

Katmandu, Journal entry #3, November 27, 2015

Kathmandu is a wonderful amalgam of the sacred of spirit and the sacred of form. Mixed-use is a way of life so natural that it's only we from outside who notice.

The temple is active as a temple at night. Now it's a storefront:



That's not a garland for the God hanging on the fence (although, why not?):



Sewing on the stoop of Shiva's temple under the watchful eye of Nandi the bull:



A sanctuary parking lot:



There are temples and sanctuaries everywhere. It would make no sense to leave the ground unused. Or, alternatively, if you crave a little quiet in the midst of the Katmandu chaos, you might say: "Is nothing sacred!?"

Katmandu, Journal entry #4, November 29, 2015



Walking the streets of the Thamel section of Katmandu, the ancient and spiritual core of the city, I keep thinking that wonderful line from Tennyson, "Tho' much is taken, much abides...". What abides firstly and most prominently is the spirit of place, that Indefinable but integral factor out of which all else flows. Much of the fabric abides as well, but there are some rents.



Compare the view above taken two years ago with the photo below taken today from a similar point. Garuda in all his devotional glory is still here but now the atmosphere of the sanctuary is broken: the magnificent Kasthanmandap temple has become transparent.



It's the same in Bhaktapur, another of the royal cities in the Katmandu valley. Here's a photo taken two years ago with the majestic Vatsala Durga Temple on the left:



This is the scene now. You can see the surviving plinth:



Toss the Goldberg Variations. File down Everest. Wholeness in us finds other examples in the world. The guardian stone elephant at the entry to the Vatsala temple survives intact (first photo in Journal entry #4). The temple I took the photo of Garuda from is in the same condition as the Kasthamandap. But at the top of its base, visible and accessible now - whereas before the quakes it was confined to the innards of the temple - is this magnificent sculpture.



These abide. As do I, as those of you who are wondering if I'm really here can now see.



Katmandu, Journal entry #5, December 4, 2015

I've settled into a holding pattern. Every two days or so I'll grab a taxi and visit a main site in the Katmandu valley. The other days I'll walk long distances in the Thamel area. Today I found my frequent charioteer, Bishnu, and quickly negotiated the price of a short trip to see the sleeping Vishnu at Budhanilkantha.



Vishnu is lying prone, in a yoga position, in a pond, on the coils of the King of snakes, Shesha, cradled lovingly as he dreams creation.



I remember being here in 1998 having no clue what I was looking at - it was packed, polluted, overcast, and I was so far away. Today there were a few pujas, one wedding, a lot of schmoozers, and nary another Westerner; it was as though I had the place to myself.



The feeling here is spacey and pacific as one would expect. It's a place of beginnings, the beginning of the dream, marriage as the beginning of a new life.

Contrast this with the Vishnu temple at Muktinath (see photoportals.com/nepal 2013) which has the character of the mountains, angular and dynamic, where Vishnu seems to be churning out avatars by the bushel to restore dharma to a wayward and wanton creation.

I can assure you, on this day, I'm not the only one considering this dual role of Lord Vishnu.



Katmandu, Journal entry #6, December 7, 2015

Remember the mountain, set in my hotel room window at Darjeeling.



Crossing the border and moving into a valley, there was also the replacement of the Dekeling Hotel view with the Holy Himalaya Hotel view:



Nevertheless, and with the mountain in mind, Darjeeling is still an island, Katmandu is a metropolis - with endless chaos, endless noise, endless pollution (even with gas supplies short), and endless interest.

My best photo op? At the beginning of a six hour trek through the hills and towns on the southwest rim of the Katmandu valley, I was following my guide out of a temple compound in Kirtipur, while this father was bringing his son in. He held the boy up for his big moment - and mine, as well.



It's not possible to summarize the tourist's experience of Katmandu in a single picture but, if I put myself in a corner, this view of Indra Chowk with the Akash Bhairav Temple would come close.



Thank you for joining me on this journey. A slightly reworked copy of this journal will be available in the new gallery, *nepal 2015*, on photoportals.com - whenever it gets posted.

As they say here, Namaste.

Paul