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Forms of Interaction between the Buddhist and Hindu Traditions of the Kathmandu Valley



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While Buddhism disappeared in the thirteenth century in India, it continues to exist to this day in the Kathmandu Valley (historical Nepal), as the only remnant of Indic Buddhism with Sanskrit as its sacred language. It does so side by side with Hinduism, with which it has shared the constrained urban spaces of the Valley for some two millennia. While this coexistence has been marked by a convergence of religious practices, Buddhism has remained for all this time a self-conscious distinct tradition, rather than being absorbed into the fold of Hinduism as happened in India. As a consequence, the Kathmandu Valley affords the unique opportunity to observe how Buddhism coexists alongside Hindu traditions, which is of course the constellation in which Buddhism existed on the subcontinent from its very beginnings until its disappearance some 1500 years later. The talk will offer an overview of the complex ways in which Buddhism and Hinduism have become intertwined, while yet remaining distinct religious traditions. Particular attention will be paid to a concrete example, namely to the various interventions by the 17th century King Pratāpa Malla at the Buddhist site of Svayambhū.