

Trip to the Terai

Description

This week we flew into Janakpur, near the India border, so that we could visit the four schools in Rautahat where Latter-day Saint Charities-Nepal and CHOICE Humanitarian donated desks and benches. We were there to do the official “handover” ceremony although the furniture had been distributed a couple of months earlier. Visiting the sites is part of the “Monitoring and Evaluation” aspect of each project. We found the furniture to be very well built and being well used!

Upon arrival in Janakpur we were met by our hired driver and he took us to see two temples in Janakpur. The first, Ram Mandir, was built in 1882 and is the oldest Hindu temple in Janakpur.



Ram Mandir



Cotton thread wrapped around the sacred banyan tree. It represents the fragile nature of life, love, trust, faith – and all things that go on to make up a relationship. This practice and other

offerings are to bring blessings to the women who perform this ritual.

We then drove a short distance through town to the Janaki Mandir which is believed to be built on the spot where King Janak found the infant Sita in the furrow of a plowed field. (Sita became the wife of Rama who is the avatar of the god Vishnu.) This amazing structure was built in 1912 and is an important pilgrimage site for Hindus in Nepal and India.

The first thing we did when we entered the plaza was take a couple of photos and then we were inundated with people wanting to have their picture taken with us. We haven't experienced this "rock star" scene here in Nepal and it reminded us of our time in India. Kiran, our associate from CHOICE, was rather shocked by the experience and became the primary photographer.



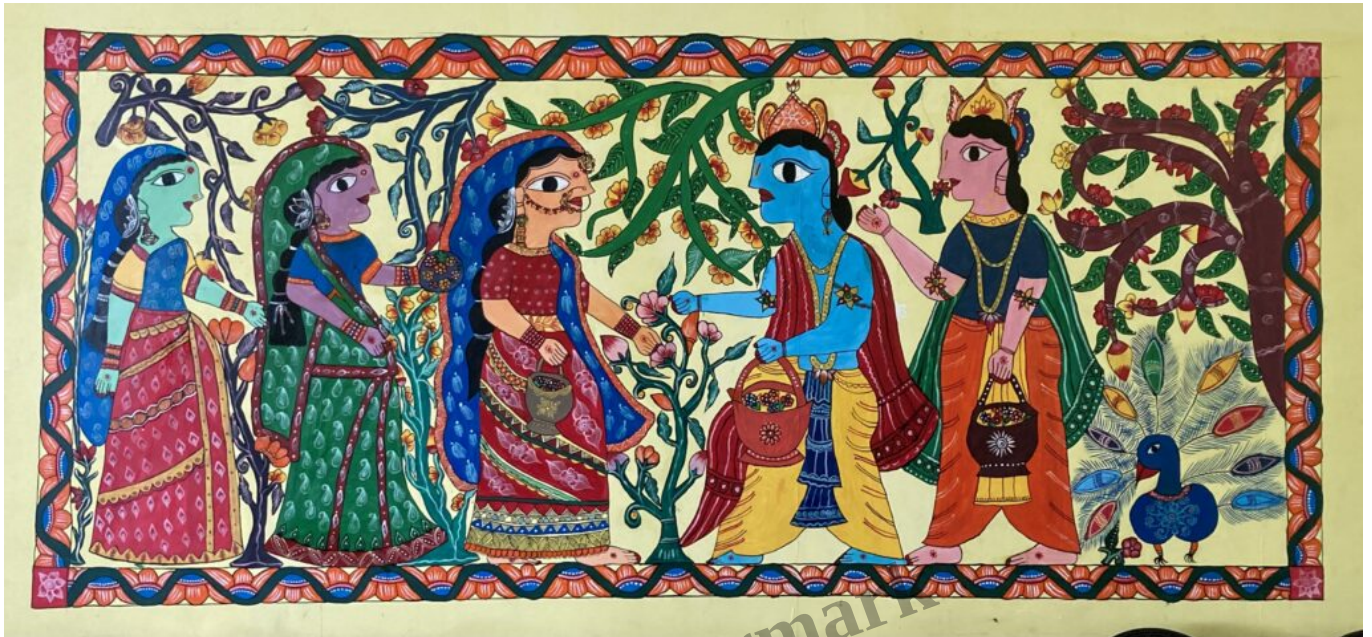
Janaki Mandir temple dedicated to Hindu goddess Sita



Kiran, Taunya and Rick

This region of Nepal is called the Terai. The plains stretch from the east to the west along the southern part of the country. It has a very different feel to it than in Kathmandu with the people and culture

showing the influence of their close neighbor, India. One of the traditions of the area is Mithila painting. It originated in the 7th century with women painting their homes with murals and designs. The tradition has been handed down from generation to generation and is a lovely folk art tradition.



Mithila artwork in the Janakpur airport

We stayed at a hotel in Bardibas, a city along the highway on the route to Rautahat. We were disappointed in the accommodations but it had A/C and was clean enough, no bed bugs and the bath towels still dried us even though they had holes. The food at the hotel was mediocre and we didn't try to eat in the villages where the schools were. We were prepared to some degree with a small jar of peanut butter, crackers, granola bars, fruit and some moong dal so we didn't starve.



Paawan Mithila Hotel

The following day we headed out early and drove almost two hours to the first school. We traveled through the villages and as we got closer we noticed probably a hundred kids walking to school. Upon

arrival we were swarmed with students wanting to see these strange foreigners. This particular school has around 1500 students and 19 teachers!! Some of the classrooms have no more room for desks and many students stand at the back. Hopefully they rotate so they don't have to stand all day. We were impressed with the students' desire to learn.





Students doing their morning exercises

Ceremonies are a big deal here in Nepal. They first introduce the guests and honor us with a garland or scarf and a tika. The mayor, deputy mayor and chief administrative officer attended the ceremony. The school principal spoke as did the mayor, Kiran, Rick and the CFA. It started pouring rain during his speech and he dismissed everyone to take shelter so the ceremony was cut short.



We went around to see some of the classrooms and the furniture and to see how they manage with the challenging number of students and not enough space, desks or teachers. We then met with the leaders and they expressed their appreciation to us and discussed the additional needs they have. One of these is that they have only six toilets for the whole student body. Three for the girls and three for the boys. That's just crazy. We have a new project to provide additional furniture to schools in this area and hopefully CHOICE will be able to put another project together to address the latrine needs at this school as well as one or two of the others we visited.



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We were honored at each school we visited. The students were all so well behaved and very curious about us. I think even some of the adults were intrigued by us, so much so that while applying a tika on Rick's forehead the man either got overly excited, was nervous or just thought the pale guy needed more color!



Tika gone terribly wrong

Rick looks annoyed in the picture but he just had food in his mouth. Note the powder on his hand and pants. I found it hard to take him seriously because I felt like laughing when I looked at him especially when sweat made the powder run down his cheeks and off the end of his nose. I realize I look pretty

amazing too!



Some of the girls in one of the classes
made us special garlands and presented
them to us

We have another new project in this region providing equipment and supplies to help meet basic healthcare needs. We visited two government health posts that are part of this project.



Entering the health post



Health post



Quiet observation of us from
under the banyan tree at the
health post

It was a long and tiring but good day. We returned to our less than amazing hotel and mediocre food with a greater appreciation for it after seeing the humble circumstances of the village people of the Terai.

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