

**The Exchange at Halesi:
A Sacred Place and a Societal Context**

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1. Introduction

The Blessing (and Curse) of Shiva

Halesi is a small, but growing village located in the Khotang District of Eastern Nepal. In many ways it is rather normal. As is typical in this area of Nepal, its inhabitants are mainly Rai Hindus, although there is a substantial community of other Hindu castes as well. Less typically, there is a small, but very important Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in Halesi. The reason for this monastery is even less typical still. In the rocky terrain around Halesi there are many caves. But in the central rocky, tree covered hillock of Halesi bazaar there is one cave of particular importance. By Hindus it is called Halesi. It gave the village its name. By Tibetan Buddhists it is called Maratika. This cave, which is a naturally formed cavity in every sense of the word, is thick with spiritual significance. It is uniquely important religious site for both Hindus and Buddhists though, as yet, the events that transpired here are not well known. But these events, as well as its very naturalness, make Halesi one of the most important spiritual sites for these two religions and perhaps the world. It is a great treasure in the hands of a little village.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate what ways the presence of such a significant temple has and will continue to affect the lives of the people in Halesi. It begins with the necessary historical and temple information to provide a basis for understanding and then goes on to look at more recent phenomenon and the dialogue in Halesi, a multifaceted exchange of belief and desires. One man, who recognizes the inextricable connection between Halesi's fate and the very

presence of the temple, jokingly referred to this relationship as the blessing of Shiva. I would add that not everything that has happened in Halesi has been easy for its people. At certain times, the presence of the temple may have seemed like more of a curse than a blessing. This paper is an attempt to look at the way that religious and practical realms interact in the little known story of one very important place.

2. Methodology

After arriving in Halesi, my primary means of understanding this place has been through casual interviews. I have tried to talk to representatives of very diverse social perspectives in Halesi society in order to get a rounded picture and allow the people themselves to identify the issues and distinctions that were a reality to them. I worked with a translator to conduct most of my interviews. The communicational flaws of translation are obvious. But there is still more to say about my quest for information through the medium of a Nepali person. Nepali people are highly sensitive to caste and class hierarchies and may have edited some attitudes according to the class and caste identity of my translator. Fortunately, my main translator was an outsider from this community, lessening the potential severity of this. One bias evident in my fieldwork is that most of my interviews come from male informants. This is because women, more often than men, were very busy in Halesi. Even if they were present, they often deferred to the men or were dominated by the men in speech and thus refrained from contributing much.

3. The Myths, Discovery, and Ordering of Halesi

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a full mythology and history of Halesi temple and the surrounding area in the centuries prior. I am more concerned with recent history, present, and future projection. For a fuller explanation of history and myths in Halesi see Buffetrille 1994, in English language, and for stories especially see Bhattarai 1984, in Nepali language. However, some familiarity with the history and stories that define Halesi are necessary to understand these more recent happenings and I will give a general overview in this section using information gathered from by own fieldwork, reinforced by the previous work of others.

Shiva and the Caves in Halesi

There are several caves in Halesi, some of which connect directly to the story of Shiva, which is told by many people to varying degrees of specificity. The two main caves are located in one forested hillock in the center of Halesi. Shiva and his family first came to Halesi when running from a monster that wished to kill him. He fled into one of these caves, which I will refer to as the Lower Cave since it has several names according to tradition. This cave opens onto the low fair grounds of Halesi. Inside the cave, Vishnu defeated the monster while Shiva, bursting through the ceiling of the cave, fled to safety in another cave near to Arguale, a town on the road from Lamindada to Halesi. The Lower Cave has features that tell the story of this event, although some are interpreted differently by different traditions. A large stone in the opening is sometimes

called Shiva's ox, which guarded the cave from the monster. It is alternatively called the body of the dead monster himself. The pattern of his intestines can be seen stringing over the arc of the cave's ceiling overhead. In the back of the cave the ceiling opens up, letting in light through a large vertical channel from near to the top of the exterior hillock. The footsteps of Shiva are clearly imprinted in the side of the cave as he fled upward and blew out this hole according to the story.

Shiva returned to Halesi when everything was safe and made his home with Parbati, his wife, in the upper cave. This is the main Shiva temple in Halesi, where the power and presence of Shiva and Parbati are felt. They remained here until the current era of humanity. Sometimes they would leave the cave disguised as Kiranti children and play in the forest or down by the banks of the Sun Khoshi and Dhudh Khoshi rivers, two major rivers which flow on both sides of Halesi region down from the mountainous north. Inside the cave is a natural Shivalinga, a stalagmite that rises from the cave floor. This is considered to be the embodiment of Shiva. There is another rock that is believed to be the embodiment of Parbati.

There are in fact many rocks and passageways imbued with special powers inside this cave. But the Shivalinga and Parbati are the main objects of worship in the cave. Many people come simply to do *darsan*, meaning "to greet god." Others come to ask for blessings. Another common practice is called *bhokal*, where a devotee asks for something and promises offerings to Shiva if, by his grace, that wish comes to be.

Padmasambhava in Halesi

Specifically Buddhist history in Halesi begins with the story of Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche as he is referred to by Tibetan Buddhists. Compared to the story of Shiva this is relatively recent time, in the time of humans. There exists both a biography of Padmasambhava and Mandarava that describe their experience in the cave of Maratika, its Tibetan name. Padmasambhava's biography describes Maratika as a place where a "rain of flowers constantly falls. Enveloped in a dome of rainbows, the scent of incense permeates the air. It has a grove of sandalwood trees and is blessed by Lords of the Three Families" (Tsogyal 1999, pp. 45). Mandarava's biography describes Maratika as a "sacred power spot where the outer, inner, and secret mandalas were complete... a wish fulfilling jewel that surpasses any other sacred place in India for the practice of spiritual attainment" (Chonam and Khandro 1998, pp. 152).

Padmasambhava came to Maratika with his consort, the Indian Princess Mandarava, to perform the practice of vidyadhara longevity. After three months of practice they had a vision of the Buddha of Long Life, Amitayus. Buddha blessed them, pouring from a "nectar-filled vase of immortal life" into their open mouths (Tsogyal 1999, pp. 45). He made them "immortal pure awareness holders" (Chonam and Khandro 1998, pp. 153). Following this they practiced the Hayagriva Mechar Cycle on the union of Hayagriva and Vajravarahi in order to eliminate any further obstacles. Upon successful realization, Mandarava "compiled a treasury of more than a thousand extensive and concise longevity

methods, including essential pointing-out instructions” (Chonam and Khandro 1998, pp. 153).

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

The Rai People in Halesi

The area of Halesi, and the entire Khotang district in Eastern Nepal as well as parts of Solu, is remembered by Rai inhabitants as their original homeland. The Rai are a mongoloid ethnicity of Nepal. They identify with a unique cultural tradition called Kirant (which also encompasses Limbu people). They use this term synonymously with varieties of Rai language, religion, and as an alternate name for the Rai people themselves. The Rai people also call themselves *Bhumi Putra*, a Sanskrit term that means “Sons of the Earth.” It is a worship and closeness to nature that the Rai pride themselves on. However, since the nation of Nepal was unified for the first time by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769 much of this distinction has been lost. The Rai people identify themselves as a Hindu people with the same beliefs as other Hindus in Nepal. This is because Prithvi Narayan

Shah knew that the only way to politically unify such a diverse country as Nepal was to unify it culturally as well. For ideological reasons as well, he envisioned a purely Hindu kingdom that would distinguish Nepal from a tainted India (Whelpton 2005, pp. 56). Rai informants told of the clever tactics with which he undermined their own Kirant beliefs. Local Rai leaders, hired into the ranks of the new kingdom (and thus dependent on it), were made to enforce Hindu worship in their communities and replace the Kirant cosmology.

Rai people still celebrate two unique annual festivals that they say are links to their past traditions. *Ubowle-Chadipurne* (The first term translates to “going up hill,” a recognition of the difficulty ahead. The second term translates to “full moon day”) takes place around May and the Nepali month of Baisak, but shifts according to the lunar calendar. This is an Earth worship puja held to bless the planting season, which will determine their fortune for the rest of the year. The second festival is *Udhaule-Dhanipurne*. It is the day of the new moon and the harvest, held around November. At this time the Rai give thanks to the Earth for their food. It is a happy time when plenty can be enjoyed. However, a characteristic of both these festivals is community wide music making and circle dancing, an event that is fun for everyone. Despite these instances of “Earth worship,” the Rai in Halesi say that the world’s primary god is Shiva, *Paruhang* in Kirant language. Shiva’s wife Parbati, known as *Sumnina* in Kirant, is also revered by them. These two Hindu deities are the main deities of Halesi Cave.

This area, previously a Rai Kingdom, used to be almost entirely forested and the Rai people, the only inhabitants of this wild territory, were famous

hunters. The story of how Halesi temple was rediscovered in more recent history, the late 18th century, involves one of these famous Rai hunters. It is popularly told by the inhabitants of Halesi. Bagbashi Rai was hunting in the rugged territory around Halesi with his dog when he spotted a golden deer with three eyes and one antler. He chased the deer through the forest until it fled into the enormous black opening of a cave that Bagbashi had never seen before. It was difficult for him to descend into the cave, but when he finally did, he discovered that the cave was the home of Shiva. The deer had in fact been Shiva himself exploring the outside, but inside he was manifest as a Shivalinga, a stalagmite on the cave floor.

The Mahanta Giri Line

At this time, the Rai were a fully Hindu people. For several years, nothing was officially done with the cave. But after a while it was decided, some say relayed by Shiva himself, that there should be a *pujari*, priest, to manage worship at this cave. According to Hindu tradition priests are always either of the Brahmin or Jogi castes. Therefore the Rai could not be priests over this temple and a Giri family was sent for from another district. The first Giri *pujari* of Halesi was named Manohar Giri. In the early 19th century, he and his family were appointed by the King of Nepal, Shri Shri Shri Maharaje Griban Yuddha Brikam Saha Bahadur Sumser Jung, and confirmed with a *Tama Patra*, an engraved metal plate that gave them the right to officiate in Halesi. The land around the temple was declared *guthi* land, a term that refers, in this case, to national land reserved for

the preservation of a religious site. Other uses, such as living or farming, were prohibited. After this declaration, The Rai inhabitants who had since settled nearer to the temple were displaced down a steep hillside descending from the ridge top of Halesi down to the Sun Koshi, a major river that flows out of Solu District. They formed the sprawling village of Kattike, which is even now known as a Rai village.

The history of the Giri family in Halesi is not flattering. It lasted several generations, roughly two hundred years, the son of the family acting as the *bal* pujari, child priest who performed the actual worship, and his father as the authoritative priest. Locals say that the Giri family claimed Halesi as their own private kingdom. They seized all guthi lands for their own farming and forced all local non-Giri families to contribute free labor in their fields. The workers were hardly even fed for their service. Many people I met, including a high caste Chhettri man, remember working in the Giri fields. People who worshipped at the temple typically brought offerings of rice, money, and livestock. All this was claimed by the Giri family for their personal use. For a long time, the Giris were the only people in Halesi who ate rice, since it is too dry in Halesi to grow there. The temple itself was only opened to worshippers and pilgrims at the Giri family's pleasure. The temple was so profitable that they maintained power in Halesi using the very wealth that the temple generated. The temple was used as a means for the oppression of people and the Giris never intended to give that power up. Until the 1990's, this reign was absolute.

4. The Power of a Natural Temple

Halesi is distinctive because it is a natural temple. Men did not craft the original cave in any way. However, this does not mean that it is linked to nature, or some abstract natural power. I pursued this question of natural power versus god power with many people. Most were confused by the distinction, did not quite know what natural power could be. This includes the Kirant Hindus, the Aryan Hindus, as well as the Buddhists. However, all were sure that it was not natural power, whatever that might be, which gives Halesi its extraordinary power. Natural things are everywhere. It is the power of God that helps you here, grants wishes, and brings milk from the rocks. Nature itself is a creation of God, it is part of God, as are all things, explained the *dhami* Jhagari Pariyar, a type of shaman. In the forested hillock that contains the caves Jhagari sees the wild haired head of Shiva.

It is worth noting that in Tibetan Buddhism the wilds of Nature have never been pictured as an ideal, but must first be conquered and tamed (Buffetrille 1994, pp. 56). This is a common motif in Tibetan literature, since wild places usually serve as the preferred environment for demons. Dorji Sherpa, a young lama studying at Maratika gomba, explained the inferiority of natural power in this way. People believe that god dwells in the soul. And without the soul, you cannot see nature. He offered an analogy. Nature is beautiful, but it cannot be green without the rain. Nature is dependent on something greater, that which makes it possible to begin with: the presence and will of God. Natural power can be manifest in bad weather. He then went on to describe a terrible storm that recently

swept across a huge region in Eastern Nepal. There were landslides and lightning strikes that caused great damage and many deaths. The storm occurred in Halesi as well and lightning struck at the gate of the temple. Even so, there was no harm to the people, trees, and buildings of Halesi. The only damage that occurred was one cracked step. Dorji compares this with the devastation in other areas where this storm had hit and is certain that it was the power of God that protected Halesi. The cave itself should have been collapsed, he says.

The Kirant dhami Prithvi Kumar Rai said that there is power in the natural world. There are numerous small deities everywhere. But the god of absolute greatest significance is Shiva. All other gods are students of Shiva. Even though Prithvi Kumar is a Bhumi Putra, a Son of the Earth, it is Shiva that grants him all of his energy and guidance when he performs healings and *pujas*, worships. It is Shiva who called him to be dhami and it is Shiva who gets angry with him if he neglects his responsibilities. The same is true for all other dhamis I spoke with.

The cave is a power spot of Shiva. Jhagari Pariyar said that the entire world is created by the desire of God. This cave, most agree, was designed by Shiva as his home. In that sense, it is perfect.

In 1982 King Birendra visited Maratika for the first time. On his way down the steep and unstable path to the cave he slipped and fell. This incident prompted him to fund the construction of a large staircase leading down to the cave, as well as a smooth floor with stairs to different levels in the interior of the cave. Just outside the gate to the proper interior of the temple there is a platform for musicians of the Pariyar dalit castes to set up for their role in the daily pujas.

The most impressive feature is a tall staircase that reaches the high chamber of the Parbati stone, from which one can look down on all the activities below. King Birendra also ordered similar construction in the Lower Cave. This floor smoothes out variations in the surface and molds around some of the larger rock features that have significance in the cave.

Even though the building inside the cave covers up some of the natural design, possibly the design of Shiva himself, most people in Halesi are extremely confident that this does not harm the cave and its power in any way. In fact, Shiva is probably very happy because it is now very easy for people of all ages to come into the cave and worship him. People are trying to protect the cave in this way, Jhagari says, and the most important things are still there. The Shivalinga itself used to be in a depression that made it difficult for people to touch and difficult for the pujari to retrieve offerings. Now there is a small, gated enclosure built around it and the topography has been altered. The Shivalinga is on a slightly lower level and the worshippers bend over from their platform in front of it to touch their forehead to the tip and arrange their offerings of flowers, milk, money, tika, and rice among other things.

One of the only activities that may have affected the power of the cave is theft. But again, only very slightly, people are quick to say. It is said that when the cave was first discovered the interior was bright as day because the walls were covered with glittering stones. Over time, people stole them all and now the cave is dull and dark. It is said that the special rocks dripping water inside the cave used to drip milk, but people were too greedy collecting it and now it is just water.

In more recent times, foreigners are said to have stolen pieces of stone or stalactites and stalagmites for souvenirs. But there is no power in these things, Jhagari is quick to point out. Prem Shrestha, a resident of Halesi, said that once a Mahanta Giri tried to steal the Shivalinga itself for sale. He broke it off the cave floor but as he carried it further from its natural place it grew heavier and heavier. He could not take it from the cave and had to return it. It was Shiva's power, he said. If anything, this last story shows that despite all the greed and petty thefts of the past, the power of Shiva still protects this cave.

In fact, this cave is still considered to be one of the most powerful temples in the world by the inhabitants of Halesi and pilgrims alike. Another name for this temple is Purbako Pashupati, the Pashupati of the East. Pashupati is one of the most important global pilgrimage sites for Hindus, located in Kathmandu. Some people in Halesi say that their temple is even greater than Pashupati. Pashupati is a man-made temple. It is still a special place, as are other man made temples that are built with pure intention, explained Ujan Giri Naga Baba, the saddhu who has taken up residence in Halesi. One can achieve God anywhere, he says, because God lives in the soul. But natural temples are different. Pashupati pleases the ascetics of people, but it was only people who made it. God did not have a hand in its creation and God never had a presence there. This latter point is the reason why people believe that a natural temple like Halesi is so powerful. This was and still is the dwelling place of Shiva. It is imbued with his power because he himself lives here. Many spiritual people still have visions of Shiva, Vishnu, and Parbati in this temple today. Spiritual people of Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds say that

the energy in this temple makes it easier for them to practice here than in any other place.

5. Hindus and Buddhists in Halesi

The Beginnings of a Religious Conflict

From the time of its discovery by Bagbashi Rai and the establishment of the Mahanta Giri pujari line, Halesi was known as a Hindu place. The inhabitants around this place were Hindu and despite Padmasambhava's history in Halesi caves there was no permanent Buddhist presence, although there were some pilgrims. Lama Ngawang Chopel Gyatso, known as the original Maratika Lama, was the first Buddhist to come to this place and try to establish a Buddhist presence here. He was born in 1922 after his parents came to Maratika to ask for children. Though he lived far away, the connection was natural. In 1968 he suffered from an illness for which he practiced long-life exercises in Halesi under the order of his teacher. Later, in 1980, he was sent back by one of his teachers and was given a small plot of land by the Mahanta Giri family (Sherpa 2000, pp. 40-47). This land was only intended for a small shack appropriate for a religious hermit. Locals recall how he tricked the Giris by somehow signing a large area of land, including the area right at the mouth of the cave, over to his name. Powerful rinpoches requested that he build a monastery and with their funds he did so in 1980. The monastery at Maratika is called Maratika Chimey Takten Choling Monastery and stands at the mouth of the cave.

From this point onwards the relationship between the Giri family, backed by local Hindus, and outside Buddhist practitioners was full of conflict. It was wrong of the Giris to seize guthi lands for their own personal use. But people felt that Ngawang, the Maratika Lama, had committed an equally unjust offense when he claimed land to build the monastery, although he did sign the land from his personal name to that of the institution. In his short autobiography, he frames the conflict of place that ensued with this phrase from the Buddha: ‘where religion is profound, the dark demons are equally profound.’ He summarizes the anti-Buddhist sentiments, which he calls “envious and hostile...lying words,” of the Hindu community as follows, “First of all, this holy place being a Hindu site by nature, nobody except this lama has ever said that it was a Buddhist holy place. Next, it is forbidden to set up (posts carrying) vile Buddhist inscriptions...in this sacred place. Lastly, Buddhists are forbidden to live in this place (which belongs to us, Hindus and so on)” (Sherpa 2000, pp. 49). Local Hindus resisted all Buddhist constructions. Statues that the Maratika Lama erected in the cave were continually vandalized and are now no longer there. The monastery was also subject to violence. There were serious threats on the lama’s life. Ngawang writes that “every year the Hindus with their hostile spirit have spoiled and destroyed things” (Sherpa 2000, pp. 49). But he was persistent, kept rebuilding, and did not run.

This is because the Buddhists, for their part, felt that *their* ownership over this site surpassed Hindu rights. Ngawang felt that “this place was discovered by Padmasambhava...and Shiva is only a guardian of it” (Buffetrille 2000, pp. 23).

From a normal Tibetan Buddhist perspective Shiva is known as a *dharma pala*, a world protector deity, named Wong Chuk Chempo. He is respected by Tibetan Buddhists but is certainly not the equivalent of Guru Rinpoche, the man who brought Buddhism to Tibet and is considered second only to the Buddha himself.

When Ngawang would explain the conflict to visiting Sherpas he described their reaction as “astonishment, not to say stupefaction, at the ‘wickedness’ of these Hindus who did not immediately recognize that this sacred site was Buddhist and that Shiva was merely a guardian of it” (Buffetrille 1994, pp. 31). Buddhists say that once they came to the cave, they researched its significance and discovered the powers of the different rocks and passages, which the Hindus were in ignorance of. They say that Hindu people then translated Buddhist deities into Hindu ones. In the back of the Lower Cave, there are several spots on the rock wall that are sprinkled with tika and routinely worshipped. One is said to be Ganesh, another is Brahma. But Dorji Sherpa says that these practices only began about ten to twelve years ago. In his opinion, and that of fellow Buddhists, there is no religious significance to this Lower Cave. It is only where Shiva fled the monster.

The Hindu and Buddhist Dialogue

Katia Buffetrille, a French anthropologist researching Halesi in 1994, wrote that “what is at stake in the present struggles between the lama and the Giris is, it seems, the supremacy of Buddhism over Hinduism or vice versa” (Buffetrille 1994, pp. 47). In 1994, this conflict over who understood most about Halesi caves was raging. As in the communities surrounding many contested

religious sites around the world, the presence of Halesi temple brought problems to the community that would not have existed otherwise. But this is a process in motion, as is evident from reading Ngawang's earlier writings and talking to Buddhists and Hindus in Halesi today. All Buddhists and Hindus I talked to in Halesi, including an old, retired Giri priest, said that they had no problem with the other religion's presence and activities in the temple. In Stan Mumford's study of the relationship between Tibetan lamas and Gurung shamans in the Manang District of Nepal, Himalayan Dialogue, he uses a model that is of use in this religious "dialogue" as well.

Mumford draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's book The Dialogic Imagination (1981) in which Bakhtin divides sociocultural time into three "chronotopes:" the ancient matrix, the individual life sequence, and historical becoming (Mumford 1989, pp. 16). Each stage refers to a cultural state of mind in which there is successively greater awareness of the exchange between self and other in an evolving and complicating society of contrasting ideals. The first stage describes a period of uncontestable truth, the second contestable truth, and the third an awareness that all ideologies "interpenetrate" (Mumford 1989, pp. 17).

Mumford's book identifies isolated shamanic society with the ancient matrix. It describes the process by which a newly founded and neighboring Buddhist settlement is first forced to comply with some aspects of the shamanic worldview that are in direct contrast with their own, namely the practice of animal sacrifice. Finally, it describes the arrival of a powerful lama from Tibet who frames all people in one worldview, not only righting the wrongs of the Buddhist settlement,

but attempting to influence the shamans as well. It is an analysis of the dialogue between past and present, relative to the desired futures of those involved and no one group or individual can be said to belong to just one chronotope.

The original, uncompromising conflict between Hindus and Buddhists is more characteristic of Bakhtin's second chronotope. The compromising dialogue it fed into is more characteristic of his third. But we cannot neatly divide the entire conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism in Halesi into these three chronotopes. The model of an evolving dialogue is very useful, however. Mumford calls it a process of "interillumination" (Mumford 1989, pp. 23). Some of the parallels between this history and Mumford's are strikingly similar. When the Maratika Lama first journeyed into the Hindu region of Halesi caves he saw himself as the bearer of a new and correct ideology that he needed to impress on the local population. In his autobiography of many years later he writes that he was "well known for having imposed on hunters and butchers the promise to stop killing" (Sherpa 2000, pp. 45). Buffetrille sites the work of a British anthropologist, C. Ramble (1989), who also wrote about the Maratika Lama's attempts to forbid hunting and felling trees in the area (1994, pp. 35). A variation of this practice is still visible in Halesi today. Visiting wealthy lamas sometimes buy the livestock of Hindu families. They do not take the animals away, but leave them with the original family to take care of, only receiving their promise that they will never kill these animals that the lama had paid for. A practice with similar results has its origins in Hindu culture. Worshippers in Halesi temple often offer animals to Shiva, everything from pigeons to cows. The pigeons live in the

caves and their calls can be heard all day long. But goats and cows must be cared for by the temple committee, understanding that, as offerings to god, they must never be killed. Its offspring, however, do not fall under this contract. In this, you can see Buddhists using something similar to a pre-existing Hindu model to impress their ideals upon a Hindu culture in a process of ideological encroachment.

As noted, there is great cooperation between Hindus and Buddhists in Halesi temple today. Perhaps the greatest reason for this is because Halesi is a Shiva temple. Shiva does not receive red offerings, sacrifices, something that Buddhist doctrine could never accept. In Mumford's study, the practice of shamanic sacrifice was the central point of contestation in a lengthy dialogic conflict. In Hindu religious culture, sacrifice is also significant. In Hindu sacrifice, the power of the life to death transition of the sacrificed animal is most important and must be witnessed by the intended god. The meat is then taken home and eaten by the sacrificing Hindus themselves. Meanwhile, the Buddhists at the Maratika monastery do admit to eating meat, but only twenty-four hours after killing, when the breath of life has left the flesh and blood, explained Dorji Sherpa. Though meat eating can still be a sensitive issue for Buddhists, what they attempt to do is remove the immediacy of a life to death transition from the desire of their consumption. In this very practice, one can see the simultaneous existence of past modes of living and intended ideals in dialogue. Though this discussion of killing is in one sense irrelevant, the very absence of sacrifice in Halesi is

important in making this place accessible from the very beginning for both Hindus and Buddhists to compromise.

This absence allowed for further dialogue to continue, a dialogue that extends to the Halesi god himself. Earlier Hindus rejected that Buddhists had any spiritual rights in Halesi. Buddhists asserted their primacy, relegating Shiva to the position of a mere guardian in Halesi (Buffetrille 1994, pp. 23). Buddhists today fully accept the story of Shiva and Halesi cave and they recount it readily. Even more significantly, Hindus and Buddhists alike have done away with the hostile division of deities. They say that Shiva and Guru Rinpoche, or Padmasambhava, are one and the same god. Guru Rinpoche is just a later incarnation. This fusion of deities is not at all typical. Though Shiva is not equivalent to Guru Rinpoche in the texts, there is a strong equivalence here in Halesi. Shiva is the greatest god of the Hindus and Guru Rinpoche is the greatest god of the Tibetan Buddhists. To say that they are equivalent as the locals do is a translation of concept or terms. It eliminates a sense of hierarchy in purpose and makes the purpose of Hindus and Buddhists in Halesi one and the same. When talking to Buddhists in Halesi they often used the name of Shiva interchangeably with that of Guru Rinpoche. It comes to represent an equivalent for their greatest god, a god that is shared. Perhaps under the tremendous pressure of past conflict this translation has served as the basis of cooperation in Halesi. But the encompassing translation does not end here.

Prithvi Kumar Rai told me that Halesi temple is not just for Nepalis, but for the whole world. It is the opinion of the Hindu inhabitants here that Shiva,

being their greatest god, is in fact the god of the entire world. All global traditions, though different in their rituals, appeal to the same god. Therefore, anybody may come and do puja in the temple. This includes Christians and Muslims, though they never do come, note the locals. The popular Buddhist long-life rituals are just one of the many possible requests a worshipper might hold in his or her heart. This openness to outside tradition and a willingness to equate is in incredible contrast to the exclusive attitude of earlier years.

It is important to see how the diversity of approach found in different religions is then understood as appropriate here in Halesi. In addition to simple life-style differences, Buddhists and Hindus have strikingly different ways of respectfully preparing themselves and doing puja. First of all, Hindus must shower, wear clean clothes, and may never eat before going to greet god. Buddhists on the other hand, do not have such concerns over cleanliness and often eat during the puja itself since one of their main activities during puja is the offering of foodstuffs to god. The food is then distributed and eaten as prasat. Ujan Giri Naga Baba, the Hindu saddhu who lives next to Halesi temple, explains that these methods do not conflict. God is not offended by Buddhists because it is their “karma” that they worship in the way that they do. All religions have their own karma for how to worship. Even a person who ate cow and came to do puja would be acceptable if that was that person’s karma, meaning acceptable in the religion and culture that he came from. As if to signify this, there is a sign that hangs on the last gate before entering the temple. It is written in Nepali, Tibetan, and English but is so faded, rusted, and bent that it is hardly recognizable as a sign

any more. One day, after a great deal of effort, I was able to make out a message requesting that all leather goods be left outside the temple. Apparently conveying this message is not so important anymore. Just the other day I had seen a Buddhist pilgrim walking in leather shoes as he toured the temple with a local lama. What is sacrilegious and offensive to god for a Hindu was apparently okay for this man. The most important thing for all people, however, is that when you go to greet god you must be *chokho*, or pure, in your heart.

In the past Dorji Sherpa remembers how the local Hindus disrespected the lamas, calling them by the denigrating term *Bhote*, a word that stereotypes dirty, meat-eating Tibetan-like people. Now, as I observed day-after-day, he and other lamas have easy social relations with just about everyone in the village. People, though of a different background, are regarded as people, especially in common affairs and the mind of a working-class villager or student monk. However, I would argue that not everything is as resolved and static as it might seem. Followers still have ultimate hope and faith in their own tradition. In Mumford's study shamans were eventually found second-guessing themselves on some issues and "taking into account the lama's ethical arguments" even though these ethics are imported (Mumford 1989, pp. 77-78). It is this kind of desire to win over that representatives from both Hinduism and Buddhism still harbor in Halesi, though it is very low profile, perhaps unconscious for many that do not lead a religious life. It operates under the understanding that both traditions are valid and in fact interconnected and equivalent in many ways, a characteristic of Bakhtin's third chronotope. This subtle dialogue for supremacy can be seen as what Mumford

calls an “ironic interplay” that is “conscious rather than unwitting” (Mumford 1989, pp. 23).

Kyabje Chatral Rinpoche wrote a short pilgrimage guide to Maratika in which he accepts the presence of Hindus but goes on to assert that Buddhists alone possess a true and deep understanding of this place: “Outwardly it is the blissful play of Shiva and Umadevi. Inwardly it is the place of Chakrasamvara. Secretly it is the celestial mansion of the deities of immortal life and most secretly it is the pure land of great bliss, the absolute Akanishta realm” (reproduced in Sherpa 2000, pp. 7-8). Therefore he is saying that the interpretation of Shiva here is the most exoteric of many more significant levels. He goes on to discuss such methods by which Buddhists can bring Hindus to a deeper understanding: “As all individuals have their own perceptions it is not right to harbor wrong views and speak maligning words. We should practice pure vision, accept their views, perform praises, and thus we shall establish karmic links which will lead them to conversion. Calumniating gods is the basis of misfortune. By narrating stories the mind can be clarified. I have said this at the very outset to create trust in non-Buddhists, Buddhists, and ordinary people, and moreover to refute arguments about this holy place” (reproduced in Buffetrille 1994, pp. 59). Chatral Rinpoche envisions a subtle and civil dialogue that will eventually “convert” Hindus to a Buddhist understanding in Maratika. Meanwhile it does not attack the validity of Hinduism and interpretation of Shiva in this place, just the superficiality of it. Hindu perception of the Halesi god as Shiva is an understanding of god in a lower state of mind.

Buffetrille refers to the Myth of the Submission of Shiva to illustrate this mentality. He says that in this process “there is no murder but a subtle transmutation and possible liberation for every being, since even such a hostile being as Shiva can obtain illumination and become Buddha” (Buffetrille 1994, pp. 53). Meanwhile, the lamas in Halesi practice patience. They distribute prasat to all the local Hindu children who come flocking during a Buddhist puja for no other reason than the free treats. And even though these same kids sometimes disturb them in their meditations for the sake of childish amusement, the monks never respond with hostility. Currently the only Buddhists in Halesi are those lamas, mostly from Solu District, that come to study and live in the monastery.

Naturally, those Hindus in the greater community have a similar attitude about the scope and presence of Buddhism in Halesi. Hindus expressed the belief that Buddhism is a branch of Hinduism. They are in fact one religion. But also implicit in this wording is the foundational character of Hinduism. Ujan Giri Naga Baba says that this place is a relatively new spot for Buddhist belief. It only became significant to Buddhists in the past 2,500 years. Padmasambhava is recent whereas Shiva was here before the world. Shiva created the world and its people. Hindu dharma is the biggest of all dharmas, he says. In Hinduism this current age is called the Kaliyug. It is a period of worldly and religious decline prior to total collapse. Though he believes in the Buddha, the fact that Buddhism evolved in a period of inescapable degradation makes it seem somewhat insignificant. However in the spirit of cooperation that characterizes Halesi today, the Baba expresses his equal love for both Hindus and Buddhists. The only casual

complaint about Buddhist spiritual activities that I ever heard is that they hang prayer flags in some places that some feel should be left without, around the temple for example. Other Hindus I met were eager to have their pictures taken with the colorful flags as a background.

The Social Dialogue

Issues in the sphere of religious matters are just one side of the Buddhist impact upon coming to Halesi. The Buddhists have also had a large impact on Halesi's society, aside from the old contestation of their very presence. Though Hindu and Buddhist spiritual relations may be at ease, these social impacts are not quite as innocuous. Many Hindus today say that it was jealousy that drove those in their community to fight against Buddhists in years past. The Giri family was jealous for their power and the average Hindu was jealous because the Buddhists were so relatively wealthy. Most Hindus today say that that fighting was misguided and wrong. But the Buddhist power and wealth has had lasting and continuing effects in the Halesi economy and the public psyche.

If there is any anxiety about Buddhist activities in Halesi, it is a vague fear that they might buy up the whole place, explained one of my informants. He feels it is necessary that Buddhists convince the people otherwise. They have bought a lot of land around Halesi, including a lot of high ground. One hillock opposite the entrance to the Lower Cave is draped in prayer flags. It is very rocky, and there is talk in town that these rocks, which can be found in other areas of Halesi, are specially suited for making cement. But the Buddhists bought this hill from its

owner after discovering that there was a large man-eating snake inside it, explained Dorji Sherpa. If the hill was broken up to make cement the snake would be released and only bad things could follow. This hill is called Chetmadorji Rhi and is one of three holy hills in this area, says Dorji.

The Buddhist buying of land, aside from barring some economic ventures as cement making, has inflated the price of all land in Halesi. Because initially Buddhists paid such high prices for the land that they bought, now nobody will sell for cheap. They have set a precedent and the prices in Halesi are nearing those of land in Kathmandu, said one informant. Though Buddhists do buy a lot of land with conservation in mind, buying is not one of the big activities in Buddhist dharma. It is giving. Some of the very first social work initiated by the Maratika Lama was to build paths in the town. At first some Hindus said that it was because he was feeling guilty for having taken guthi lands and having built the monastery in a Hindu holy place. But as the pattern of giving continued the complaints stopped. On a more practical side, this growing association of Buddhism with monetary benefits may have played a very large role in the disappearance of the Hindu resistance to the Buddhist presence.

Buddhists give according to their ability. The more that they can give, the more merit they can accrue by alleviating the hardships of others. In Buddhist pujas, as mentioned earlier, a large pile of food is amassed for offering to god. After receiving god's blessing it is distributed, not kept for oneself. It is the act of giving that is important. The average monk in the Maratika monastery is not wealthy. But many Buddhists, particularly those visiting from far away, are. One

day in the temple I was offered a five-hundred-rupee note by a Buddhist pilgrim visiting from Sikkim. I felt silly and wrong accepting it in front of all these kids who habitually begged me for money, to who I always said I couldn't give. This woman was far from the wealthiest Buddhist to visit Halesi. Reincarnate Lamas visiting Halesi are particularly famous for their charity. Locals say that when these big Lamas come they call for all the people in the town to line up and share their needs. The Lamas have stacks of money on hand and assistants that can run to the stores and make purchases.

Though they are practicing their dharma with good intention, people in Halesi say that these practices are directly responsible for creating a culture of begging among the town's individuals and organizations. All agree that begging was not a problem until reincarnate lamas began visiting Halesi. Now for visitors, one man said, Halesi might seem like a place where only beggars live. In the main square of town near the temple there are always many adults sitting, waiting for visitors to flock upon with greetings, stories of hardship, and requests for help. Another man said that begging is like a bad habit. They don't understand that everyone who comes here is not of the same means and the same purpose. People do not just come to give. One man approached me to ask for money to help finish the roof on his house. We later learned that he had received thirty five thousand rupees from a visiting lama and his house was already re-outfitted with a brand new tin roof. Aid also comes to villagers in the form of easy jobs for inflated prices.

The idea that the coming of Buddhists might provide some employment for the people of Halesi was recognized by Buffetrille in 1994 when he said that the “presence of the lama has brought work opportunities to the poorest, mainly as porters for Buddhist pilgrims” (Buffetrille 1994, pp. 23). These days many wealthy Buddhists come in to Halesi by helicopter. Even though the landing pad is only a couple hundred yards from the monastery, a local who acts as porter for that distance can easily expect a thousand rupees for the job, said my friend. And if they offer to give a tour they might receive three or four thousand more. Doing standard manual labor in Halesi it takes three hours to earn fifty rupees, the price of a single meal. The inflation of wages when working for the Buddhists is enormous.

It is ironic that these days, if not back in Buffetrille’s time as well, these seemingly spectacular work opportunities and gifts are actually forming a barrier to the economic success of these poor people in Halesi. When my Nepali assistant and translator was trying to leave Halesi to make the trip back to Kathmandu she had difficulty finding a porter to carry her bag. My friend said that if I were leaving there would be a line of potential porters competing to assist me. When the time did come for me to leave I never asked for a porter since I planned to carry my own bags, but I still had several offers. Rather than working as hard as they would need to for an average Nepali employer, these people are waiting for a visitor who they think will basically hand the money over for nothing. Prem Shrestha, a prominent businessman in town, says that he always needs help in his shop. Even though there are many people lazing around town, they never come.

He says that there is a lot of work all over town, but these people are not willing to work for normal wages because of the precedent of easy wages set by visitors. Despite all the begging, there are no truly destitute people in Halesi. All people own land that they can work and a home that they can return to. But their needs are imbalanced because of the sporadic nature of their work schedule. The same man that received thirty five thousand rupees for a new roof on his home later approached me to buy him some rice. He said that his family was hungry and there was no food at home.

Buddhists look at this persistent poverty in the face of many opportunities to escape it as a characteristic of karma. A visiting lama from Tibet said that in their last life these beggars may have been wealthy men and women, but did not pay attention to dharma. Now they are reincarnated as poor people in a holy place. It is a way of forcing them to face their sin. Prem Shrestha framed his argument using the term 'luck' instead of karma. If it is your fortune to be poor than you will always be poor, he says. To him it makes sense that these poor people are born in a holy place like this. The poverty of these people is in God's hands he said. Even if you break your head for these people you cannot raise them up. Prem Shrestha says that most of the poor people around here used to own a lot of local land. They sold it and squandered the money. They should be well off but instead they are struggling. However, this discussion of karma and luck does not discount the significance of the interaction between Buddhists and the villagers that is the topic of this section. Most villagers say that this is the main instigation for begging in Halesi.

There are two primary youth clubs in Halesi, the Jana Jyoti Club and the Panchawati Pragati Youth Club. These clubs are dedicated to furthering development in Halesi and have made the elimination of begging practices one of their projects. Many people in town, particularly the beggars, are eagerly awaiting the next visit of the reincarnate lama who has made gift-giving visits to Halesi a routine in his life. It is approaching fast, they say with a greedy twinkle in their eyes. Some people in town, however, suggest that the lamas should stop giving to individual beggars altogether.

At this point a distinction needs to be made between giving destructively and giving in a way that is productive to social causes and the community as a whole. Halesi is a remote town with very little access to resources and a greater economy. Lamas in Halesi, who can raise significant monetary funds from outside sources, have been the primary means by which this town has developed at all. The school in Halesi was built under the direction of the Maratika Lama using funds he raised from abroad. While many oppose lamas giving to individuals, nobody opposes gifts to the school or other public works. The reincarnate lama who has been most active in Halesi recently has promised that the next time he comes he will build a college for this village. The benefits of Buddhist involvement for Halesi are enormous. But it is not a total solution to the problem because one individual cannot manage the needs of an entire town. The school in Halesi is struggling because it is not recognized by the government and thus gets no funding. It is entirely dependent on private donations. The school's principal understands that developing dependence is a major problem and expressed his

belief that even if the school receives aid it must still continue to work for and take responsibility for its own future and betterment.

This is the kind of attitude that is necessary here. The very presence of the temple is what brought the Buddhists to Halesi. With the Buddhists came money. Buddhist practices of giving have created dependence in a group of individuals who refuse to take responsibility for themselves. But the community-wide gains far outweigh the losses. As long as they maintain a sense of self-responsibility than the people of Halesi will benefit from a blessing that countless struggling rural villages in Nepal will never receive.

6. Recent History Rapid Change and the Maoist Conflict

Religious life in Halesi is not isolated from the community at large. Recent history in Halesi is fascinating and there has been a shocking amount of change here in a short period of time. This area of Eastern Nepal was an emergency zone during the Maoist conflict period. Young people in Halesi who did not wish to become embroiled in the conflict were forced to leave Halesi for other areas since one of the Maoist tactics was to kidnap youth and attempt to convert them to the cause. Halesi was a regular scene of conflict between Maoist forces and the national police. The villagers were caught in the middle, always accused of helping one by the other. In reality, they had no choice but to do what they were told. One man said that the Maoists were kind of like those beggars that

pester us visitors. You had to feed them, house them. You couldn't brush them off. But after they left the army was soon to follow with accusations about supposed Maoist sympathy. Aside from using the town's resources, Maoists attempted to exert the influence of their ideology on Halesi, but were not able to maintain a presence that could manage it. However the Maoists were just one force in an evolving social consciousness and movement towards caste equality that had been underway in Halesi. One man explains that the law and political situation, not simply the ideals of the Maoists, was on their side. Since the 1962 national law in Nepal declaring the equality of all castes there was a precedent and the disruption of the 90's made it possible to make a difference in such a remote place as Halesi. In 1995 the Maoists began running programs on caste equality in Halesi, an attempt to diminish discrimination.

Though low-caste people from far away villages could easily get into the temple since they were unknown, it was the local low-caste that were discriminated against most heavily. Even though they had grown up in this place their entire lives they could not enter. One man recalls how it began. Local boys would enter the temple in pairs. The Giri priests could not exert any physical restraint at this point. They simply looked shocked and appalled. It was the practice of low-caste families to do their puja just outside the temple gate. A Giri priest would then carry the offerings in to the Shivalinga itself. About twelve years ago a local man and his family decided to do their puja inside the gate. The priests could not touch them, they simply stood behind them glaring. Why are you

surprised? If you plant rice and get millet then you should be surprised, this man said to them. But this should not surprise you.

In 1999 the Maoists made another dramatic move in Halesi. They confiscated all the town's alcohol and threw it into the temple. Then they rounded up all the town's people, high and low caste alike, and forced them to enter the temple. They de-seated the Giris and formed a temple committee, which unfortunately, only consisted of Giri men. From this point on it was relatively easy for low-caste members of the village to enter the temple. But temple management in other respects did not change all that much since the same people of old were still in power. The national conflict was still raging and the Maoists did not have time to focus on Halesi. The situation again declined and Gajurman Rai, a descendent of Bagbashi Rai, the discoverer of Halesi, went to the Maoists remote jungle headquarters for help in 2000. Over the next few years the Maoists offered sporadic assistance in Halesi. They were involved in protecting Buddhists as they built an expansion to their monastery by threatening any Hindu's that vandalized the construction. In 1994 the Maoists again visited Halesi and did away with the Giri's power altogether, as well as seizing all guthi land from their personal hands. Later, they formed a new temple committee and made Gajurman Rai the president. They also made Gopal Giri and his son the new priests of the temple. Gopal is a direct descendent of the original priest of Halesi, appointed by the king centuries ago. After four generations his family's position was usurped by another Giri family, headed by Raj Bol Giri. This new line chased Gopal's

family away and dominated the temple until the Maoists interfered just a few years ago.

The new temple committee, called the Halesi Mahadev Natural Temple Preservation and Management Committee, has been running for two years now. Its main source of funds comes from the temple offerings. Sixty percent go to the school and 40 percent go to temple preservation and other village development projects. This idea that the temple can be used to aid the practical and societal needs of people in Halesi is exactly what people want. Whenever people discuss this developmental purpose, they always contrast it with the Giris, who the people say never did anything for development and kept all temple money for themselves. The Maoists and their educational programs were instrumental in realizing the rights of all castes and people in Halesi as well as de-seating the Giris. But people in Halesi are quick to point out that these ideals were something they themselves had fought for for a long time. They only needed the Maoists power of force to make them a reality.

Total caste equality is not a complete reality in Halesi, but most people are hopeful, recognizing that this is a process that takes time. It is most difficult for older people to make the change, which involves changing one's learned culture. It is still difficult for many low caste people to visit the homes of high caste villagers. Some elders of the low castes are still hesitant to enter the temple, and some elders of the upper castes, including the Baba, still feel that they should not be allowed because it is harmful to god. But one hard-working Pariyar man, a low caste name popular in Halesi, says that if you are clean then it should be no

problem. He believes that people should be judged by their character and not their caste. Therefore the responsibility for decency is in everyone's individual hands. Pariyars, he says, comprise the vast majority of beggars in Halesi. The responsibility to adjust to new opportunities is their own. Just as high caste people might hesitate for a while, low caste people may hesitate as well. Time will tell. As mentioned earlier Buddhist and Hindu relations, after a very difficult beginning, are entirely at ease. This is the product of the Buddhists' own efforts and the aid of the Maoists to fight any kind of social stratification. Generally speaking, old Giri priests that remain in Halesi are allowed to live but are not necessarily liked. Their kids, who are growing up under normal conditions, are fairly well integrated.

What is important to note here is that the temple is at the center of all this conflict and change. It was the means by which one elite family dominated a community. It was also the emotionally and spiritually charged means by which the oppressed low castes could exert their will for equality. Its abuse was a source of outrage for all people in the community and the impetus for Maoists to come to Halesi and force a change. It made Halesi stand out. After the new restructuring of society and the recent Constitutional Assembly elections that took place last month (April, 2008), the temple is also the embodiment of people's hope for the future.

7. Conclusion

Halesi Temple and the Future of a Village

In the recent Constitutional Assembly elections the vast majority of elected officials in Khotang are Rai people belonging to the Maobaadi political

party. They represent the same views as the Maoists, but are the tamer, post-conflict version of that group. Khotang, the large region of Nepal of which Halesi is a part, is once again dominated by Rai leaders. In the Rai memory and consciousness Khotang and part of neighboring Solu is the age-old homeland of the Rai people. Today there are hopes to reclaim that kingdom after centuries of marginalization. Most Kirant people in Halesi are hoping that this old homeland will be reclaimed in the form of an independent Kirant State that operates under the national government. If all goes well in the Constitutional Assembly this will be the result. They envision Halesi as the future jewel and center of their Kirant State. Halesi temple is a point of cultural pride for the Rai. It is their very own discovery and one of the most powerful temples in the world. Some Kirants argue that a Kirant pujari is necessary at this temple, though not all Hindus would be ready to accept this change.

Most non-Kirant people in Halesi are familiar with the general concept of the Kirant State and do not mind that idea. As long as there is no caste discrimination then they are fine with it, they say. Whenever Kirant people discuss the State they are always sure to say that there will be no discrimination. The main purpose of the State will be to preserve Kirant culture, religion, and language, mainly through programs in public schools. Many Kirant people in Halesi are conscious that their culture is being forgotten and lost. They want to do something about it. The two youth clubs mentioned earlier, the Jana Jyoti Club and the Panchawati Pragati Youth Club, make preserving the Kirant culture one

of their missions. Members from these groups spoke passionately about the importance of cultural identity.

It is ironic that these same Rai officials pushing for a Kirant State are members of the Maobaadi party. The official Maobaadi stance on religion is a classic Leninist approach. One young member invoked Lenin as he espoused his belief that dharma is like an addiction. He was followed by the impassioned retort of his friend and peer from the Jana Jyoti club, “Culture is the identification of a people. So we preserve it.” It was simple, but firm. And it is representative of the general feeling among Rai. This is something that the young Maobaadi committee member recognizes as well. He went on to say that right now his people are not ready to give up their religion, they cannot escape the bounds of their culture. But he has hope that one day they will be able to see that there is no God. This will change everything, he says. Meanwhile, it is still very common even for members of Maobaadi and Maobaadi supporters to have religious belief and pray at Halesi temple. The bottom line is that the Maobaadi is dependent on the support of the people. This is why during the insurgency period the Maoists never took steps to hurt religion in Halesi in any way¹. Even from an antireligious perspective Halesi temple is valued as an attraction of great economic worth. All agree that Halesi Temple will never be harmed by the Maobaadi.

¹ Some old, upper-caste Hindus believe that the Maoist involvement in making the temple accessible to all castes was in fact harmful to religion since it goes against tradition. They believe that Shiva’s anger is manifest in decreased rainfall and the collapse of Kakani Cave a few years ago. Ujan Giri Naga Baba is a proponent of this view but says that it is all part of the Kaliyug. Other middle-aged to young Hindus in Halesi had initial fears, repeating an old tale that the Shivalinga would sink into the ground upon contact with lower castes. When it remained where it was they abandoned their fears and decided that this move towards caste equality was in fact a good thing characteristic of modernity.

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

People say that Halesi will soon become a large town, if not a city one day. There are some fears. People mention the inevitable pollution that will accompany unplanned urbanization, the vulgar dress and attitude of urban youth. One man expressed his fear that following the infiltration of foreign values he will lose control of his sister and daughter in the presence of so many outside boys. Despite these fears the positivity and hope that accompanies this vision of a

growing Halesi far outweighs the bad. People in this small village are excited by the prospect of development and modernization that growth will bring. Another man added to this vision of Halesi as a modern town, hoping that Halesi would become a place of culture and scholarly research. He expressed the need to advertise about the power and history of Halesi temple because, even though the word is spreading, it is still relatively unknown. One man, after explaining the inevitability of these changes, then explained to me the reason why. It is all because of Halesi temple, he said. He said that nobody would ever harm Halesi temple because Halesi temple is the “fortune and hope of the people.” All this will happen in Halesi, but only because the temple is here. It is the blessing, or curse, of Shiva that will carry Halesi into a different kind of struggle from years past. For the people of Halesi there will be new advantages, but there will be new challenges as well.

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