

# Shaileshwarī as the Goddess of Power and Creation in Her Mythological Literature

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## Abstract

*This paper attempts to highlight the paurānic ("mythical") or religious story of the temple of Goddess Shaileshwarī of Silgadhi, Doti under Seti zone, Nepal with Northrop Frey's theories of Myth Criticism, Archetypal Criticism, and the Quest-Myth so that the people of Nepal and India would know about the temple's mythical and religious importance. By spreading the temple's mythical story in Nepal and India, we could promote the religious tourism of Nepal, especially of the local area. The story of Goddess Shaileshwarī goes back to the Satya Yuga when Shiva and Pārvatī got married as mentioned in the "Mānas Khand" of The Holy Skanda Purān. After Their marriage, They stayed in the temple area to enjoy Their divine honeymoon for some time. Then, Brahmā (the Creator) came to this temple and prayed to Pārvatī, now known as Shaileshwarī or Shilādevī. Similarly, two Indian Brāhmins and Lord Rām—all three from India— visited the temple, worshipped, and prayed to Shiva and Pārvatī, and were blessed by Her in the Tretā Yuga. Shaileshwarī is the Goddess of the universe who fulfils Her devotees' desires. Shiva and Pārvatī are the archetypal symbols or primordial images of creation, destruction, re-creation, power, knowledge, and a sacred sexual union. Every male and female creature is a living embodiment of Shiva and Pārvatī. Also, Shiva and Pārvatī live in each other's body as Ardhanārīshwara ("Lord Shiva whose left part is of Goddess Pārvatī "). So, every male and female is divine and both have each other's qualities, too.*

**Keywords:** Goddess, Shaileshwarī, Shiva, Pārvatī, Brahmā, Lord Rām, Indian Brāhman, sex

## Introduction

The temple of Goddess Shaileshwarī is at Silgadhi, the headquarters of Doti district, Seti zone under the Far Western Development Region, Nepal. The temple is one of the famous temples of that Region. The purpose of this paper is to introduce to the Nepalese and Indian devotees with the mythical literature or the religious story of Goddess Shaileshwarī in order to promote the religious tourism of Nepal, especially of the local area.

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Northrop Frey's concepts of Myth Criticism, Archetypal Criticism, and the Quest-Myth are used in this paper to study the religious literature or the *paurānic* ("mythical") story of the temple of Goddess Shaileshwarī. Shiva and Pārvaī are archetypes. As M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham define:

the term **archetype** denotes narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images that recur in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals. Such recurrent items are often claimed to be the result of elemental and universal patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader because he or she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author. (18)

So, the term "archetype" means a recurrent symbol or motif in literature, art, or mythology. As Lois Tyson elucidates, we find divine beings, who are "superior in kind to both men and their environment" in myths (223). The common pattern of the traditional Quest-Myth is "seek-and-find," and the modern quest pattern is "to seek, to find, and to lose" (234). Seeking is the pursuit of our desired objects; finding is the attainment or fulfilment of our desires. The protagonist or hero goes in search of a truth or something else in the *paurānic* or mythical stories of all religions.

As August G. Lageman comments, "Myths are truer than true" (58). Generally, myths are often linked with falsity. People do not believe unconfirmed rumors and opinions; so they say that they are myths. People often relegate myths to the level of preposterous stories. Though myths are believed to be imaginary by some people, they are not just stories or fictions because they hold the elements of belief and faith. So, Lageman defines myths as "fundamental visions which enable us to understand, cope with, and transform ourselves and our worlds" (58). Actually, myths tell us some sort of truth about the creation, nature, relationship, and desires of man and woman, and about human life and the world as a whole.

Tracing the mythological and historical background, Lava Prasad Shrestha writes that the headquarters of Doti district is Silgadhi, which was named after Shilādevī or Shaileshwarī. The district falls under Seti zone, which was named after the Seti River (known as the Sitā River in *The Holy Skanda Purān*). In 1714 BS, before the union of Nepal kingdom, Pahādi Shāhi, the king of Doti, gave the priest of the Shaileshwarī temple some land as a trust to worship Shaileshwarī institutionally. The kings of Rājapur and Jumlā district also contributed to the development of the temple. After Doti was annexed into the one large kingdom of Nepal, the Governor Pushkar Shāh reconstructed the temple and built an inn and a pond (called as Rānī Pokharī) near the temple (15-27).

The research gap of this paper is to highlight or expose the so far hidden religious story or mythical literature of the Nepalese temple named Shaileshwarī to the audience and to show how the temple can be developed as a sacred pilgrimage site for Hindus living both in Nepal and India in order to promote the tourism of Nepal.

### **A Retrospective Study of Goddess Shaileshwarī and Her Mythological Literature**

To look retrospectively, the story of Shaileshwarī goes back to the pre-historical period. It was the time after the marriage of Lord Shiva with Goddess Pārvatī, according to the "*Mānas Khand*" of *The Holy Skanda Purān* written by Veda Vyās in the *Dwāpara Yuga* (Regmi 471- 488), who wrote many religious and spiritual scriptures of *sanātana dharma* ("eternal religion") of Hindus about 5,000 years ago.

According to *The Shaileshwarī Māhātmya*, Shiva married Pārvatī in the Himalayas in the *Satya Yuga* ("the name of the first of the four universal ages"). While passing from the Himalayas to Kailāsh, the abode of Shiva, the newly married Shiva and Pārvatī came to the beautiful area of Chandan Parvat (now known as Shaileshwarī area), surrounded by tall and dense trees, echoed with the melodious sounds of birds, swept by the faint wind of the Seti River, and stopped there to enjoy the divine marital bliss of their honeymoon period (1.1-8).

Meanwhile, Brahmā (the Creator), Vishnu (the Protector), deities, and Indra (the king of deities) were waiting for the birth of Shiva and Pārvatī's son Kumār, who could kill Tārkāsur demon. After a lapse of some time, they started searching Shiva and Pārvatī. Newly married Pārvatī felt shy to have seen them unexpectedly amid the dense beautiful jungle of the Shaileshwarī area and, therefore, She disguised herself into a round black stone ("*prastara pinda*"), which is still now worshipped as Shaileshwarī or Shilādevī. Seeing Brahmā ready to pray, Shiva instead hinted Him to pray to Pārvatī to please Her. Pleased by Brahmā's prayer, She appeared, before His eyes, decked with many divine ornaments, bearing divine weapons such as a conch, a discus, a mace, and a lotus in eighteen-armed form, wearing divine garlands and red clothes, besmeared all over with divine sandal-pastes, full of all wonders and seated on a lion (1.9-23).

Then, She blessed Brahmā including the other gods. "After that Shiva and Pārvatī each left Their half-power over the round black stone and set off for Kailāsh (the abode of Lord Shiva) with the gods. Since then, sages, gods, and saints have been worshipping Goddess Shaileshwarī secretly even today" (my trans.; 1.41- 44).

Therefore, the round black stone of the Shaileshwarī temple is also regarded as a semi-image of Lord Shiva and Goddess Pārvatī. Semantically, Shaileshwarī means the Goddess of a mountain: Shilādevī means the Goddess in the form of a stone. Since Lord Shiva gave more importance to Pārvatī to please Her, devotees started to give more priority to Goddess Shaileshwarī over Lord Shiva. However, He is also worshipped along with Her inside the temple.

According to *The Shaileshwarī Māhātmya*, Goddess Shaileshwarī is very kind, forgives devotees' offences, and fulfills all their desires by merely their prayers to Her. "Lord Shiva also becomes happy simply with [prayers], flowers of *bilba*, fruits, or only with water. Nevertheless, it is surprising that people are suffering from trouble without having this kind of knowledge and [devotion]" (my trans.; 4.21).

According to *The Shaileshwarī Māhātmya*, Lord Rām, Laxman, Hanumān, and Guru Vashistha visited Shaileshwarī after *ashwamedha yajna* ("a great ritual performance") in the *Tretā Yuga* ("the name of the second of the four universal ages"). Ram prayed to Her as Bhuvaneshwarī, one of the divine forms of Goddess Durgā. As found in His prayer to Her, the divine form of Bhuvaneshwarī is like this: "The Goddess is decorated with red dress and red ornaments, bears a snare, a hook, and blessing and securing postures of hands (my trans.; 5.21-22)," who fulfills devotees' wishes like the divine cow of Kāmadhenu. Pleased with Lord Rām's worshipping and prayer, Goddess Shaileshwarī appeared in her physical form and blessed Him.

At the end of the *Tretā Yuga*, Punya Kīrti, a rich Indian Brāhman from Bareli, and Soma Sharmā, a poor but pious Indian Brāhman from Gujarāt, came to the temple of Shaileshwarī. The poor Brāhman worshipped Shaileshwarī with holy water, *bilva patras* (a type of leaves), and husked rice. The rich Brāhman worshipped Her with a variety of rich things. Contrastingly, he hated the poor Brāhman.

After two months of the rigorous test of the poor Brāhman by the Goddess, the poor Brāhman witnessed the presence of Shaileshwarī. On the other hand, the rich Brāhman became sad not to receive the Goddess's grace. One day a saint told him in his dream to go to the poor Brāhman for getting spiritual help. The rich Brāhman did the same and was gifted with the divine knowledge by the grace of the Goddess. This story indicates that the Goddess is pleased with the one who, even though being poor economically, worships Her with a simple heart, but not with the one who is full of hatred, jealousy, or pride.

It is said that a tiger very often comes to the temple and moves around it at midnight still now. It is prohibited from taking the photo of the round black stone of Goddess Shaileshwarī as in the temple of Pasupatināth in Kathmandu. The Bhatta priests take a bath in the old stone sprout at Silgāun and bring a pitch of water daily for the Goddess Shaileshwarī. It is believed that Goddess Shaileshwarī herself goes to this stone sprout riding on a tiger in the *brāhma muhūrta* ("nearly 4 O'clock in the morning").

Once when one of the foremothers of the priest family had gone to the stone sprout early in the morning as usual, she saw the Goddess mounted on a lion returning from the stone sprout. Therefore, the stone sprout holds a special historical importance. The temple remains open early in the morning and again early in the evening every day. There is a permanent oil lamp, which burns non-stop, in the temple.

Looking back the history of the Bhatta priests of the Shaileshwarī temple, Jagannāth Bhatta writes that the first priest of the Shaileshwarī temple was Govind Bhatta, who was descended from the line of Vasistha saint, a follower of "*Mādhyandinī Shākhā*" ("branch") of *The Shukla Yajur Veda* and of *pancha pravara* ("related to the lineage of a superior sage characterized by five qualities"). The first Bhatta priest was religiously and morally very rigid (1-5). In fact, a person's truth, penance, chanting, dedication, all learning, and all skills turn out to be useless when he or she has no good manners and morals.

Two great festivals are observed at the Shaileshwarī temple. One is *laksha* or *koti hawan mahāyajna* and the other *Shaileshwarī jātrā*. *Laksha hawan* is marked in every 12 years from *Māgh shukla panchami* to *purnimā* (approx. 25 Jan. to 6 Feb). During *laksha hawan*, a mixture of ghee, sesame, and barley seeds are put into a burning fire in the name of the Goddess amounting to one lakh and twenty five thousand times. Inside the temple, there is an *agni kunda* ("a place where barley seeds, etc. are poured into the sacred fire"), used by Lord Rām, in which sacred fire is burnt and *hawan* is performed occasionally these days.

Once a year on *Kārtik shukla purnimā* (approx. 11 Nov.), the *Shaileshwarī jātrā* ("festival") is celebrated. On this day, a long flat staff covered with silver is decorated as a figure of the Goddess by using silver and golden idols of the Goddess with jewelries, black wigs, red *saris*, garlands, and a golden spire at the top.

Then, a Bhatta priest sprinkles holy water over the divine figure and worships it amidst the holy sound of conches, bells, and the other traditional folk musical instruments such as *damāhās* ("traditional drums"), *bhokars* ("a type of brass instruments"), *jhyālis* ("a type of traditional folk percussion instruments"), *narasingas* ("a type of primitive trumpets"), and flutes. When the sound creates a type of hypnotic or magnetic trance, *dhāmis'* ("spiritually-enlightened people supposed to have the power of oracles") bodies shiver by getting the power of the Goddess and carry the divine figure of the Goddess around the temple and town area. The divine figure creates a spiritual trance in the body and mind of the watchers and holds them spellbound. This is a remarkable achievement of the *jātra*.

As per the tradition, a pilgrim, after worshipping Shaileshwarī, should go to Badimālikā to worship Goddess Badimālikā trekking through Khaptad. In Khaptad area, there was a great saint, now known as Khaptad Bābā. He penanced for more than 50 years in Khaptad. According to Rabindra Pradhan, Khaptad Bābā was born in Kāshmir Jambu in a prestigious and rich Brāhman family on 10 February 1880 (xx).

Later on, Khaptad Bābā came to Nepal and settled down finally at the mountain of Khaptad to live a life of austere penance (xxii) in 2002 BS and became popular as Shree 1008 Sacchidānanda Saraswatī Kahptad Bābā (3). He left his body from this world in 28 Baishāk 2053 BS and attained *nirvāna* (252). Before the Royal Massacre on 1 June 2001,

the Late His Majesty King Birendra and the Late Her Majesty Queen Aishwarya would visit Khaptad Baba by helicopter at least once a year.

According to *The Tīrtha Traya Māhātmya Sangrahaḥ: Shaileshwarī, Khaptad, and Mālikā Māhātmya*, both Badimālikā and Khaptad are great religious places where gods and goddesses dwell in. Khaptad is a beautiful trekking and research place for natural, spiritual, and literary lovers. There is a Khaptad National Park in Khaptad. "The natural beauty of this region and tranquility gives you a profound way of thinking of innovative ideas. If you are really bored from mundane life and want to live a new spiritual world, then this can be your real destination" (*naturetrail.com*).

Khaptad Bābā, while living in Khaptad, wrote some significant books in Hindi. Afterwards, they were translated into Nepali and English and published by the government and others). His important books include: *Swāsthya Vijnāna* [*The Science of Health*], *Vichāra Vijnāna* [*The Science of Thought*], *Dharma Vijnāna* [*The Science of Religion*], and *Mai Aur Merā Kartavya* [*I and My Duties*].

There was a special connection between Khaptad Bābā and the Shaileshwarī temple. Though being an ascetic saint, he would visit the temple in Silgadhi time to time to pray to the Goddess in order to be an example for the common people.

There are many fruits of worshipping and praying to the Goddess Shaileshwarī. In *The Shaileshwarī Māhātmya*, the Goddess blesses: "My devotee will become a *siddha* ("a saint-like figure having mysterious powers"), full of eight *siddhis* ("superhuman powers") and the world-power, spiritually enlightened, erudite, omniscient, having a power to travel anywhere, and whose all desires will be fulfilled" (my trans.; 1.38, 3.10).

Similarly, "My devotee will receive the fruits of *ashwamedha yajna* ("ancient Vedic performance of the sacrifice of a horse"), various pleasurable things, and at last the eternal Abode of Goddess Durgā after his or her death" (my trans.; 5.31-32).

Goddess Shaileshwarī should be worshipped with the following mantra to fulfill our desires as Lord Rām did in the Shaileshwarī temple: "I pray to Goddess Shaileshwarī or Shilādevī, with Lord Shiva, 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 Shaileshwarī as uttered by Brahmā (the Creator), Soma Sharmā (a pious Brāhman of Gujarāt, India), or Lord Rām as mentioned in *The Shaileshwarī Māhātmya* under the *Holy Skanda Purān*. By doing so "your all desires will be fulfilled" (my trans.; 3.9) by the grace of Goddess Shaileshwarī as assured by Her. Since Lord Ram's visit to the temple of Shaileshwarī, Her publicity started to grow in the world (5.42).



Now, among the three Sanskrit prayers to Goddess Shaileshwarī, I am going to translate the prayer into English, which was done by Brahmā (the Creator) to the Goddess. The prayer holds a great religious, mythological, and spiritual importance for the students or lovers of literature.

### Prayer by Brahmā ("the Creator of the Universe") to Goddess Shaileshwarī

In His *stotra* ("prayer") to the Goddess, Brahmā says, "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, with my mind, speech, and action, because of whose *Māyā* ("divine illusive power") even Vishnu ("the Protector") also is unable to know Her since the beginning. When even Vishnu cannot know Her, how can the deities know Her?" (1.13). "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī to whom deities, demons, serpents, *yakshyas* ("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 as well" (1.14).

Similarly, in His prayer to the Goddess, Brahmā says, "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, 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 to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, who kills the demons like Shumbha and Nishumbha, 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 *hrīm*" (1.16). "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, by getting whose even the slightest power, I [Brahmā] create the world, Vishnu 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 to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, who has incarnated in various forms and names such as Dakshinakālī, Kāmākshī, Guhyakālī, Ugratārā, Nīl Saraswatī, Eka Veṇī, Ṣodashī, Pañchadashī, Bālā, and Tripurā" (1.18). "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, who has mainly ten forms though who has infinite forms; these ten forms are in three-powered forms on the basis of Their *sattva* ("good"), *rajas* ("brisk"), and *tamas* ("dark") qualities; and on the basis of the differences of power, the Goddess is worshipped as Kullukā (Kula-Kundalinī) by the *kaula mārgī* (those who follow the Trāntric way)" (1.19).

Still further, in His prayer to the Goddess, Brahmā says, "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, who creates the world as *Nārī* ("*Prakriti*; Nature") and *Puruṣa* ("Consciousness"), who possesses the world as the earth, and who protects creatures as water" (1.20). "I bow to Lord Shiva's beloved, Goddess Shaileshwarī, who cannot be described by mind, speech, and action, and to whom *yogis* can see in Her *saguna rūpa* ("divine form with divine qualities") by means of the powers of their *yoga* and *samādhi* ("perfect absorption of thought into the Supreme Spirit)" (1.21). "After the completion

of the prayer, Goddess Shaileshwarī appeared in front of Brahmā and Indra including the other deities in Her divine form on the left side of Lord Shiva by displaying Her beautiful form decorated with 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, Goddess Shaileshwarī blessed them. Finally, both Shaileshwarī and Shiva left for Kailāsh leaving their semi-powers over the round black stone, which is now known as Shaileshwarī. Because of the presence of Shiva in the round black stone, He is also worshipped together with the Goddess in the temple. So, devotees worship the round black stone of the Goddess as Ardhanārīshwara ("an image of half Pārvatī and half Shiva") also.

The above prayer done by Brahmā to Goddess Shaileshwarī can be studied and analyzed from different perspectives such as devotion, knowledge, Tantra, and *yoga*. In other words, the prayer is a precious gem which can be read from both dual and non-dual perspectives. From the dual perspective, Shiva is a body whose power is Shakti, Pārvatī, or Shaileshwarī; without Shakti ("Power"), Shiva cannot exist and function either. From the non-dual perspective, Shakti, Pārvatī, or Shaileshwarī is both Goddess and God; She is both—male and female. She creates, sustains, and destroys the world; and She is the Ultimate Reality.

One name of the Goddess is Shakti ["Power"], a proper name. Shakti is only one. Exactly speaking, there is only Shakti in the universe. This is a non-dual or monistic perspective. Shakti has various forms and names such as Pārvatī, Durgā, Devī, Kālī, and so on. This is a dual perspective. As the prayer indicates, Goddess Shaileshwarī is one of the ten mahāvidyās (the ten names of Devī as mentioned in the scripture of Tantra). Goddess Shaileshwarī is worshipped by her devotees to get power, prosperity, and good children.

### **Mythical Interpretation of Shiva and Pārvatī's Religious Story**

As said earlier, both Lord Shiva and Goddess Pārvatī are worshipped in the temple of the Goddess Shaileshwarī. However, the glory of Pārvatī as Shaileshwarī is more than that of Lord Shiva. Pārvatī, also known as Shakti, is given more priority over Shiva. Regarding this, Lynne Gibson explains Shiva as "a member of the Trimurti [Brahmā, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the destroyer]" and He is "the deity of destruction and reproductive power" (5). "This is because by destroying things he also makes renewal and new growth possible. His energy, Shakti, is capable of both destroying and reproducing things. Shakti is believed to take the female form as Shiva's consort Pārvatī, and as other deities such as Durgā and Kali" (16).

Gibson further explains, "Pārvatī is Shiva's consort. She, along with all the other female deities within Hinduism, is understood to represent the feminine aspect of God. Hindus believe that Pārvatī is a form of Shakti, the destructive and reproductive energy associated with Shiva. Shiva and Pārvatī are often shown together and, like other deities, they symbolize male and female aspects of the One Supreme Being" (19).



Explaining still further, Gibson assesses, "As Pārvatī, the Mother Goddess, Shakti is gentle, peace-loving and family oriented, but she can take other more fearsome forms, such as Durgā or Kali" (19).

Similarly, Shiva and Pārvatī are the mythological archetypes of *Puruṣa* ("a self or soul") and *Prakṛiti* ("Nature") the union of both is the cause of the creation of this universe, while viewed from the philosophy of Shāṅkya. The knowledge of Shaivism and Tantrism has been revealed to us through the Shiva's teachings to Pārvatī. Thus, Shiva and Pārvatī are found as the mythological archetypes or primordial images of creation, destruction, re-creation, knowledge, and power.

The ancient Quest-myth pattern of "seek and find" or "pursuit and achievement" is found in the religious literature of Goddess Shaileshwarī. As the mythical story of the temple reveals to us, all three—Brahmā (the Creator), Shoma Sharmā (a poor Brāhman from Gujarāt, India), and Lord Rām from Ayodhyā, India—seek Goddess Shaileshwarī and find Her in the temple, now known as the temple of Shaileshwarī. They worship and pray to Her and are blessed by Her.

There is a round black stone inside the temple of Goddess Shaileshwarī. The stone is an archetypal symbol of the combined form of Shiva-Pārvatī, known as Ardhanārīshwara ("Shiva in the right half-part and Pārvatī in the left half part, both sticking together"). As an archetypal symbol, the image of Ardhanārīshwara suggests that in every male and female creature, there is the presence of Shiva and Pārvatī respectively; so every creature is divine.

The image of Ardhanārīshwara also suggests that every male is Ardhanārīshwara ("half male and half female"); it further suggests that every male is half man and half woman, and every female, too, is half woman and half man. The left part of every man is of woman, and the right part of every woman is man. This means that every man and woman have the characteristics of each other; as Shiva and Pārvatī are incomplete without each other, the same way husband and wife too are incomplete without each other. One needs another's help. The mythical literature of Shiva and Pārvatī indicates that there is an equal respect for women as for men in the Hindu society since the beginning.

The image of Ardhanārīshwara is symbolic of the sexual union of male and female, which is necessary to propagate offspring for the sustenance of the world. In Hindu scriptures such as in Vātsāyana's *Kāma Sutra*, the sex between husband and wife is taken as a gift of God; the sex between married couples is a pious activity, not a sin. Only the premarital sex and the sex outside marriage is a sin. But the Western religion such as Christianity takes sex as a sin, resulted by Adam and Eve's disobedience to God, i.e., eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge due to the temptation made by a Satan in the form of a snake.

The mythological literature of Goddess Shaileshwarī suggests that sex is designed by Shiva and Pārvatī in order to create and sustain the world; so, sex is necessary for the

creation and sustenance of the world; so Kāma Deva ("the god of sex") is called a god, not a demon in Hindu scriptures. This fact is strengthened by Shiva and Pārvatī's combined image of Ardhanārīshwara ("both Shiva and Pārvatī living together in each other's body") and their "creation myth."

It is necessary to preserve and conserve the cultural, mythological, religious, and historical heritage of the Shaileshwarī temple, and to publicize its mythical literature or religious story both in Nepal and India for the benefit of religious seekers and Nepal's (religious) tourism.

## Conclusion

The temple of Goddess Shaileshwarī is one of the most attractive places of the Far Western Region in Nepal. Shiva is also worshiped with Pārvatī in the temple. Goddess Shaileshwarī is Pārvatī, who is the Goddess of power and creation of the whole universe as mentioned in Her mythological literature in *The Holy Skanda Purān* of Hindus. There is a round black stone inside the temple, which is known as Shaileshwarī.

The stone of Shaileshwarī was not established by any human being. Rather it was self-created. So, Shaileshwarī is not an ordinary temple; it is a special temple visited by Brahmā ("the Creator of the universe"), Lord Rām ("one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu"), and two Indian pious Brahmans. But this fact is not known to the huge public of Nepal and India. Hence, this article was written to disclose this hidden fact about the importance of Goddess Shaileshwarī to the Hindu devotees and tourists, living especially in Nepal and India, and to promote the age-old ties between Nepal and India, by applying Northrop Frey's theories of Myth Criticism, Archetypal Criticism, and the Quest-Myth as the methodological tools of this study.

As the mythological story tells us, Lord Shiva and Goddess Pārvatī were enjoying their divine honeymoon days in the area of Shaileshwarī temple after Their marriage. Meanwhile, Brahmā and other deities happened to see Them in Their secret love making state. Then, Pārvatī felt shy and disguised Herself into a round black stone, which is now known as Shaileshwarī. Then, Brahmā prayed to Her and took her blessings. And finally, both Lord Shiva and Pārvatī left to Their home ("Mount Kailāsh"), leaving Their half-half power over the round black stone. So, the stone is worshipped as Ardhanārīshwara ("an image of half Shiva and half Pārvatī"). After that, Lord Rām from Ayodhyā, India, came to the temple of Shaileshwarī and worshipped Her in order to glorify Her existence, setting an example to the public to teach that She is the Goddess of the universe, who fulfills Her devotees' desires. Since then, the publicity of goddess Shaileshwarī started to increase here and there.

The story of a poor Brahman and a rich Brahman indicates that the Goddess is pleased with the one who, even though being poor economically, worships Her with a simple heart, but not with the one who is full of hatred, jealousy, or pride. In fact,

individuals' truth, penance, chanting, dedication, all learning, and all skills turn out to be useless when they have no good manners and morals.

Goddess Shaileshwarī, who is Lord Shiva's beloved, creates the world as *Nārī* ("*Prakriti*, Nature") and *Puruṣa* ("Consciousness"), possesses the world as the earth, and protects creatures as water. This indicates that the Goddess becomes both—male and female in Her creation.

From the philosophy of duality, Shiva is a body whose power is Shakti, Pārvaṭī, or Shaileshwarī; without Shakti ("Power"), Shiva cannot exist and function either. From the philosophy of non-duality, Shakti, Pārvaṭī, or Shaileshwarī is both Goddess and God; She is both—male and female or masculine power and feminine power. She creates, sustains, and destroys the world; so, She is the Ultimate Source of power, creation, destruction, and recreation of the world.

There is a round black stone inside the temple of Goddess Shaileshwarī. The stone is an archetypal symbol of the combined form of Shiva-Pārvaṭī, known as Ardhanārīshwara (Shiva in the right half-part and Pārvaṭī in the left half part). As an archetypal symbol, the image of Ardhanārīshwara suggests that every male and female creature is an embodiment of Shiva and Pārvaṭī; so every creature is divine and every man and woman is half man and half woman. The left part of every man is of woman, and the right part of every woman is man, indicating that every man and woman have the characteristics of each other.

Shiva and Pārvaṭī are incomplete without each other, the same way husband and wife are incomplete without each other. One needs another's help. There is an equal respect for women as for men in the Hindu society since the beginning.

The image of Ardhanārīshwara is symbolic of the sexual union of the male sex and the female sex, which is necessary to propagate offspring and to sustain the world. The sex between husband and wife is a gift of God, i.e., a pious activity, not a sin. Only the premarital sex and the sex outside marriage is a sin. This idea of sacred sex is against the Western religion such as the Christian one that treats sex as a sin, resulted by Adam and Eve's disobedience to God, i.e., eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge due to the temptation made by a Satan in the form of a snake.

Thus, it is found that sex is designed by Shiva and Pārvaṭī in order to create and sustain the world; so, sex is necessary for the creation and sustenance of the world; so Kāma Deva ("the god of sex") is called a god, not a demon in Hindu scriptures. This fact is strengthened by Shiva and Pārvaṭī's combined image of Ardhanārīshwara (both Shiva and Pārvaṭī living together in each other's body) and their "creation myth." Hence, the union of Shiva and Pārvaṭī as Ardhanārīshwara is symbolic of a sacred sexual union of husband and wife, which is necessary for creation and sustenance of the world. In the sacred union, both divine masculine energy and divine feminine energy meet with each other and the two souls feel joy, which is a spark of divine joy.

To summarize, Shiva and Pārvatī of the Shaileshwarī temple are found as the mythological archetypes or primordial images of power, creation, destruction, re-creation, knowledge, and a sacred sexual union in the mythological literature of the Goddess as mentioned in *The Shaileshwarī Māhātmya* of *The Holy Skanda Purān* written by Veda Vyās.

### Suggestions

The temple of Shaileshwarī holds a special mythical, religious, historical, and cultural importance. The prayers done to the Goddess by Brahmā (the Creator of the universe"), a pious Brāhman from India called Soma Sharmā, and Lord Rām from India are of great importance for the lovers of mythical and religious literature. The temple area is the main base camp from where we can make a journey to Khaptad, a heaven of natural beauty.

Therefore, it is necessary to publicize the mythical literature or the religious story of the temple both in Nepal and India for the benefit of religious seekers and Nepal's (religious) tourism. If it could be done, it will attract Indian tourists and pilgrims into Nepal and strengthen the age-old relationship between Nepal and India. Ultimately, it would enhance Nepal's tourism prospects magnificently.

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