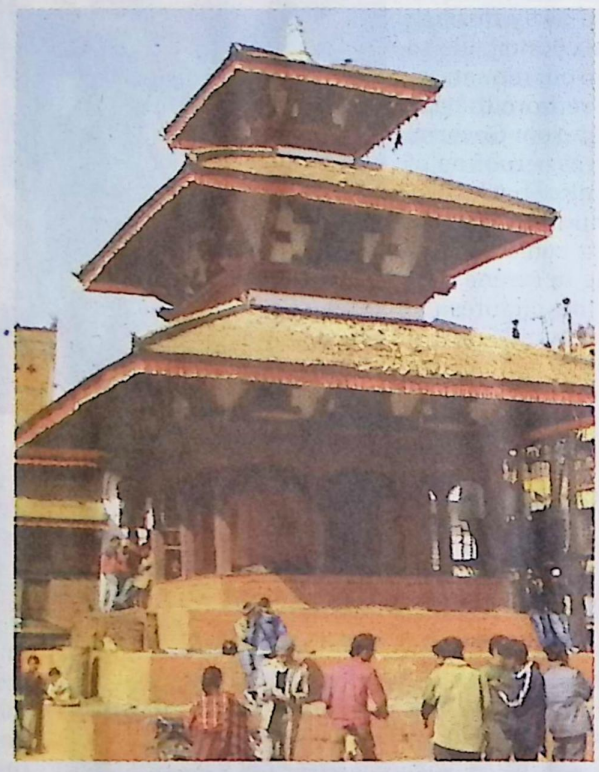
The 'old' city is noted for its many Hindu and Buddhist temples and palaces, mostly dating to the 17th century. Among the many Buddhist stupas, Swayambhunath and Boudhanath temples stand prominently and could be hardly missed. Located in a lovely little hill rock, Swayambhunath Stupa is one of the most fascinating architectural jewels of the world. This great Stupa, a holy memorial site represents typical Buddhist architecture. Its main feature, the white dome is identified with a spotless pure jewel of Nirvana and a golden spire in conical shape surmounted on the dome. Underneath this towering structure is a pair of all seeing eyes of Buddha painted on all four sides of the Stupa.Boudhanath Stupa is one of the imposing of the Buddhist monuments in the region. The Stupa, a world heritage site stands on the massive three level platforms surrounded by colourful private family houses.



Yet another striking landmark of Kathmandu is the Pashupatinath Temple, a world heritage site. The temple dating back 1500 years, regarded as the most sacred Hindu temple in the world is located on the eastern fringe of Kathmandu. Thousands visit the temple daily to receive blessings from Lord Shiva. There is a large market in the streets surrounding the temple. Vendors sell souvenirs including toys, clothes and fruits. Food and orange marigolds are sold as religious offerings. The huge temple is of pagoda architecture and the two level roofs are of copper with gold covering. The temple is crowded with worshippers of all ages. Cows regarded as holy munch lazily on the roads and the entire complex is a haven for beggars and monkeys.

Kathmandu offers restaurants of different cuisine. Of many, the Wunjala Moskva, the garden restaurant, deserves to be mentioned. Set in the charming ancient atmosphere of temple architecture, we were entertained to traditional Newar dances particularly Peacock dance, Elephant dance and the Stick dance as we relished delicious traditional Newar cuisine. The Newars (original inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley) have a very rich history of culinary art.

As part of our retreat, we visited few villages in the suburb -- an hour's drive through the dry rugged mountainous terrain. The serpentine narrow bumpy roads are full of potholes. The purpose was to gain information on the UNICEF supported community based health and nutrition interventions. At the villages, we were greeted the traditional Nepali way with tilok and marigold garland. During our sojourn, we were appraised of the various services delivered to the mothers and children by the health volunteers. The villagers informed us that the traditional Nepali cap is popularly known as 'Dhakai topi'. Bangladeshi songs and music are very popular and we were further told that the Nepalese enjoy our television programmes particularly the drama serials.

Kathmandu is situated in the Kathmandu Valley along with two other ancient cities, namely Bhaktapur and Lalitpur (Patan). The main square of the ruined Bhaktapur city contains innumerable temples and other marvelous architectural showpieces .The narrow streets are lined with antique shops rich in wood carvings and stoneware.

Hindu priest attired in colourful robes, sporting locked hairdo with red tilak on the forehead and wooden beads frequent almost every corner chanting religious rhymes and giving sermons to those seeking blessings.

During our sojourn, we meandered to Patan (Lalitpur), considered to be the oldest and most beautiful among the three royal cities in the Kathmandu Valley. It is best known for its finest tradition of arts and crafts and its rich cultural heritage. Patan is separated from Kathmandu by the Bagmati River. The city excels in traditional handicrafts and small scale cottage industries.

The most important monument of the city is the Patan Durbar Square that outstands with its most magnificent architectural splendour and unique artistic beauty. The Hindu temples and Buddhist Vihars adorn the city. The inbuilt cultural heritage like the Royal palace, with intricately carved doors and windows and beautiful courtyards enhance the beauty of the city. Priceless art pieces in stone, metal, terracotta, ivory and other objects are littered in almost every street. All this artistic excellence of the craftsmen makes the entire city look like an open art gallery.

Away from the routine hubbub, it is worth visiting an open museum so close to our borders.