

## Hidden Treasures of Nepal

Dr. Sudha Subramaniam

[sdhsubramaniam21@gmail.com](mailto:sdhsubramaniam21@gmail.com)

### Abstract

If ever there is a place on earth that is nestled in the foothills of majesty, that breathes history and ancient truths, that holds the wealth of unique temples, that unlocks insight into hidden treasures for the seeking mind, it is Nepal. The birthplace of Goddess Sita in 7600 BC, the birthplace of the Buddha around 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE, the sacrosanct place adorned by the majestic mountain ranges of the Himalayas, Nepal is India's geographical neighbour, yet very much a part of ancient India. The young monks who preach Buddhism and undertake the monastic walks, the living goddess of Nepal who is chosen by the Gods and the aura of devotional diversity that marks the uniqueness of Nepal beckon the traveller to unravel the history and to set out in quest of the intangible wealth that is ensconced in every shrine, every cultural practice and ancient lore. To travel to Dhanushwadi in Janakpur and behold a part of Lord Shiva's mighty Gandiva bow that Prince Rama broke at the Swayamvara of Princess Sita reveals the truth of the Ramayana.

### Keywords

History, unique temples, Goddess Sita, the Buddha, living Goddess of Nepal

### Introduction

Virgin land that beckons with a pristine beauty! Snow-capped mountains fringing the Terai regions, unfolding carpets of green that encase plants of rarity; hills that reach up to the majestic blue sky and blue skies that bow to uncharted horizons; the hidden treasures of Nepal beckons the human mind to reach out and grasp the reality of the great epic the Ramayana, the Kingdom of Janakpur ruled by King Janaka, the temple on the banks of the white stone river where Lord Rama and Goddess Sita's glances met for the first time, Dhanushwadi where you can find parts of the huge Gandiva bow of Lord Shiva that Prince Rama strung and broke to wed Princess Sita, the Swayamvara Hall where their wedding took place and so much more! The Ramayana took place around 7600 BC and to date, Janakpur echoes the story of Princess Sita, daughter of King Janaka. Thousands of years later, around

the 3<sup>rd</sup> BCE, Buddha, Prince of Kapilavastu was born to Queen Mahamaya at Lumbini in Nepal. The Buddha temple at Lumbini, the 6.5 meters high pillar in honour of Lord Buddha erected at Lumbini by King Ashoka in 245 BCE radiate with the glow of the five-fold precepts of Buddhism. Traveling the length and breadth of Nepal opens the door to a true visualization of the Ramayana, of Buddha, and of the beautiful abodes of the Gods. The majesty of Mount Everest, the ethereal sunrises reflecting on the white snow-clad mountains and the spellbindingly beautiful temples and other tourist places hold the mind in eternal captivity to seek the perpetual glory of history's hidden treasures. The Pashupatinath temple, the Swayambhunath Temple, the Budhanilkantha temple where the deity floats in water, the Dakshinkali temple, the Jagannathkrishna temple, Taleju temple in the Darbar square with an overlooking hotel set inside an ancient palace area, the Boudhanath Stupa in a gargantuan spherical shape and then, of course, the hidden living Goddess of Nepal!

### **The temple of Devi Girija in Janakpur**

A beautiful secluded temple surrounded by breathtakingly beautiful flora and fauna on the banks of the Gandaki river at Janakpur in Nepal bespeaks of divine romance. Janakpur was the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Mithila, bounded on the north by the Himalayas, on the south by the Ganges, on the east by the Kosi river and on the west by the Gandaki River. The riverbank is full of beautiful white stones right up to the white beach and brilliant hued waters. Before the swayamvara, Princess Sita, accompanied by her companions had come to the temple of the Goddess to offer prayers. Princes Rama and Lakshmana along with Sage Vishwamitra were just climbing up to the temple as Princess Sita and her companions, who had just completed their prayers, emerged out of the temple. Rama and Lakshmana were dressed in simple attire. They had left the Kingdom of Ayodhya along with Sage Vishwamitra to slay the demons disturbing the penance of the sages. Having completed their task, Sage Vishwamitra brought them to Janakpur. Ram's gaze met Sita's and held for moments of infinite time. He felt a pull at his heart's strings, she felt a pull on hers. Sita beheld Rama with a countenance so noble and look as serene as the waters of the river. The white stones of the riverbank seemed to glow with pristine beauty. She could not help but think, "Who is he, with skin the colour of the blue lotus? What is his name?" He too could not help but think, "This must be Princess Sita, bedecked for the swayamvara." She returned to the Palace, he climbed up to the temple. The tryst with destiny had been made.

## Dhanushwadi

Dhanushwadi lies twelve miles northeast of Janakpur Dham. This is the place where a piece of the mighty Gandiva, Lord Shiva's bow, fell. A huge cobra with a jewel on its forehead comes to guard the piece, on every Full Moon day. When Sita became a maiden, King Janaka decided to hold a grand swayamvara. All the Princes were invited. He decided to give Sita's hand in marriage to anyone who was able to lift and string the mighty bow of Lord Siva. Fifty thousand men were required to lift the bow and place it in the parade ground. On the auspicious day of the swayamvara, the mightiest of mighty Kings could not even budge the bow. Prince Rama then took his turn. He not only lifted the bow and strung it, but it broke with a loud twang underneath his strength. It broke into three parts. One part fell at Dhanushwadi.



**Image 1: Dhanushwadi**

## Birthplace of the Buddha at Lumbini

Prince Siddhartha, son of King Suddhodana and Queen Mahamaya of Kapilavastu renounced life at a young age. He went on to become Buddha, the enlightened one. Buddha was born to Queen Mahamaya underneath a Sal tree in the Lumbini grove in southern Nepal, which lies a few kilometers to the east of Kapilavastu. Sanskrit scriptures which date to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE and Pali scriptures mention Lumbini as the birthplace of the Buddha. Archaeological surveys have revealed the ancient Fort and Palace at Kapilavastu. The temple of the Goddess of Time surrounded by elephants has continued worship to this day. The Ashoka Pillar in Lumbini is one of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century stone pillars built under the reign of King Ashoka. King Ashoka embraced Buddhism after the battle of Kalinga when he was filled

with remorse at the loss of valuable lives and the unnecessary bloodshed. Lumbini and Kapilavastu are popular pilgrimage sites. It was designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997. In Nepal, many young boys and girls embrace Buddhism and renounce life to become monks. They join the Buddhist Sangha, with the chant, '*Buddham Sharanam Gachchami, Dhammam Sharanam Gachchami, Sangham Sharanam Gachchami.*'

### **Temples of Nepal**

The Pashupatinath Temple with the Swayambhu four-faced Shivling is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is one of the energy points of the world and was not affected even by an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on the Richter scale. We can buy rare ekmukhi rudrakshas at Pashupathinath.

### **Budhanilkantha Temple**

Carved out of a single blue-black stone, the ornately carved statue of Lord Vishnu lies in a pool of water. Legend says that the deity in the water was found by a farmer while cultivating his land. Blood began to flow and excavation revealed the deity. Thousands of pilgrims visit Nepal to attend the Haribondhini Ekadashi Mela which takes place on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the Hindu month of Kartik, to celebrate the awakening of the Lord.



**Image 2: Budhanilkantha**

### **Jagannath Krishna Temple**

Located in the Durbar Square area, it was built in 1563. Built on a three-tiered platform, the two-storeyed temple has beautiful erotic carvings of historical and religious importance on

the roof and the walls. The temple and the surrounding areas exude a unique historical feel. Rare artifacts, unique crafts, and products of Nepal can be purchased in the Darbar area. One wing of the old Darbar has been made into a hotel. The antiquity of the construction and the center square facing ornate windows are alluring.

### **Taleju Temple**

Located in the Durbar square of Kathmandu, the magnificent Taleju temple is dedicated to the clan Goddess of Malla Kings, Devi Taleju Bhawani. As per popular legend, the Devi herself had directed that the temple should be constructed in the shape of a Yantra.

### **The Boudhanath Stupa**

With its gargantuan spherical shape, the majestic Boudhanath Stupa dominates the skyline. Located in the northeastern outskirts of Kathmandu, this is the largest stupa in Nepal. It has a massive mandala. The 'kora' (religious circumnavigation of the colossal dome) and prostrating in front of the stupa bestows good karma and permanently closes the gates of hell. Thousands of pilgrims visit the Boudhanath Stupa.

### **The Living Goddess**

The tradition of the Living Goddess dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Kumari, the Living Goddess of Nepal, is selected from amongst girl children of the age of three years who portray the features and characteristics of the Goddess. The Kumari is believed to be an incarnation of Devi Taleju. The Royal Kumari of Kathmandu resides in Kumari Ghar, a palace in the centre of the city, and is worshipped as the Goddess till she attains puberty. The living Goddess lives a disciplined life and is worshipped during festivals.

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