



Narrating Legends and Beliefs: The Panauti Temple as Living Cultural Heritage from Constructivist Lens

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Abstract

This article explores legendary fables, Indra (King of heaven) and Ahilya (Gautama Rishi's wife), and beliefs that make Panauti as a heritage place. For the last many centuries, it has been a historic place of Newari culture and tradition like Kathmandu Valley. It is an important religious site with temples and the confluence of three holy rivers: Punyawati, Rudrawati, and Lilavati. One of the oldest monuments is Indreshwar Mahadev temple. Every twelve years, a month-long religious function happens known as Makar Mela. In this Mela thousands of pilgrims visit to take a holy bath on the confluence of three rivers to rinse the sin of their hopeful life. The required data/information are generated through observation and interviews with the main adorer of Indreshwar Mahadev temple and informal conversations with a few schoolteachers. The study concludes that the place is naturally beautiful, socio-culturally rich, religiously holy, and historically an important place for wayfarers and researchers. Lots of sources of knowledge that the Panauti civilization has. Therefore, it is inevitable to preserve Panauti as one of the cultural heritage sites of Nepal.

Keywords: heritage, legendary, Makar-Mela, observation, religious, cultural heritage

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1. Introduction

Being a school teacher of social studies (first author), my thirst for knowledge allows me to roam around unknown facts related to social science following known pieces of evidence. There was a house of traditional healers nearby my house who used to heal the illnesses of infants chanting the names of many gods/goddesses. In this regard, Paudel et al. (2018) have mentioned that the impact of religious belief and its effect on health is defined in two different ways individual belief and people's social capital or connectedness and empowerment to understand the relationship with resources its proper utilization for their health and wellbeing (p. 2). Listening, more often, to those chanting I asked him why summoning names of the gods and goddesses, he replied that the power of the god and goddesses located at the eastern side of the village caused health problems to the infants known as *Purvia*. According to Manandhar (2009), many Nepalese people think that the problem (sickness) is created by a dissatisfied spirit (divine or demon). To cure such an illness the enchanter would offer *Akshata* (rice with red powder to worship the god/goddesses) to the east side and burn the *Batekodhup* (handmade incense) to pray those gods and goddesses twice a day (morning and evening) at least three days. For a trial, I also learned such a praying called *Purvia Bakhanne* (praying the gods and goddesses existed at the eastern site). To process the chanting, the enchanter has to summon the names of the gods and goddesses in a sequence. For this, Soyambhu Nath (calling it *Purvia Raja*) is summoned at the first including many temples located in the Kathmandu valley and Dhaneshwar, Chandeshwar, and Indreshwar situated near Banepa, Kavreplanchwok District. The traditional healer who follows such a religious and cultural belief system was there, even still in practice, to heal the illness of infants known as *Jhankri*. For this, Paudel et al. (2018) stated that there are different cadres of faith healers locally known as Dhami-Jhankri (p. 7). As Bastola (2021), these two terms are often used interchangeably (p.2). However, I had never visited such a religious site (Panauti) where the Indreshwar Mahadev temple existed for centuries.

1.1. Background of Study

Panauti temple is one of the 15th sites of tentative UNESCO heritage sites of the country (UNESCO, 2023). This temple is an adjoining cultural sites of Kathmandu Valley located just 35 km far in the southeast direction from Kathmandu. It is situated at the confluence area of Rudrawati (Roshmati), Punyawati (Padmavati) and Lilavati Rivers. Stunning mountain views can be observed from different places in Panauti. The place is naturally beautiful and culturally rich. It is a historical place of the Newar community. According to Ghimire and Shrestha (2014), the Maneshwar

temple was built as a mark of gratitude to the famous king Mandev during the Lichhavi period (p. 6). Newari culture has continuously been practiced, promoted, and conserved for centuries. Several ancient evidences like Nepal Mahatmya and Himawat Khanda prove the historicity of the place. Panauti survived in the form of legends and fables before written history. There are many temples like Brahmayani, Bhadrakali, Pashupati, Tula Naraya, Unmatta Bhairav, and Indreshwar Mahadev temple including Layakhu Durbar and Panauti Museum. The museum in which locally made oldest goods and books have been preserved which evidences how the civilization of the Panauti was in the past.

The Indreshwar Mahadev temple with the richest crafts and artifacts is one of the oldest well-conserved Hindu temples in Nepal where thousands of devotees come to visit from different parts of the country including India every year. The place is full of old-style houses, Patis and Satals (public rest-house), courtyards, monuments, and temples designed and created with the guidance of Gupta and Kushan artists, scrolls and mural paintings are the main features that can still be observed in Brahmayani temple. The Indreshwar Mahadev temple was rebuilt by Virammadevi, widow of Jayaditya Malla (1238-1293), with old scripts in 1295. Several evidences show that it was established during the Malla regime, some argue that it was built in 1028 BS. The history is attributed to Ananta Malla (1274-1307), it is because during this period the place was well-protected and developed. Even it is believed that the place was given as a dowry by King Bhupatindra Malla to his sister. Therefore, it is known as an ancestral place of Newar like Kathmandu Valley. So, the Newar community is still dominant and occupies more than 99 percent of the Panupati population. It was established during the kingship of Ananda Dev Malla, King of Bhadgaun (Bhaktapur) establishing 300 houses with 900 windows and 8 chowks.

Panauti has very fertile land with an agro-suits climate, the best place for farmers including tourists, wayfarers, and pilgrims. Most of the households are involved in year-round agro-activities including different businesses and jobs. The religious visitors and nature lovers who visit there are the source of income for business people of Panauti.

2. Techniques and Tools for Generating Data/Information

The data was generated during the field trip as a part of training exposure provided by the teacher training center, Dhulikhel, Kavre. Some information are also collected during the religious visit with the teachers associating in Kathmandu University High School. Behrendt and Franklin (2014) stated that once teachers are empowered and learn how to develop and orchestrate a successful field trip, they will enable

students to develop an interest in learning through firsthand experience (p.1). Before a day, four groups, out of all trainees, were formed by the course facilitator for this field trip who suggested preparing a reflexive field report by each group which has to be presented in the next-day session. Dori and Herscovitz (2005) mentioned that professional development is necessary to train teachers on how to present a new curriculum, professional development focusing on field trips would help teachers understand the necessity of preplanning, participation, and student reflection.

Being MPhil graduates, teachers and researchers, thought that this opportunity could be helpful to develop an academic research paper that unpacks historical, religious and cultural attractions of Panauti temple. We then carefully collected data for making reflexive reports to present in training sessions and religious visits. We captured some essential, as much as possible, data beyond the requirement of making field notes. In so doing, we maintained a diary note for recording textual data, and mobile was used for capturing visual data (photos and videos). The recording of the narration made by adorer Ramesh Jung Pradhan was used as a descriptive data source. Similarly, a few teachers were asked, during the informal conversation, who teach at the school located near Indreshwar Mahadev temple, Panauti. Narratives are the main source of data including the information board hung on the wall of the museum. For this, insights were derived from the individual narratives of people, as well as the larger narratives embedded in the socio-cultural context. The temple premises and a mini museum were closely observed which also enriched the data.

2.1. Opening Narratives

It was the second last week of June 2024. I was, as a trainee, in a training session for a week. We (30 teachers from 5 different districts: Dhading, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Sinduli, and Sindhupalchok) were informed by the training facilitator to visit Panauti as a part of the training provided by the teacher training center, Dhulikhel, Kavre. The training was for those teachers who teach social studies and human value education for grades 6-8. The notice made me so excited remembering my childhood days of listening to Enchanter's healing approach and later myself as a practitioner of those praying processes.

We all were divided into five groups for that field trip and advised to prepare the field notes and present them in the next day's session. I had the responsibility to present the overall learning from the field trip, I did accordingly. The purpose of the field trip was to develop knowledge and skills in reflexive report writing and presenting relating and connecting

values of the natural, historical, religious, and socio-culturally important places with pedagogical process while teaching social studies and human value education.

It was the sunny morning of 23rd June 2024. We were informed by the training facilitator about the field trip to Panauti. It was just 10:30 am when the bus arrived at the training center and picked up us for Panauti at 10:50 am. It took less than one hour to reach Panauti. We all got down from the bus at 11:20 and visited Indreshwar Mahadev temple premises. Because of my first visit, I was so excited to observe all the monuments perceiving Panauti as a religious and cultural site. At the same time, thinking of capturing some photos and videos to show school children where I teach. For that, my Samsung Galaxy mobile captured some photos and recorded short videos as well. We also visited the Chandeshwar temple while returning training center. The purpose of the field trip was to enhance the knowledge and skill of the participant trainees for arranging short trips to their students around their local area as a part of a constructive pedagogical approach. This trip also allowed us to polish the ideas that we teachers have to value the different places near school making short trips with students.

2.2. Legendary Narratives

Based on information generation from a main adorer, Ramesh Jungam Pradhan, of Indreshwar Mahadev temple, and different sources of knowledge we would say Panauti is a legendary town with facts and fiction. It has its history that tells us the religious belief systems that people follow. Panauti was named by Rishis/Munis when they found nine new sprouts on a dried bamboo pillared at the land somewhere at Panauti. Therefore, a literal meaning of Panauti relates to the Newari language like Pa means bamboo, Nau means nine new sprouts, and Ti for Tirtha (place for pilgrimage). The ancient name of Panauti was Asmanagar until the date of Taleju Bhawani brought from Simraun Gardh. Later on, it got different names like Panati, Panchali, Panawati, Punyawati and finally Panauti. It is also believed that the name Panauti was a distorted form of the river Punyawati. However, it is not only a cultural site but also an immeasurable religious importance..

The appearance of Lord Shiva in Panauti is a mythical belief that has been found in ancient Vedic scripts. It was a meditation place for Gautam Rishi with his wife Ahilya. She was so charmingly beautiful and her beauty captivated the King of heaven, Indra. A wicked thought was born in his

mind and one day Indra was enthralled by Ahilya and thought to lose into lust with Ahilya and disguised himself as Gautam Rishi when Rishi left the hut to have a bath at the river. At that moment the disguised Indra went to Ahilya and purposed to have sex. Ahilya was surprised and rejected it, but Indra disclosed his Identity I am not Gautam, I am Indra, and if you go against my intention, I curse you. Being afraid Ahilya agreed. But unfortunately, Rishi had forgotten to take sesame and barley with him for bathing which made him come back to the hut, at the moment he found Ahilya and Indra in sexual climax. Seeing such an unexpected moment made him immeasurable angry Rishi cursed both of them and as a result, Ahilya's physique turned into hard rock and Indra's body was covered with many yonis (vagina). For this Ghimire, Shrestha, and Singh (2014) have mentioned.

The story of the incident and Gautam's curse "Who is this man that you are having a romantic time with in my absence, you slut. You are a woman lacking in moral values such as shame, fidelity, and virtue. You are heartless like a. I hereby put a hex on you that you become a rock."

After that Indra went to heaven with an ugly physical appearance. Indra was asked by his wife Indrayani about the incident, and he replied the reality that he did. Being worried about such a strange but shameful problem for Indra, the Indrayani asked his Guru Brihaspati to find out the way to remove the Yoni-marked on Indra's body. And then Guru Brihaspati suggested Indrayani to have penance of Lord Shiva by Indra and penance of Parvati by Indrayani for twelve thousand years. To do penance they (Indra and his wife Indrayani) met at the confluence of three (Roshmati, Punyamati, and Lilavati) rivers. After that penance, Lord Shiva and his wife decided to free Indra from such a shameful blemish on his body. For this Shiva appeared in Panauti as a great Lingam while Indra had been bathing in the river created by flow of the milk produced from the breast of Parvati. After a while, all the Yonis had disappeared from the body of Indra but one remained in the form of an eye on the head of Indra, known as the third eye. Then a Shiva Lingam stood at a place of temple and at the same time an invisible river, Lilavati, was created. Thereafter, the Lilavati is believed as an auspicious place, Sassi Tirtha, for the purifying bath to make the body holy.

Therefore, the people who come to visit Panauti as devotees on the occasion of religious/cultural events held in the month of Jesth (May/June) known as

Rathyatra (chariot street procession) and Makar Mela, like Kumbha Mela in India, celebrated in every twelve years at the confluence of the rivers with a main aim of having a holy bathe. This month Makar Mela (cultural fair) is celebrated from the beginning day to the end of Magh (the 10th month of the Nepali calendar). During this celebration the devotee of Indreshwar Mahadev who takes a bath on the full moon day can easily access heaven and get salvation, people still follow such a belief. It is believed that the devotee who takes a bath in this river following an auspicious day could get relief from his un/knowingly sinful activities. Such inscription has been written in Chapter 98 of Himawat Khanda and its seventeenth stanza of Chapter 5 in Nepal Mahatmya. And another interesting thing is that the Panauti area is on a single stone. To construct any house in this area the foundation of the house has to be dug until touching this gigantic stone. Still, our belief is this big stone is rounded by Basuki Naga and the people have to carefully dig the foundation of the house to save Naga from making any hurt.

For a few decades, we (Panauti people and leaders) have seriously been trying to collect more pieces of evidence/documents to fulfill the requirements to apply for this place on the world heritage list but have not had success yet. In the past Indreshwar Mahadev temple had its trusty land but the government confiscated it, as a result, it is being hard to organize feasts and festivals due to financial constraints. No local government has given monetary support as their responsibility to this temple.

Besides the narration revealed by the adorer, we interacted with a few teachers of the school located near Indreshwar Mahadev temple premises. One of the teachers said that;

Panauti is a place of temples like Kathmandu Valley. Most of the visitors are supposed to know only a few temples along with Indreshwar Mahadev temple. But there are found number of temples namely Dhaneshwar Mahadev temple, Mukteshwar Mahadev temple, Jaleshwar Mahadev temple, Panchamukhi Mahadev temple, Badrinarayan temple, Ram temple, Maneshwari temple, Kedarnath temple, Gorakhnath temple, Mahadevnarayan temple, Sankatnarayan temple, Matyanarayan temple, Sitalamai temple, Batsaladevi temple, Basukinag temple, Bhagawati temple, Kaathganesh temple, Dharmadhaatu Mahabihar around Panauti area. The people who live in Panauti feel proud of having these temples and feel secure in being safe from any sort of disaster. Even a teacher said

that in this area the loss of people during the earthquake in 2015 did not happen except few battered. This place has its own historical, religious, cultural, socio-economical, and natural importance that we love and feel lucky to be here.

3. Conclusion

The study concludes that Panauti is a historically important place with Newari culture and traditions, still about 100 percent of households are of Newar. It is not only the best place for farmers because of fertile farmland but also a religious site for pilgrims, an important hob for religious wayfarers and nature lovers. On the other hand, Panauti is famous as a historic place of legends and fables before written history began. It is because the legendary tales followed by local people and some religious scripts like Nepal Mahatmya and Himawat Khanda prove its historicity. Similarly, the Maneshwar, Indreshwar Mahadev, and many other temples, Satals and Paties, courtyards, and a museum also proved the historical civilization of Panauti. Out of many, the Indreshwar Mahadev is the main feature of belief that makes known the Panauti a religious site among Hindu people. The Makar Mela is celebrated once every 12 years as the main religious event. In this Mela thousands of pilgrims come to visit Panauti which supports generating income for the Panauti people promoting harmonious get-togethers and showing humanity with new faces.

This might be reason concerned government and non-government agencies have enlisted this place as tentative UNESCO cultural heritage site. Besides, local development stakeholders are thoughtfully preserving and conserving this area as an important religious and historic place for running and coming generations. Finally, visiting such an important heritage site the teachers, students, academicians, and researchers may widen their knowledge and positive thoughts that could be meaningful for their respective life and hopeful living. The field trip could be a part of a constructive pedagogical approach to enhance students' knowledge and skills with first-hand experiences and connect their way of thinking to historically, religiously socio-culturally, and naturally important places, as a part of human civilization and their lives, how the importance of these valuable things are.

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