

A DIVINE ASCENT: MAHANAVAMI AT TALEJU TEMPLE AND THE CELEBRATIONS OF BASANTAPUR

THE MOST AUSPICIOUS DAY

DATE: OCTOBER,2024

Dashain, the greatest festival of Nepal, is a time of family, feasts, and profound faith. And within this fifteen-day celebration, **Mahanavami** holds a special significance. It is the day we worship the divine feminine in her most powerful form—Goddess Durga—as the slayer of evil. For our family, the tradition is unwavering: a pilgrimage to the sacred **Taleju Bhawani Temple** in the heart of Kathmandu, followed by immersing ourselves in the vibrant energy of the **Basantapur Durbar Square**.

The Morning: The Sacred Pilgrimage to Taleju

The morning of Mahanavami dawns with a different kind of energy. The usual city noise is replaced by a reverent hum. Dressed in our finest traditional clothes, we joined the throngs of devotees snaking their way through the ancient alleys of the old city towards the towering temple of **Taleju**, the royal goddess of the Malla kings.

The air grows thick with the scent of incense and *dhoop*. The sound of temple bells and chanting grows louder as we approach. The line moves slowly, but there is no impatience, only a collective sense of anticipation. The temple, opened to the general public only on this day, stands as a majestic symbol of Newari architecture and devotion.

Finally, ascending the steep, narrow staircase to the main sanctum is a moment of pure spirituality. The glimpse of the magnificent, multi-tiered pagoda roof against the blue sky is breathtaking. Inside, the atmosphere is electric with devotion. We offered our prayers, received *tika* and *prasad* from the priests, and felt a deep connection to centuries of tradition. It is more than a ritual; it is a powerful, collective experience of seeking blessings from the divine mother for prosperity, protection, and strength.

The Midday: The Living Museum of Basantapur

Descending from the spiritual high of Taleju, we stepped directly into the living, breathing museum that is **Basantapur (Kathmandu Durbar Square)**. On Mahanavami, the square is not just a UNESCO World Heritage Site; it is a grand stage for celebration.

The square teems with life. Families, much like ours, are out in their vibrant best. The intricate woodwork of the Kumari Ghar (Living Goddess's residence) and the ancient palaces form a majestic backdrop to the festive chaos. The sounds here are a joyful cacophony—the chatter of families, the call of street vendors selling toys and balloons, and the fluttering of hundreds of pigeons taking flight.

We did what every family does: we strolled, we people-watched, we bought *malaha* (woven bamboo bows and arrows) for the children, and we simply soaked in the joyous atmosphere. The historical stones of the square, witnesses to centuries of Mahanavami celebrations, seem to come alive with the laughter and energy of the people.

The Tradition: Sacrifices and Symbolism

A defining sight on Mahanavami in Basantapur is the ritual sacrifices (*bali*) that take place in designated areas. While intense, it is an integral part of the day's tradition, symbolizing the victory of good over evil and the destruction of negativity within us. We witnessed the ceremony from a distance, acknowledging its deep cultural and religious significance as a part of the day's powerful narrative.

Conclusion: A Tapestry of Faith and Culture

As the afternoon sun began to warm the ancient bricks of Basantapur, we found a quiet spot to sit and reflect. The day felt complete.

Our Mahanavami journey is a perfect tapestry of the spiritual and the social, the ancient and the living. It is a day where deep, personal faith inside the hallowed temple grounds seamlessly blends with the joyful, communal celebration in the public square. It is a day that connects us not only to the gods but also to our community, our history, and our shared identity. We returned home with our spirits uplifted, our faith renewed, and our hearts full of the unique, unforgettable energy that only Mahanavami in the old city can provide.



Figure: Lonely Roads Of Kathmandu Valley During Dashain.



Figure: At Kathmandu Durbar Square.



Figure: Dashain Vibes.



Figure: Crescent Moon