping the Goddess of the temple by all sons began. The water of the Setī River of Dipāyal is very pious. It cleanses pilgrims's sins. Its origin is Surmā Sarovar mountain and Tāklākot (near the Nepal-Tibet border).

History and Lineage of the Bhatta Priests of the Śaileśwarī Temple

Looking back on the history of the Bhatta priests of the Śaileśwarī temple, Jagannāth Bhatta records that the first priest of the Śaileśwarī temple was Govind Bhatta descended from the line of the sage Vaśistha, a follower of *Mādhyaṇḍinī Śukla*

("Mādhyandinī Branch") of *Śukla Yajur Veda* and of *pañca pravara* ("related to the lineage of a superior sage characterized by five qualities"). He was utterly religious and morally very rigid as well (1-5). One's *satya* ("truth"), *tapa* ("penance"), *japa* ("chanting"), *nisthā* ("dedication"), all learning, and skills turn out to be useless when they have no good manners and morals.

Govind Bhatta with his younger brother had come to Silgadhī as a pilgrim from Kānya Kubja (Kannauj) of Karṇātak, India, to escape the tyranny of Muslims in the 5th century BS. Referring to hearsay, Jagannāth Bhatta writes that a farmer of the Punnā village had two cows but they did not give milk for three months. The woman inquired the two Brāhmaṇas about the whereabouts of her cow. As directed by them, she went further into the deep jungle of the eastern side and she found them milking over a bouquet of *kāsa* grass (a type of grass). She found the reason why her cows did not use to give milk. Coincidentally, the two Brāhmaṇas happened to reach the same place where the cows used to milk over the bouquet of grass, which was like a pond full of milk. They removed the grass and found a unique candescent *Līṅgam* ("a divine round black stone") of Śaileśwarī. They cooked rice with water, which turned out to be rice pudding. While drinking water, it changed into milk. Then they walked up towards the eastern side of Śilākot, where there was a king named Khadāsalla, known as Vote Rajā. Their eyes closed (i.e., could not see anything) and saw only darkness while trying to cross the small hill of Śilākot but surprisingly their eyes opened while turning back. The then-existing Vote Rajā heard about their story. Then he appointed them as the priests of the Śaileśwarī temple. The same night Govind Bhatta saw in his dream Goddess Śaileśwarī, who instructed him to worship Her daily for his welfare. Since then, his offspring have continued worshipping. The king ordered to make a house with the plaster of the paste of black pulse for them and gave

them land also in the Puṇya Gram, now called Punnā Gāun (3, 6; 28-29; 1-2). The words "Grām" or "Gāun" means a village. And the king gave the elder brother the portfolio of the Home Minister, too. Eventually, the younger brother moved to Thalārā known as Devasthalī in the Bajhān district. The son of Govind Bhatta was Garvū, who had two sons— Ṛshav Dev Bhatta, the elder son, who moved to Silgāun, where the priests of the temple reside now, and Dharma Dev Bhatta, the younger son, who continued living in Puṇya Gram, now known as Punnā Gāun.

Geographical and Archaeological Significance

From the viewpoints of geography and archaeology, too, the surrounding area of the Śaileśwarī temple holds great significance. It is surrounded by natural beauty. The temple is at the top of the hill just above the valley of the Setī River. The weather of the temple is mild— neither too hot during the summer season nor too cold during the winter. The temple area is supposed to be full of gold, silver, and crystal mines underneath.

According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* in *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa*, the newly married Lord Śiva and Goddess Pārvatī sat in the Candana Parvata ("a hill full of sandalwood") and enjoyed their divine conjugal love around that temple area, full of different beautiful and precious things such as different kinds of creepers, vines, plants, trees, and herbs, the mines of gold, silver, metals, semimetals, and crystals, being echoed by the melodious sounds of different birds and by the melodious songs of heavenly nymphs and singers, and touched by the cold air caused by the water of the Setī River (my trans.; 1.5-8).

According to *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*, there is a waterfall called Śīloda, also known as Gaurikuṇḍa (a pool of water used by Goddess Gaurī) in the southern direction of the Śaileśwarī temple. Those who take a bath there become free from all

sin, and there is a mine of gold under the stone from within springs the water (my trans.; 2.9-10).

Lord Ram prays to Goddess Śaileśwarī or Śilādevī, who is always accompanied by Lord Śiva. She is sitting in a mine or abode of gold, and she has a very pleasing appearance. She is ready to give blessings of superhuman powers to those who pray to her (my trans.; 5.19-20).

The above discussion of the mythological story highlights the possibility of the presence of valuable metals and crystals underneath the temple area. Therefore, it is advisable to explore and excavate the surrounding areas of the Candana Parvata where the temple is situated to search for valuable metals and crystals. If the government could do so, the importance of the temple area would increase. If the valuable metals and crystals were found, they would play a great role in enhancing the economy of the country.

Tourist Attractions

The beautiful temple of Śaileśwarī is the main attraction center for tourists in Silgadhī, Dotī. As written by Durga Shankar Bhatta, *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* of *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa* informs us that a monk named Soma Śarmā Brāhmaṇ from Gujarāt, the southern part of India, came, worshipped, and prayed to Goddess Śaileśwarī. The poor Brāhmaṇ Soma Śarmā saw a living form of Goddess Śaileśwarī in front of his eyes one day. Similarly, a rich Brāhmaṇ Puṇyakīrti from Bareilī, the northern part of India, visited the temple of the Goddess of Puṇāgirī that is situated in Tanakpur, the north-west part of India. Then, passing along with the Mahākālī and Setī rivers, he came to the temple of Śaileśwarī, worshipped, and prayed to Her. The detailed story about these two Brāhmaṇas can be read in *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya*.

The story shows that there has been a strong spiritual and cultural relationship between Nepal and India since the pre-historical period (133).

If this information about the two Indian Brāhmaṇas' visit to the temple of Śaileśwarī including India's Lord Ram's visit can be spread in India through the social media of Nepal and India at the state level, we can promote religious tourism in Nepal by attracting the Indian tourists to the temple of Śaileśwarī, which is significant mythologically, spiritually, and historically as well (135).

Though there is entrance only for Hindus, as in the Paśupatināth temple in Kathmandu, into the temple of Śaileśwarī, yet foreign tourists can enjoy its outside beauty. The temple of Śaileśwarī is hundreds of years old. It is big and beautiful. There is a golden roof and a golden peak at the top of it. Surrounded by the age-old tall trees, it is situated in the middle of lower and upper markets at a hill above the Setī River.

The other tourist attractions are the small temples of local deities surrounding the Śaileśwarī temple. Such small temples are those of Gaṇeś (a deity of wisdom), Hanuman (a deity of strength), Candeśwar Bhairav and Candeśwarī Bhagavatī ("the male and female guard deities of Śaileśwarī), Gaṇe (a local guardian deity), Lord Śiva (the Lord of Knowledge), Saraswatī (the Goddess of Learning), Bhimsen (a deity of power), and Rādhā Kṛṣṇa (Kṛṣṇa is one of the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu; Rādhā is Kṛṣṇa's famous beloved lover).

Similarly, the Śaileśwarī temple is surrounded by a beautiful garden, a statue of Khaptad Bābā, Kīrtan Kuñja Bhavan, where hymns are sung with musical instruments, Rānī Pokharī ("name of a pond"), inns, a high school, a campus, and Satsaṅga Bhavan, where religious minded people gather together and exchange

spiritual ideas or deliver didactic discourses. These are the tourist attraction centers near the Śaileśwarī temple.

Śaileśwarī and Khaptad Bābā

Khaptad Bābā, a saint of Indian origin, had a great devotion to Goddess Śaileśwarī, though he was a great holy saint, who particularly followed the path of knowledge but not of devotion as per the saintly tradition. He led an austere life of penance amid the lonely jungle of Khaptad. According to Rabindra Pradhan, he was born in Kāśmīr Jambu in a prestigious and rich Brāhmaṇ family on 10 February 1880 (xx). Later on, he came to Nepal and settled down finally at the mountain of Khaptad, which lies in the Far Western Region of Nepal, to live a life of austere penance (xxii). It was in 2002 BS when he settled in Khaptad (3) and became popular as Shree 1008 Saccidānanda Saraswatī Khaptad Bābā (3). He left his physical body in 27 *Baiśākh* 2053 BS (252) above the sky of the Ridi area while flying from Nepaljung to Kathmandu (Kharel 64).

With his inspiration, the Gita Library was established and inaugurated by his hand near the premise of the Śaileśwarī temple. For the financial support of the library, he had written some invaluable books in Hindi. They are now translated into Nepali and English and published by the Government. They are:

- *Swāsthya Vijñāna* [*The Science of Health*]
- *Vicāra Vijñāna* [*The Science of Thought*]
- *Dharma Vijñāna* [*The Science of Religion*]
- *Mai Aur Merā Kartavya* [*I and My Duties*]
- *Yoga Vijñāna* [*The Science of Yoga*]
- *Nārī Dharma Tathā Puruṣa Dharma* [*The Duty of Man and the Duty of Woman*]

- *Ātma Jñāna* [*The Knowledge of the Self*]
- *Vedānta Vijñāna* [*The Science of Vedānta*]

These books can be read online free from "<https://khaptadswami.com.np/index.php>."

In the interval of two to three years, Khaptad Bābā, who usually lived at Khaptad, would visit Śaileśwarī temple and stay in the shrine of Dugdha Mast ("a deity regarded as one of the images of Lord Śiva that was worshipped with milk") near the temple. It is believed that he used to talk to Dugdha Mast at night. There is a close connection between Silgadhī and Khaptad and between Śaileśwarī and Badīmālikā, one of the names of Goddess, whose temple lies in the district of Bājūrā.

Once a year on the day of Śrāwan Śukla Pratipadā (the first day of the bright lunar calendar of the Śrāwan month), the people of Silgadhī send to the temple of Badīmālikā a large bundle of special materials of worshipping through some people with the official help of the Chief District Officer of Dotī district. Before their departure to Badīmālikā, a priest of Śaileśwarī temple worships the bundle as Goddess Badīmālikā and a squad of the army plays on the brass bands and salutes the bundle as the image of Goddess Badīmālikā whose description is found in the book entitled *The Tīrtha Traya Māhātmya Sangrahaḥ: Śaileśwarī, Khaptad, and Mālikā Māhātmya*.

Khaptad is a stunning location for hiking and scientific research for people. The peacefulness and natural beauty of this area inspire us to think deeply and creatively. This could be your destination if you're tired of your ordinary existence and wish to experience something different (naturetrail.com). Khaptad National Park is located at Khaptad, a valley, surrounded by mountains, situated at the elevation of 10,800 feet (altitudehimalya.com), in a distance of two days journey on foot from the Silgadhī base camp.

Khaptad is a natural beauty of Nepal. Although it is a national park, it is more than that. It is one of the tranquil places, situated in the Far Western Region of Nepal, in a 446-kilometer air distance from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. The main area of Khaptad is situated at the center of four districts (Bajhāng, Bājūrā, Dotī, and Achām) (*naturetrail.com*).

Khaptad is pleasing for all—pilgrims, saints, devotees, lovers, scientists, birds, and animals. Nature has enriched herself with precious treasures: different sorts of mines, flowers, birds, animals, herbs, and bamboo. It is like a spread-out colored carpet. The area is covered with snow almost 4-5 months a year. Mysterious sounds such as bells ringing and local drums being beaten are heard at the dead-midnight here.

Khaptad is a holy and spiritual place of saints who did penance and breathed their last in this holy land. There are many worth visiting places here such as the Trivenī River, military camp, Khaptad National Park, Dānphe Kot, Khaptad Lake, horse-racing plain areas, the new hermitage of Khaptad Bābā, the old hermitage of Khaptad Bābā made of beautifully-carved stones that were allegedly paved by Sītā (the wife of Lord Ram) inside the river, Dharma Dwāra, guest house, Nāga Dhungā, and Sahaśra Liṅga (a self-originated stone of Lord Śiva as mentioned in *The Holy Skanda Purāṇa*), situated at the height of about 12000 feet.

Two festivals are observed here in Khaptad. One is *Khāpar Tāla Melā* ("Khaptad Lake Festival") in Bhādra (Aug-Sep.). Another is a 10-day *Gangā Daśaharā Melā* in the month of Jeṣṭha (approx. 1-10 May). Khaptad Tāla is situated in the north-eastern part of Khaptad National Park at an altitude of 3,050 m. or 10,010 ft. (*Wikipedia*).

How to Reach the Temple of Śaileśwarī?

You can catch a direct bus from Kathmandu, Dhangadhī, Mahendranagar, or Maṅgalsen to Silgadhī, where the temple is situated. Or you can fly to Nepāljang or Dhangadhī by plane from Kathmandu; then from there, you can catch a bus bound for Silgadhī. The temple is accessible through the pitch road. Or you can fly to Khaptad by chartering private helicopters from Kathmandu, Nepāljang, and Dhangadhī airports or by trekking. Trekking is the best to take wonderful natural snaps, which could be done while going to Khaptad from any of the four districts—Bajhāng, Bājūrā, Dotī, and Acchām (*naturetrail.com*).

Chapter Six

Challenges, Problems, and Solutions

Based on the suggestions received from the interviews, the following points suggest how the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī is significant and could be developed as a tourist and religious center by overcoming the problems seen at the present moment.

The temple of Śaileśwarī is not an ordinary one for Her stone image was not established by any human being. Rather it was self-originated. As mentioned in the "Mānas Khand [Chapter]" of *Skand Purāṇa*, the glory of the temple goes back to the Satya Yuga ("the Golden Age") when Lord Śiva and Goddess Pārvatī were married.

From the mythological viewpoint, the significance of the Śaileśwarī temple is as equal to the Paśupatināth temple of Kathmandu. Therefore, the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī should be developed as a major pilgrimage site of the Far Western Region through its wide publicity both in Nepal and abroad, especially in India. If this could be done, it would contribute greatly to the development of the regional tourism sector of Nepal. But there are many problems in doing so.

Concerned authorities or the Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee could publish this study as a booklet for the publicity or development of the temple area. Or this study could be uploaded on the internet to spread the popularity of the temple to attract pilgrims, tourists, or devotees living both at home and abroad, especially in India.

According to my interviews with the local devotees, there are many problems that the outsider devotees, visitors, or tourists are facing. There is no proper infrastructure for them in the temple area. There are no proper facilities for *dharmasālās* ("guest houses"), sewers, lodging and vegetarian food, pure water

supply, bathrooms, separate gents' and ladies' toilets, parking, and shopping stalls of dairy products, religious materials, pamphlets, maps, and books for outsiders. There must be proper management of all these facilities to develop the temple area and enhance its mythological, religious, spiritual, and cultural glory.

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation needs to allocate a sufficient budget annually for the development of the temple and the temple area. However, the local authorities are reluctant to approach the government for this move.

Likewise, the Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee needs to make documentaries about the temple of Śaileśwarī based on the mythological, religious, spiritual, and cultural stories of the temple. Similarly, it needs to publish posters, pamphlets, and brochures about the mythological, religious, spiritual, and cultural importance of the temple.

It should encourage the local people to promote their traditional songs such as *deudā* and *loka dohorī*, *loka bhākā*, and traditional hymns such as *māṅgal* which are sung during the special festive occasions of the temple. Similarly, it should play a role in preserving the old instruments and encourage the local people to continue their traditional practice of playing the instruments during the special festivals of the temple.

Opening a *gurukul* (“traditional Sanskrit school”) near the temple's premise is desirable to preserve and promote ancient literature and scriptures of Hindu religion and philosophy. It will help to promote the significance of the temple. Similarly, it is desirable to open a cowshed with some cows whose milk could be offered to the Goddess and God daily during the daily ritual of *rudrābhiṣek* which is recited to please God Shiva. The milk could be served to the saints who visit the temple occasionally. Even the urine and cow dung are useful for the temple for daily rituals.

Even the local people can benefit from the cows's products. There are no proper lodging and food facilities for sadhus or saints who come to visit the temple for a short or long time. A separate inn with the facility of a bathroom and a restroom is to be made for this purpose. To meet all these demands, a master plan is to be prepared by the Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee.

In addition to the above suggestions, the Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee should request the pious devotees and pilgrims who want to visit the Śaileśwarī temple to abide by some rules. In my interview with Prem Shankar Bhatta and others, they tell this researcher about the necessity of strictly maintaining the following rules, which are written in the Nepali language on a board outside the temple premises. They are translated now into English:

- No use of leather materials such as shoes and sandals inside the temple complex.
- No use of cameras, video cameras, mobile phones, and tape reordering materials inside the temple.
- No use of intoxicating things such as cigarettes, drugs, opium, wine, and aphrodisiac non-vegetarian things like eggs and meat inside the temple complex.
- Let's give priority to the feeble, disabled, or old citizens while visiting the temple.
- No use of plastic-related materials to preserve the environment of the temple.
- No spitting, urinating, or throwing garbage around the temple premises to maintain environmental purity.
- Let's maintain a peaceful, religious, and spiritual environment around the temple.

- No burning incense right inside the temple to keep it clean. The devotees can burn incense and light butter lamps or oil lamps outside the main gate of the temple.
- Use of pure materials for the Goddess.
- Let's donate for the conservation, preservation, and development of the area of Śaileśwarī temple.

Chapter Seven

Goddess Śaileśwarī: The Archetypal Embodiment of Creation, Energy, and Equality

Summary/Findings

This study finds out that the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī holds great significance from mythological, cultural, artistic, historical, and religious viewpoints. The Goddess is the archetypal embodiment of creation, energy, and equality. The mythological story of Goddess Śaileśwarī (Pārvatī) and Lord Śiva and their creation myth is mysterious and esoteric. The stone of Śaileśwarī was not established by any human being. It appeared when Goddess Śaileśwarī disguised in the form of a stone. Later on, Śiva also started living inside the stone leaving His half power in it. She was prayed by Brahmā (the Creator), Soma Śarmā (an Indian Brāhmaṇ from Gujarāt), and the Lord Ram from Ayodhyā, India. Therefore, the temple holds great importance for the religious seekers of both countries—Nepal and India.

The whole world is created by Śiva and His Feminine Power, i.e., Pārvatī or Śaileśwarī. Besides, Śiva is known as Puruṣa (Conscious Person; the Self; the Soul); Pārvatī is known as Prakṛti ("Nature"). They are the archetypal embodiments of the creation myth. Mythologically, all the masculine creatures are Śiva, also known as Maheśwara; all the feminine creatures are Pārvatī, also known as Umā or Śaileśwarī. Not only that, even every man and woman is a combined form of Śiva and Pārvatī. The left part of every man is a woman and the right part of every woman is the man. This means that both men and women have the characteristics of each other. In men, the characteristics of women are hidden or latent, and in women, the characteristics of men. Since both men and women have the characteristics of each other, they are equal.

As Goddess Śaileśwarī is significant mythologically, so also is She significant culturally. As per the culture, the devotees of the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī observe some festivals. More enthusiastically, once a year on Kārtik Śukla Pūrṇimā, they celebrate the festival of Śaileśwarī Jātrā. Every twelve years, they generally perform sacred oblations into the sacrificing fire one lakh and twenty-five thousand times with the mantra of the Goddess; it is called Lakṣa Havan. Sometimes, they perform the sacred oblations ten million and twenty-five thousand times with the mantra of the Goddess; it is called Kotī Havan.

Historically speaking, Silgadhī, the headquarters of Dotī district, has been named after Śaileśwarī or Śilādevī; so, the district has retained its popularity due to the temple of Śaileśwarī. The temple is significant from geographical and archaeological viewpoints.

Besides, the temple of Śaileśwarī holds its significance on the international level also; In the Tretā Yuga, two pious Indian Brāhmaṇas, one from Gujarāt and another from Bareilī, and the Lord Ram from Ayodhyā, India, came to take the blessings from Goddess Śaileśwarī. Since the time of Ram's visit to the temple, it has come to the notice of the public and started to be popular here and there. This story shows the age-old mythological, religious, and cultural relationship between Nepalese and Indian people. If this information could be disclosed in Nepal and India through the media, it could promote the religious tourism sector of Nepal.

Conclusion

This study conducted a field visit and interviews and used library and internet materials (primary and secondary sources) to examine the mythological and cultural significance of the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī of Dotī district along with its historical, geographical, and archaeological significance by applying the theoretical

frameworks of folklorism/folkloristics and Hindu folklore and scriptures. This study was primarily based on the mythological stories of *The Śaileśwarī Māhātmya* (“*The Glory of Śaileśwarī*”). This study concludes that Goddess Śaileśwarī is an archetypical embodiment of creation, energy, and equality and that as Śiva and Pārvatī are equal so also are men and women equal spiritually. Hence, the preservation of the mythological and cultural heritage of the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī is a must for national identity and pride, and the growth of the tourism industry today.

The story of Śaileśwarī is a mythological one. Generally, every mythological story has a moral lesson. Hindu mythological stories show what we ought to do to make our life perfect or ideal, or what we can do our best to make life beautiful, peaceful, and happy. Similarly, the mythological story of Goddess Śaileśwarī shows that we should love, worship, and pray to Goddess Śaileśwarī, who always lives with Lord Śiva, to fulfill our material and spiritual desires. We can either get material or spiritual prosperity or both as per our desires through our devotion to Śiva and Pārvatī, who are the God and Goddess of the universe.

Lord Ram from Ayodhyā, a city situated on the banks of the holy Sarayū River in the Uttar Pradesh state of India, and two Indian Brahmins, one from Bareilly and another from Gujarāt, came to visit the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī, according to *The Holy Skand Purāṇa*. Before Lord Ram, His fifth ancestor King Dilīp had visited Dilīpeśwar Mahādev at Dipāyal, which is mythologically linked to the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī and holds great cultural significance.

If this information can be spread in Nepal and India, a lot of Nepalese and Indian devotees, pilgrims, and tourists could come to see the temple every year. If this publicity happens, it could help to develop the temple area religiously, spiritually, and

financially. Also, this publicity could help to strengthen the age-old Indo-Nepal religious, spiritual, and cultural relationship.

The temple of Śaileśwarī is the main attraction center of Dotī district due to its mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance. Not only this, but also the temple is a common property of all the Hindus living in Nepal, India, and all over the world. According to *The Holy Skand Purāṇa*, the round black stone image of Goddess Śaileśwarī, which is situated inside the temple, was not made by any human hand but was self-created, and Lord Ram had visited the temple to worship the Goddess. Thousands of people from home and abroad could visit the temple annually if they knew these significant matters about the temple. Because of a lack of publicity, the pre-historical temples of Nepal are still under shadow. The temple of Śaileśwarī is one of them. The financial condition of the people of Dotī district, especially of the Silgadhī area, would be much better if the publicity about the Śaileśwarī temple could be done. And the tourism industry of Nepal would flourish.

The temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī and Khaptad National Park are the main attractions of the Far Western Region. They hold special religious, historical, and natural importance. They are linked to each other because Silgadhī, where the Śaileśwarī temple is situated, is the main base camp for trekking to Khaptad National Park.

Against this background, conserving these two places' cultural, religious, and historical heritage with new technology and modern facilities is necessary to promote religious tourism. We should not forget that the main attractions for tourists and pilgrims are local religious, historical, and natural places and their cultural heritage and activities.

Judgmental Remarks

Mythological stories may be true or false. But they tell us some sort of truth about humanity. In this connection, the mythological story of Goddess Śaileśwarī significantly tells us that Pārvatī, who is the Feminine Power and the Goddess of the universe, is greater than Lord Śiva because without Her Power the creation is impossible.

The mythological story of Śiva and Pārvatī shows the significance of Pārvatī over Śiva; He had given significance to Her over Him. Generally speaking, Pārvatī means Śakti ("Power") without which no one, even Śiva, can function. Pārvatī is a representative of all women, and Śiva is a representative of all men. As Pārvatī is greater than Śiva, so also are women greater than men.

This type of story of Śiva and Pārvatī could be a great source of inspiration for radical feminists who claim that there must be the supremacy of women over men and that women must get more priority than men in every field of life. The radical feminists' debate about the greatness or superiority of women over men tries to eliminate male supremacy in all social, cultural, and economic milieu.

In every man and woman, both Śiva (male qualities or powers) and Pārvatī (female qualities or powers) are present. In other words, we find both characteristics—those of Śiva or man, and Pārvatī or woman in each other. The right part is of Śiva and the left part is of Pārvatī. The male qualities are strength, power, confidence, and willpower. The female qualities are softness, love, love for art, tolerance, affection, mercy, kindness, and devotion. In men, the male qualities are dominant but feminine qualities are hidden or latent, and in women, the female qualities are dominant but male qualities are hidden or latent. In meditation, when Śiva ("male power") and Pārvatī ("female power") meet each other, we reach the state

of *samādhī* ("a trance of divine bliss") and feel felicitous. Śiva and Pārvatī are inseparable from each other as fire and its flame are. In this sense, both are equal. Analogically, both man and woman are inseparable, equal, and divine.

Similarly, the moral of the three mythological stories of Goddess Śaileśwarī is that Śiva (God) and Pārvatī (Goddess) reside in the heart of everyone. One need not go far away to find Śiva and Pārvatī outside. One simply needs devotion, not wealth, to gain Their blessings. And, the rich should not hate the poor if they want their spiritual upliftment.

Life is fleeting, like a burning candlestick, and nothing follows us into the hereafter save the good or wicked deeds we have committed. Thus, it makes sense to take advantage of the chance to see the temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī, one of the Hindus' holiest places of pilgrimage. Its natural and physical beauty will be more appreciated by researchers and even nonreligious tourists if they visit the holy temple in person, besides reading this research report. During this visit, they will also understand the temple's cultural, mythological, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance.

Novelty and Level of Contribution of the Study

Since there is no practice of doing research on the mythologically and culturally significant temples in Nepal, especially in the faculty of English literature, this study will highlight the neglected but very significant temple of Dotī district. Also, this study will contribute to spreading the information about the temple all over Nepal and India if it is kept on the internet for online readers, which will help to promote the tourism industry of Nepal.

Recommendation

More research is needed on this topic of Goddess Śaileśwarī from different perspectives of mythology, religion, spirituality, culture, history, geography, and archaeology. Future researchers could fill this gap. Some typical titles are suggested below for further study:

- The Significance of Goddess Shaileshwari from the Perspective of Shaktism
- The Significance of Goddess Shaileshwari from the Perspective of Tāntrism
- The Significance of Goddess Shaileshwari from the Perspective of Shaivism
- The Significance of Goddess Shaileshwari from the Perspective of Parā Vidyā and Aparā Vidyā

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Appendices

Appendix I

Vowel Alphabets of Sanskrit Transliteration

Sanskrit Letters in <i>Devanāgarī</i>	Vowel Letters	Transliteration	Sounds Like
अ	a, A	a, A	o in son
आ	Aa	ā, Ā	a in master
इ	i, I	i, I	i in if
ई	ee, Ee (long)	ī, Ī	ee in feel
ए	u, U	u, U	u in full
ऊ	oo, Oo (long)	ū, Ū	oo in boot
ऋ	ri, Ri	ṛ, Ṛ	ri in rishi
ॠ	ree, Ree	ṝ, Ṝ	
लृ	lri, Lri	ḷ, Ḹ	
ॡ	lree, Lree	ḹ, Ḹ̄	
ए	e, E	e, E	e in ten
ऐ	ai, Ai	ai, Ai	y in my
ओ	o, O	o, O	o in over
औ	au, Au	au, Au	ow in now
◌̣ (anusvāra)	m, M	ṁ, Ṁ	m in hum
◌̣ (visarga)	ha, Ha	ḥ, Ḥ	h in huh!
◌̣ candrabindu	nj, Nj	~	ni in aniuli

Appendix II

Consonant Alphabets of Sanskrit Transliteration

Sanskrit Letters in <i>Devanāgarī</i>	Consonant Letters	Transliteration	Sounds Like
क्	K	K	k in king
ख्	Kh	<i>Kh</i>	ckh in blockhead
ग्	G	<i>G</i>	g in guard
घ्	Gh	<i>Gh</i>	gh in log- hut
ङ्	Ng	<i>ñ</i>	ng in king
च्	Ch	<i>C</i>	ch in chin
छ्	Chh	<i>Ch</i>	chh in catch him
ज्	J	<i>j</i>	j in jug
झ्	Jh	<i>Jh</i>	dgeh in hedgehog
ञ्	n	<i>Ñ</i>	n in vyanjana
ट्	T	<i>t</i>	t in ten
ठ्	Th	<i>th</i>	th in ant- hill

ड्	D	<i>d</i>	d in <i>doom</i>
ढ्	Dh	<i>dh</i>	dh in <i>godhood</i>
ण्	N	<i>n</i>	n in <i>phanā</i>
त्	T	<i>T</i>	French <i>t</i>
थ्	Th	<i>Th</i>	th in <i>thumb</i>
द्	D	<i>D</i>	th in <i>then</i>
ध्	dh	<i>Dh</i>	theh in <i>breathe</i> <i>here</i>
न्	N	<i>N</i>	n in <i>pen</i>
प्	P	<i>P</i>	p in <i>pen</i>
फ्	Ph	<i>Ph</i>	ph in <i>loop-hole</i>
ब्	B	<i>B</i>	b in <i>ball</i>
भ्	Bh	<i>Bh</i>	bh in <i>abhor</i>
म्	M	<i>M</i>	m in <i>money</i>
य्	Y	<i>Y</i>	y in <i>yellow</i>
र्	R	<i>R</i>	r in <i>row</i>
ल्	L	<i>L</i>	l in <i>low</i>
व्	V	<i>V</i>	v in <i>avert</i>
श्	sh (palatal)	<i>Ś</i>	sh in <i>shoot</i>
ष्	sh (cerebral)	<i>ṣ</i>	sh in <i>show</i>
स्	s	<i>S</i>	s in <i>sin</i>

ह्	H	<i>H</i>	h in <i>hollow</i>
क्ष्	Ksh	<i>kṣ</i>	ksh in <i>kshetri</i>
त्र्	Tr	<i>Tr</i>	tr in <i>trailokya</i>
ज्ञ्	Jn	<i>Jñ</i>	jn in <i>jnani</i>

(Adapted from *Bhagavad-Gītā: As It Is* by A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda)

Appendix III

Prayer by Brahmā to Goddess Śaileśwarī in the Satya Yuga¹

ब्रह्मोवाच—

नमामि मूर्ध्ना च गिरा च कर्मणा

गिरीन्द्रजायाः पदपङ्कजद्वयम् ॥

यन्माययाजोऽपि विमोहितश्चिरं

नोद्यापि जानाति न कुत्र ते सुराः ॥१३॥

या देवदैत्योरगायक्षकिन्नरै—

नरैमुनीन्दैः परिसेविता सदा ॥

भुक्त्यै विमुक्त्यै च सुरेश्वरीं परां

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥१४॥

स्फुरन्मणीन्द्रोज्ज्वलकुण्डलोल्लसद्—

गण्डस्थलां रत्नकिरीटमण्डिताम् ॥

बन्धूकवर्णामरुणाम्बरांपरां

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥१५॥

शुम्भादिदैत्यौघविनाशकारिणीं

पाशाङ्कुशाभीतिवरोल्लसत्कराम् ॥

लज्जाजपोत्साहवतां सुसिद्धिदां

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥१६॥

यदंशलेशोद्भवसत्तया जगत्

सृजाम्यहं पाति हरिर्हरत्यजः ॥

¹ This English translation has been taken from Damaru Chandra Bhatta's article "Śaileśwarī as the Goddess of Power and Creation in Her Mythological Literature" published in *Pursuits by Nepal Journals Online*.

यदङ्घ्रिसेवाप्तपदाः सुरास्तां

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥१७॥

या दक्षिणा कामकला च गुह्यका

योग्रा च नीलैकजटाभिधा स्वयम् ॥

या षोडशी पञ्चदशी च वाला

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥१८॥

यानन्तरूपापि दशस्वरूपिणी

त्रिशक्तिरूपा गुणभेदतोऽतोभवत् ॥

या कुल्लुकाशक्ति विभेदतः स्वयं

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥१९॥

स्त्रीपुंस्वरूपेण विसृज्यया जगद्—

भूमिस्वरूपेण विभर्ति तत्पुनः ॥

जलस्वरूपेण च जीवयत्यजा

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥२०॥

यां योगिनो योगसमाधिना परां

पश्यन्त्यरूपामपि चित्स्वरूपिणीम् ॥

तां वाङ्मनोऽगोचररूपिणीं सतीं

शैलेश्वरीं नौमि शिवाभिलालिताम् ॥ २१॥

स्कन्द उवाच—

इत्थं स्तुता जगद्धात्री ब्रह्मणा परमेष्ठिना ।

प्रत्यक्षमभवत्तत्र वामभागे महेशितुः ॥२२॥

रक्तम्बरा त्रिनयना नाना रत्नौघमण्डिता ।

वरदान्मुखी साक्षाद्भानुकोटिसमप्रभा ॥२३॥

In His *stotra* ("prayer") to Goddess Śaileśwarī, Brahmā says, "I bow down to Lord Śiva's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, with my mind, speech, and action, because of whose Māyā ("divine illusive power") even Viṣṇu (the Protector) also is unable to know Her since the beginning. When even Viṣṇu cannot know Her, how can the deities know Her?" (1.13). "I bow down to Lord Śiva 's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī to whom deities, demons, serpents, Yakṣyas (demigods who are the attendants of Kubera, the god of riches), celestial singers or musicians, human beings, and sages worship forever in order to get worldly pleasures and spiritual liberation" (1.14).

Similarly, in His prayer to the Goddess, Brahmā says, "I bow down to Lord Śiva 's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, who is decorated with radiant best earrings of crystals, decorated with a crown of pearls, having a red complexion of rhododendron, and wearing a red dress" (1.15). "I bow down to Lord Śiva's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, who kills the demons like Śumbha and Niśumbha, who bears a snare, a hook, and a blessing posture and a securing posture of hands, and who blesses those devotes who incant her one-syllabled divine mantra known as *hṛm*" (1.16). "I bow down to Lord Śiva 's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, by getting whose even the slightest power, I [Brahmā] create the world, Viṣṇu protects the world, Rudra destroys the world, and by serving whom the deities have got their proper titles" (1.17).

Further, in his prayer to the Goddess, Brahmā says, "I bow down to Lord Śiva 's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, who has incarnated in various forms and names such as Dakṣinakālī, Kāmākṣhī, Guhyakālī, Ugratārā, Nīla Saraswatī, Eka Veṇī, Ṣodaśī, Pañcadaśī, Bālā, and Tripurā" (1.18). "I bow down to Lord Śiva's beloved, Goddess

Śaileśwarī, who has mainly ten forms though who has infinite forms; these ten forms are in three-powered forms based on their *sattva* (good), *raja* (brisk), and *tama* (dark) qualities; and based on the differences of power, the Goddess is worshipped as Kullukā (Kula-Kuṇḍalinī) by the *Kaula mārgī* (those who follow the Trāṇtric way)" (1.19).

Still further, in his prayer to the Goddess, Brahmā says, "I bow down to Lord Śiva's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, who creates the world as *Nārī* ("*Prakṛti*; Nature; *Māyā*") and *Puruṣa* ("*Jīva*"), who possesses the world as the earth, and who protects creatures as water" (1.20). "I bow down to Lord Śiva's beloved, Goddess Śaileśwarī, who cannot be described by mind, speech, and action, and to whom *yogis* can see in Her *saguṇa rūpa* ("divine form with divine qualities") using the powers of their yoga and *samādhi* (perfect absorption of thought into the Supreme Spirit)" (1.21).

"After the completion of the prayer, the Goddess Śaileśwarī appeared in front of Brahmā and Indra including the other deities in Her divine form on the left side of Lord Śiva by displaying Her beautiful form decorated with a red dress, having three eyes, decorated with various jewels, having the radiance of the sun, and being willing to bless them" (1.22-23). "Then the Goddess Śaileśwarī blessed them. Finally, both Śaileśwarī and Śiva left for the Kailāśa leaving their semi-powers over the round black stone, which is now known as Śaileśwarī" (1-29-43). Because of the presence of Śiva in the round black stone, He is also worshipped together with the Goddess in the temple. So, devotees worship the round Black stone as *Ardhanārīśwara* ("an image of half *Pārvatī* and half Śiva") also. The image of *Ardhanārīśwara* represents *Puruṣa* ("Consciousness") and *Prakṛti* or *Pradhāna* ("Nature"); this dual concept is discussed by Sāṅkhya philosophy.

Appendix IV

Prayer by Soma Śarmā to Goddess Śaileśwarī at the end of the Tretā Yuga

सोमशर्मोवाच—

अनामरूपोऽपि सनामरूपः

स्वयं स्वमायाशबलो बभूव ॥

एको बहुस्यामितिचिन्तयेशः

क्षेत्रज्ञतामाप च यस्तमीडे ॥१॥

मायारजोऽशेन युतो विधिः स्वयं

तत्सत्त्वसङ्गादभवद्वि विष्णुः ॥

तमोगुणाद्रुद्र इति प्रसिद्धो

यः सर्वगः शर्वसंज्ञस्तमीडे ॥२॥

मायामयं विश्वमिदं विरच्य

तथैव सम्पाति हरत्यपि द्राक् ॥

तदन्तरस्थोपि ततः प्रभिन्नो

देहीव देहादिद्वयस्तमीडे ॥३॥

नमामि जगतो मूलकारणं परमेश्वरीं ॥

ययाव्याप्तमिदं भाति नाना रूपस्वभाववत् ॥४॥

नमामि तां परानन्दमयीं चैतन्यरूपिणीम् ॥

ययात्यक्तमिदं सर्वं वैरूप्यं याति तत्क्षणात् ॥५॥

शिलादेवी ! नमस्तुभ्यं शैलराजसुते ! शिवे ! ॥

शिवशक्ते ! सुरेशानि ! सर्वदा शर्मदे ! सताम् ॥६॥

इति स्तुत्वा प्रणम्याथ शिवौ परमया मुदा ॥

शिरस्यञ्जलिमादाय स्थितोऽग्रे नतकन्धरः ॥७॥

स्कन्द उवाच—

भक्तभक्तिं परीक्ष्येत्थं सन्तुष्टा भक्तवत्सला ॥

दयार्द्रहृदया विप्रे ददौ वरमनुत्तमम् ॥८॥

In his *stotra* ("prayer") to Śiva and Pārvatī whose united form is Goddess Śaileśwarī, Soma Śarmā, a pious Indian Brāhmaṇ, says, "I pray to the God Śiva, who is attributeless and formless but who with His power of Māyā took names and forms (became manifest with form and attributes) and created the world, desiring to be many out of one" (3.1). "I pray to the God Śiva, who is famous as Brahmā due to *rājas* quality, as Viṣṇu due to *sattva* quality, and as Śankar due to *tamas* quality, and who is the Universal/Cosmic Form due to His omnipresence in the world" (3.2). "I pray to the God Śiva, who creates, sustains, and destroys the world out of His Māyā, and who is separate from the world though abiding in it just as the Inner Self is different from Its body though abiding in it" (3.3). "I pray to the Goddess Śaileśwarī, who pervades this world, appearing in many forms and natures, and who is the root cause ("Prakṛti ") of this world" (3.4). "I pray to the Goddess Śaileśwarī, who has the Blissful-Conscious-Form, and when she leaves the world, it becomes disfigured (without name and form)" (3.5). I pray to the Goddess Śīlādevī, who is the daughter of the Himalayas, sitting in company with Śiva, having the combined form of Śiva and Śakti, who is the Goddess of deities, and who always gives good blessings to Her devotees" (3.6). "Thus, after praying to the Goddess and God with his two joined hands, he stood in front of them, bowing down to them with his hands on his head" (3.7) as a mark of respect. Then, the Goddess Śaileśwarī blessed him with many things, saying, 'all your desires will be fulfilled. . . . even those who will

recite the *stotra* ('prayer') sung by you will never get any troubles. . . . and will attain spiritual knowledge, too, at the end" (3.8-13).

Appendix V

Prayer by Lord Ram to Goddess Śaileśwarī towards the end of the Tretā Yuga

श्रीराम उवाच—

भुवनां भावयामीह भुवनस्यादि—कारणाम् ॥१३॥

भक्तितलभ्यां भानुकोटि—भासुरां भव संयुताम् ॥

कालीङ्गमल पत्राक्षीङ्गामाख्याङ्गामचारिणीम् ॥१४॥

कत्रीं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः कामरिसहितां भजे ॥

दुर्गा दुर्गासुरघ्नीं च दुर्गम्यां दुष्टनाशिनीम् ॥१५॥

देवेज्यां दहनालोकां देवेश—सहितां भजे ॥

क्षमाशीलां क्षपेशेज्यां क्षत्रियेष्ट वर प्रदाम् ॥१६॥

क्षेत्र—क्षत्रज्ञ—रूपाञ्च भजेऽहन्त्र्यक्ष गेहिनीम् ॥

तारिणीं तारकाभासां तारकासुर—नाशिनीम् ॥१७॥

त्रिनेत्रान्तीर्थरूपाञ्च त्रियम्बक—युतां भजे ॥

पार्वतीं पद्मनयनां पन्नगासन—पूजिताम् ॥१८॥

परावरेशीं पद्मास्यां भजे पशुपतिप्रियाम् ॥

शैलेश्वरीं शिलादेवीं सुवर्णाकर वासिनीम् ॥१९॥

सौम्य—रूपां सिद्धिदात्रीं शिवेन सहितां भजे ॥

भैरवीं भक्त—दुखौघ—भञ्जिनीं भानु—भासुराम् ॥२०॥

भावुकां भक्त—भव्याय भवेन सहितां भजे ॥

स्कन्द उवाच—

इति स्तुता शिलादेवी श्रीरामेण परात्मना ॥२१॥

प्रत्यक्षमभवत्तत्र रक्त वस्त्रानुलेपना ॥

वराभयाङ्कुशं पाशं बहन्तीं करपङ्कजैः ॥२२॥

In his stotra ("prayer") to Goddess Śaileśwarī, Lord Ram says, "I salute with my two hands to Kāmākhyā (a form of Satīdevī who originated out of Her *yoni* or sexual organ which had fallen there where there is Her temple now in Asāma, India), who has assumed the form of the world, who is the prime cause of the world, who is radiant with the light of ten thousand suns, who is along with Lord Śiva, who has assumed the form of Kālī (another name of Pārvatī), who has lotus-like eyes, and who can travel as per Her desires" (5.13-14). "I pray to the Goddess with Lord Śiva, who is the creator of the whole world, who kills the demon 'Durgāsura,' who cannot be attained with simplicity, and who kills evil persons" (5.15). "I pray to the Goddess with the Lord, who is worshipped by deities, who is radiant like fire, who has a forgiving nature, who is worshipped by the moon and gives blessings to Kshatrīyas (the warrior class people) as per their desires" (5.16). "I pray to the Goddess, who is in the forms of the world and creatures, who gives *mukti* ("permanent liberation from the cycle of life and death"), who is radiant like stars, and who killed the demon 'Tārakāsura'" (5.17). "I pray to Pārvatī, the daughter of the Himalayas, who has three eyes (of the moon, the fire, and the sun), who has assumed the form of Tīrtha (a holy pilgrimage site), who has the lotus-like eyes, and who is worshipped by the Lord Viṣṇu" (5.18). "I pray to Śaileśwarī or Śilādevī, who is the Goddess of living and non-living objects, who has a lotus-shaped face, and who is sitting amid a gold mine" (5.19). "I pray to the Goddess with the Lord, who is in beautiful form, who gives *siddhi* (power to achieve things as per one's desires) to Her devotees, who is in the form of Bhairavī (one name of Pārvatī), who destroys devotees' troubles, who is radiant like the sun, and who is emotional for the welfare of devotees" (5.20-21).

"After the completion of Lord Ram's prayer, Goddess Śaileśwarī appeared in Her beautiful physical form holding a snare and a hook in her two hands plus displaying her blessing and securing posters of two hands, sitting on a lion surrounded by *mātrikā gaṇa* (a group of female deities who work as Her attendants), decorated with a gems-added dress, bracelets, and earrings. Then, She gave Him blessings and said, 'Those who recite the stotra sung by Lord Ram in Her praise will achieve the fruits of *aśwamedha yajña*, gain *aṣṭha siddhis* ("eight mystical powers"), enjoy great worldly pleasures, and ultimately attain My divine world (abode)"(5.22-32).

Appendix VI

A Photo of Śaileśwarī Temple



Fig. 1: Source: The Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee, Silgadhi, Doti Dated BS

2071

Appendix VII

Śaileśwarī Temple as Depicted in the Postal Stamp of Nepal



Fig. 2. Source: A Google Photo, Online Resource, Accessed 1 January 2024

Appendix VIII

A Photo of Śaileśwarī Jātrā (Gāṇja/Gāja)



Fig. 4. A Photo of Śaileśwarī Temple Dated BS 2080 Kartik Śukla Pūrṇimā

Appendix IX

Śaileśwarī Temple as Depicted in a Documentary



Fig. 3. Source: A Google Photo of Śaileśwarī Temple, Accessed January 2, 2024

Its documentary can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00l7qaOHvQg>.

Appendix X

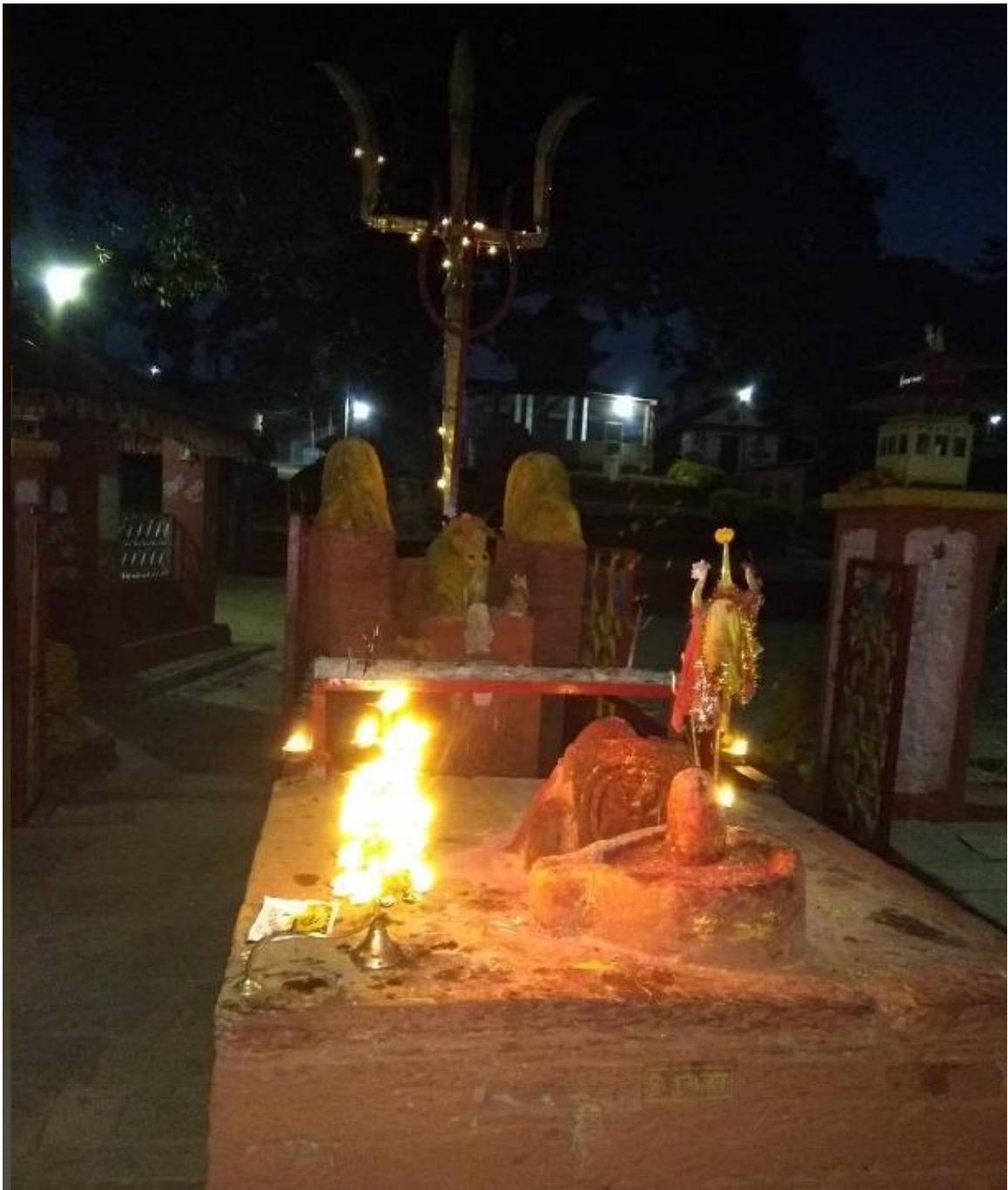
A Rare Photo of the Priests, Dhāmīs, Bhandārīs, and Local Devotees of the Old Temple of Goddess Śaileśwarī Taken on BS 1995 Baisākha Śukla Pūrṇimā, Saturday (14 May 1939)



Source: From the Album of Bidhan Shrestha, a Local Devotee of Śaileśwarī Temple

Appendix XI

A Photo Showing Śiva Liṅga in the Middle of the Yonī Outside the Premise of the Temple of Śaileśwarī on the Night of 20 October 2018 Taken by this Researcher



Appendix XII

A Photo of the Goddess Carved on the Wood Outside the Temple, Taken on 10 July 2024



Appendix XIII

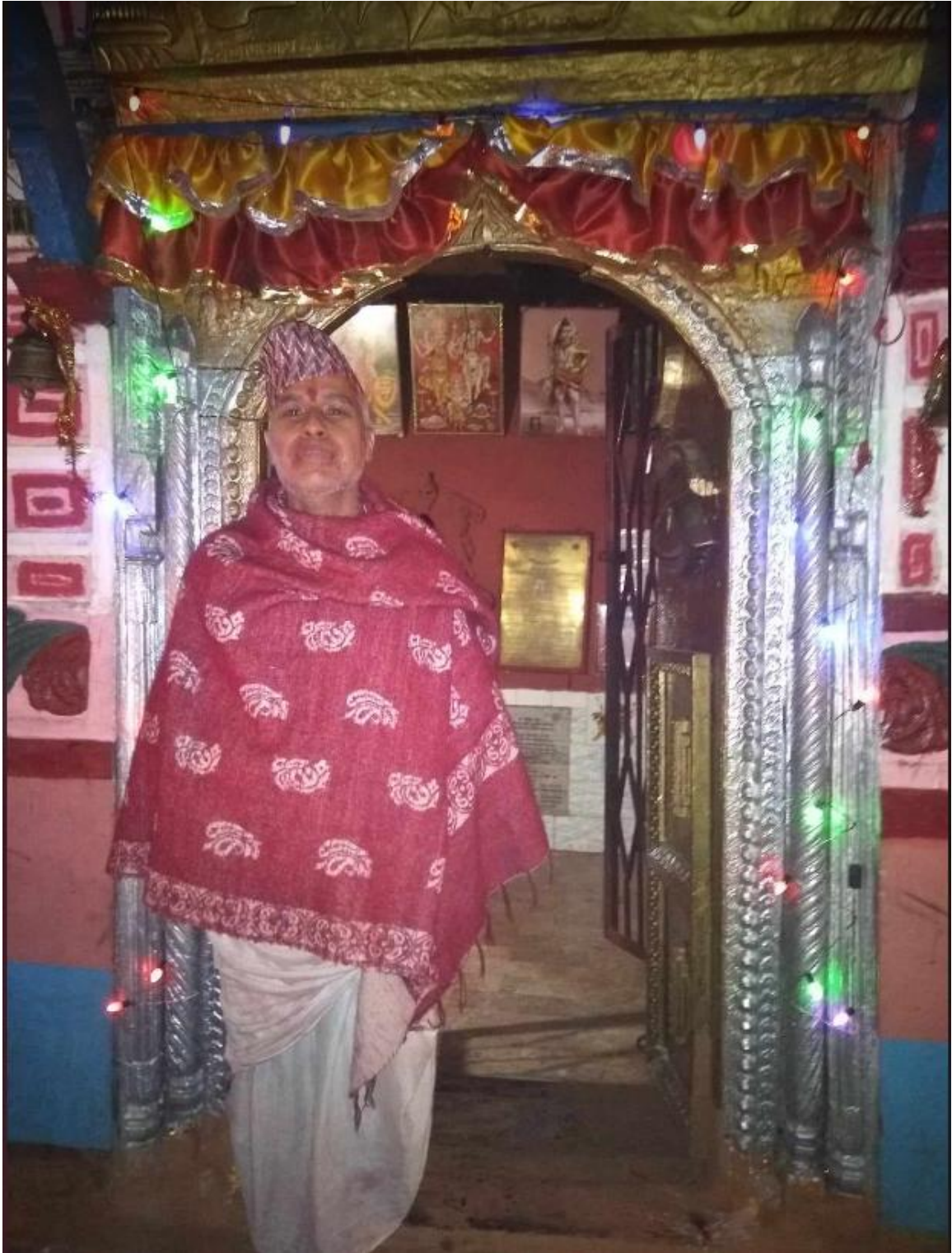
A Photo of Śiva and Śaileśwarī outside the Temple of Shaileshwari Taken on 10 July

2024



Appendix XIV

This Researcher as a Devotee in the temple of Śaileśwarī on 16 October 2018



Appendix XV

A Photo of the Entrance Gate of Goddess Śaileśwarī on 11 July 2021. Prem Shankar Bhatta, a Priest and President of the Śaileśwarī Area Development Committee in the middle surrounded by Bhandārī on the left, Dhāmīs on the right, and two members of the Committee on each side



Source: From the Album of Ram Dhmi, one of the Helpers of Śaileśwarī Temple

Appendix XVI

Interview Questions Asked to the President of the Development Committee of the Śaileśwarī Temple and Others²

Opening Remarks: Thank you for taking the time to join me for the interview. I appreciate your time and willingness to share your perspectives on the mythological, cultural, historical, geographical, and archaeological significance of the Goddess and Her temple. Let me assure you that the information you provide will be used only for the study. Please, feel free to skip any questions or exit the interview anytime if you feel uncomfortable. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

- Let us talk about the mythological significance of the Goddess Śaileśwarī.
- Now, please tell me about the mythological story of the Goddess.
- How was the Goddess named Śaileśwarī?
- Is there any folklore or hearsay about Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple?
- Have you heard any legend related to Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple?
- Now, let us talk about the cultural significance of the Goddess Śaileśwarī.
- What types of festivals are observed by the local people? And how many times?
- Why do people come to visit the temple of the Goddess Śaileśwarī?
- Now, let us talk about the historical significance of the Goddess Śaileśwarī.
- When was the temple made?
- How was its structure in the beginning?
- How did it come to this present beautiful structure?

² The questions asked by the researcher in Nepali language are transcribed here into the English transcript (intelligent verbatim).

- Did any kings contribute to the development of the Goddess Śaileśwarī's temple?
- Are there any historical writings inscribed on stone, wood, metal, or parchments about the significance of the Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple?
- Now, let us talk about the geographical significance of the Goddess Śaileśwarī's temple.
- What are the temples around the main temple of the Goddess Śaileśwarī?
- What is their significance?
- Are the names of the Setī River, Silgadhī, and Silgāun connected to the names of the Goddess such as Śaileśwarī and Śiladevī, and Her mythological story?
- Now, let us talk about the archaeological significance of the temple of the Goddess Śaileśwarī.
- It is written in the mythological story of the Goddess Śaileśwarī that the areas around and near the temple of the Goddess Śaileśwarī is full of precious mines of gold. Is it true?
- What do the people say about this?
- When was the Development Committee of the Śaileśwarī temple established?
- What is its role in the development of the temple area?
- What are the hurdles in the development of the temple area?
- What could be done to develop the temple area?
- What could be done to attract national and international religious tourists, especially the Indian ones?
- Do you think the flow of religious tourists can contribute to the tourism sector of Silgadhī, the headquarters of the Dotī district?

- Do you have anything more to say about the Goddess Śaileśwarī and Her temple?
- Thank you so much for your kind information and cooperation.