



ठमेलका सम्पदाहरू  
**Uncovering Thamel : The Heart of Cultural Treasures**



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# Uncovering Thamel

*The Heart of Cultural Treasures*



**NeNAP**

**Neeti Anusandhan Pratishthan, Nepal**

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I am sincerely thankful to Mr. Deepak Kumar Adhikari whose early encouragement and critical insights laid the groundwork for this research and gave me the confidence to pursue it with clarity and conviction.

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As part of the research methodology, site visits were conducted for detailed documentation and observation of each location. Semi-structured interviews were held with local authorities, residents, and cultural experts to gather in-depth insights and regional perspectives. The findings were later presented in two review meetings—one at the NeNAP office and the other at Anupam Foodland, Battisputali—where the individuals acknowledged below participated and provided valuable inputs. Their feedback, combined with further verification through historical records, helped enrich and validate the conclusions of this study.

I am deeply indebted to the following individuals whose generosity of knowledge, time, and spirit enriched this research in meaningful ways: Bishwombar Lal Pradhan and Rahendra Prasad Pradhan, for sharing their knowledge on Bhagawan Bahal; Achyut Bajracharya, for offering his historical perspectives on Gunakar Mahabihar; Milanratna Bajracharya, for his expertise on Maitripur Mahabihar; Arun Kumar Bajracharya, for his guidance on Karunapur Mahabihar; Kiran Chitrakar and Rajan Shakya, for their contributions on Shrigha Bihar; Zaffer Hushan, for his valuable insights into Gaa: Hiti; Basundhara, for her reflections on Bagawati Bahal; Pralhad Subedi, for his understanding of Thameleshwor Mahadev; Purushottam Kuinkel and Pradip Bikram Thapa, for their accounts of the Shree Kalika Kamachhae Jwala Mandir (Tridevi Temple); and Kushal Lamshal and Mukunda Bahadur Kalikote, for skillfully capturing the visual elements of this research through their outstanding photography. Each of their contributions has added depth and dimension to this research, making it not only more comprehensive but also more meaningful.

Finally, to my family and friends, your unwavering support, patience, and encouragement have been my greatest strength. Your presence throughout this journey has meant more than words can express.

To all who walked alongside me in this endeavour, thank you.

**Prakriti Adhikari**

## **Publisher's Words**

We're delighted to present ठमेलका सम्पदाहरू "Uncovering Thamel: The Heart of Cultural Treasures", a coffee table book that celebrates the rich cultural heritage of Thamel's temples and monasteries. This book is the outcome of an initial dialogue with Dr. Ram Thapaliya, whose insights were instrumental in connecting us with Sahadev Dhamala (Bimal), Vice President of the Thamel Tourism Development Council (TTDC) and General Manager at Kathmandu Eco Hotel Pvt. Ltd, Thamel. Their early contributions helped shape the vision for this project: Unveiling Thamel's Sacred Spaces. This work aimed to highlight the often-overlooked cultural significance of Thamel's thirteen key monuments spanning from Kantipath to Chhetrapati (east to west) and Sorakhuttae (Lekhath) Marg to Tahiti Chowk (north to south).

This book is more than just a collection of photographs; it is a testament to the dedicated work of our researcher Prakriti Adhikari, who meticulously visited each site, gathered facts, and captured the essence of these sacred spaces. Her on-site efforts have brought to life the intricate details and historical narratives of Thamel's temples and monasteries. We are thankful to the relevant stakeholders who gave valuable feedback for the verification and enrichment findings of the study.

This research work was subject to a rigorous validation process. It was initially presented on two separate occasions to experts in the relevant field, whose feedback led to significant enhancements. The ultimate version of this research was finalized only after all contributing experts meticulously reviewed, corrected, and authenticated its content.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Mr. Deepak Kumar Adhikari for his dedicated effort to initiate and finalise the research work. Similarly, we appreciate Mukunda Bahadur Kalikote for his exceptional photographic contributions. His skillful lens has beautifully immortalized the serene beauty and architectural grandeur of Thamel's Cultural Treasures, allowing readers to experience their majesty from every page.

We hope ठमेलका सम्पदाहरू "Uncovering Thamel: The Heart of Cultural Treasures" serves as an enlightening journey, offering a new perspective on the vibrant spiritual and cultural tapestry woven within the heart of Thamel.

**Neeti Anusandhan Pratishthan, Nepal (NeNAP)**

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## Introduction

In the northeastern corner of Kathmandu lies Thamel, a unique area known for its vibrant and dynamic atmosphere. This lively place, free of the noise of public vehicles, is a hub of activity, offering bustling markets, various amenities, and a thriving nightlife. During the day, Thamel is a peaceful marketplace. At night, the streets light up with energy, filled with music, open clubs, and many restaurants and cafés cater to locals and tourists around the clock.

Amidst this modern vibrancy lives the Newa community, the indigenous people of Kathmandu<sup>1</sup>. The Newas are known for their rich cultural and religious traditions. They are deeply rooted in New Buddhism<sup>2</sup>—a unique blend of Buddhist teachings and local customs. This tradition has shaped the area’s cultural landscape. It influences everything from ancient temples to everyday practices. The region’s original name in Newa is “Tha Bahi,”<sup>3</sup> meaning “upper place”<sup>4</sup>. This later became Thamel. The name emphasizes the place’s geographic and spiritual significance and its deep roots in Newa heritage.

Thamel is a place where the past and present coexist, yet the rapid pace of modernization often overshadows its rich cultural identity. This report seeks to uncover and celebrate the artistic treasures of Thamel, ensuring that the vibrant history and traditions of the community living in the region are preserved amidst modernity. By bringing these cultural elements to the forefront, the paper aims to offer visitors a more profound, enriched experience of Thamel, where the essence of Nepal’s heritage is interwoven with the lively contemporary life of the realm.

### *Rise of Thamel as Tourist Hub*

The rise of Thamel as a significant tourist hub began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the influx of hippie culture<sup>5</sup>. During that time, Nepal was unique for its relatively relaxed stance on specific substances, including marijuana<sup>6</sup>. This attracted many Western tourists seeking spiritual freedom and adventure. These visitors, often called “hippies,” introduced new elements of Western culture —music, fashion, and lifestyle —that left a lasting imprint on Kathmandu, particularly in Thamel. Although the legal status of cannabis changed with its ban in 1973<sup>7</sup>, the cultural influences from that era continue to shape Thamel’s lively character today.

1 [https://www.academia.edu/648144/The\\_Newars\\_the\\_Indigenous\\_Population\\_of\\_the\\_Kathmandu\\_Valley\\_in\\_the\\_Modern\\_State\\_of\\_Nepal](https://www.academia.edu/648144/The_Newars_the_Indigenous_Population_of_the_Kathmandu_Valley_in_the_Modern_State_of_Nepal)

2 <https://www.nepal-tibet-buddhas.com/nepal/newar-buddhism/>

3 <https://www.landnepal.com/details/2299.html/>

4 By Achyut Bajrachaarya

5 <https://unmappedroutes.com/2012/04/15/the-end-of-the-hippie-trail-freak-street/>

6 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9107886/>

7 Chopra, G. S., & Smith, J. W. (1974). Psychotic reactions following cannabis use in East Indians. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 30(1), 24-27. doi: 10.1001/archpsyc.1974.01760070014002.

## *A Hidden Cultural Gem*

For centuries, the Newa community has not just lived in Thamel—they have been its heart and soul. Their ancestors made their homes in bihars (monasteries) and bahals (courtyards)<sup>8</sup>, beautifully carved places that have endured through the ages. Even as the neighborhood grew and changed, with new homes and businesses popping up, these ancient sites have remained central to the community's spiritual life, keeping the spirit of Newa Buddhism alive.

Even with the hustle and bustle of modern life, Thamel still holds onto its rich history. Old temples, stupas, and religious sites remain silent witnesses to the past. The Guthi, an organization of community members dedicated to preserving their cultural heritage, maintains these places well. This shows that Thamel is more than just a tourist destination. It is a lively fusion of tradition and modernity, where centuries-old customs intertwine with contemporary life, providing a distinctive and intimate window into Kathmandu's rich cultural fabric.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://bajracharya.org/introduction-to-newar-buddhism/>



## *Thameleshwor Mahadev*

*A sacred sanctuary of Lord Shiva at the entrance of Thamel.*

The Thameleshwor Mahadev Temple is a revered Lord Shiva temple located at the entrance of Thamel, near Sorakhuttae. Established in 2065 Bikram Samwat (B.S.) (2008 A.D.) by a community-driven initiative to preserve local heritage, the temple's foundation took on added significance when a buried Nandi, Shiva's sacred bull, was unearthed during construction, prompting its dedication to Lord Shiva as Thameleshwor Mahadev<sup>1</sup>.

The temple quickly became a center of devotion, attracting locals and visitors seeking peace in the lively Thamel district. The three-story structure inside the temple complex accommodates worshippers and provides space for chanting bhajans (devotional songs) and feeding devotees. Its walls, adorned with idols of various Hindu deities such as Ganesh, Devi, Hanuman, and Radha Krishna, reflect the temple's inclusive nature.

Thameleshwor Mahadev is a spiritual center in bustling Thamel, drawing devotees for worship, bhajan (devotional singing), and community gatherings. The three-story structure is adorned with various Hindu deities, including Ganesh, Devi, Hanuman, and Radha Krishna, embodying inclusivity and reverence for diverse aspects of Hindu worship.

Built as a communal effort to protect cultural heritage, the temple symbolizes unity and devotion. To preserve its significance, ongoing community involvement and support for maintenance will ensure it remains a place of peace and spirituality amidst the vibrancy of Thamel.

<sup>1</sup> Site visit and interview





## *Maitripur Mahabihar*

*A sacred monastery is a testament to the Malla period's grandeur established in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.*

The esteemed Maitripur Mahabihar is also known as Kwa Bahal. It was established in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by the revered Wak Vajracharya<sup>1</sup> and quickly became a focal point of spiritual practice and communal life. This sacred monastery, designed with a square compound and nine entry gates, showcases the architectural splendor of the Malla period. During his reign, King Pratap Malla contributed to the structure's resilience, ensuring it would endure as a symbol of Buddhist faith and a masterpiece of its time.

Maitripur Mahabihar holds profound religious and historical significance, as it houses ancient manuscripts, intricately carved statues of Dipankar Buddha, and the rare Dewavatar Buddha. Every corner of Kwa Bahal reflects a legacy of spiritual devotion, with the ceremonies and rituals here profoundly rooted in the Buddhist traditions of the local community. A central figure in these rituals is the living goddess, the Kumari or Vajradevi, who embodies a continuous lineage of devotion that links the present community to its ancestral past<sup>2</sup>. But the Kumari no longer exists in this Bihar.

Through centuries of challenges, including natural disasters and historical changes, Maitripur Mahabihar has been carefully preserved by the local Buddhist community, especially the Vajracharya lineage. Their dedication has ensured that Kwa Bahal remains a revered place of worship and a cultural landmark, safeguarding its spiritual and architectural legacy for future generations.

<sup>1</sup> <https://saarang.com.np/story/maitripur-mahabihar/>  
<sup>2</sup> Site visits and interview





## *Natyeshwar*

*A temple dedicated to musical instruments.*

The Natyeshwar Temple is located at *Tha: Hiti*. It is dedicated to musical instruments and is important for individuals starting their musical journeys or acquiring new instruments. Musicians often visit the temple to seek blessings for success in their musical endeavors. Its prominent location in front of the chaitya further emphasizes its role within the local community. Situated in Sorakhuttae, the Natyeshwar Temple is a cherished historical and religious monument revered by the area's 35 toles (neighborhoods). According to inscriptions, the temple was established approximately 350 years ago during the reign of Bhaskar Dev Malla. In 2041 B.S., it was reconstructed to preserve its legacy, ensuring it continues to serve as a spiritual hub for residents.

The Natyeshwar Temple is a symbol of the region's musical heritage and a focal point for community gatherings and cultural celebrations. Its restoration efforts demonstrate residents' commitment to maintaining its historical and spiritual significance, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity within the community.





## *Tridevi Temple*

*A temple that resembles the traditional Newari architecture.*



The Shree Kalika Kamachhae Jwala Mandir is historically known as the Tridevi Temple. It is a culturally and spiritually significant site located at the eastern entrance to Thamel, along Kamachhae Marg, branching from Kantipath Road in Kathmandu. Constructed in 1876 B.S. (1819 A.D.) by Ranadhoj Thapa, son of the renowned Bada Kaji Amar Singh Thapa, the temple is dedicated to three powerful manifestations of the goddess: Kalimai, Jwalamai, and Kamachhae. According to historical accounts, the temple was built before Amar Singh Thapa departed for war against the British, with the intent of invoking divine strength and protection for him.

The temple's bell was installed in 1899 B.S. and remains an important element of its ritual space. Architecturally, the temple is a remarkable example of traditional Newari design, featuring detailed wooden carvings in Awrakh wood that reflect the master craftsmanship of the era. The idols of Kamachhae and Jwalamai were brought from Guwahati, Assam, and Himachal Pradesh, respectively, making these deities rare and spiritually significant within the Nepalese context.

More than an architectural heritage site, the temple serves as a vital religious centre for the community. It plays a prominent role during major festivals such as Bada Dashain and Buddha Jayanti. On Dashami, the temple becomes a vibrant spiritual hub where devotees perform rituals including bhajan, kirtan, Dashami Bali (animal sacrifice), and tantric worship. During Buddha Jayanti, members of the **Bagale Thapa clan** gather at the temple to perform hom and havans (ritual fire offerings), reinforcing the temple's role as a space of ancestral and communal worship.

The temple is believed to fulfil devotees' wishes within a year, attracting large crowds of worshippers throughout the year. The presence of idols sourced from various regions of Nepal and India highlights the temple's unique legacy of cultural integration and religious inclusivity.

In recent years, Shree Kalika Kamachhae Jwala Mandir has seen substantial restoration and preservation efforts, initially led by the Tridevi Marmat Tatha Samrakshan Samiti, a committee formed by former Queen Aishwarya in collaboration with residents. As of 2081/12/25 B.S., the temple's management has been officially overseen by the Shree Kalika Kamachhae Jwala Guthi Vyawasthapan Samiti. The current president of the committee is a direct descendant - eighth generation - of Amar Singh Thapa, continuing the historical lineage associated with the temple.

Despite periods of neglect, strong community involvement has led to the temple's revival, transforming it into a cherished destination for both domestic and international visitors. Its enduring religious significance, combined with the legends and cultural narratives associated with the goddesses, offers pilgrims and tourists alike a deep and authentic connection to Nepal's spiritual heritage.





## *Ashok Chaitya*

*A quiet reminder of the rich Buddhist heritage of Kathmandu.*



The Ashok Chaitya is located in Ashan Galli<sup>1</sup> within Thamel and is thought to date back over 2,000 years to the Licchavi period<sup>2</sup>, when Buddhism was prominent in the Kathmandu Valley. Although no direct evidence links it to Emperor Ashoka, the chaitya bears his name, symbolizing a connection to his Buddhist legacy.

The chaitya is architecturally unique, combining elements from the Licchavi and Malla periods, distinguishing it from typical stupas<sup>3</sup>. It holds particular importance to the Newari Buddhist community as a site

1 <https://saarang.com.np/story/ashok-chaitya/>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

for ancestral worship. Notably, on the day before Kojagrat Purnima, community members gather to circle the chaitya and honour their ancestors in a longstanding ritual<sup>4</sup>. Also called “Kul Chaitya,” visiting this shrine on every occasion in Newari traditions remains an essential practise<sup>5</sup>.

Ashok Chaitya has endured through centuries and is maintained by the local Buddhist community to ensure its cultural relevance<sup>6</sup>.

4 <https://saarang.com.np/story/ashok-chaitya/> and locals

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.



## *Bhagawan Bahal*

*A cultural treasures that embody the deep-rooted regions of the Buddhist traditions.*



The Bhagawan Bahal is also known as Bikramsheel Mahabihar. It is a historical Buddhist site in northern Thamel. It is distinctive for being overseen by the Pradhan dynasty, unlike other bihars in the Kathmandu Valley, typically managed by Bajracharya, Shakya, or Tuladhars<sup>1</sup>. The site's evolution is from "Thamagram," meaning the eldest Bihar in the Licchavi period, to "Singhakalpa Nagar."<sup>2</sup> The area was called Thabahil and later named Thamel, highlighting its enduring cultural and geographical significance<sup>3</sup>.

The main Bihar, a four-story pagoda, is dedicated to Singha Sarthabahu, a legendary Dwapar Yuga merchant<sup>4</sup>. It is the oldest of the bihars and occasionally hosts the Kumari, the living goddess<sup>5</sup>. Bhagawan Bahal houses a rich collection of religious artifacts, including idols of Singha

Sarthabahu, Mahakal, and Mahamanjushri, along with a prized manuscript of the Pragyaparamita in gold and silver ink, believed to date back to Nagarjuna Buddha<sup>6</sup>. It is a central location for numerous rituals and festivals, including Gai Jatra, Janai Purnima, Dewali Puja, Kaya Astami, and Khadga Jatra, reinforcing its role as a vital religious hub<sup>7</sup>.

The preservation of Bihar is notably influenced by contributions from the 11<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist master Atisha, which has helped maintain its role as an educational and pilgrimage site<sup>8</sup>. The Guthis of the Pradhan community are actively working to protect its architecture, artifacts, and religious significance, ensuring this cultural heritage endures<sup>9</sup>. Ongoing preservation efforts will be vital to maintaining its legacy for future generations.

1 Interview and sight visits  
2 <https://saarang.com.np/story/bhagwan-bahal/>  
3 Ibid.  
4 Ibid.  
5 Interview and sight visits

6 Ibid.  
7 <https://saarang.com.np/story/bhagwan-bahal/>  
8 Ibid.  
9 Field observations



## *Bhagwati Temple*

*A revered religious site also known as Sankateshwor Bhagawati.*



The Bhagwati Temple is also known as Sankateshwor Bhagwati. It is a prominent religious site in Mulbazar, Thamel, dedicated to Goddess Bhagwati, worshipped as Goddess Durga<sup>1</sup>. Though its establishment date is unknown, the temple is central to the Bhagwati Bahal area. It is surrounded by other important icons, including a miniature stupa (Chi Baadya) and statues of deities like Bhimsen, Ganesh, and Narayan, reflecting its cultural and spiritual significance<sup>2</sup>.

The Bhagwati Temple is a focal point for local worship, especially during festivals like Dashain and Kaya Ashtami, when devotees gather to offer prayers and rituals to Goddess Bhagwati<sup>3</sup>. The nearby stupa adds to its sacredness, linking it to the broader religious landscape of Thamel and highlighting its role in upholding cultural traditions.

The local community has preserved the Bhagwati Temple, which remains an active part of Thamel's religious life, drawing pilgrims and tourists.

Despite its ancient origins, the Bhagwati Temple has been well-preserved thanks to the efforts of the local community. It remains an essential part of the place's religious life and is a notable destination for pilgrims and tourists. Visitors to the temple can experience not only the spiritual richness of the site but also gain insight into the deep-rooted cultural practices that continue to thrive in this vibrant neighborhood.

<sup>1</sup> <https://saarang.com.np/story/bhagwati-temple/>

<sup>2</sup> Site visits and observations

<sup>3</sup> Interview



## *Bhimsenpati*

*A serene spot for residents and travelers to rest and socialize amidst the vibrant hustle of Thamel.*

The Bhimsenpati is a public resting space in Thamel named after the deity Bhimsen, serves as a community hub where locals and travelers gather<sup>1</sup>. Though its origins are uncertain, Bhimsenpati reflects traditional Nepali architecture and local culture. It is located near Bhagwati Bahal and offers a peaceful spot amidst Thamel's lively streets.

Dedicated to Bhimsen, the god of prosperity and trade, Bhimsenpati holds special significance for business people who visit to seek blessings for success<sup>2</sup>. The Pati also connects key areas like Bhagwati Bahal, Narsingh

Gate, and Lekhnath Marg, making it a vital link in Thamel's bustling landscape. The annual jatra (festival) in Patan dedicated to Bhimsen reinforces the community's reverence for this deity.

Sustained by local community efforts, Bhimsenpati remains an active cultural and social landmark in Thamel. Its continuous use by locals and tourists highlights its ongoing importance. Preserving Bhimsenpati's historical and cultural relevance will ensure it remains a testament to Thamel's vibrant heritage and communal life.

<sup>1</sup> <https://saarang.com.np/story/bhimsen-pati/>  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





## *Gaa: Hiti*

*A traditional stone spout (dhungedhara), a remarkable example of ancient engineering and cultural heritage.*

The Gaa: Hiti is a traditional stone spout (dhungedhara) in Thamel, exemplifies ancient Nepali engineering and cultural heritage. Constructed in 738 A.D., likely by the sisters of Sarthavahu, a legendary 7<sup>th</sup> century trader<sup>1</sup>, it is located east of Bhagwan Bahal. Built below ground level, *Gaa: Hiti* features detailed stone carvings of deities and animals, with Makara-shaped water spouts linked to the goddess Ganga<sup>2</sup>.

Initially, Gaa: Hiti served as a primary water source for drinking, bathing, and laundry, powered by an ingenious rainwater-collection and gravity-driven system. The carvings of Hindu deities like Bhagirath, Lord Vishnu, Uma Maheshwari, and Lokeshwor emphasize its dual role as a site of religious significance<sup>3</sup>. The ancient Shilapatra manuscript discovered here reinforces its historical and spiritual relevance to the community.

Although partially damaged by the 2015 earthquake, local community efforts have carefully restored *Gaa: Hiti*<sup>4</sup>. Its association with the legendary trader Sarthavahu, along with its sophisticated water management system, fascinates visitors. Preserving *Gaa: Hiti* will ensure it remains a unique cultural landmark, showcasing the Kathmandu Valley's heritage of engineering and devotion.



1 <https://saarang.com.np/story/gaa-hiti-dhungedhara/>  
2 Ibid.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Interviews and site visits



## *Gunakar Mahabihar*

*A fine example of traditional Newar architecture.*



The Gunakar Mahabihar is also known as Chhusyabaha. It is a historic Buddhist monastery in Thamel, established in 1667 A.D. (Nepal Era 787) by Gunajyoti Vajracharya<sup>1</sup>. Named after its founder, who funded its construction through successful ventures in Tibet, the Vihar showcases traditional Newari architecture. Its two-story design encircled a central courtyard rich in wood carvings and religious iconography.

As a center of Vajrayana Buddhism, Gunakar Mahabihar houses the main idol of Achhobyatathagat Buddha, one of the five Dhyani Buddhas. Additionally, it features statues and carvings portraying Buddha's life and teachings. The Vihar holds historical Shilapatras and inscriptions from the 8th century, making it a reference model for other monasteries, including one in Lumbini<sup>2</sup>.

Supported by the local Guthi (trust), Gunakar Mahabihar has been well-preserved, with its most recent renovation completed in 2003-2004 with assistance from German organizations<sup>3</sup>. The intact original structure and historical artifacts continue to attract devotees and tourists alike, reflecting the Newa community's commitment to preserving its spiritual and architectural heritage in Kathmandu.

1 <https://www.facebook.com/gunakarmahavihar/>

2 Site visits and interview

3 Interview



## *Karunapur Mahabihar*

*A vital center for Buddhist rituals, with ceremonies like Manjushree Puja and Dipankar Buddha worship.*



Situated near Jyatha Tole and Chusya Bahal, the historic Karunapur Mahabihar, also known as Musya Bahal, is a prominent Vajrayana Buddhist monastery dating back to the Malla period, a time when Buddhism thrived in the Kathmandu Valley<sup>1</sup>. Traditionally credited to Majindrapala, the monastery's establishment is also attributed to the devout Bajracharya sisters, Hari-Laxmi and Jinidevi<sup>2</sup>. The two-story structure encircles a square compound with 16 doors and a courtyard at each exit, showcasing the architectural elegance of the Malla era.

Karunapur Mahabihar, one of the 18 principal Bihars in Kathmandu, holds significant spiritual and cultural value. The monastery is adorned with stupas, thangkas, images of the Buddha, including Achhobhya Buddha, and deities such as Ganesh and Manjushree. It serves as a hub for Buddhist rituals, such as the Manjushree Puja and Dipankar Buddha worship, drawing practitioners year-round.

Despite its ancient origins and challenges, including earthquake damage, Karunapur Mahabihar has been preserved through the tireless efforts of the local Bajracharya community and a dedicated committee. Their commitment to restoring and maintaining the site ensures that future generations will continue to experience its profound cultural heritage. Today, the Bahal is a significant site for visitors interested in Kathmandu's rich Buddhist traditions, offering insight into centuries-old spiritual practices kept alive within its walls.



<sup>1</sup> Information gathered by Rupa Dangol passed by Bimal Ji  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



## *Tha: Hiti Chaitya*

*A reflection to the history of the site as the location of a significant water tap believed to be made of gold.*

The *Tha: Hiti* Chaitya is situated at the central junction of *Tha: Hiti* Chowk, directly in front of Natyashwori. The term “*Tha*” means “top,” while “*Hiti*” translates to “water sources,” indicating the site’s historical significance as the location of an important water tap believed to be made of gold. A chaitya was constructed over this tap to protect the valuable water source, serving as a religious monument and a protective structure.

The chaitya is enclosed by iron bars and features a gate for access, highlighting its importance and enhancing its sacred atmosphere. Although the water tap is concealed beneath the chaitya, visitors can still hear the water flowing if they listen closely<sup>1</sup>, preserving a subtle connection to the site’s original purpose. This chaitya at *Tha: Hiti* Chowk exemplifies the community’s dedication to maintaining a vital resource within a sacred context.

The Chaitya at *Tha: Hiti* is an important reminder of the harmonious relationship between community resources and spiritual practices. Ongoing efforts to preserve its structure and significance demonstrate the local community’s commitment to honoring their cultural heritage while ensuring the site’s original purpose remains relevant for future generations.



<sup>1</sup> Interview at sites



## *Sri Ghah Chaitya*

*A wooden replica of the renowned Swayambhu Maha Chaitya.*

The Sri Ghah Chaitya is commonly called “*Kathe Swayambhu*.” It is a historic Buddhist monument near Thahiti Chowk in Thamel, Kathmandu<sup>1</sup>. Believed to have been established during the Licchavi Era (450–750 C.E.), it is a wooden replica of the famed Swayambhu Mahā Chaitya<sup>2</sup>. The structure’s name derives from sacred vessels known as Ghah, highlighting its spiritual and cultural importance<sup>3</sup>.

Kathe Swayambhu is an accessible site for Buddhist worship, drawing in devotees for offerings and rituals that parallel those at the original Swayambhu Stupa. It holds deep spiritual significance, embodying the essence of Buddhist worship and traditions. Major religious celebrations and rituals are observed here, making it an important community landmark for veneration and cultural gatherings.

Over time, Kathe Swayambhu has been maintained by the local Buddhist community, which has undertaken renovations to preserve its historical and spiritual essence. Continued restoration efforts and community engagement are essential to ensure its preservation for future generations, along with potential support from heritage conservation initiatives.



1 Site visits and interview  
2 <https://mona.com.np/srighah/sri-gha%E1%B8%A5-caitya/>  
3 Ibid.



**Prakriti Adhikari**

## *About the Researcher*

**Prakriti Adhikari** is a dedicated scholar and a passionate researcher with a deep-rooted interest in cultural heritage, identity, and social transformation. She is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas at El Paso, where she continues to expand her academic engagement with issues related to culture, rhetoric, and societal change.

With a strong academic foundation in international relations and cultural studies, she brings both intellectual rigor and heartfelt curiosity to her work. She holds a Master's degree in International Relations from South Asian University (SAU), New Delhi, where her dissertation explored *Nepal's Climate Security Dilemma*, reflecting her analytical depth and sensitivity to issues at the intersection of

environment, policy, and society. Her undergraduate studies in Economics and Mathematics from the University of Delhi further strengthened her interdisciplinary lens and critical thinking.

From June to October 2024, Prakriti worked as an independent researcher with Neeti Anusandhan Pratishthan, Nepal (NeNAP), where she immersed herself in the lived stories, rituals, and historical narratives embedded in the heart of Thamel. Her approach, grounded in respectful dialogue and close engagement with locals, historians, and cultural custodians, allowed her to uncover layers of meaning that often go unnoticed. The outcome of this journey is *Uncovering Thamel: The Heart of Cultural Treasures*, a heartfelt attempt to document, celebrate, and preserve the intangible heritage that shapes one of Kathmandu's most iconic neighborhoods.

Beyond the pages of this research lies Prakriti's enduring commitment to safeguarding Nepal's cultural legacy. Her work reflects not only scholarly insight but also a sincere dedication to amplifying the voices and values that make places like Thamel much more than just destinations; they are living testaments to memory, resilience, and belonging.