

# Katmandu Valley Temples II

## Patan Durbar Square



**Bhaktapur  
Durbar Square**  
(page 29)

**Changu Narayan**  
(page 52)

The word "durbar" is from Farsi (Persian) and it originally referred to the kingdom's public activities and the place where they happened, the court or courtyard. In the context of Nepal it refers to the extended area around and including the palace.

Each of the three main cities in the Katmandu Valley descends from a medieval kingdom and each has its palace and the associated plazas, temples, statues, gateways, markets, shrines, shops, mansions, waterworks, and parks.

Patan Durbar Square is in the modern city of Lalitpur, the second largest city in the Katmandu Valley. It lies just across the Bagmati River from Katmandu, a 15 minute taxi ride south from Katmandu Durbar Square.

When I arrived by cab (about \$3), the first thing I looked for was a toilet. I asked in a number of places, in English and in universal signs of discomfort, but they're not big on public facilities here. I was finally directed back to where I had been dropped off and found a dark western-style toilet up a flight of steps from the street.

It was a perfect vantage point for my first picture of Patan's Durbar Square, with the royal palaces on the right and the grand mid 17th Century granite Chyasaldewal Krishna Temple to the left of the main north-south street.





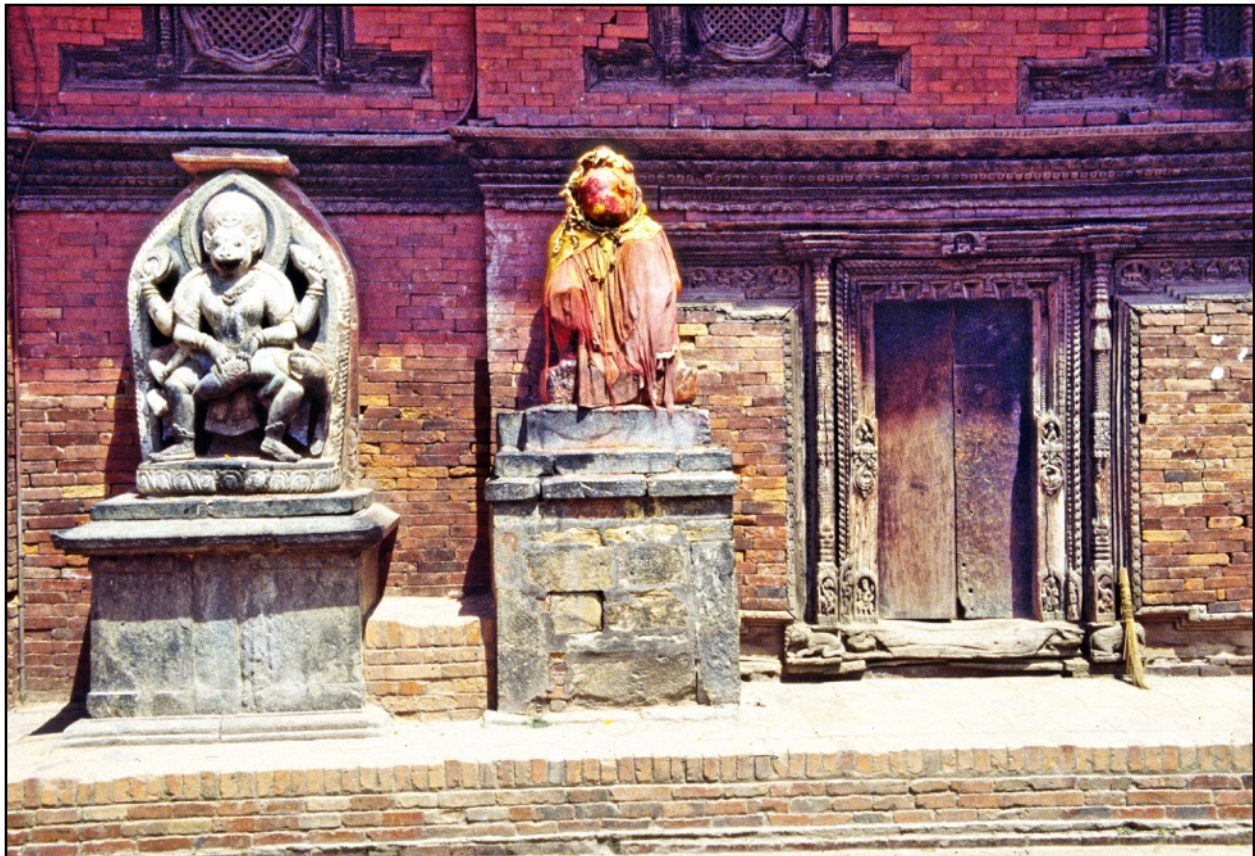
Although it was my first Patan picture in 2013, I did visit in 1998 and took a similar photo (on slide film) from a little to the right and without the vantage.





When I had paid the required fee, I walked a few steps down the main street, the "Royal Way", and was accosted repeatedly by "guides". I have no doubt they would have provided a decent tour but I was intent, as usual, on taking pictures.

Immediately on the right, past where the gray car and the two ladies with baskets would have been, outside Sundari Chowk, we're greeted by a cloaked Hanuman and by the stone Vishnu, in his Narsingha incarnation, taking apart an unfortunate demon.



Just beyond, also on the right, are the great stone lion guardians of the palace entrance.





Entering the palace, we come first to the square called Mul Chowk, the oldest of the palace squares. In the center is the small gilded Bidya Temple with its refined kirtimukha sculpture.



Nearby is a highly carved wood garuda design above a doorway.





A different doorway with a similar design,  
which shows the relationship between door  
frame and the decorative elements above it.



Opposite the palace  
entryway, is the  
Teleju Bell.





Exiting and turning right, we continue on the Royal Way. Just past and behind the bell, also on our left, is the brick-and-plaster shikhara-style Narasimha Vishnu temple.



The two small pagoda-style temples close by are also dedicated to Vishnu.





A common practice of Newari design is to inlay wood, stone, or ceramic carvings into brick walls. The curved central section shows Krishna playing the mridangam.



In front of a temple nearby is this delicate statue of a kneeling god.





On their own private platform stand the pagoda-style Narayan and (right) Jagannarayan Temples. The Jagannarayan Temple is the oldest temple in Patan Durbar Square and is dedicated to Vishnu as Narayana, the one who pervades all.



The Royal Way comes to an end with the Vishwanath Shiva Temple with its elephants and mahouts guarding the temple's entrance (just over the head of the lady in white sari) and the Bhimsen Temple, a corner of which shows at the far right.





One constant feature of the Vishwanath Temple is the line of tourists waiting to take a photo or to be taken in a photo in some position relative to one of the elephants or one of the mahouts. This is a quiet moment that I had waited patiently for.



Right behind the photographer, across from the Vishwanath Temple, is the sunken Manga Hiti, one of many Patan water conduits. The spouts are carved in the shape of the mythical makara - part crocodile, part elephant.





On the cross street at the north end of the Royal Way, just past the Vishwanath elephants, you can see the rooftop *Cafe du Temple* and handicrafts shops.

That's the three-tiered Bhimsen Temple on the left.



I arrived at the intersection with more than an hour's worth of photograph files on my memory card - temples, deities, woodwork, waterworks, people, guardians of the gate. Having been here before, many years ago, was no help. My map was no help - it merely told me that forward, right, or left would get me somewhere. The "guides", where were they now that I needed one? Right and left had many shops. I decided to go forward and visit the lesser frequented streets around the Durbar area. It also had the advantage of being downhill.



At first it looked like any alley in any old city. Fewer vehicles than in Katmandu, more leisurely, less jostling. Pedestrians and bike riders kept to their side of the street.

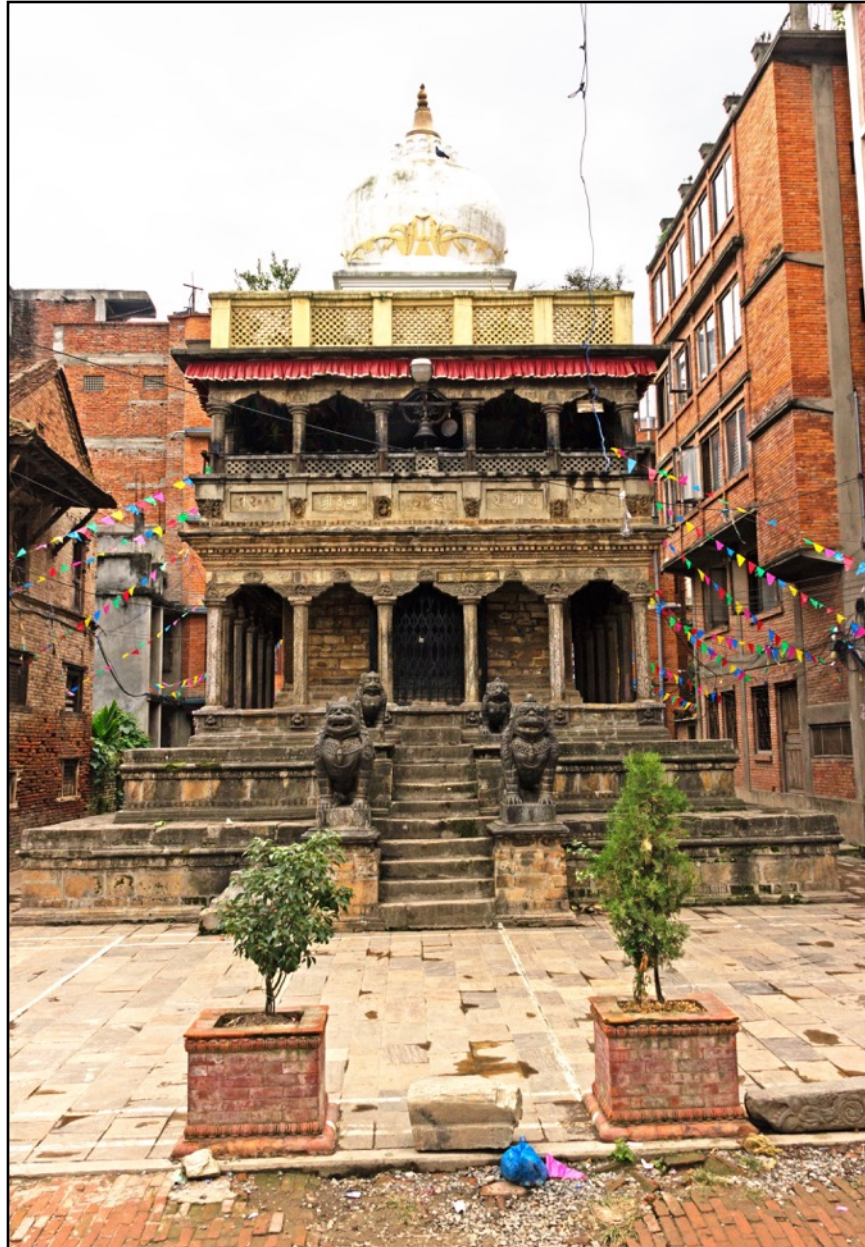
In a block or so I was alone in a residential area occasionally interrupted by a temple that looked like it once could have been in the extended royal family.



I continued to consult the map, stopping on the side of the road out of habit, although the traffic was minimal. Occasionally I would come upon a gem - here we see the guardians of and steps to the Radha Krishna Temple on Swotha Square.



Perhaps some day I'll identify  
this lovely domed temple with a  
roof garden and guardian lions  
north of the Radha Krishna  
Temple on Swotha Road.





I now had a direction. On the map I could see a temple compound further down the road. There are a number of temples in this enclosure, with the major ones devoted to Bagalamukhi and Shiva. Bagalamukhi is a counterpart (although not a consort) of Lord Shiva in his role as destroyer of ignorance. She clubs delusion out of her devotees, enhancing the opportunity for their awakening.

On Thursdays, according to the guide book, it's crowded here, with her petitioners, but it wasn't Thursday, and it was easy to stroll around the large area and to watch the priest do a puja.



The 5-tier pagoda-style  
late-14th Century  
Kumbheshwor Shiva temple  
with his trident symbol  
fortuitously placed.





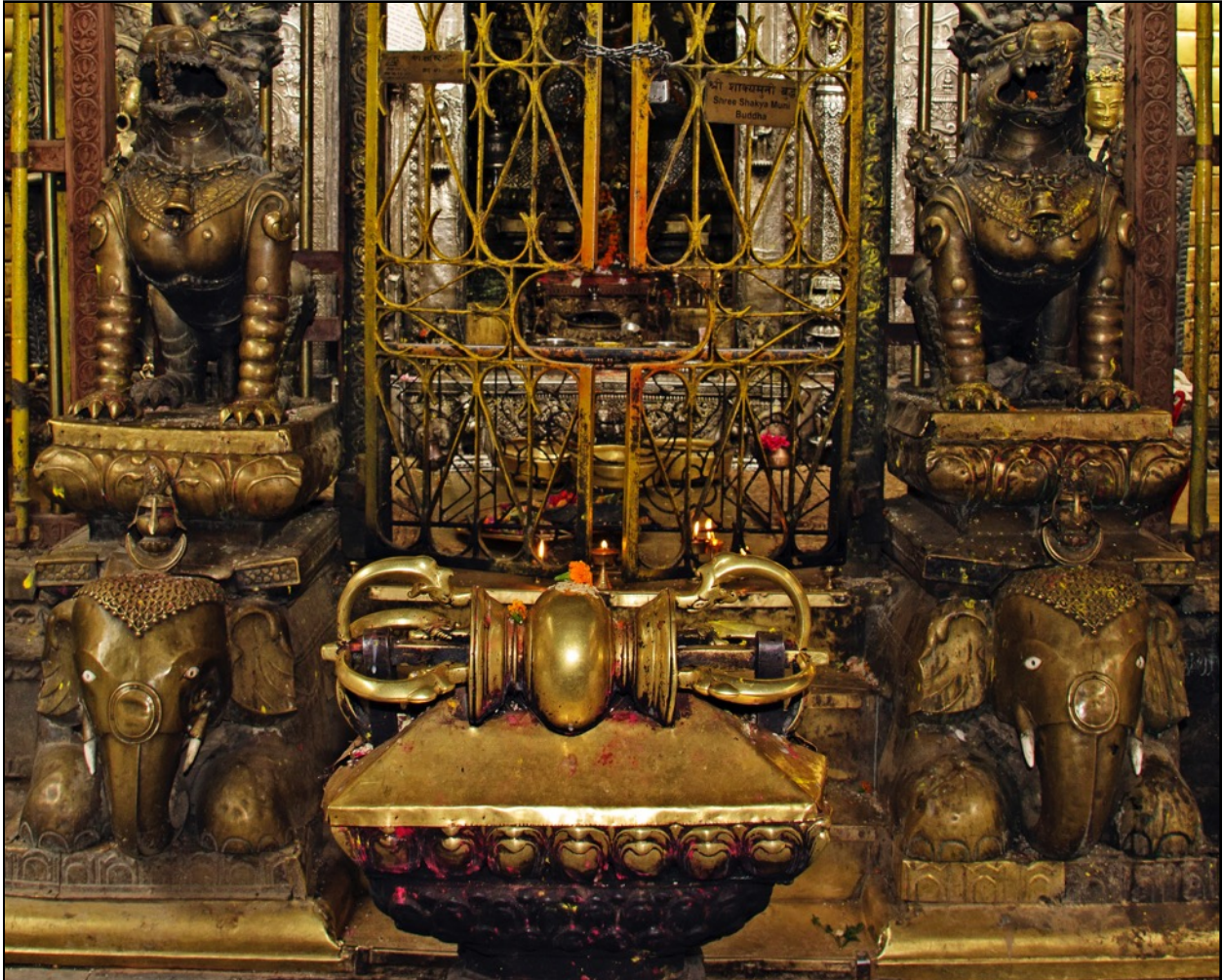
I was able to get information from some of the tourists here and I headed back to Durbar Square via a different route, uphill, on a road broken by construction. I was looking for the famous Golden Temple and I could see nothing in front of me that looked anything like famous. I asked several merchants and one pointed ahead to a landmark.

I walked briskly uphill for several minutes until I heard rushing behind me. It was the merchant, who took me by the arm and guided me back the way I had just come, until I was in front of the Golden Temple.



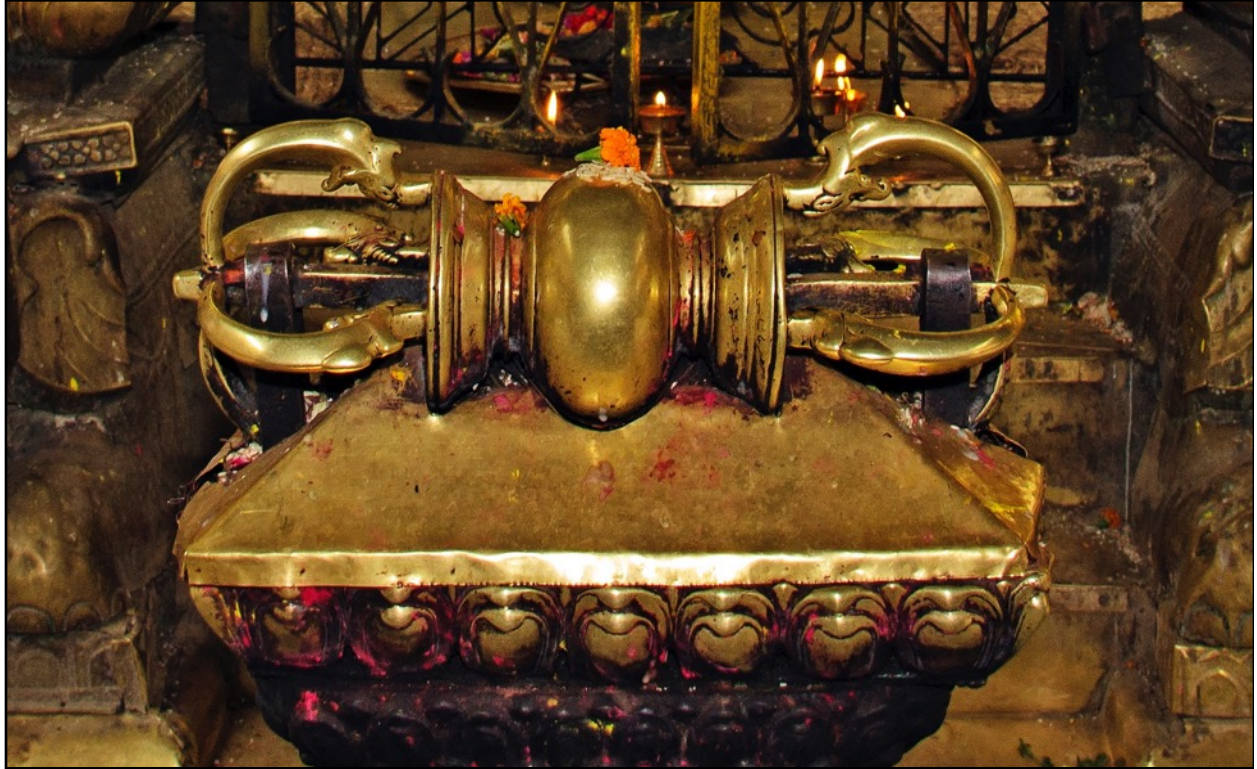
It doesn't look missable now but then I may have been a little tired.

It's not all gold inside but it's shiny and impressive.





A closer look at the vajra.



The sanctuary has many statues of mythical and fierce creatures.



I wandered around west of Durbar Square for a while, getting a feel for the city outside the royal zone, then walked back, chose a temple - Vishwanath - sat on the quiet side away from the elephants, took out my iPad and read for a bit, took some photos, exchanged a few words with a few people, looked at the woodwork, did what I usually do in Katmandu when I'm done being a tourist.

When I left Patan the thing I most wanted to do was to come back again - some day - stay longer, see more.



# Katmandu Valley Temples II

## Bhaktapur Durbar Square



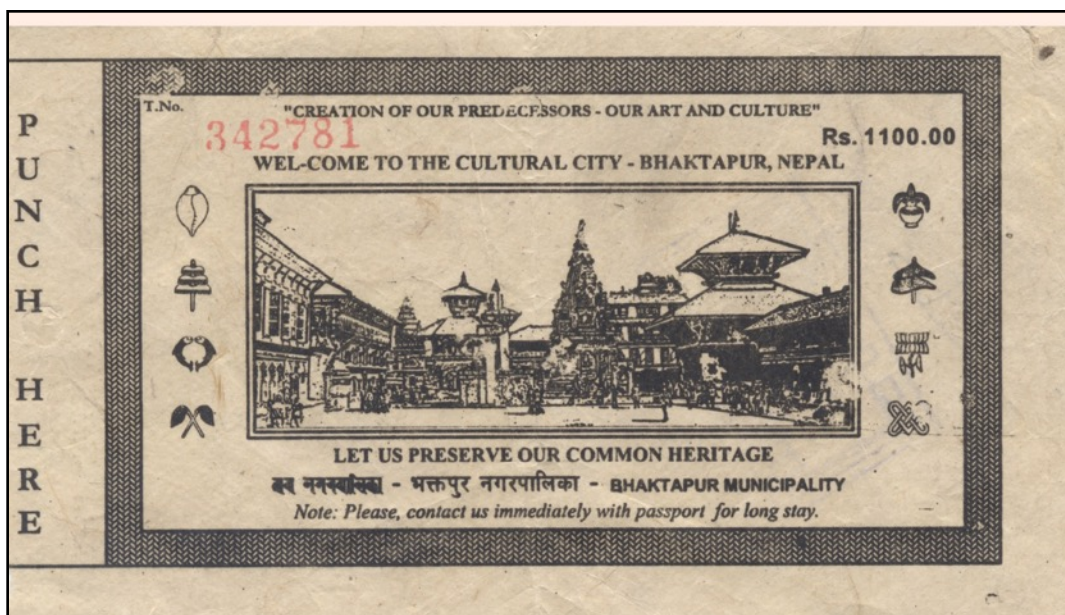
Patan Durbar Square (page 1)

Changu Narayan (page 52)

In Bhaktapur it's often hard to distinguish a temple from a mansion or a shop or a hotel, or any old wood building - the ancient city occupies much of the modern city.

I hired a taxi for the day to take me to Bhaktapur, which is east of Katmandu, and to Changu Narayan which is a few miles further on to the north. The ride took about 30 minutes, not including the time we spent at the pond, just before we got to the entrance, where I took photos of the mountains in the distance.

The entry fee for Bhaktapur was similar to the other Durbar Squares, 1100 NPR (Nepalese rupees), roughly \$11. There is a difference, however. Here you're gaining access to the city rather than just the royal area. I wondered at the time, although I didn't ask anyone, what do you do if you're staying at a hotel in the city center. I'll have to check into a hotel next time I'm here, and find out.





The heart of Bhaktapur Durbar Square is the 55 Window Palace along with the temples and other artifacts facing it. Entry to the palace is through the Golden Gate (Soon Dhoka), a masterpiece of Newari architecture, built in 1753.



The Soon Dhoka frieze (top) and finial (bottom):





The 55 Window Palace behind the Teleju bell (top), A Palace window (bottom).





The Soon Dhoka entry to the Palace is straight ahead with the elephant entry to Vatsala Devi Temple on the right. The small bell is known as the "Barking Dog" Bell because of what happens each morning when it's rung. Past the bell and the elephants is the much larger post for the Teleju bell.





The elephant guardian to the entry of the Vatsala Devi Temple:



The Vatasala Devi Temple  
seen through the enclosure  
of the Teleju bell.





The Shikhara-style sandstone Vatsala Devi Temple was constructed around 1700. Vatsala Devi is the fierce form of the goddess Durga. In this form she is often seen in relation to Bhairav, the fierce form of Shiva.



A closer view of the upper decoration.





On the opposite side of the square from the Palace and a little to the west is the Shikhara-style terra cotta Shiva Kedarnath Temple. On the next page is the upper part of the Shiva Kedarnath Temple (top) and the lower part next to a small pagoda-style Krishna temple (bottom).

In this 1998 photo you can see the Cafe de Temple Town to the right.







In Durbar Square, a little to the east of the Palace, is the sturdy stone 17th Century Siddhi Laxmi Temple. The Vatsala Devi Temple is behind it to the left with the edge of the Palace to the right. The stone lions with steps in between are all that's left of a temple destroyed in the 1934 earthquake.



The pagoda-style Chayasilin Mandap Temple in front of and the Siddhi Laxmi Temple to the side of the Palace with the lone stone lions.





Inside the main gate of Bhaktapur's Durbar Square. The lions on the right (only one is visible in the photograph) guard the entrance to the old Royal Palace which is now part of the museum.



Between the lions are two magnificent sculptures. This, the one on the right, shows Narasimha, the upholder of dharma, eviscerating a naughty siddha.

The red powder is touched or tossed on to the sculpture by devotees asking for his blessing or wanting to avoid his displeasure.







The main entrance. Photos taken in 1998 (top) and 2013 (bottom).



There's more than one square in Bhaktapur. I walk back through Durbar heading southeast through the town, passing guest houses, cafes, restaurants, art and handicrafts galleries, wood, bronze, paper, and textile workshops, temples, at least one pool and snooker bar, banks, minimarts, sweet shops, tea and spice shops, until I enter into Taumadhi Square and its 5-tier wood and brick pagoda-style temple.





Nyatopola temple (top) was built in the 16th Century and is dedicated to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Next door is the slightly older Bhairavnath Temple, dedicated to Shiva the fierce (bottom).





I continue south and downhill to the rest of Taumadhi Square and through it to Potter's Square, passing commercial buildings along the way that look like any one could be a temple.





I pass through markets where, in one case, merchants, wearing the traditional dhaka topi hat, were selling chickens out of the back of a truck.



Bhaktapur is a total adventure. I never knew where I was but I was always happy to be there. Even photography came second to exploration. Turning east and then north, I stopped at the Mandala Guest House to enjoy a refreshing minute and eventually came to Dattatray Square and took a photo of the Woodcarving Museum's window.





It would be easy to understate the ubiquity and impact of the intricately carved wood doors and windows, stone and bronze guardians and shrines, finials, temples and old-buildings-that-could-be-temples in Bhaktapur. Only if you're here can you believe it - and then barely in a quarter-day's exposure.

There's a relationship that's built with the beings of great artists and craftsmen. The people and the creations live together.



# Katmandu Valley Temples II

## Changu Narayan



**Patan Durbar Square (page 1)**

**Bhaktapur Durbar Square (page 29)**



Changu Narayan is a temple compound less than a half hour drive north of Bhaktapur followed by a stiff walk uphill through the town. It's recognized as the oldest temple in Nepal, believed to have been built in the 4th Century A. D., although it has undergone restoration, most notably in 1702.

Changu Narayan is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. There are many stone sculptures in the compound - of Vishnu, Lakshmi, Garuda, and Vishnu's incarnations - dating from the 5th to the 16th Century. The sculptures include the 9th Century family portrait in stone of Vishnu with Lakshmi and Garuda.



Garuda faces the west door of the temple. The stone statue is reputed to be from the 5th Century.



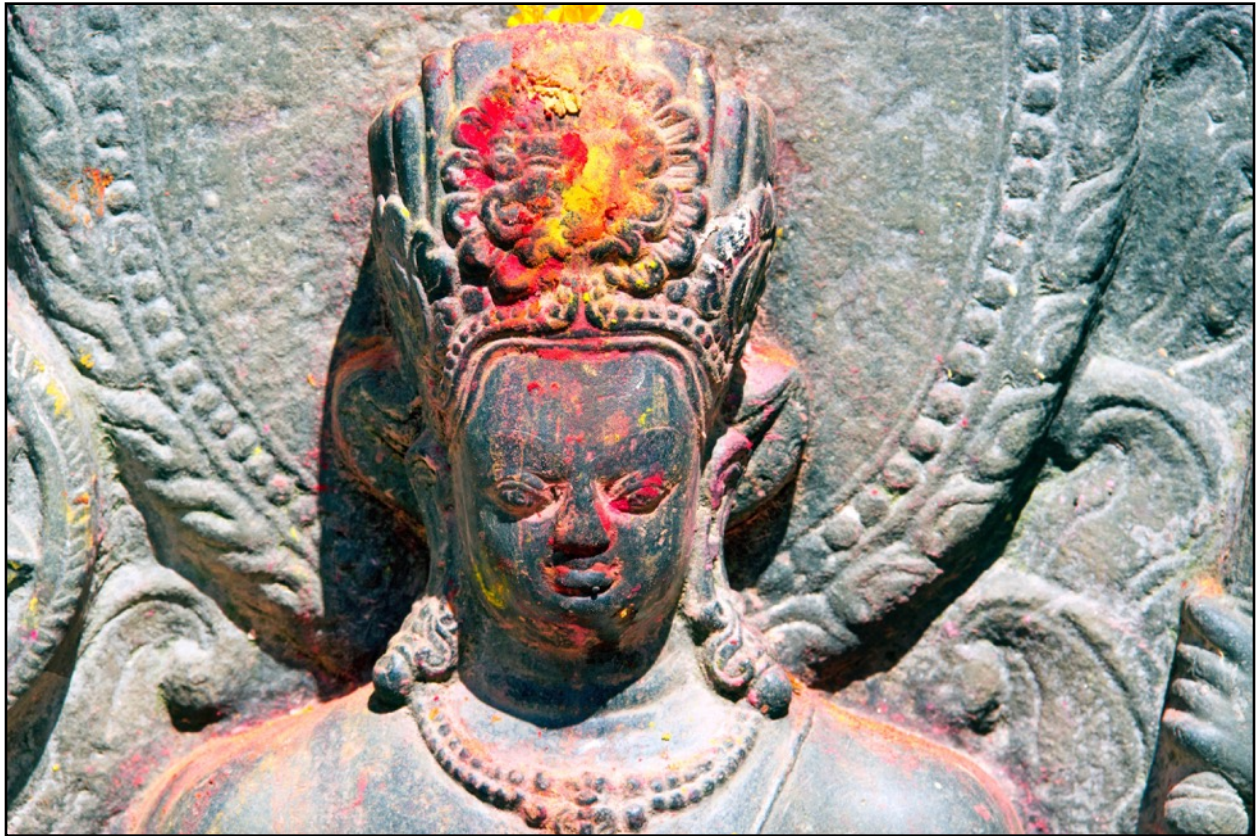


The 7th Century Garuda Narayan, Vishnu riding in a cup-throne formed by the wings of Garuda, his vahana (vehicle). Two of Vishnu's characteristic symbols are prominent, the chakra wheel in his right raised hand and the club in the left. A picture of this statue is on the Nepal 10 rupee paper currency.





The yellow and red powders, rice, and flowers are tossed by devotees during and after puja.





Over the door of a small temple all the way to the right as you enter the compound is a grisly but striking Kirtimukha, a decorative element often used to guard the entryway.



The compound is small but there is so much to see that it's worth at least a full day to look, sit back and absorb, and look again.

The highly-decorated bronze doors of the main temple:





The wood struts on the double-roofed Changu Narayan Temple are intended to brace the roof and to display the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. I'm reminded of Krishna's comment in the Bhagavad Gita, that Vishnu incarnates "time after time" to restore balance to his creation when it most needs it, to support those who recognize who he is and to redirect the attention of those who don't. That is, of course, a paraphrase.



I haven't seen any reference to when the struts were created or installed (or who might have created them) or if there is regularly or irregularly scheduled maintenance or restoration. The temple has been damaged by fire a number of times, so it's possible that the struts come from different eras.





On the walk downhill to the carpark, I notice how peaceful the town is. There are merchants catering to the tourists but there aren't many tourists and the merchants are laid back anyway. There is activity, however, such as this girl and the woman in the background winnowing corn. It has been a very fulfilling day.

