

# Swayambhu Stories



***Swayambhu Stories* is a public-facing, community engaged project that uses digital technology to document and preserve the unique cultural heritage embodied at Swayambhu while making stakeholder knowledge and immersive exploration of this Nepali World Heritage site accessible to people across the Himalayas and the world.**

Project Lead: Lauren Leve, PhD  
Dept. of Religious Studies  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## Overview

The Swayambhu Mahachaitya in Kathmandu, Nepal is a pan-Himalayan social and ritual space central to the religious and cultural lives of many Nepali Buddhist and Hindu communities. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it also draws tourists and pilgrims from across the globe. Yet, it faces acute physical risk from seismic activity. And many stakeholders also fear that the rich immaterial cultural heritage traditionally enacted at the temple (unique social and ritual knowledge, cultural practices, and forms of expression) is equally under threat due to Nepal's rapidly changing social, economic, and technological landscapes.



*Swayambhu Stories* addresses these challenges while elevating the voices of diverse Nepali stakeholder communities and empowering stakeholder youths and heritage enthusiasts with transposable skills they can use independently to benefit locally led preservation initiatives.

Our work will result in a conservation-quality 3D model of the temple complex and an accompanying archive of oral history and interviews with Buddhist and Hindu stakeholders and other visitors. Stakeholder-curated interview segments will be uploaded to the model as video annotations, allowing users to click on a prayer

wheel and watch a Tibetan monk explain why it is efficacious to spin them, or to click on a statue and listen to the Tamang descendant of the person who donated it discuss her family's affective and economic relationship to the temple since, or to click on the doorway to the home of a hereditary temple priest and hear him explain the pride he feels in his close relation to the temple but also how burdensome it can be; how his life as a priest differs from





his father's, and what kind of a future he wishes for his son who is studying for a BA in computer science but will also carry on the family's ritual responsibilities.

When complete, the annotated model/environment will be accessible on the web and via mobile devices. It will also be optimized for VR, allowing a fully immersive experience.



### Goals & Outcomes:

- **Protect** & conserve the Swayambhu's material cultural heritage
- **Document** the religiously and culturally diverse forms of knowledge, practice, and traditional cultural expression associated with the temple
- **Elevate** stakeholder voices & **empower** caretaker communities
- **Participatory** structure, **best practices** for cross-cultural partnerships
- **Skill training** and technology-transfer are fundamental parts of project design
- **Inclusive** project output acknowledges & **advances diverse goals** held by different communities.



**Project Partners:** Baakhan Nyine Waa, Mr. Amrit Buddhacharya, Swayambhu Management & Conservation Mahasamiti, Swoyambhu Yuva Pariwar, Impact! Productions, Raj Bikram Maharjan/Airlift Technologies