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ENG 485

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An investigation of my experience in Nepal through selected song lyrics

In the beginning, it was like Seger's "Katmandu." It was everything we wanted. The only thing in our minds: going to Kathmandu. Or even better: going to Mt. Everest. We were tired of our world here. We needed a "new beginning," somewhere to escape the ordinary. And it did not disappoint. Just like in Blink's "Going to Nepal," we were "happy, [we were] free, sitting on a rock, up on a mountain in Nepal [we were] happy to be nothing. And [we were] the happiest of all. It was a different kind of happiness. Here in American and most of the so-called Western world we tend to judge worldly happiness according to possessions, earthly goods, unique opportunities. We hadn't gotten richer by a penny, we hadn't acquired anything material or tangible during our trek. Yet, we felt richer than ever before. Away from our comfort zones, from familiar faces and customs, we felt happy, unchained, displaced from the madness of our ordinary world, and projected into a fairy-tale like valley in between a jungle of icy peaks. Quoting the lyrics of The Pogues' "The Sunny Side of the Street," [we were] "up on the roof with nothing at all. And [we] knew that day [we] were gonna stay right where [we were]."

Every fairy tale has its end, however. The ice backtracked, the air thickened, the peaks shrunk. We were back to Kathmandu and its throat-itching smells. If there is one thing I wish we had experienced more, that would be Tibetan culture. I can certainly relate to Cockburn's "Tibetan Side of Town" vivid descriptions of smells, atmospheres, people. But the perennial tension between Tibetan culture and the surrounding countries went somehow largely undetected in our experience. Were we overly inebriated by our time in the mountains that we forgot to dig

deeper into the local culture? Possible, although most locals seemed to think that a lot has changed since Cockburn wrote his song in 1988. I presume this lays the ground for a return trip that involves more Kathmandu and less Everest, more rural villages and fewer Sherpas.

Quoting Cat Stevens' "Kathmandu," the "strange bewildering time of Nepal" spun us into a chaotic whirlwind of 3 weeks and catapulted us out of it and back into our "comfort zone" before we could permanently soak in its increasingly familiar surrealism. Back to the "western world," we craved chaos. We craved what we had barely experienced. We craved more adventure, more eccentric smells, more overwhelming sounds, more unexplainable meshes of flavors taking over our senses. Maybe this is the forbidden love Joplin was talking about in her "Cry Baby." Our road ended in Kathmandu. But a new one started right after. Did Nepal give us an answer? (as Letters to Cleo hinted at in their song) It is hard to tell now. One time may not have been enough. It may have just undusted the path in front of us, and we have yet to embark on the new road that will begin once again in Nepal. After, as Jimmy Buffet said, "Oh what would they do if I flew to Nepal?"