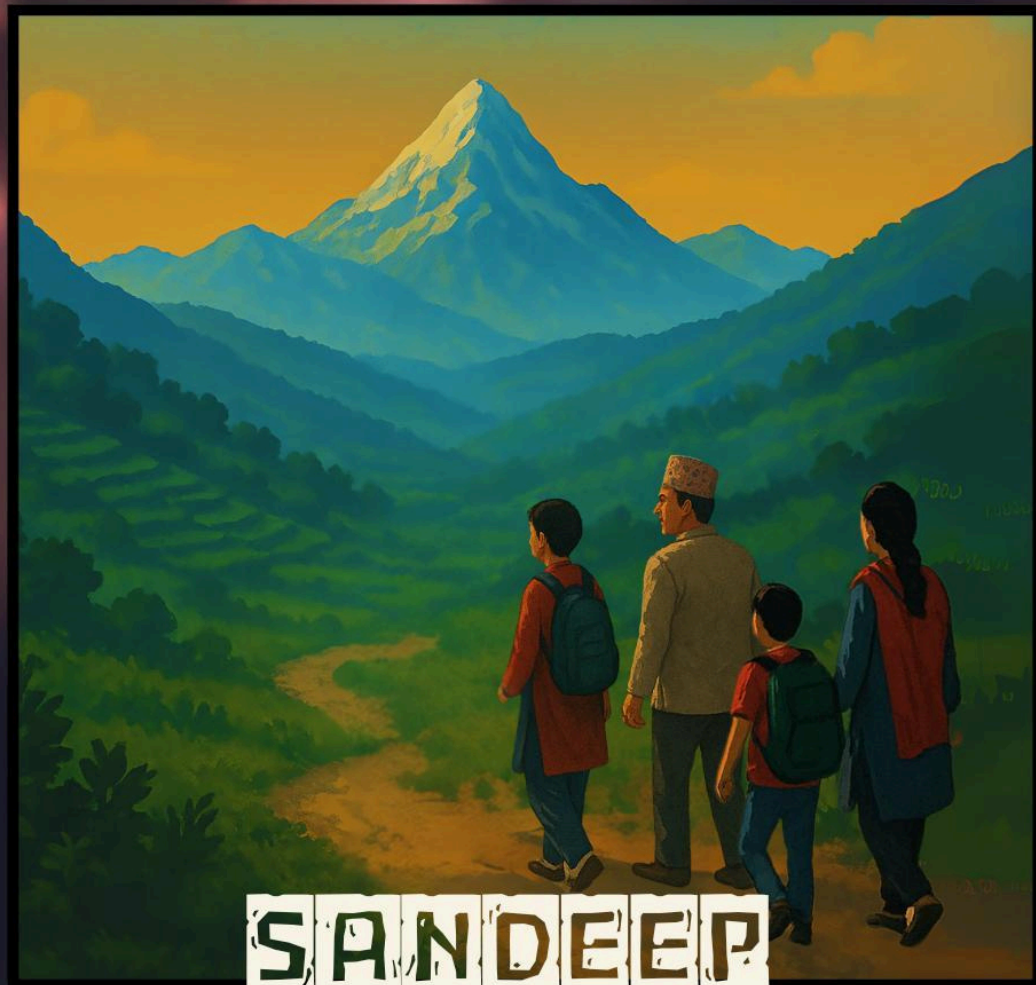


KATHMANDU EXPRESS

One Journey Many Challenges



SANDEEP
VHANDARI

About the Novel

"Kathmandu Express" is a novel written by Sandeep Vhandari that blends elements of fiction and non-fiction, chronicling a five-day journey through Nepal to attend an uncle's wedding in Kathmandu. The story is narrated by the protagonist, accompanied by their grandfather, Geeta Didi, and Sujan.

The journey begins with a breathtaking sunrise, setting the stage for a trip filled with both beauty and challenges. The travelers are captivated by the stunning landscape, with hills rising and falling like waves, lush greenery contrasting against the clear blue sky, and glimpses of terraced fields and small settlements.

Despite the scenic beauty, the journey is fraught with challenges and mysteries that test the travelers' resolve. One significant obstacle is the breach of the Saptakoshi River, which forces them to cross by ferry amidst the roar of rushing water, blending fear with the thrill of adventure. Road closures due to landslides and heavy rains necessitate detours, turning unexpected stops into opportunities for exploration in charming villages and scenic viewpoints.

The narrow, winding roads present a mix of stunning and intimidating views, with steep drops serving as a stark reminder of nature's power. Heavy rains further complicate the journey, transforming roads into muddy trails and creating urgency. Yet, the rain also brings the landscape to life, enhancing its vibrancy and richness.

Throughout the journey, a sense of camaraderie develops among the passengers. They share laughter, stories, and fears, transforming difficulties into cherished memories. Each challenge deepens their appreciation for the journey, highlighting the beauty that often arises from overcoming trials. The novel captures the essence of adventure and the unexpected beauty found in the journey itself.

KATHMANDU EXPRESS

“One Journey Many Challenges “

A Story Novel about Travelling and journey...

Written by

Sandeep Vhandari

In days of yore, a tale of paths amassed,

Wove through the hills on way to Kathmandu.

With grandsire, sister, and her lad impeccable,

Journeyed to uncle's nuptials pending, true.

Saptakoshi swelled its banks with fervor, bold,

And closed off routes 'cross cities, roads anew.

One way remained, a risky venture sought,
To ferry atop waves, an adventure, clue.
We braved the river's sway, in merry flight,
Nature's sights we reveled in, skies' pure hue.
Five days we rolled, each hour a delight,
Crossing in joy, our spirits yearned to sue.
Through billowed roads, our laughter filled the air,
In glee we journeyed on, our hearts alight. Hand
in hand, through waters wild and fair, Uniting kin
in bonds that felt so right.

Dedications

Late Geeta Bhandari Khanal.

(Geeta Didi)

1971-2022 AD.

Late Man Bahadur Bhandari.

(Grandfather)

1943-2023 AD.

Kathmandu

Express

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Chapter 1: A Fateful Decision.

The year was 2009, a time when the world seemed simpler, yet brimming with the promise of endless possibilities. I was twelve years old, a curious spirit with a heart full of wanderlust, when my life took a turn that would forever be etched in my memory.

It was the height of summer, and the scorching sun had cast its relentless heat upon the land, baking the earth beneath our feet and filling the air with the scent of sun-baked grass and wildflowers. The cicadas sang their relentless symphony, a soundtrack to the lazy, hot days that seemed to stretch endlessly.

Nestled in a small, close-knit village in eastern Nepal, Urlabari, our home was surrounded by rolling fields and dense forests. The village, with its cobblestone streets and quaint, thatched-roof cottages, felt like a place out of time, untouched by the rapid advancement of the outside world.

It was a place where everyone knew each other by name, where the aroma of freshly baked bread wafted through the air, and the sound of children's laughter echoed through the narrow lanes.

My name is Sandip Bhandari. At twelve years old, I had curly hair and studied in class 7 at Morang Model Secondary English School. In my free time, I loved singing and playing games with my friends.

Singing was one of my favourite hobbies, and I enjoyed it immensely. Playing games, whether it was outdoor sports or video games, was another way I spent my time.

I also had a big dream of travelling to distant, faraway places. Although I didn't have the chance to do so then, I was always excited about the idea of exploring new places and experiencing new .

One particularly sunny afternoon, my friends and I decided to embark on an impromptu adventure to the local river. We had often talked about it, imagining the fun we could have splashing around and swimming in its cool waters. That day, without much thought or preparation, we simply decided to go for it.

We met up at the end of our street, a group of eager kids ready for some excitement. We wore our everyday clothes, not bothering with any bags or supplies, letting the spontaneity of the moment guide us. The sun was high in the sky, casting long shadows that danced along the path as we made our way to the river.

Our journey took us through fields and past clusters of trees, the sound of our chatter and laughter filling the air. The anticipation grew with each step as we neared the river, guided only by the distant sound of water flowing over rocks.

When we arrived, the river was more inviting than we had imagined. The water glistened like a mirror under the sunlight, and the gentle current created a soothing melody that complemented the rustling leaves and chirping birds. Without hesitation, we kicked off our shoes and raced to the water's edge.

The first splash was exhilarating. The river was cool against our skin, a refreshing contrast to the warm summer air. We waded in deeper, laughing and calling out to each other as we explored the shallow parts of the river. Some of us tried swimming, while others simply floated on their backs, gazing up at the sky.

We took turns daring each other to dive from a low rock into the deeper pool, our cheers echoing along the riverbank with each successful jump. It was pure, unfiltered fun—the kind that only comes from being in the moment, surrounded by friends and nature's beauty.

As the afternoon wore on, we found a sandy patch by the riverbank where we could sit and dry off. We lay there, feeling the warmth of the sun on our faces, talking about everything and nothing. Time seemed to stretch, each minute filled with the simple joy of being together, free from any worries or responsibilities.

Eventually, the sun began to set, painting the sky with strokes of orange and pink. We knew it was time to head back, even though none of us wanted the day to end. We left the river behind, our hearts full of happiness and our minds already planning our next adventure.

That spontaneous trip to the river became one of my most cherished memories—a testament to the joy of childhood, the thrill of unplanned adventures, and the bonds of friendship that made every moment unforgettable.

As the sun began its descent, casting a warm golden hue over the village, my grandfather, Man Bahadur Bhandari, burst into the courtyard with a broad smile. “Sandip, pack your things! We’re off to Kathmandu! Your uncle’s wedding is just the beginning. It’s time for an adventure!” His excitement was infectious.

My eyes widened with a mix of excitement and apprehension. “Kathmandu? Really? What will it be like, Grandpa? Will we really see temples as tall as the sky?”

He laughed heartily, placing a reassuring hand on my shoulder. “Indeed, my boy! And much more. The city is full of wonders waiting to be discovered.”

My grandfather, a man whose wisdom seemed as endless as his curiosity, was the spark that ignited our adventure. His eyes, always alight with a playful glint, were windows to a soul that thrived on discovery. His love for adventure pulsed through his veins, and it was this boundless spirit that led him to announce our journey to Kathmandu.

For him, the trip was more than just attending a wedding; it was an opportunity to explore the unknown and share that joy with his family. His excitement was infectious, filling the air with a sense of anticipation that none of us could resist.

Kamal, my youngest uncle, has always been a belfigure in my life, and now he's about to embark on a new journey—he's getting married! The oved excitement is palpable as I prepare to attend his wedding soon. Even more thrilling is the fact that I'll be traveling to Kathmandu, a city I've always dreamed of visiting.

Growing up, Kamal was more like a father to me. His stories of life in Kathmandu, filled with bustling streets and vibrant culture, always fascinated me. He moved there at 18, driven by ambition and a desire to build a better future. Hearing about his adventures and successes inspired me and filled me with a sense of pride.

Now, the day is fast approaching when I'll witness Kamal's next big step. I'll be travelling to Kathmandu with my grandfather, and just thinking about it fills me with joy. The idea of exploring the city that Kamal loves so much and being part of his special day feels like a dream come true.

Imagining the journey ahead, I can't help but feel incredibly lucky. Being there to celebrate Kamal's wedding is more than just attending a ceremony—it's about being part of a significant moment in his life. I'm thrilled to share this experience with my grandfather, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

Soon, I'll be in Kathmandu, surrounded by family and immersed in the festivities. I feel truly blessed to be part of Kamal's wedding, celebrating his love and success. This journey promises to be unforgettable, and I can't wait to be there, standing by my uncle's side on his special day.

My father's eldest sister, Geeta Bhandari Khanal, whom I affectionately called Geeta didi, was the heart of our family. Her warmth and nurturing nature made her the emotional anchor for us all. She possessed a wisdom that came from years of experience, and her presence was a comforting constant.

For her, the journey to Kathmandu was a blend of duty and love; attending her brother's wedding was important, but ensuring the well-being of her family during the trip was paramount. Her caring nature and steadfast support made her the perfect guardian for our adventure.

Later that evening, as I was nervously packing my bag, Geeta Didi gently stroked my hair. "Don't worry, Sandip. I'll make sure everything goes smoothly. We'll be there together, and nothing will go wrong."

I bit my lip, my anxiety evident. "What if we get lost, Didi? It's such a big place."

Geeta's smile was warm and comforting. "We'll stick together, like we always do. Remember, we're a family, and we'll face everything together."

Joining us was Geeta didi's youngest son, Sujan Khanal – my big brother, whose protective instincts were matched only by his adventurous spirit. He was a natural leader, always looking out for his younger cousins and ensuring we stayed out of trouble.

His bravery and sense of responsibility were comforting, and his excitement for the journey mirrored that of our grandfather. For him, the trip was an opportunity to explore new horizons and embrace the thrill of the unknown, all while keeping his family safe.

As for me, a twelve-year-old with a heart full of wanderlust, the journey to Kathmandu was a dream come true. The stories of ancient temples and bustling bazaars had filled my imagination with vivid pictures of a world far removed from our quiet village.

The excitement was tinged with a touch of apprehension, but my curiosity far outweighed any fears. I looked up to my grandfather and brother, and with my sister (auntie) by my side, I felt ready to embark on this grand adventure.

The idea of the journey to Kathmandu stirred a whirlwind of emotions within me, each one as vivid and complex as the other. First and foremost was excitement, a bubbling anticipation that thrummed through my veins and made it difficult to sit still.

The stories of ancient temples, bustling bazaars, and the vibrant streets of Kathmandu had painted a picture in my mind of a place filled with wonder and endless possibilities. The chance to see these sights with my own eyes, to walk the same streets that countless others had walked before me, felt like a dream come true.

This excitement wasn't amplified by the sense of adventure that came with the unknown; every twist and turn of our journey promised new experiences and discoveries that I could scarcely imagine.

Yet, this excitement was not without its counterbalance. Alongside the thrill of anticipation, there was a touch of apprehension that crept into my thoughts. Leaving the familiarity of Urlabari, with its close-knit community and comforting routines, to venture into the bustling, unfamiliar world of Kathmandu was a daunting prospect.

The idea of navigating through a city teeming with strangers, of facing the unexpected challenges that travel often brings, stirred a sense of nervousness within me. What if we got lost? What if something went wrong? These questions lingered in the back of my mind, casting small shadows over the brightness of my excitement.

Despite these apprehensions, curiosity was the emotion that ultimately overshadowed all others. It was an insatiable curiosity, a burning desire to see, hear, and feel everything that Kathmandu had to offer.

My mind was filled with questions about the city's history, its people, and its culture. This curiosity gave me the courage to embrace the unknown, to step out of my comfort zone and into a world that was entirely new to me. I knew that whatever challenges we might face, the experiences and knowledge we would gain would be well worth it.

Lastly, there was a deep sense of gratitude and love that underpinned my emotions. The journey was not just a physical trip; it was an opportunity to strengthen the bonds with my family, to share in the excitement and challenges together.

My grandfather's infectious enthusiasm, my aunt's nurturing presence, and my brother's protective spirit made me feel supported and cherished. This sense of togetherness, of embarking on a grand adventure with those I loved most, filled my heart with warmth and joy, making the journey to Kathmandu a profoundly meaningful experience even before it began.

Together, we formed a tapestry of personalities and motivations, each contributing to the rich, vibrant experience that awaited us. Our relationships were woven with threads of love, respect, and shared dreams, which would make our journey not just a physical one, but a profound exploration of our bonds and selves.

In the room next door, Sujan was already bustling around, excitedly packing his rucksack. He glanced at me and grinned. "We'll look out for each other, Sandip. This is going to be an unforgettable adventure. Think of all the stories we'll have to tell when we get back!"

My confidence grew as I returned Sujan's smile. "I can't wait to explore the markets and see the temples. Do you think we'll see any elephants?"

Sujan laughed, the sound full of youthful exuberance. "Maybe! Kathmandu is full of surprises. But no matter what happens, we'll face it all together."

The night before our departure, the family gathered at the edge of the village, looking out toward the horizon. Man Bahadur's voice was filled with a mix of wisdom and anticipation. "Family, today we embark on a journey not just to Kathmandu, but into the unknown. We go with open hearts and curious minds. Remember, the greatest discoveries are not just about new places, but about understanding ourselves and each other. Let's make this journey unforgettable."

Geeta Didi nodded, her eyes reflecting the warmth of her father's words. "Together, we'll create memories that will last a lifetime. Let's move forward with love and courage."

Sujan, ever the spirited one, pumped his fist in the air. "To Kathmandu and beyond! Let's go, family!"

I, feeling a surge of excitement and determination, echoed my brother's enthusiasm. "Yes! To Kathmandu and beyond!"

We were not to embark on this adventure alone. The prospect of travelling together as a family filled our hearts with a surge of joy and anticipation. The motivations behind our journey to Kathmandu were multifaceted, each one weaving into the fabric of our adventure.

The primary reason for our journey was to attend my uncle's wedding. This event held significant importance for our family, as weddings are pivotal moments that bring relatives together to celebrate love and unity. It was essential for us to be there to support and rejoice with our extended family.

The trip was also an opportunity to immerse ourselves in the rich cultural heritage of Kathmandu. The city, with its ancient temples, bustling markets, and historical landmarks, promised a treasure trove of experiences and learning. For my grandfather, Man Bahadur, this was a chance to share the cultural wealth of our country with the younger generation.

For my grandfather, the journey was fueled by his love for adventure and exploration. He saw this trip as an opportunity to step outside the familiar confines of our village and experience the

vibrancy of city life. His enthusiasm for discovering new places and stories was infectious and a key motivator for the entire family.

Travelling together as a family was a way to strengthen our bonds. The shared experiences, challenges, and joys of the journey promised to bring us closer. For Geeta didi, ensuring the well-being and happiness of the family during the trip was a significant motivation, as she valued the sense of togetherness and support that comes from shared adventures.

The journey was driven by a deep curiosity and a desire for personal growth. For me, the stories of Kathmandu had filled my imagination with wonder, and the prospect of seeing these sights firsthand was thrilling. This trip was a chance to expand my horizons, learn new things, and satisfy my inquisitive nature.

Lastly, the journey was about creating lasting memories. For all of us, the trip to Kathmandu was a chance to make unforgettable moments that we could cherish for years to come. It was about capturing the essence of family, adventure, and discovery, and holding onto those memories as a source of joy and inspiration.

Each of these motivations contributed to the excitement and anticipation that filled our hearts as we prepared for the journey. Together, we painted a picture of a trip that was not just about reaching a destination but about the experiences and growth that would come along the way.

Little did I know that this journey, born out of a simple desire to attend a family wedding, would set in motion a series of events that would change my life forever. As we would step into the vibrant world of Kathmandu, we were unknowingly stepping into a chapter of our lives that would be marked by adventure, discovery, and the forging of memories that would last a lifetime.

The night before we were to leave, I lay in bed, my mind racing with visions of the days ahead.

Would the bus ride through the hills be as breathtaking as I imagined? How would it feel to cross rivers on a ferry, surrounded by the grandeur of nature? And what challenges might we face along the way?

The journey promised an array of experiences, from the joy of discovery to the trials that would test our determination and unity as a family.

As I drifted off to sleep, one question lingered in my mind, filling me with both excitement and a hint of apprehension: What adventures truly awaited us on the road to Kathmandu, and how would this journey change us all?

The answers lay just beyond the horizon, in the heart of an adventure that was about to begin.

The Saptakoshi flooding in 2008 was a devastating natural disaster that occurred in Nepal. It was caused by heavy rainfall in the region and resulted in the overflow of the Saptakoshi River, one of the largest rivers in Nepal. The Saptakoshi flood was primarily caused by heavy rainfall in the region.

The monsoon season in Nepal brings significant amounts of rainfall, and in 2008, there was an unusually high amount of precipitation. This excessive rainfall, combined with the melting of snow in the Himalayas, resulted in a significant increase in the water levels of the Saptakoshi River.

The heavy rainfall caused the river to swell beyond its capacity, leading to the overflow of its banks. As the water level continued to rise, the river breached its embankments in some areas, causing widespread flooding in the surrounding regions.

The floodwaters submerged villages, towns, and farmland, causing extensive damage and displacing thousands of people.

Additionally, there were reports of landslides in the upstream areas of the river, which further contributed to the flooding. The landslides increased the volume of water and debris flowing into the river, exacerbating the flooding situation.

The combination of heavy rainfall, snowmelt, and landslides created a catastrophic flooding event in the Saptakoshi River basin in 2008, leading to significant damage and loss of lives in Nepal and India. The excessive rainfall, coupled with the melting of snow in the Himalayas, led to the river swelling beyond its capacity.

The flooding was particularly severe in the Sunsari and Saptari districts of Nepal. As the river burst its banks, it caused widespread destruction, including the displacement of thousands of people, loss of lives, and damage to infrastructure, homes, and agricultural land. The floodwaters submerged villages, towns, and farmland, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake.

During the Saptakoshi breach in 2008, the flooding and damage caused by the overflow of the river could have potentially affected travel between Kathmandu and Urlabari. The flooding would have likely resulted in road closures, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted transportation services.

Given the severity of the flooding and the extent of damage caused by the Saptakoshi breach in 2008, it is likely that travel between Kathmandu and Urlabari would have been challenging and risky.

In March 2009, the Saptakoshi breach that occurred in 2008 would have likely had an impact on travel between Kathmandu and Urlabari. As mentioned earlier, the flooding caused by the breach would have resulted in road closures, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted transportation service.

Considering the severity of the flooding and the time that had passed since the breach in 2008, it is possible that travel restrictions may have improved compared to immediately after the breach. However, it is still important to improve road conditions that's still damaged and devastated.

News on radios and televisions had been repeatedly broadcasting -

"During such situations, it is common for authorities to advise against unnecessary travel in the affected areas to ensure the safety of individuals. It is crucial to follow the guidance and instructions provided

by local authorities and stay updated on the latest information regarding road conditions and travel advisories."

Chapter 2: The Road Less Travelled

Our adventure began in the early hours of the morning, as the first rays of sunlight peeked over the horizon, casting a golden glow across our village. The air was crisp, carrying with it a sense of anticipation and possibility. We gathered together, my grandfather, Geeta didi, Sujan, and myself, our bags and backpacks filled with essentials for the journey ahead.

Among our belongings, there were two sacks that stood out from the rest. One contained a bountiful supply of rice, its grains representing sustenance and nourishment. The other sack held a collection of potatoes, symbolizing versatility and the potential for hearty meals. These sacks were not only provisions, but also a reminder of simplicity and love.

As we made our way to the Urlabari bus park, excitement coursed through our veins. We could see the bus in the distance, its name proudly displayed on the plate just above the windshield "Ugrachandi Yatayat". The words were etched in bold letters, a testament to the countless journeys this bus had embarked upon. The paint on its exterior had faded over time, and its joints creaked with every movement, but it stood strong, ready to carry us to our destination.

As we approached the bus, a mix of emotions filled the air. There was a palpable sense of adventure, as well as a hint of trepidation. We were about to step into the unknown, leaving behind the familiarity of our village and venturing into new territories. But the allure of exploration and the promise of unforgettable experiences outweighed any doubts or fears that lingered within us.

With each step onto the bus, we could feel the excitement intensifying. The air inside was infused with the scent of worn leather seats and the faint hum of the engine. We found our seats, settling in among the other passengers who were also embarking on their own journeys. The anticipation was almost tangible, as if each person carried their own dreams and aspirations, all converging on this bus.

And so, as the engine roared to life and the bus began to move, we watched as our village gradually disappeared from view. The sun's golden rays continued to cast long shadows across the landscape, bidding us farewell and welcoming us to the unknown. The journey had officially begun, and we were ready to embrace every twist and turn, every encounter and discovery that lay ahead on our path.

As we ventured further from the village, the scenery underwent a remarkable transformation. The colours of nature became more vibrant and diverse, creating a picturesque sight. The fields, once covered in lush greenery, gradually transitioned into rolling hills, cities and forests.. The textures of the fields changed too, from soft and grassy to rugged and rocky.

Along the journey, we encountered a variety of trees and plants that added to the beauty of the landscape. Tall and majestic pine trees stood proudly, their dark green needles contrasting against the blue sky. Vibrant wildflowers adorned the forests, painting a vibrant tapestry of colours.

We reached Ithari, and the bus came to a halt for a while. The air buzzed with conversations and the clamour of vendors, but my mind was occupied with the unsettling news of the Saptakoshi River. It had overflowed its banks, causing widespread destruction. Roads were washed away, and the once-stable bridges now lay in ruins. Our path seemed more daunting than ever.

There were only two routes left for us to reach our destination. The first was to travel through India, and cross the river from there. This option seemed less challenging and more straightforward. The second route was to navigate the hills and cross the river by ferry, a more arduous and risky journey.

After some deliberation, our bus driver decided to take the first way, through India. It was the safer and easier option, albeit still fraught with its own uncertainties. As the bus started moving towards Biratnagar, I felt a mix of relief and lingering anxiety. The clock had struck 12 noon by then, and the sun was high in the sky, casting a relentless glare over everything.

With each mile, the landscape began to change, reflecting the new territory we were entering. The conversations inside the bus grew quieter, perhaps because everyone was lost in their own thoughts, contemplating the journey ahead. Despite the challenges, there was a sense of camaraderie among us, as if the shared experience had already begun to forge a bond.

As we moved closer to the border, Jogmuni, I couldn't help but think about the journey that lay ahead. The road to Jogmuni might be less treacherous, but it was still a step into the unknown. Yet, with each turn of the wheels, I felt a growing sense of determination. We were not just passengers on a bus; we were travellers on an adventure, ready to face whatever came our way.

I have seen the Saptakoshi flood overflow and the destruction it had wrought throughout the Jogbani and Biratnagar areas. The sheer force of nature's fury was evident in every direction I looked. The once-thriving fields were now submerged under a relentless tide, transformed into vast, sprawling ponds that stretched out towards the horizon. The sight of the floodwaters, still

pooling and converting open lands into murky basins, was a haunting reminder of the devastation that had unfolded.

The landscape bore the scars of the flood, with fields washed away and the remnants still drowning in water. Crops that had once promised a bountiful harvest now lay ruined, their vibrant greens replaced by the dull, lifeless brown of destruction. It was a sobering sight, one that underscored the fragility of human endeavours in the face of nature's indomitable power. The water, indifferent to the human suffering it caused, continued its encroachment, reshaping the land in its image.

Amidst this tableau of ruin, there were pockets of life struggling to adapt. People moved cautiously through the waterlogged terrain, their expressions a mix of determination and despair. Despite the overwhelming odds, there was a palpable sense of resilience in the air. Small boats navigated the newly formed waterways, ferrying essentials and offering a lifeline to those stranded by the flood. The community's spirit, though battered, remained unbroken.

As the bus inched forward, the full scale of the disaster became increasingly apparent. Buildings lay in ruin, their foundations eroded by the relentless surge of water. Roads had been transformed into treacherous paths, with only the bravest or most desperate venturing across them. The chaos and upheaval were a stark contrast to the serenity that had once defined these areas. Each passing moment deepened my appreciation for the complexity of the situation and the resilience of those affected.

Despite the bleakness of the scene, there was an underlying current of hope. The people of Biratnagar and Jogbani, though facing immense challenges, were united in their efforts to rebuild and recover. The shared adversity had fostered a sense of solidarity, a collective determination to rise above the trials they faced. This indomitable spirit, visible in the faces of those around me, infused me with a sense of optimism. It was a reminder that even in the darkest of times, the human spirit has an incredible capacity to endure and overcome.

Our bus stopped for what felt like two hours at the Jogbani bus park. The wait was long and wearying, but it also provided us an opportunity to stretch our legs and take a break from the monotonous journey. As the minutes ticked by, the rumbling in my stomach became impossible to ignore. Sujan, sitting beside me, was also feeling the pangs of hunger. It seemed like a good time to find something to eat.

"Sujan, I'm starving," I admitted, rubbing my stomach. "Do you think we can find something around here?"

"Me too. Let's see if we can spot a restaurant nearby," Sujan replied, his eyes scanning the surroundings eagerly.

Just then, Geeta didi, who had been travelling with us, turned around and offered a solution.

"There's a nice little restaurant just a few minutes' walk from here," she said with a reassuring smile. "I can take you there if you'd like."

"That would be great, mummy. We could really use a good meal right now," Sujan responded gratefully.

My grandfather, who had been quietly sitting by the window, nodded in agreement. "A good meal sounds like just the thing. Let's go," he said in his steady, comforting voice.

As we stepped off the bus and onto the street, the bustling atmosphere of the Jogbani bus park enveloped us. Vendors were calling out to passersby, selling everything from fresh fruits to trinkets. The air was filled with a mix of aromas – fried snacks, spices, and the occasional whiff of incense from a nearby temple. It was a sensory overload, but in the best possible way.

Geeta didi led us through the crowd with practised ease, navigating the maze of stalls and pedestrians until we reached a modest yet inviting restaurant. The sign above the door was slightly faded, but the delicious smell wafting from within left no doubt that we were in the right place. We entered and found a table near the window, which offered a view of the vibrant street outside.

As we settled into our seats, a friendly waiter approached. "What would you like to have?" he asked.

My mouth watered at the thought of the delicious Nepali dishes. "I think I'll have the momo, and maybe some dal bhat," I said, looking at Sujan for his order.

"I'll go for the thukpa," Sujan decided. "And maybe we can share a perfect plate," I agreed.

My grandfather, always a fan of traditional dishes, decided on a hearty plate of goat curry with rice. "This will remind me of home," he said with a smile, his eyes twinkling with anticipation.

As we waited for our food, the conversation flowed easily. We talked about our journey so far, the sights we'd seen, and the challenges we had faced.

Geeta didi ordered some Roti with curry, her eyes lighting up with each anecdote.

Despite the hardships, moments like these reminded us of the joy and camaraderie that come with travelling together. My grandfather shared tales from his youth, recounting adventures that spanned decades and continents. His stories were a treasure trove of wisdom and humour, making us laugh and think in equal measure.

When the food finally arrived, it was everything we had hoped for and more. The momo were perfectly steamed, the dal bhat was comforting and hearty, and the thukpa was a warm, savoury delight. My grandfather's goat curry was rich and flavorful, just as he remembered from his younger days. Geeta Didi's Puri Tarkari looks delicious too. We ate with gusto, savouring each bite and feeling our spirits lift with every mouthful.

By the time we finished our meal, the bus was ready to depart. We left the restaurant with satisfied stomachs and renewed energy, ready to face whatever lay ahead on our journey. The brief respite had been just what we needed, a reminder of the simple pleasures that can be found even in the midst of chaos. With my grandfather's steady presence and the camaraderie of our group, we felt ready to tackle whatever came next.

The bus driver returned to our seats and somberly announced that the river crossing from India was closed for another week. The news sent a wave of disappointment through the passengers, as we had hoped for a smoother journey through the familiar route. However, the maintenance work on the roads and bridges meant that our only option was to take the second route, which involved crossing the river by ferry through the hills.

As we absorbed the news, conversations broke out among the passengers. Some were concerned about the safety and reliability of the ferry journey, while others saw it as an opportunity for a unique experience. My grandfather, always an optimist, reassured us that the hills and the convergence of the seven rivers would offer a breathtaking sight and a chance to witness the power of nature.

With a collective sigh, the bus started back towards Itahari, retracing its path. As we moved through the familiar terrain, the scenery seemed to take on a new beauty. The green forests and rolling hills stretched out before us, providing a soothing backdrop to our journey. The bus continued its steady pace, carrying us closer to our next destination.

As the hours passed, we finally reached Dharan. The bus made a brief stop, allowing us to stretch our legs and take in the sights of the bustling town. The air was filled with the sounds of vendors and the chatter of locals going about their daily routines. We soaked in the vibrant energy of the place, knowing that our journey was far from over.

With renewed energy, we boarded the bus once again and continued our expedition towards Chatara. The sun began its descent, casting a warm glow over the landscape. The golden hour painted the surroundings in hues of orange and pink, adding a touch of magic to the scene. The bus pushed forward, carrying us closer to our destination as the clock struck 6 o'clock in the evening.

The sky grew ominously dark, and it wasn't long before raindrops began to fall. The gentle drizzle quickly turned into a steady downpour, soaking the landscape and adding a layer of mystique to our surroundings. The rain brought with it a refreshing coolness, contrasting with the warmth of the day that had passed.

The hills around us were cloaked in a soft mist, their contours softened by the rain. Small houses dotted the hillsides, their roofs glistening with moisture. Each home seemed like a tiny refuge amidst the sprawling wilderness, a testament to the resilience of the people who lived there.

As we made our way along the narrow, muddy path, the rain continued to fall, making our journey more challenging. The ground was slippery, and we had to tread carefully to avoid slipping. Despite the difficulties, there was a sense of adventure in the air, as if the rain had added an extra layer of excitement to our trek.

"Uncle, watch out," I called out, my voice barely audible over the sound of the rain and bus engine.

"The path is really slippery."

"Don't worry, I've got it," The bus driver replied with a grin, his eyes sparkling with determination.

"This rain won't slow us down."

With the steady presence, the contractor of the bus looked at us with a reassuring smile. "We're almost there. Just a little further, and we'll reach Chatara."

As we trudged onward, the sight of the river flowing in the distance gave us a renewed sense of purpose. The Saptakoshi River, swollen from the rain, surged with a powerful current. The view of the river, framed by the dense forests and hills on its banks, was a breathtaking sight, even under the grey skies of the rainy evening. The water moved with a relentless force, carving its way through the landscape and creating a mesmerizing spectacle.

By the time we reached Chatara, it was 7 pm, and the rain showed no signs of letting up. The evening was dark and wet, the air filled with the sound of raindrops hitting the ground and the murmur of the river nearby. The road was still muddy and a bit narrow. Although, it was a hive of activity, with a pile of buses jammed, all waiting for the river crossing. Our bus was stuck in the middle of the congestion, adding to the sense of chaos.

"We've made it to Chatara, but it looks like we're going to be here for a while," Sujan remarked, peering through the rain-streaked window.

"At least we're not alone," I said, trying to find some humour in the situation. "We're in good company with all these other buses."

Grandfather chuckled, his laughter a comforting sound amidst the rain. "Patience, everyone. We'll get across eventually. This is just another part of the adventure."

As we waited, the conversation among the passengers grew livelier. People shared stories of their travels, bonding over the shared experience of being stuck in the rain. Some offered snacks and warm drinks, creating a sense of community within the crowded bus park.

A fellow traveller sitting nearby leaned over the window and struck up a conversation. "Where are you all headed?" he asked with genuine curiosity.

"We're on our way to the other side of the river," I replied. "It's been quite a journey so far, but we're determined to make it."

"Same here," he said with a nod. "These rains have really thrown a wrench into everyone's plans, but it's all part of the adventure, right?"

Geeta didi chimed in, "Absolutely. And with good company, even the longest waits can be enjoyable."

As the hours passed and the rain continued to fall, the camaraderie among the passengers grew.

We shared stories, laughter, and even a few songs, finding joy in each other's company despite the challenges. The view of the river flowing nearby, framed by the dark silhouettes of the forests and hills, served as a reminder of the beauty and power of nature.

Eventually, the rain began to lighten, and the promise of a river crossing grew closer. Our journey was far from over, but the experiences we had shared and the bonds we had formed made every moment worthwhile. With the resilience and determination that had carried us this far, we knew we were ready to face whatever lay ahead.

By the time the rain finally ceased, the air was filled with a delicate freshness. The once relentless downpour had dwindled to a gentle drizzle, and then, mercifully, stopped altogether. The roads were still muddy, but the atmosphere had shifted, carrying a renewed sense of hope and anticipation.

The contractor and the driver decided to step out and gather information about the ferry and our turn to cross the river. "We're going to check on the ferry situation," the contractor announced. "Stay put, and we'll be back soon with an update."

As they walked away, the rest of us took the opportunity to stretch our legs and take in the surroundings. The rain had washed the landscape clean, leaving everything glistening under the emerging moonlight. The Saptakoshi River, now calmer, reflected the silvery glow of the evening sky. The green hills, laden with moisture, seemed to pulse with life, their misty outlines adding an ethereal quality to the scene.

"Look at that view," Sujan remarked, his voice filled with awe. "It's like something out of a painting."

I nodded in agreement. "It's stunning. The rain's given everything a magical touch." Grandfather stood

beside us, his eyes twinkling with appreciation. "Nature has a way of reminding us of its beauty, especially after a storm."

As we waited, a conversation sparked among the passengers.

"Have you ever seen anything like this?" a woman asked, her eyes wide with wonder.

"No," another passenger replied. "It's incredible. The river, the hills... it's all so serene now."

Geeta didi joined in, "It's moments like these that make the journey worthwhile. Sometimes, the unexpected detours are the best parts."

An older man, who had been quietly observing, chimed in. "I've travelled this route many times, but tonight, it feels different. There's a sense of calm and unity among us."

A young boy, sitting by the window, pointed excitedly at the river. "Look, the water is sparkling! It's like the river is welcoming us."

2

As the night deepened, the scene around us became more tranquil. The glistening river, the mist-covered hills, and the serene atmosphere created a sense of magic, as if we had been to a different world. The earlier chaos and uncertainty seemed to fade away, replaced by a sense of calm and unity among the travellers.

As the contractor and driver returned with the news, a wave of disappointment swept through the bus. The ferry had already closed at 5 pm, and it was now around 8 pm. We would have to wait until 9 am the next morning for the next crossing. The contractor mentioned a nearby hotel for those who wanted to rest comfortably.

"There's a hotel not far from here," he said. "If anyone wants to get a good night's sleep, you can head there. The ferry will start running again at 9 am."

A few passengers looked tempted by the offer, but my family and I decided to stay put. We couldn't risk leaving our bags and the sacks of rice and potatoes unattended.

"I think we'll stay here," I said, glancing at our belongings. "I don't want to leave our stuff behind."

Sujan nodded in agreement. "Yeah, it's safer if we stick together and keep an eye on everything."

Geeta didi looked around the bus and then at us. "We can make it through the night here. It's not the most comfortable, but at least we'll be together."

Grandfather, ever the pragmatist, added, "I've slept in worse places. A night on the bus won't be so bad."

As the other passengers began to make their decisions, the atmosphere on the bus grew more relaxed. Some chose to head to the hotel, while others, like us, decided to stay.

A fellow passenger, a young woman sitting nearby, turned to us with a smile. "Mind if I sit with you all? I don't want to go to the hotel alone."

"Of course," I replied, making space for her. "You're welcome to join us."

She introduced herself as Anjali and quickly became part of our group. We settled into our seats, trying to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. The bus was filled with the quiet hum of conversations as people adjusted to the unexpected change in plans.

"Do you think it'll be safe here?" Anjali asked, a hint of worry in her voice.

"It should be," I reassured her. "We're all in this together, and we'll keep an eye out for each other."

As the night wore on, the bus became a cozy haven. We shared stories, snacks, and laughter, creating a sense of camaraderie that made the situation more bearable. Grandfather, always the storyteller, regaled us with tales from his youth, lightening the mood with his humour and wisdom.

"You know," he began, "this reminds me of a time when I was travelling through the mountains. We got stuck in a snowstorm and had to spend the night in a small hut. It was freezing, but we made it through with some good company and a lot of laughter."

We all listened intently, the warmth of his story wrapping around us like a blanket. "That sounds like quite an adventure," Sujan remarked.

"It was," Grandfather replied with a chuckle. "But like tonight, it taught me that sometimes the best experiences come from the unexpected."

As the hours passed, the bus grew quieter. Some passengers dozed off, while others stayed awake, lost in their thoughts. The rain had stopped completely, leaving a gentle stillness in the air. The moonlight filtered through the windows, casting a soft glow over the bus.

Anjali, seated beside me, spoke up softly. "Thank you for letting me stay with you. This could have been a lot scarier on my own."

"You're welcome," I said with a smile. "We're all in this together, and it's always better to have company."

As the night deepened, the bus became a makeshift home. We took turns keeping watch over our belongings, ensuring that everything remained safe. Despite the discomfort, there was a sense of unity and resilience among us.

As the bus grew quieter and the rain had finally ceased, a sense of calm began to settle over us.

But it was a fragile calm, easily disturbed by the slightest noise or sudden movement. Just then, one of the passengers, an older man with a weathered face, cleared his throat.

"You know," he began, his voice low and gravelly, "there's a story about the Saptakoshi River that I think you should hear."

Everyone turned to him, curiosity piqued but also a sense of dread creeping in. The dim light in the bus cast eerie shadows on his face, making his expression even more unsettling.

"It's an old tale, passed down through generations," he continued. "They say that many years ago, there was a tragic accident involving the ferry. It was a night just like this one—dark, rainy, and cold. The ferry was making its usual late trip, carrying a group of people across the river. Among them was a young couple, newly married and full of dreams for their future."

His voice grew softer, almost whispering, as if the very air around us had thickened with the weight of his words.

"Halfway across, the ferry encountered a sudden, violent storm. The river rose rapidly, and the ferry struggled against the fierce currents. The captain did his best, but the storm was relentless. In the chaos, the newlyweds were swept overboard. The husband tried desperately to save his wife, but the river claimed them both."

A shiver ran through me, and I could see the fear reflected in the eyes of those around me. The bus seemed even smaller, the walls closing in as the story unfolded.

"Their bodies were never found," the man continued, his eyes distant as if seeing the events play out before him. "Since that night, locals say that the spirits of the couple haunt the Saptakoshi River. They appear on nights like this, searching for each other, forever separated by the waters that took their lives."

He paused, letting the weight of his words sink in. The silence was deafening, broken only by the occasional rustle of someone shifting in their seat.

"They say," he added, his voice almost a growl, "that if you listen closely, you can hear their cries for help carried by the wind. And if you're not careful, their restless spirits might mistake you for their lost love, luring you into the river's depths."

A chill ran down my spine, and I could see others clutching their belongings tighter, their faces pale with fear. The bus felt colder, and the once-comforting darkness now seemed menacing.

"I was scared," I admitted, my voice barely a whisper. "Everyone was feared."

The man leaned back, his story complete but its effects lingering in the air. We all sat in stunned silence, the horror of the tale wrapping around us like a suffocating fog. The minutes ticked by, each one feeling like an eternity.

Eventually, exhaustion overcame fear. We huddled closer together, seeking comfort in the presence of others. The haunting tale of the Saptakoshi River weighed heavily on our minds as we finally drifted into an uneasy sleep.

As I closed my eyes, the man's words echoed in my mind, and I couldn't shake the feeling that the spirits of the river were out there, watching and waiting. The night seemed endless, but we clung to the hope that the dawn would bring safety and the promise of a new day.

And so, with fear in our hearts and the ghostly tale lingering in the air, we slept.

Finally, as the first light of dawn began to break over the horizon, we felt a renewed sense of hope. The long night was behind us, and the promise of a new day lay ahead. We had faced the uncertainty together and emerged stronger for it.

With the ferry set to run again at 9 am, we prepared for the next step of our journey. The challenges we had faced had brought us closer, turning strangers into friends and transforming the bus into a symbol of our collective strength.

As the sun began to rise, casting a golden glow over the landscape, we knew that no matter what lay ahead, we were ready to face it together. Our adventure continued, and with each passing moment, we embraced the journey with open hearts and unwavering determination.

Chapter 3: The Ferry Crossing

The sun was already high in the sky, casting a warm glow over the drenched landscape as we gathered by the bus. It was 9 in the morning, and all the passengers, including those who had stayed at the hotel, were assembled. The air was filled with a sense of anticipation and the lingering scent of rain.

The contractor, with a thoughtful expression, addressed the group. "Everyone, I have some news. Unfortunately, the bus can't go any further. The road is too muddy and narrow. We will have to walk to the ferry, which is about a half-hour journey from here."

A murmur of concern rippled through the crowd, but it was quickly replaced by a collective resolve. We had come this far and were determined to continue.

"We're going to have to carry our bags," the contractor continued. "So make sure you have everything you need. Let's stick together and help each other out."

I glanced at Sujan, who gave me a reassuring nod. "Ready for another adventure?" he asked with a grin.

"Always," I replied, adjusting my backpack. "Let's do this."

Geeta didi, always the practical one, checked to make sure everyone in our group was prepared.

"Dad, do you need any help with your bag?" she asked.

Grandfather shook his head, his eyes twinkling with determination. "I've got it, Geeta. Let's get moving."

As we shouldered our respective loads and began our trek along the hilly road, the challenges ahead became more apparent. The path was a series of ups and downs, winding through the lush green hills and dense forests, with occasional patches of slippery mud from the recent rain.

Grandfather, who carried a big sack of rice on his back, moved with surprising agility for someone his age. Sujan and I carried sacks of potatoes, which, thankfully, were not as heavy as the rice. Geeta didi had taken on the task of carrying the heavy backpacks, her determination evident in every step.

"This road is no joke," Sujan remarked, adjusting the sack of potatoes on his shoulder. "But thank God these sacks aren't as heavy as the rice."

"Seriously," I agreed, glancing at Grandfather with admiration. "I don't know how Grandfather does it. He's amazing."

Grandfather turned back and smiled, his eyes twinkling with mischief. "I've had a lot of practice carrying things over the years. Just keep moving and you'll get the hang of it."

Geeta didi, walking beside us, nodded. "It's all about pacing yourself. Don't rush, just take it one step at a time."

We continued our journey, navigating the hilly terrain with a mix of caution and determination. The road dipped and rose, testing our endurance but also offering stunning views of the surrounding landscape. The vibrant wildflowers, the glistening leaves, and the occasional chirping of birds provided a beautiful backdrop to our trek.

As we climbed another incline, I couldn't help but notice the camaraderie among the passengers.

People were helping each other, offering words of encouragement and lending a hand when needed. It was a heartwarming sight, a reminder of the strength of human connection.

"Need a hand with that?" a fellow traveller asked Geeta didi, noticing her heavy load. "I'm good,

thank you," Geeta didi replied with a smile. "But I appreciate the offer." "You're doing great, mom,"

Sujan said, his tone filled with admiration. "We're almost there." "Thanks, son," she replied. "Just

keep moving. We're all in this together." As we descended a particularly steep section of the road,

the sound of rushing water grew louder,

signalling our approach to the river. The anticipation of reaching the ferry was palpable, fueling our determination to keep going.

"Just a little further," Grandfather called out, his voice filled with encouragement. "We can do this."

The ground was still damp from the rain, and we had to tread carefully to avoid slipping. The conversations among the passengers provided a comforting background noise, a reminder that we were all in this together.

"Watch your step," a fellow traveller called out, helping an elderly woman navigate a particularly slippery patch. "It's a bit tricky here."

"Thanks," she replied with a grateful smile. "I appreciate it."

As we walked, the beauty of the landscape unfolded around us. The recent rain had brought the scenery to life, with vibrant wildflowers blooming along the path and the leaves of the trees glistening in the sunlight.

"This place is incredible," Sujan remarked, his eyes scanning the surroundings. "It's like walking through a painting."

"I know," I agreed. "It's hard to believe we were stuck in the rain just last night."

Geeta didi, walking beside us, with backpacks on her both hands, nodded. "It's moments like these that make the journey worthwhile. The challenges we face only make the beauty we find more precious."

Grandfather, leading the way with steady steps, turned to us with a smile. "Nature has a way of reminding us of its wonder, especially after a storm."

As we continued, the path gradually levelled out, and the sound of rushing water grew louder. We knew we were getting closer to the river and the ferry that awaited us. The sense of anticipation grew with each step, mingling with the camaraderie and shared determination of our group.

With renewed vigour, we pressed on, walking the final steps to the hilly road. The sight of the riverbank came into view, and with it, the ferry that would carry us across. The Koshi River, calm and serene, stretched out before us, its waters reflecting the clear blue sky.

"We made it," Sujan said, his voice filled with relief and excitement. "We're finally here."

The steel ferry stood tall and mighty, its imposing presence commanding respect. With its sturdy construction and steel railings enclosing all sides, it exuded a sense of safety and reliability. It was evident that this ferry was built to withstand the powerful currents of the river and carry a substantial number of passengers.

As we approached the ferry, the size of it was awe-inspiring. Its spacious deck could easily carry up to 100 people at a time, ensuring that everyone could find a comfortable spot to settle in. The sight of the large hook hanging from the upper rope or wire added to the intrigue, hinting at the advanced technology that powered this electric vessel.

The ferryman, with his weathered hands and kind face, guided us onto the ferry and ensured that our belongings were secure.

"Welcome," he said, his voice warm and reassuring. "We'll get you across safely."

We carefully loaded our bags and sacks onto the ferry, making sure everything was secure. The other passengers followed suit, their faces a mix of exhaustion and relief. Grandfather, still carrying his sack of rice, was one of the first to step aboard, offering a hand to help the others.

"Thank you," a young mother said, guiding her small child onto the ferry. "It's been quite a journey."

"Indeed it has," Grandfather replied, his eyes crinkling with a smile. "But we're almost there." The anticipation grew as we watched the water currents, aware of their strength and the challenge they presented. The knowledge that this ferry was designed to navigate such conditions filled us with a mix of excitement and confidence.

As we stepped onto the ferry, we were immediately struck by the feeling of being surrounded by the river. The steel railings provided a sense of security, yet allowed us to witness the beauty of the water flowing beneath us. The sound of the rushing current added a thrilling element to the experience, reminding us of the power and vastness of nature.

As the ferry set off, the electric motor hummed to life, propelling us forward with a smooth and efficient motion. The gentle rocking of the ferry created a soothing rhythm, easing the fatigue from our previous trek. We found ourselves drawn to the edge, captivated by the ever-changing landscape unfolding before our eyes.

Sujan and I stood side by side with Geeta didi holding her hands near the edge, watching the landscape slowly pass by. The hills we had just traversed looked even more majestic from this vantage point, their green slopes rolling into the distance. Birds flew overhead, their calls blending with the soft murmur of the river.

"This is incredible," Sujan said, leaning back and closing his eyes for a moment. "All the hard work was worth it."

"Definitely," I agreed, feeling a sense of peace wash over me. "This is what adventure is all about." Geeta didi looked content as well. "It's been a challenging journey, but we've faced it together. That's what makes it special."

Grandfather, standing at the bow of the ferry, turned to look at us. "Every journey has its obstacles, but it's the people you travel with that make all the difference."

The river seemed to come alive as we glided across its surface. The currents, though powerful, were tamed by the expertise of the ferryman and the strength of the vessel. We marvelled at the synchronisation between nature and technology, realising that this ferry was a testament to human ingenuity and the harmonious interaction between humans and the environment.

Our thoughts were filled with a sense of gratitude and wonder. We were grateful for the opportunity to witness the beauty of the river and the surrounding landscape from this unique perspective. The ferry had become more than just a means of transportation; it had become a symbol of our journey, a bridge connecting us to new experiences and cherished memories.

The ferry continued its smooth passage across the river, and I felt a deep sense of gratitude for this experience. The camaraderie, the challenges, and the breathtaking beauty of the landscape had all combined to create a memory that would stay with me forever.

A bit earlier, as we were walking to reach the ferry from the bus, I overheard snippets of conversations among the other travellers. Many of them were talking about Barahakshetra, a pilgrimage site nearby that held significant cultural and religious importance.

"Barahakshetra is just a short distance from here," one man had said. "It's a sacred place, and many people come here to pay their respects."

"I've always wanted to visit Barahakshetra," a woman replied. "They say the temples there are beautiful, especially after the rain."

The mention of Barahakshetra added an extra layer of excitement to our journey. It was a reminder of the rich cultural heritage of the region and the many hidden gems waiting to be discovered.

But our journey and destination were to reach Kathmandu as soon as possible; otherwise, my grandfather would probably take me to visit the temple.

As we neared the opposite shore, the ferryman's voice resonated through the air, announcing our impending arrival. We gathered our belongings, but our hearts held onto the impressions and emotions that the ferry had evoked. The strength, the beauty, and the harmony of this experience would forever remain etched in our minds, reminding us of the power of human determination and the wonders of the natural world.

As the ferry approached the opposite shore, a sense of accomplishment washed over us. The journey had been long and filled with challenges, but each step had brought us closer to our destination. The landscape before us was lush and inviting, a promise of new adventures and discoveries.

The ferryman expertly guided the vessel to the dock, ensuring a smooth landing. "Welcome to the other side," he said with a warm smile. "Safe travels on the rest of your journey."

We disembarked, collecting our bags and sacks, and thanked the ferryman for his skill and kindness. The other passengers began to disperse, some heading towards Barahakshetra, while others, like us, continued their journey towards Kathmandu.

"Let's take a moment to rest and regroup," Grandfather suggested, finding a shaded spot by the riverbank. "We've come a long way, and we still have a bit to go."

We settled down, enjoying the cool breeze and the peacefulness of the river. The sense of camaraderie that had developed among us was stronger than ever, and we shared stories and laughter as we rested.

As we settled down by the riverbank, Grandfather approached the contractor to discuss our next steps. The contractor, a man with a weathered face and kind eyes, looked thoughtful for a moment before addressing the group.

"Everyone, I have some news," he began, gathering our attention. "The next bus, Lalima Yatayat, is on its way from Kathmandu and should arrive here by 7 PM. It's currently halfway through its journey. Once it arrives, we'll swap passengers, as both buses are returning to their starting points."

A murmur of relief and anticipation spread through the group. The wait would be long, but at least we had a plan.

"Thank you for letting us know," Geeta didi said to the contractor. "It's good to have a plan."

"Yes, we have no other choice but to wait," he replied. "In the meantime, let's make ourselves comfortable and ensure everyone is well-fed and rested."

We found a shaded spot by the riverbank and began to settle in. The sound of the water flowing gently by was soothing, and the lush greenery around us provided a peaceful backdrop.

"Looks like we have some time on our hands," Sujan said, setting down his sack of potatoes. "How about we make some noodles and chatpate?"

"Great idea!" I replied, eager to do something productive. "Let's gather the ingredients and get started."

We pulled out our portable stove and pots, and soon the aroma of cooking noodles filled the air. Grandfather, always resourceful, helped us gather some wild herbs and spices to add flavour to our meal.

As we cooked, the other passengers began to take an interest, and soon we had a small group gathered around us, eager to join in. Geeta didi expertly mixed the ingredients for the chatpate, a spicy and tangy snack that was a favourite among us.

"Would you like to try some?" she offered, handing a plate of chatpate to a fellow traveller.

"Thank you," the traveller replied, taking a bite and smiling. "This is delicious! You have a real talent for cooking."

"Thank you," Geeta didi said with a modest smile. "It's a family recipe."

As we shared our meal, conversations flowed easily, and the sense of camaraderie grew stronger. We talked about our journeys, our families, and our hopes for the future.

"So, what brings you to this part of the country?" a young woman asked us, her eyes filled with curiosity.

"We're on our way to Kathmandu," I explained. "It's been quite an adventure so far, but we're determined to make it."

"Kathmandu is a beautiful city," she replied. "I'm sure you'll love it there. I'm heading back home after visiting some relatives."

As the sun began to dip lower in the sky, casting a warm, golden light over the landscape, we continued to share stories and laughter. The hours seemed to pass more quickly with good company and delicious food.

"Grandfather, do you have any stories from your travels?" Sujan asked, his eyes twinkling with curiosity.

Grandfather chuckled, his eyes crinkling with a smile. "Oh, I have plenty of stories. Let me tell you about the time I crossed the Himalayas on foot..."

As Grandfather began to recount his tale, we listened with rapt attention, hanging on to every word. His stories were filled with adventure, wisdom, and a deep appreciation for the beauty of the world. I turned to a fellow traveller, an uncle who had been quietly observing the surroundings.

"Uncle, do you know what time it is now?" I asked.

He glanced at his watch and smiled. "It's 3PM, young one."

Hearing this, Sujan and I exchanged a glance and sighed. The hours seemed to stretch endlessly before us, making us feel restless and bored.

"We should explore the nearby villages," Sujan suggested, his eyes lighting up with excitement. "It could be fun, and it will help pass the time."

I nodded eagerly. "That's a great idea! Let's go check them out."

However, as we started to stand up, Geeta didi, who had been arranging our belongings, intervened. "Hold on, you two. You're both just kids. What if you get lost?"

"But didi, I'm twelve and Sujan is fifteen," I protested. "We can handle it."

Geeta didi shook her head firmly. "I understand, but it's not safe. We need to stay together, and someone has to look after the backpacks and sacks. We can't all go wandering off."

Seeing the determination in her eyes, Sujan and I reluctantly sat back down. "I guess there's no option but to wait," I muttered.

After a few minutes of fidgeting, Sujan nudged me. "Let's at least go to that nearby house and ask for some water. I'm thirsty."

"Good idea," I agreed, and we both stood up again.

"Alright, but be quick and stay together," she cautioned.

Sujan and I made our way to the house, which was surrounded by beautiful, vibrant flowers and lush greenery. The air was filled with the scent of blooming jasmine and the sound of chirping birds. As we approached the house, an elderly woman stepped out onto the porch. She had a warm smile and a gentle demeanour.

"Namaste," I greeted her politely. "Could we please have some water?"

"Namaste," she replied with a kind smile. "Of course, come in. You must be tired from your journey."

We followed her inside, where she poured us each a glass of cool, refreshing water. As we drank, she asked, "Are you travellers? Where are you headed?"

"Yes, we're on our way to Kathmandu," Sujan explained. "But we're waiting for another bus to arrive."

"Ah, Kathmandu is a wonderful city," she said, nodding. "I hope you have a safe and pleasant journey."

"Thank you," I replied, feeling grateful for her hospitality. "The scenery around here is really beautiful."

"It is," she agreed. "Nature has a way of calming the soul. Enjoy it while you can."

We finished our water and thanked the elderly woman once more before heading back to the riverbank. As we walked, Sujan looked around at the picturesque landscape.

"You know, even though we're stuck waiting, this place isn't so bad," he said, admiring the view.

"Yeah," I agreed, taking in the serene surroundings. "It's actually pretty awesome."

When we returned, Geeta didi looked relieved to see us. "Did you get your water?" she asked.

"Yes, and the lady at the house was really nice," I told her.

"Good," Geeta didi said with a smile. "Now, let's just enjoy the scenery and wait for the bus. It will be here before we know it."

As we settled back down, I felt a renewed sense of calm. The wait might be long, but with such beautiful nature around us and good company, it didn't seem so bad after all.

The sky gradually darkened, and the air grew cooler. We gathered closer around the fire, enjoying the warmth and the sense of togetherness.

"Looks like it's almost time," the contractor said, checking his watch. "The bus should be here soon."

We packed up our cooking supplies and gathered our belongings, ready to continue our journey. The anticipation of the bus's arrival filled the air, mingling with the excitement of the evening. As the headlights of Lalima Yatayat appeared in the distance, a cheer went up from the group. The bus pulled up to the riverbank, and the driver stepped out, greeting us with a friendly wave. "Welcome, everyone," he said. "Let's get you all settled and ready to swap places."

We quickly and efficiently swapped passengers, ensuring that everyone was comfortable and had their belongings. The driver of Agni Yatayat, a jovial man with a big smile, helped us with our bags and made sure everything was in order.

"Thank you for waiting," he said. "We'll get you to Kathmandu safely and comfortably."

As we boarded the bus, the sense of relief was palpable. We settled into our seats, grateful for the opportunity to rest and continue our journey.

"Looks like we're back on track," Sujan said, leaning back in his seat with a satisfied sigh. "Here's to the next leg of our adventure."

"Indeed," I replied, feeling a sense of contentment. "To new experiences and the road ahead."

As the bus pulled away from the riverbank, taking us towards Kathmandu, I looked out the window at the passing landscape. The challenges we had faced and the camaraderie we had shared had made this journey unforgettable. And with each new step, I knew that our adventure was far from over.

The transformation of the region, marked by the construction of the Koshi Bridge at Chatara and the widening of the Madan Bhandari Highway, is a remarkable story of progress and development. This area, once reliant on ferries for crossing the formidable Koshi River, now boasts a modern bridge that not only enhances connectivity but also stands as a testament to the advancements in infrastructure over recent years.

The Koshi Bridge at Chatara is more than just a structure of steel and concrete; it represents a significant leap forward in bridging communities, fostering trade, and facilitating easier travel. Before its construction, the challenges of crossing the Koshi River posed significant barriers to movement and economic activities. The bridge has effectively eliminated these challenges, allowing for smoother, more reliable transportation. It has opened up new avenues for commerce, enabling local businesses to thrive and grow by providing easier access to markets and resources. The transition from the narrow Madan Bhandari Road to the expansive Madan Bhandari Highway further underscores the region's rapid development. The old road, with its limitations, often caused bottlenecks and delays, hampering efficient travel. The new highway, with its wider lanes and improved infrastructure, has transformed the travel experience, making it safer and more efficient for both locals and visitors. This improvement in road infrastructure is crucial for supporting the growing population and the increasing volume of traffic, ensuring that the region can keep pace with its development aspirations.

Tourism has emerged as a significant beneficiary of these infrastructural advancements. The enhanced accessibility provided by the Koshi Bridge and the Madan Bhandari Highway has made it

easier for tourists to discover the region's natural and cultural treasures. The area is home to stunning landscapes, rich biodiversity, and historical sites like Barahakshetra, which attract visitors from near and far. The influx of tourists brings economic benefits, creating jobs in hospitality, guiding services, and local businesses, thereby boosting the local economy.

Furthermore, the growth in tourism promotes cultural exchange and understanding. Visitors have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the local culture, participate in traditional festivals, and experience the way of life that makes the region unique. This cultural exchange enriches both the visitors and the local communities, fostering a sense of global connectedness.

The development narrative of this region is a powerful reminder of how strategic infrastructure projects can catalyse broader economic and social growth. The Koshi Bridge and the Madan Bhandari Highway are not merely physical structures; they are symbols of progress, resilience, and the forward-looking vision of the community and its leaders. As the region continues to develop, it is poised to become a vibrant hub of economic activity and a cherished destination for tourists, showcasing the harmonious blend of natural beauty and human ingenuity.

Looking ahead, the ongoing and future projects in the region hold the promise of even more transformative changes. Continued investment in infrastructure, sustainable tourism development, and community engagement will be key to maintaining the momentum of growth. The story of the Koshi Bridge and the Madan Bhandari Highway is just the beginning of an exciting journey towards a prosperous and dynamic future for the region and there's a lot more exciting places and stories to read on further chapters of this journey to Kathmandu.

Chapter 4: Nature's Delight

We sat on the bus called Lalima Yatayat, and as the engine roared to life, it felt like the beginning of a new chapter in our journey. The bus started moving, and the excitement of getting back on the road to Kathmandu was palpable. Sujan and I had managed to snag the cabin seats just to the right of the driver, giving us a prime view of the road ahead through the front windshield.

"We've got the best seats in the house," Sujan said with a grin, nudging me with his elbow.

"Absolutely," I replied, my eyes glued to the ever-changing scenery. "We can see everything from here."

The road was a gravel road with many ups and downs, making the ride both thrilling and a bit nerve-racking. The recent rains and the impact of the Saptakoshi River's breakage had left the road harsh and dangerous. Every bump and turn was a reminder of the power of nature and the resilience required to navigate through it.

"Look at that," Sujan pointed out, as we passed a particularly steep incline. "The road looks like it's barely holding together."

"It's amazing how the driver handles it with such ease," I said, watching him expertly manoeuvre the bus around obstacles.

The driver, a seasoned man with a calm demeanour, glanced at us with a reassuring smile. "This road has seen better days," he said. "But it's nothing we can't handle. Just sit back and enjoy the ride."

The road we were travelling on had been recently widened and was now known as the Madan Bhandari Road (Now Madan Bhandari Highway). In recent days, some people had also started calling it the Beltar Basaha Road, reflecting the area's evolving identity.

"You know," a passenger said, turning to Sujan, "this road wasn't always this good. They've done a lot of work to improve it."

"Yeah, I heard it's now called the Madan Bhandari Road," Sujan replied. "It's amazing how much effort goes into maintaining these routes."

The bus rattled over a particularly rough patch, and we held on to our seats, the excitement mingling with a bit of apprehension. The view from the front was both breathtaking and humbling. The lush green hills, the dense forests, and the occasional glimpse of the river below created a stunning backdrop to our journey.

"Nature's really putting on a show for us," Sujan remarked, his eyes wide with wonder.

"It's like a roller coaster ride," I said, laughing. "But with much better scenery."

As we continued along the winding road, the conversations among the passengers added to the ambiance. People shared stories of their travels, their families, and their hopes for the future. The sense of camaraderie that had developed during our previous challenges was still strong, and it felt like we were all part of one big adventure.

"Remember the ferry crossing?" a fellow traveller said, leaning forward to join our conversation.

"That was something else. But it just makes you appreciate the beauty of this place even more."

"Absolutely," I agreed. "Every challenge we face just adds to the experience."

The bus hit another bump, and we all laughed, the shared moment of unease turning into a bonding experience. Grandfather, seated a few rows behind us, caught our eye and gave us a thumbs-up, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

"He's loving this," Sujan said with a chuckle. "I think Grandfather thrives on these adventures."

"He's got the spirit of a true traveller," I replied, feeling a deep sense of admiration for him. "And he's taught us well."

As the bus navigated another curve, the driver pointed out a particularly scenic spot. "That's the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve over there," he said. "If you're lucky, you might spot some rare birds or even wild water buffalo."

Sujan and I pressed our faces against the window, trying to catch a glimpse of the wildlife. The reserve, with its vast wetlands and diverse flora and fauna, was a testament to the natural beauty of the region.

"This is incredible," Sujan whispered, his eyes scanning the landscape. "It's like something out of a nature documentary."

"I know," I said, equally captivated. "We have to come back here someday and explore it properly."

The bus continued its journey, the road winding through the hills and valleys, each turn revealing new vistas and hidden gems. The conversations among the passengers flowed easily, the shared experience creating a sense of unity and purpose.

As we travelled along the Madan Bhandari Road (Now Madan Bhandari Highway), also known to some as the Beltar Basaha Road, the landscape around us seemed to tell a story of resilience and renewal. The recent improvements to the road were a testament to the efforts of countless individuals working together to make travel safer and more accessible.

The journey was long, but the sense of adventure and the beauty of nature kept our spirits high. With each passing mile, we felt a deeper connection to the land and to each other, the challenges we faced only strengthening the bonds we had formed.

"To new adventures and the memories we're yet to make," I said, raising an imaginary toast.

"To the journey," Sujan replied, his eyes shining with excitement.

And with that, we continued our ride, the road ahead filled with endless possibilities and the promise of new discoveries.

The full moon cast a soft glow over the night sky, illuminating the surroundings with a magical light. As we reached Udayapur Gaighat, a sense of tranquillity enveloped the valley, enhancing its natural beauty.

The beauty of Gaighat Valley was breathtaking. The rolling hills, covered in lush greenery, stretched as far as the eye could see. The valley was dotted with small villages, their lights twinkling in the distance like stars on the ground. The calm river meandered through the valley, reflecting the moonlight and creating a shimmering path of silver.

As we stepped off the bus, the cool night air greeted us, carrying with it the scent of the surrounding foliage. The peacefulness of the valley was almost tangible, and a sense of serenity washed over us.

"Wow, look at this view," Sujan whispered, his voice filled with awe. "It's like we've stepped into a postcard."

"I know," I replied, taking in the sight before us. "It's like a hidden gem, untouched by the chaos of the world."

A fellow passenger, overhearing our conversation, chimed in. "Gaighat Valley is truly a hidden paradise," she said. "The tranquillity and natural beauty here are unmatched."

We nodded in agreement, struck by the profound beauty of our surroundings. It felt like a moment frozen in time, a chance to pause and appreciate the wonders of the world.

As the bus driver announced that he needed to rest for the upcoming journey back to Kathmandu, we understood the importance of taking care of oneself amidst the demands of travel. He recommended a nearby lodge for his sleep, ensuring he would be well-rested for the drive the next day.

With the bus parked at Udayapur Gaighat bus park, we settled back into our seats, ready to find comfort and rest after the long day. We had some snacks to satiate our hunger and then drifted off to sleep, the gentle rumble of the bus lulling us into a peaceful slumber.

In our dreams, the beauty of Gaighat Valley continued to captivate us. The moonlit landscapes and the serene atmosphere filled our minds, creating a tapestry of memories that would forever remain etched in our hearts.

At that moment, as we slept on the bus, we felt grateful for the opportunity to experience the wonders of nature and the joy of travel. Tomorrow would bring new adventures and challenges, but for now, we embraced the stillness of the night and the beauty that surrounded us.

As dawn broke, the first rays of sunlight pierced through the bus windows, gently waking us from our slumber. The night had worked its magic, and we felt refreshed and ready for the next leg of

our journey. The valley, bathed in the soft glow of morning light, looked even more enchanting than it had under the moon.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," Sujan said, nudging me awake. "Look at that sunrise."

I rubbed my eyes and gazed out the window. The sky was a canvas of pinks and oranges, with the sun slowly rising over the horizon. The hills and valleys seemed to come alive with the light, casting long shadows and illuminating the dewdrops on the leaves.

"Morning, Sujan," I replied, stretching. "This place just keeps getting more beautiful."

Grandfather, already awake and sipping his tea, joined us at the front of the bus. "Early mornings are the best time to appreciate nature," he said with a smile. "Everything feels so fresh and full of promise."

As the bus driver returned, looking well-rested and ready for the day's drive, we gathered our belongings and prepared to continue our journey. The sense of anticipation was palpable, and the beauty of Gaighat Valley served as a perfect backdrop to our renewed excitement.

"Alright, everyone," the driver announced. "Let's get back on the road. Kathmandu awaits!"

The bus roared to life once more, and we resumed our journey along the Madan Bhandari Road (now Madan Bhandari Highway). The landscape continued to captivate us, with each turn revealing new vistas and hidden treasures. The hills, covered in a patchwork of fields and forests, seemed to stretch endlessly, inviting us to explore their secrets.

As we travelled, we passed through small villages and towns, each with its own unique charm. The locals, going about their daily routines, waved at us with friendly smiles, a reminder of the warmth and hospitality that characterised the region.

"Look at those terraced fields," Sujan pointed out, his eyes wide with wonder. "It's amazing how they make use of every inch of land."

"Yeah," I agreed. "It's a testament to their ingenuity and hard work."

As the bus climbed higher into the hills, we reached a small roadside teahouse. The driver announced a brief stop, giving us a chance to stretch our legs and enjoy a hot cup of chai. The aroma of spices and boiling tea filled the air as we stepped off the bus.

The teahouse was a charming, rustic place with wooden benches and tables. Local villagers and fellow travellers sat together, sharing stories and laughter. The owner, a kind-faced woman with a warm smile, welcomed us with open arms.

"Come, sit," she said, gesturing to an empty table. "I will bring you some fresh chai and snacks."

We sat down at a wooden table, enjoying the view. The teahouse, perched on a hillside, offered a panoramic vista of the valley below. The river, winding its way through the landscape, glistened in the morning sun, and the distant mountains stood tall and majestic against the sky.

We settled in, grateful for the break. The chai was hot and fragrant, warming us from the inside out. The owner brought us plates of samosas and pakoras, their crispy exteriors giving way to flavorful fillings.

"This is delicious," Geeta didi said, savouring a bite of his samosa. "I could get used to this."

"This is life," Sujan said, taking a deep breath of the crisp mountain air. "I could stay here forever."

"Me too," I replied, feeling a deep sense of contentment. "But we have a journey to complete and more adventures waiting for us."

As we enjoyed our meal, we struck up a conversation with a fellow traveller, a young woman named Maya who was also on her way to Kathmandu. She had been travelling solo, exploring different parts of Nepal and documenting her journey through photography.

"I love capturing the beauty of everyday life," Maya said, showing us some of her photos. "The people, the landscapes, the moments that make each place unique."

Her photos were stunning, each one telling a story of its own. "You have a great eye for detail," I said, admiring her work. "Your photos really bring the journey to life."

As we chatted with Maya, the sun began to set, casting more bright over the hills. The sunlight was bright, adding to the cosy atmosphere.

"We should get back on the road soon," Grandfather said, glancing at his watch. "It's 11am. We still have a long way to go."

Reluctantly, we bid farewell to the teahouse and its warm hospitality.

As we prepared to continue our journey, the teahouse owner handed us a small bag of freshly baked pastries. "For the road," he said with a smile. "Safe travels, and may your journey be filled with joy."

"Thank you," we chorused, touched by his generosity.

The bus resumed its journey, the road winding through the hills and valleys, each turn revealing new and breathtaking views. The camaraderie among the passengers grew stronger with each passing mile, the shared experience creating a sense of unity and purpose.

It was day three of our journey, and we were still halfway to Kathmandu. The road ahead was long and winding, stretching out before us like a never-ending ribbon of possibilities. The landscape around us had begun to change, transitioning from the flat hills and trees to rolling hills and lush greenery.

The bus rattled along the uneven road, and I watched as the scenery outside the window shifted with each passing mile. Villages dotted the landscape, their thatched-roof houses nestled among terraced fields. Farmers worked diligently, their hands moving rhythmically as they tended to their crops.

Sujan, sitting next to me, was engrossed in a book about the history of Nepal. "Did you know," he said, not looking up from the pages, "that Kathmandu was once a major trade route between India and Tibet? It's why the city has such a rich cultural mix."

I nodded, feeling a sense of anticipation building within me. "I can't wait to see it for myself," I replied. "But I'm also enjoying the journey. There's so much to see along the way."

Grandfather, seated in the row ahead, turned to join the conversation. "The journey is just as important as the destination," he said, his eyes twinkling with wisdom. "Every moment is a new experience, a new story to tell."

As the bus rolled into Lahan, we were greeted by the sight of vast expanses of rice fields stretching out in every direction. The golden-green stalks swayed gently in the breeze, creating a mesmerising wave-like effect. The Terai region, rich in rice, wheat, and paddy production, was truly a sight to behold.

"Look at those fields," Sujan said, pressing his face against the window. "It's like an ocean of green."
"It's amazing how fertile this land is," I replied. "No wonder it's known for its agricultural produce."

The bus moved continuously without stopping, the driver focused on the road ahead. I leaned forward and tapped his shoulder. "Can we slow down a bit? I'd love to take in the scenery."
The driver shook his head, a determined look on his face. "We have to reach Kathmandu soon," he said. "If we keep this pace, we should arrive by tomorrow morning."
Sujan sighed but nodded in understanding. "I guess he's right. We do have a long way to go."

As we continued our journey, the landscape around us remained lush and green, the fields giving way to small villages and bustling marketplaces. The bus rattled along the road, the sounds of daily life filtering in through the open windows.

We soon reached Mirchaya, and the name was prominently displayed on shops and signboards. The town was alive with activity, vendors calling out their wares, children playing in the streets, and people going about their daily routines.

"Mirchaya looks like a lively place," Sujan remarked. "It's got a nice vibe to it."

"Yeah, it does," I agreed, watching the scenes unfold outside. "It's always interesting to see how different towns have their own unique character."

The bus didn't stop in Mirchaya either, and we continued on our way. The conversations among the passengers grew louder, filled with stories of their travels and anecdotes about the places they had visited.

"Do you think we'll have time to explore Kathmandu when we get there?" Sujan asked, turning to me.

"Definitely," I replied. "We've been through so much to get there. We deserve to enjoy it."

As we approached Dhanusdham, the landscape began to change once more. The fields were interspersed with more trees, and the road curved through gentle hills. The name "Dhanusdhan" was visible on various signboards, and the town seemed to be a hub of activity.

"Dhanusdham," I said aloud, reading one of the signs. "We're getting closer to Bardibas."

"Yeah, we're making good progress," Sujan said. "I can feel the excitement building up."

As we neared Bardibas, the sense of anticipation grew among the passengers. The driver remained focused, navigating the road with skill and precision. The camaraderie among us had only strengthened, and the shared experiences created a bond that made the journey even more meaningful.

"Bardibas is just around the corner," the driver announced, glancing back at us. "From there, it's a straight road to Kathmandu."

"Almost there," Grandfather said, a smile spreading across his face. "This journey has been quite the adventure."

"It really has," I agreed, feeling a surge of excitement. "And I can't wait to see what awaits us in Kathmandu."

As the bus continued its journey, the conversations turned to plans for our time in the city, the excitement palpable in the air. The road ahead was filled with promise, and the beauty of the journey was a testament to the wonders of exploration and the joy of travel.

With each passing mile, we felt a deeper connection to the land and to each other, the challenges we faced only strengthened the bonds we had formed. The journey to it was nearing its end, but the memories we had created would last a lifetime.

The journey continued, the bus winding its way through narrow rivers and bridges and picturesque dense forests. The moon began to see overhead, its light guiding us through the windows. As we reached Bardibas, our bus stopped near a big restaurant. It was 8 PM by now, and the driver turned to us with a smile.

"Let's get some dinner," he said. "The bus will stop for one hour. Have some food and use the restroom if you need to."

The restaurant was hefty and big, like it could feed a hundred people. There were many tables, and a warm, inviting smell wafted through the open doors. We all disembarked, grateful for the chance to stretch our legs and fill our stomachs.

Sujan's eyes widened as he took in the sheer size of the place. "Wow, this place is massive! It's like a banquet hall."

"I know," I replied, my mouth already watering from the delicious aromas. "Let's find a table and see what they've got."

Grandfather, ever the seasoned traveller, led the way with a confident stride. "Come on, kids. Let's get a good spot before it fills up."

We found a table near the window, giving us a view of the bustling street outside. As we settled in, a waiter approached us with a friendly smile and handed us menus.

"Welcome! What can I get you folks tonight?" he asked.

Geeta didi took a long sigh while looking at the menu. "Daal bhat with mutton for me", she pointed out.

Sujan glanced over the menu, his eyes lighting up. "I think I'll go for the mutton curry and rice. What about you, Sandeep?"

"I'm leaning towards the chicken thali," I replied. "It's been a while since we had a proper meal."

Grandfather nodded in agreement. "I'll have the fish curry. It's always good to try the local specialties."

As we placed our orders, the restaurant buzzed with activity. Families, travellers, and locals all mingled together, creating a lively atmosphere. Nearby, we overheard a group of fellow passengers discussing their journey.

"I can't believe how beautiful the ride has been," one woman said, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "The landscapes are just breathtaking."

"Absolutely," her companion agreed. "And we've met such interesting people along the way."

Sujan leaned back in his chair, a thoughtful expression on his face. "It's amazing how travel brings people together. We've all got our own stories, but we're sharing this journey."

"That's the beauty of it," I said, taking a sip of my water. "Every stop, every meal, every conversation adds to the experience."

Our food arrived, and the rich aromas filled the air. The waiter placed the steaming dishes in front of us, and we eagerly dug in. The flavours were incredible, each bite a burst of spices and textures.

"This is delicious," Sujan said between mouthfuls. "The mutton is so tender."

"The chicken is perfect," I added, savouring the taste. "They really know how to cook here."

Grandfather, always one to appreciate good food, nodded in approval. "The fish curry is excellent. Fresh and full of flavour."

As we ate, a young couple at the next table struck up a conversation with us. They were also heading to Kathmandu and shared their excitement about the journey.

"We've been travelling for a few days now," the woman said. "Every stop has been an adventure."

"Same here," I replied. "It's been an incredible experience. The landscapes, the people, the food—everything has been amazing."

The man nodded. "Kathmandu is going to be the cherry on top. We can't wait to explore the city."

"Neither can we," Sujan said with a grin. "It's been a long journey, but it's all worth it."

As the hour drew to a close, we finished our meal and took a moment to relax. The restaurant, with its warm lighting and friendly atmosphere, felt like a brief oasis on our long journey.

The driver called out, signalling that it was time to board the bus again. We thanked the staff, gathered our belongings, and made our way back to the bus, feeling rejuvenated and ready for the next leg of our adventure.

"That was a great meal," Sujan said as we settled back into our seats. "I'm glad we stopped here."

3 "Me too," I agreed. "It's moments like these that make the journey so memorable."

Geeta didi smiled, her eyes twinkling with satisfaction. "Onward to Kathmandu, then. The adventure continues."

As the bus roared to life and pulled away from Bardibas, we all felt a renewed sense of excitement and anticipation. The road ahead still held many surprises, and we were ready to embrace each one, knowing that every moment was a story waiting to be told.

Our bus continued west from Bardibas, and the beauty of nature unfolded before our eyes. The lush greenery and rolling hills were a sight to behold. As the evening progressed, a gentle rain began to fall, adding a refreshing touch to the cool night air.

It must have been around 9 PM when our bus came to a sudden halt at Lalbandi. We quickly realised that we were in a jam, with buses and heavy trucks piled up ahead of us. The rain was now coming down harder, creating a rhythmic pattern against the bus windows.

"What's happening?" Sujan asked, peering into the darkness outside.

"I don't know," I replied, straining to see through the rain. "Ask the driver."

Geeta didi made her way to the front of the bus, where the driver was engaged in a heated conversation with a few other persons through the window.

"The road's blocked," the driver explained, shaking his head. "I don't know the exact reason but people are saying that the roads are closed until tomorrow morning. I'm sorry to say, but we won't be moving tonight."

A collective sigh of frustration echoed through the bus. She returned to her seat, relaying the news to Grandfather and other passengers.

"Looks like we're stuck here for the night," I said with a resigned shrug.

"Can't we just leave our backpacks and sacks here and find a guesthouse?" Sujan suggested.

Grandfather shook his head. "I asked around. Everyone's in the same situation. Nobody wants to leave their belongings unattended. It's too risky."

Nearby, a young woman with a baby cradled in her arms voiced her concerns. "It's impossible to find a guesthouse now. We'll have to stay on the bus."

An elderly man chimed in, "Better to stay here and keep an eye on our things. The guesthouses are probably packed anyway."

A murmur of agreement rippled through the passengers. Despite the discomfort, no one was willing to take the chance of leaving their possessions behind.

"We'll just have to make the best of it," Sujan said, trying to sound optimistic. "At least we have each other."

Geeta didi, always the voice of reason, nodded. "Let's try to get some rest. Tomorrow will bring new challenges, and we'll need our energy."

As we settled back into our seats, the rain continued to fall, creating a soothing lullaby. Despite the unexpected delay, there was a sense of solidarity among the passengers. We were all in this together, bound by the shared experience of our journey.

The bus became a temporary refuge, a small world of its own, where strangers become companions. And as the night wore on, we found comfort in each other's presence, knowing that the road ahead, though uncertain, would eventually lead us to our destination.

As night fell, the passengers grew quiet, lulled by the gentle motion of the bus. Sujan and I shared a blanket, our heads resting against each other as we drifted off to sleep.

In my dreams, I saw the vibrant streets of Kathmandu, the ancient temples and bustling markets. The journey was far from over, but each day brought us closer to our destination and to the adventures that awaited us.

And as the bus rolled on through the night, I knew that the road to Kathmandu was a journey of discovery, of connection, and of embracing the beauty of the world around us.

Morning broke with a sense of relief as the first rays of sunlight pierced through the clouds. It was 6 AM, and the announcement that the road had been cleared spread quickly through the bus. The engines of buses and trucks roared to life, and soon, the convoy of vehicles began to move. It was day four of our journey to Kathmandu.

Our bus rolled forward onto the Mahendra Highway, one of Nepal's major thoroughfares. This highway, also known as the East-West Highway, stretches across the entire breadth of the country, linking the eastern and western regions. It is a vital artery for commerce and travel, offering glimpses of Nepal's diverse landscapes and cultures.

As we journeyed westward, the scenery outside our windows was nothing short of mesmerising. We passed through beautiful places.

As the bus continued its journey along the Mahendra Highway, the landscape around us constantly shifted, revealing the rich tapestry of Nepal's natural beauty. Each town and village we passed through offered a unique glimpse into the country's cultural diversity and heritage.

Hariwan was our first notable stop, a small town nestled amid verdant fields. The early morning sun bathed the landscape in a golden hue, and the sight of farmers tending to their crops added a serene charm to the place. The simplicity and tranquillity of rural life were evident here, a stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of city life.

Moving on, we arrived in Chandrapur, a town that seemed to pulse with energy. The streets were lined with small shops and stalls, where locals engaged in animated conversations and children played joyfully. The aroma of freshly cooked food wafted through the air, tempting us to sample the local delicacies. Chandrapur's vibrant atmosphere was a testament to the lively spirit of its people. Our next significant landmark was Nijgadh, surrounded by dense forests that are part of the Terai Arc Landscape. This area is known for its rich biodiversity, home to numerous species of flora and fauna. The lush greenery and the calls of exotic birds created a symphony of nature that was both soothing and invigorating. Nijgadh's natural beauty was a reminder of the ecological wealth that Nepal holds.

As we approached Birgunj, the scenery shifted once again. Birgunj is one of Nepal's major commercial hubs, located close to the Indian border. The town was a hive of activity, with markets bustling with traders and shoppers. The streets were crowded with rickshaws, motorbikes, and pedestrians, each adding to the vibrant tapestry of daily life. Birgunj's strategic location makes it a key player in cross-border trade, and its dynamic rich history, cultural heritage, and breathtaking landscapes, was the ultimate destination of our journey and the atmosphere reflected this importance.

With each mile, the anticipation of reaching Kathmandu grew. The capital city, known for its . But the road to Kathmandu was not just about the destination; it was about the experiences and memories we gathered along the way.

As we travelled further, the terrain began to change, hinting at the mountainous regions that lay ahead. The road would soon wind its way through the hills, offering panoramic views of valleys and peaks. The adventures that awaited us were still numerous, from navigating the winding roads to exploring the cultural landmarks and natural wonders of Kathmandu.

Our journey on the Mahendra Highway was a microcosm of Nepal itself—diverse, beautiful, and full of surprises. Each town, village, and stretch of road had its own story to tell, adding layers to our travel narrative. With excitement and curiosity, we continued our journey, ready to embrace the adventures that lay ahead as we made our way to the heart of Nepal.

Despite the progress, we knew that many adventures and challenges still awaited us on our way to Kathmandu. The journey was far from over, but with each passing mile, our excitement and anticipation grew. The promise of new experiences and the beauty of Nepal kept our spirits high as we continued on our path, ready to embrace whatever lay ahead.

Chapter 5: towers of fears and the roads of hills.

It was day four of our journey to Kathmandu. I glanced at my beautiful watch that Geeta Didi had bought for me in Nijgadh when the bus had stopped at a tea shop. The memory of that moment brought a smile to my face.

As we had disembarked the bus for a short break, a man with a bucket full of watches approached us. He had the look of a local Madhesi, with a friendly demeanour that made him instantly likeable. "Hello, sir! Hello, madam!" he called out, holding up the bucket. "Buy one watch and get one free! Only one hundred rupees!"

Sujan nudged me. "Look at those watches. We could really use one, don't you think?"

I nodded eagerly. "Yeah, let's ask Geeta Didi.

We found her enjoying a cup of tea at the shop and hurried over. "Geeta Didi, can we please get a watch?" I asked, pointing towards the man. "They're really cheap, and we could use them to keep track of time."

Geeta Didi looked at us with a raised eyebrow. "Are you sure about this? They look quite basic."

Sujan chimed in, "Please, mom. It'll be useful for us, and it's a good deal. Buy one, get one free!"

She sighed but couldn't hide her smile. "Alright, alright. Let's have a look."

We walked over to the man, who greeted us with a wide grin. "Namaste, madam! These watches are very good. Only one hundred rupees, and you get two! Perfect for the young ones."

Geeta Didi inspected a few of the watches, checking their quality. "They seem decent," she said, turning to us. "Which ones do you like?"

Sujan picked a sleek black one, and I chose a vibrant blue. "These ones!" we said in unison.

"Okay, we'll take these two," Geeta Didi said, handing over a hundred-rupee note to the man.

"Thank you, madam! Great choice," the man said, handing us the watches. "Enjoy your new watches!"

We couldn't contain our excitement as we did. "Thank you, Didi!" we both exclaimed.

"You're welcome," she replied with a fond smile. "Just make sure to take good care of them."

Sujan and I kept glancing at our wrists, admiring our new watches. They weren't fancy, but they felt like a token of this incredible journey we were on.

"It's perfect," Sujan said, adjusting his watch. "Now we can keep track of time better."

"Definitely," I agreed. "And we'll always remember this moment."

Geeta Didi chuckled. "You two and your watches. Just don't forget to enjoy the journey itself."

"We won't," we promised in unison.

After an hour-long tea break, we heard the loud sound of the bus's horn, indicating that it was time to continue our journey. We quickly finished our tea and snacks, gathered our belongings, and the hum of the bus's engine and the gentle sway of the vehicle brought a sense of familiarity and tranquillity.

The journey to Kathmandu was not just about reaching a physical place; it was about the experiences, the connections, and the adventures that unfolded along the way. And as the bus carried us forward, I couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement for what lay ahead.

As the bus rolled on, I felt a renewed sense of excitement. The road to Kathmandu was full of surprises, and our new watches were a small reminder of the adventures and memories we were making along the way.

Looking out of the window, we watched as the scenic landscapes of Nepal unfolded before us. The lush green fields, the towering mountains in the distance, and the villages we passed by were all part of the captivating beauty of the country.

Inside the bus, conversations buzzed among the passengers. Some were discussing their plans in Kathmandu, while others exchanged stories and experiences from their own journeys. The atmosphere was filled with a mix of excitement and anticipation for what awaited us in the vibrant city.

As the bus continued its journey, I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude for the experiences and connections we were making along the way. Each moment was adding to the tapestry of memories that would forever be etched in our hearts.

With a contented sigh, I leaned back in my seat and let the rhythmic motion of the bus lull me into a peaceful state. The road stretched out before us, and with each passing mile, we were one step closer to our destination.

I glanced at my watch; it read 10 a.m. The day was bright, with rays of sunlight piercing through the clouds.

Our bus was en route to Hetauda. After a while stop in Birgunj, now our bus was moving back to Pipara Simara, a quaint town celebrated for its peaceful atmosphere and historical charm. Situated in Nepal's Terai region, Pipara Simara is a lively centre of local commerce and culture, its streets bustling with traditional Nepali shops and the air filled with the tantalising aroma of local dishes from street vendors.

As the bus trudged forward, the scenery outside evolved. The flat Terai plains transitioned into rolling hills and the distant, majestic outlines of mountain ranges. The landscape transformed into a vibrant mosaic of lush greenery, terraced fields, and charming little houses nestled in the hills. The air became cooler and fresher as we ascended, and the sky stretched out in a brilliant expanse of blue.

Upon reaching Amlekhganj, the town's name was prominently displayed on signboards. Perched at the edge of the hills, Amlekhganj serves as a gateway to the breathtaking natural beauty beyond. It is where the bustling plains meet the serene mountains. Just beyond lies Parsa National Park, a vast sanctuary brimming with diverse wildlife and dense forests. The park is a haven for flora and fauna, offering sightings of elusive animals such as tigers, leopards, and elephants.

Despite the park's allure, our itinerary did not allow for a stop there, as our final destination was Kathmandu. The capital city has been awaiting us with its myriad attractions and vibrant energy. Inside the bus, the atmosphere was lively, filled with a symphony of voices. People shared stories, discussed their plans, and exchanged laughter. A group of passengers animatedly talked about the places they wanted to visit in Kathmandu.

"Have you read about the ancient Swayambhunath Stupa?" one asked, eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Yes, it's also known as the Monkey Temple. I've heard the views from there are amazing," another replied.

In the seats just ahead of me, a tender conversation unfolded between a young father and his little son.

"Daddy, why can't we stop at Parsa National Park?" the boy asked, eyes wide with curiosity and a hint of disappointment.

His father chuckled softly, his eyes twinkling with the wisdom of many years. "Well, my dear," he said, placing a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder, "we have to reach Kathmandu as soon as possible. But don't worry, we'll come back one day to explore the park and see all the animals. Maybe we'll even spot a tiger if we're lucky."

The boy's face lit up with a smile. "Promise?" he asked.

"Promise," the young father replied, giving him a reassuring nod.

The bus continued its journey, the engine's steady hum blending with the soft chatter of the passengers and the rhythmic sound of the wheels on the winding road. The road ahead twisted and turned, revealing breathtaking views of valleys below and peaks above.

Sujan and I encountered Maya, a solo traveller with a passion for photography. It was a pleasant surprise to see her again, as we had met at a teahouse after leaving Gaighat. Maya happened to be sitting just behind our seats on the bus, making it easy for us to strike up a conversation.

Maya, with her keen eye, noticed the unique watches we were wearing and couldn't help but inquire about their significance. We gladly shared that Geeta didi had purchased them for us earlier in the day during a tea break. Though they may not be extravagant, these watches held a special place in our hearts.

Curiosity piqued, Maya asked if we were all travelling together. Sujan, my big brother, answered affirmatively. We explained that we were on our way to Kathmandu, but if it weren't for our special reason, we would have loved to visit Parsa National Park. Maya, being an adventurous soul, had an interest in the park, having heard about its stunning beauty and abundant wildlife.

Maya revealed that she loved traveling solo and capturing the essence of her destinations through her photography. Kathmandu was one of her stops, and she was filled with excitement to explore the city. We couldn't help but share her enthusiasm for discovering the hidden gems of Kathmandu.

Regretfully, we couldn't join Maya on a visit to Parsa National Park this time, but we expressed our desire to experience it someday. Maya suggested that we all go together in the future, creating memories and capturing the park's beauty through our lenses. Sujan and I immediately agreed, thrilled at the prospect of embarking on an adventure with Maya.

With the plan for a future trip in mind, our conversation continued to flow effortlessly. We shared stories, experiences, and laughter, forming a bond during the bus ride to Kathmandu. The passing landscapes, vibrant towns, and friendly locals added to the richness of our journey.

As we travelled, Maya shared her photography tips and tricks, inspiring us to look at our surroundings with a fresh perspective. We marvelled at the way she captured the essence of each moment, freezing time in her photographs. Maya's passion for photography ignited a new spark within us, and we couldn't wait to explore Kathmandu with our cameras in hand.

The hours flew by as we delved into deeper conversations, discussing our dreams, aspirations, and the beauty of the places we had visited. Maya's infectious energy and genuine curiosity brought us closer together, creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and friendship.

As the bus climbed higher, the sense of anticipation grew. Every bend in the road brought with it a new vista, a new chapter in our journey. The hills and mountains seemed to whisper their ancient tales, inviting us to become a part of their timeless narrative.

Therefore, we reached Hetauda, a bustling town that serves as a major transit point in Nepal. The bus came to a halt at the main bus terminal, and the driver announced a brief stop for passengers to stretch their legs and grab a bite to eat.

Hetauda was alive with activity. The streets were lined with shops, eateries, and vendors selling everything from fresh fruits to hand crafted trinkets. The aroma of local cuisine wafted through the air, and the chatter of people created a symphony of sounds that spoke of the town's vibrant culture.

Geeta Didi suggested we take this opportunity to explore Hetauda a bit and have lunch. We eagerly agreed, excited to experience yet another facet of our journey. As we stepped off the bus, the warm sun greeted us, and we blended into the lively crowd.

Maya, always ready with her camera, began capturing the essence of Hetauda through her lens. "This town has such a unique charm," she remarked, snapping photos of the bustling market and the colourful stalls.

Grandfather, with the water bottle in hand, looked around with a twinkle in his eye. "I remember coming here years ago," he said, his voice filled with nostalgia. "The town has grown, but the spirit remains the same."

We wandered through the streets close to the bus terminal, drawn by the variety of foods being sold by street vendors. Eventually, we settled at a small, cosy restaurant that offered traditional Nepali dishes. The menu featured delicacies like momo (dumplings), dal bhat (lentil soup with rice), and sel roti (a type of rice doughnut).

As we enjoyed our meal, we reflected on our journey so far. Sujan was particularly animated, recounting the highlights with enthusiasm.

"From the watches in Nijgadh to the scenic landscapes along the way, this trip has been amazing," he said between bites of momo.

Geeta Didi smiled, her eyes filled with affection. "It's been a memorable experience for all of us. And we still have so much to look forward to in Kathmandu."

Maya raised her camera, capturing a candid shot of our group. "These moments are what make travel so special," she said. "It's about the people you meet and the memories you create together."

Grandfather nodded in agreement, his eyes shining with wisdom. "Travelling teaches you so much," he said. "It's the journey that matters, not just the destination."

After lunch, we took a leisurely stroll through Hetauda's streets, soaking in the sights and sounds, heading back to the bus terminal. The town's charm was undeniable, with its mix of modernity and tradition seamlessly blending together. We admired the intricate architecture, and even bought a few souvenirs from the market.

Soon, it was time to board the bus again. We settled back into our seats with a smile. After some time the engine roared to life, and the journey resumed. The road ahead continued to wind through hills and valleys, each turn revealing new vistas and experiences.

With our spirits lifted by the delightful stop in Hetauda, we felt a renewed sense of excitement for the adventures that lay ahead. The journey to Kathmandu was not just about reaching a destination and attending uncle's marriage; it was about the stories we were gathering along the way, the friendships we were forging, and the memories we were creating.

As the bus moved forward, carrying us closer to our final destination, we couldn't help but feel grateful for the journey itself. Hetauda had added another beautiful topic to our travel tale, and we were eager to see what the next pages would hold.

The bus continued its journey towards the Mahendra Highway. The lush greenery and the rolling hills, with terraced fields cascading down the slopes like giant steps and the winding roads offered breathtaking views of the valleys below.

The bus driver expertly navigated the twists and turns, honking occasionally to alert oncoming traffic on the narrow mountain roads. Inside the bus, the atmosphere was relaxed. Some passengers dozed off, lulled by the rhythmic motion, while others gazed out the windows, lost in their thoughts.

Maya was reviewing her photos, a satisfied smile on her face. "Look at this one," she said, showing us a picture of a street vendor in Hetauda.

My face lit up with a warm smile. "I think this really captures the spirit of the place."

Maya is an enchanting young woman in her mid-twenties, standing at a graceful 5'6". Her slender frame and sun-kissed skin tell the story of countless hours spent under the open sky, exploring the world around her. Her hair, a rich deep brown, cascades in loose waves past her shoulders, often left to flow freely in the breeze or tied back in a casual ponytail when she's engrossed in her photography. Her hazel eyes, flecked with green and gold, sparkle with an innate curiosity and excitement, framed by long, dark lashes that add depth to her expressive gaze.

Her facial features are delicately balanced, with an oval-shaped face, high cheekbones, and a well-defined jawline. A slightly upturned nose adds a touch of playful mischief to her appearance, while her full, naturally rosy lips often curve into a warm, genuine smile that instantly puts others at ease. Maya's beauty is complemented by her practical yet stylish wardrobe. She favours comfortable, travel-friendly clothing, such as well-worn jeans that fit her perfectly and a simple, fitted t-shirt in a soft green hue that accentuates her eye colour. Over her shirt, she typically wears a lightweight, khaki-coloured jacket with multiple pockets, ideal for carrying her camera gear and other essentials.

Maya's practical attire is completed with sturdy hiking boots, well-suited for the diverse terrains she encounters on her adventures. She carries a small black backpack that holds her camera equipment, extra lenses, and a journal where she meticulously documents her travels. Around her neck, she wears a simple silver necklace with an intricate pendant, a cherished keepsake from her journeys. Her wrists are adorned with a few woven bracelets, each one a memento from a different place she has visited, adding a personal touch to her overall look. Maya's effortless charm and ready-for-anything style make her a captivating presence wherever she goes.

Sujan, who had struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger, turned to share an interesting tidbit. "Did you know that Hetauda is also known for its industrial area? It's one of the major centres for manufacturing in Nepa

Grandfather nodded. "Yes, Hetauda has grown significantly over the years. It's a key junction that connects different parts of the country. But despite its development, it retains a certain charm that makes it special."

As the bus climbed higher, we could see the majestic peaks of the Himalayas in the distance, their snow-capped summits gleaming in the sun. The sight was awe-inspiring and served as a reminder of the natural beauty that Nepal is renowned for.

Upon reaching Bharatpur, the bus made a brief stop to allow the passengers who were disembarking in Bharatpur to say their farewells. The stop lasted only a few minutes, giving the passengers enough time to gather their belongings and bid their fellow travellers goodbye.

During this short break, we took the opportunity to stretch our legs and take in the surroundings of Bharatpur. The air was filled with a sense of anticipation and excitement as people quickly exchanged final words and heartfelt goodbyes.

As the bus prepared to depart once again, we waved goodbye to those staying in Bharatpur, wishing them well on their onward journey. With a renewed sense of adventure, we settled back into our seats, ready to continue our own exploration of the beautiful city and the road ahead.

As the passengers began to settle into their seats, the bus conductor made his way to the driver's seat, where an intense and worried conversation began. Both men exchanged glances, their faces etched with concern. It wasn't long before the conductor stood up and faced the passengers, his voice steady but tinged with urgency.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have an important announcement," he began, causing a ripple of silence to spread through the bus. "Due to a heavy landslide in Kulekhani, the hilly road is blocked. Unfortunately, we won't be able to return to Hetauda as planned."

A murmur of concern and curiosity spread among the passengers.

"Instead," the conductor continued, "we will move straight forward through the Mahendra Highway and then upward through Narayangarh-Muglin Highway. Our route will now take us through Krishna Bhair."

The mention of Krishna Bhair, a notoriously treacherous stretch of road known for its sharp turns and steep drops, caused a few gasps. Passengers exchanged worried looks, some glancing out the window at the landscape that was rapidly changing from urban sprawl to dense forest.

The conductor tried to reassure them. "Please remain calm. We will be driving carefully to ensure everyone's safety. If you have any concerns or need assistance, please do not hesitate to let us know."

The atmosphere in the bus shifted palpably. Some passengers pulled out their phones, perhaps to inform loved ones of the change in plans, while others peered out the windows, trying to get a sense of the new route. The once lively chatter had now turned into hushed conversations and nervous whispers.

As the bus began its journey through the Mahendra Highway, the scenery changed dramatically. The dense forests of Chitwan provided a lush, green canopy, with the occasional glimpse of wildlife adding a sense of adventure to the journey. Yet, the looming challenge of Krishna Bhair kept the atmosphere tense.

The driver, now acutely focused, navigated the winding roads with precision, his hands steady on the wheel. The conductor moved through the bus, offering words of comfort and checking on Passengers.

As the bus reached Narayangarh and transitioned onto the Narayangarh-Mugling Highway, the atmosphere inside shifted noticeably. The clock struck 7 PM, and the twilight cast a serene yet mysterious glow over the landscape. Exhaustion mingled with excitement as we inched closer to our destination.

The highway was a critical artery connecting the southern plains to the hilly regions, and its importance was evident in the steady flow of vehicles. Despite the late hour, the road was alive with activity. Trucks laden with goods, cars, and buses like ours moved purposefully, their headlights piercing the growing darkness.

Outside the window, the lush greenery of the Chitwan National Park began to give way to the more rugged terrain of the hills. The silhouettes of trees against the fading light created an almost ethereal atmosphere. The river Trishuli flowed alongside the highway, its waters glistening under the moonlight. The gentle sound of the river brought a sense of tranquillity, contrasting with the steady hum of the bus engine.

Inside the bus, the passengers settled into a comfortable silence, each lost in their thoughts. Some dozed off, while others gazed out the windows, captivated by the changing scenery. The earlier tension of the journey through Krishna Bhairava had given way to a sense of calm, the shared experience bonding us in quiet camaraderie.

Sujan leaned back in his seat, his eyes heavy with fatigue but his face lit with a smile. "This has been quite the journey," he said softly, his voice barely audible over the engine's hum.

I nodded, feeling a similar sense of contentment. "Yeah, it's been amazing. But how far is Kathmandu?"

Geeta Didi, ever the caretaker, made sure we were all comfortable. "Just a little longer," she reassured us. "We'll be in Kathmandu soon."

Maya, her camera now resting in her lap, looked reflective. "Every journey has its moments of challenge and beauty," she said, her eyes scanning the horizon. "This one has been unforgettable." As the bus climbed higher, the road became more winding, each turn revealing a new aspect of the landscape. The headlights illuminated the path ahead, casting long shadows that danced on the rocky cliffs. The air grew cooler, and a gentle breeze wafted through the bus, carrying with it the earthy scent of the hills.

The night sky, now free from the city lights, was a canvas of stars. It felt like the universe was keeping us company, guiding us on our journey. The constellations seemed to tell stories of their own, adding to the sense of wonder that enveloped us.

The bus rolled into Ramnagar. There was a palpable shift in the atmosphere. Ramnagar, a small yet bustling town, appeared as a lively oasis amidst the rugged terrain of the highway. The road straightened out, making the journey smoother, and the landscape subtly changed, reflecting the town's unique character.

The town was a hive of activity, even as the evening deepened. Street vendors lined the roadside, their stalls illuminated by strings of lightbulbs and lanterns, casting a warm and inviting glow. The aromatic scent of freshly cooked food wafted through the air, mingling with the earthy smell of the surrounding countryside. Vendors called out, advertising their wares, from local snacks to handcrafted items, creating a symphony of sounds.

Small shops and eateries were scattered along the main street, their doors open to welcome travellers and locals alike. People bustled about, finishing their errands or heading home, adding to

the town's dynamic energy. Despite its size, Ramnagar exuded a sense of community and vibrancy that was both comforting and invigorating.

The bus made a brief stop, allowing passengers to stretch their legs and perhaps grab a bite to eat. The break was a welcome respite from the journey, offering a moment to soak in the town's ambiance. The local architecture, a mix of traditional and modern styles, told stories of Ramnagar's heritage and its evolution over time.

As the bus pulled away from Ramnagar, the town's lights gradually faded into the distance, leaving us with fond memories of our brief encounter. The road ahead beckoned, and with renewed energy, we resumed our adventure towards Kathmandu, carrying with us the essence of Ramnagar's vibrant spirit. As the bus rolled into Jugedi, the transition from the dense forests and winding mountain roads to the more open plains was palpable. Jugedi, a small but bustling settlement, marked the beginning of a new phase in our journey. We didn't stop here, but the scenic beauty and the sense of progress filled the bus with a renewed sense of energy.

Dasdhunga, a place renowned for its rugged beauty and historical significance, came into view as our bus continued its journey. Nestled in the heart of Nepal, Dasdhunga is known for its breathtaking landscapes and the serene Trisuli River that flows through it. The river, with its crystal-clear waters and gentle rapids, added a sense of tranquillity to the otherwise rugged terrain.

As we watched the scenery unfold through the bus windows, the lush greenery of the surrounding hills provided a stunning contrast to the deep blue of the Trisuli River. The landscape was dotted with terraced fields and quaint villages, each one adding to the picturesque charm of Dasdhunga.

Grandfather, sitting next to a fellow passenger, began to share a piece of history that added a sombre note to our journey. "You know," he said, his voice tinged with reverence, "this place holds a significant place in Nepal's history. It was here, in Dasdhunga, that we lost one of our great leaders, Madan Bhandari."

The fellow passenger, a middle-aged man with a kind face, nodded. "Yes, I remember hearing about that tragic accident. It was in 1993, wasn't it?"

Grandfather sighed, his eyes reflecting the weight of the memory. "Yes, it was. Madan Bhandari was a visionary leader, known for his remarkable speeches and his dedication to the people of Nepal. He was travelling with his colleague, Jeevraj Ashrit, when their vehicle plunged into the Trisuli River."

The passenger leaned in, listening intently. "Such a loss for the country. Do they know what caused the accident?"

"There are many theories," Grandfather replied. "Some say it was a mechanical failure, while others believe it might have been foul play. But whatever the cause, the impact of his loss was felt deeply across the nation."

As the conversation unfolded, I couldn't help but feel a sense of reverence for the place we were passing through. The beauty of Dasdhunga was undeniable, but it was also a place marked by a profound historical tragedy.

Sujan, who had been listening quietly, spoke up. "It's amazing how a place can hold so much history and emotion. The Trisuli River looks so peaceful now, but it must have been a witness to so many stories."

Maya, ever the observer, lifted her camera to capture the serene beauty of the river and the surrounding hills. "This place is incredible," she said, her voice filled with awe. "The way the river winds through the landscape is like something out of a painting."

As our bus continued its steady pace without stopping, we marvelled at the changing scenery. The rolling hills, the terraced fields, and the distant peaks of the Himalayas all contributed to the stunning tapestry of Dasdhunga. The Trisuli River, with its gentle flow and sparkling waters, seemed to carry with it the stories of the past and the promise of the future.

Grandfather and the fellow passenger continued their conversation, sharing memories and reflections on Nepal's history and the enduring legacy of Madan Bhandari. "His vision for a united and prosperous Nepal continues to inspire us," Grandfather said. "Even though he's gone, his ideals live on in the hearts of the people."

The passenger nodded in agreement. "True leaders like him leave an indelible mark. Places like Dasdhunga remind us of the sacrifices made for our country and the importance of carrying forward their legacy."

As the bus moved onward, we all took a moment to appreciate the beauty of Dasdhunga and the significance it held. The journey through this remarkable place was a reminder of the resilience and spirit of Nepal, a land rich in history, culture, and natural splendour.

With a sense of reverence and admiration, we continued our journey, grateful for the opportunity to witness the beauty of Dasdhunga and to remember the stories that shaped our nation's history. The Trisuli River flowed alongside us, a silent witness to our travels and a symbol of the enduring spirit of Nepal.

Soon after, we reached Devghat, a place steeped in history and spirituality. The bus continued moving, but the sight of Devghat sparked conversations among the passengers.

Devghat is a renowned pilgrimage site, situated at the confluence of the Trishuli and Kali Gandaki rivers. It holds immense religious significance for both Hindus and Buddhists. The area is dotted with ancient temples, ashrams, and caves, making it a spiritual hub. According to mythology, Devghat is believed to be one of the holiest places where the gods once dwelled. It is also said that the great sage Vashishta performed penance here, and the Pandavas from the Mahabharata visited this sacred land during their exile.

The Trishuli River, flowing nearby, added a serene and majestic backdrop to this historical site. Its waters, clear and swift, seemed to carry the whispers of ancient tales and the blessings of the gods.

As the bus continued moving without stopping, the passengers couldn't help but admire the view outside.

"Look at the Trishuli River," Sujan said, his eyes wide with wonder. "It's so beautiful."

Geeta Didi nodded, her gaze fixed on the flowing water. "The river is not just a natural wonder; it's a symbol of our heritage and spirituality. Devghat has always been a place of deep reverence."

Maya, ever the photographer, leaned closer to the window, trying to capture the essence of the moment. "I wish we had time to stop here. The light on the water, the temples in the distance—it's all so captivating."

Grandfather, with his wealth of knowledge, began to share stories about Devghat. "This place has seen countless pilgrims over the centuries. People come here to perform sacred rituals, especially during Maghe Sankranti, when thousands gather to take a holy dip in the river. It's believed that bathing in these waters washes away sins and brings spiritual purification."

A fellow passenger, an elderly woman, joined the conversation. "I visited Devghat many years ago with my family. The peace and serenity there are unparalleled. We performed rituals for our ancestors and felt a deep connection to our roots."

The bus moved steadily along the highway, the rhythmic hum of the engine blending with the gentle sound of the flowing Trishuli River. The landscape outside was a picturesque blend of verdant hills, ancient temples, and the ever-present river, creating a sense of timeless beauty.

As we continued our journey, the conversations inside the bus flowed as smoothly as the river outside. The shared stories and admiration for the landscape brought us closer, creating a sense of community among the travellers.

"Even though we didn't stop, just passing by Devghat feels like a blessing," I said, feeling a deep sense of gratitude for the journey.

"Absolutely," Maya agreed, her camera capturing the fleeting moments. "Sometimes, just being in the presence of such history and beauty is enough."

With the bus moving continuously, the view of Devghat slowly faded into the distance, but the stories and the sense of wonder remained with us. The Trishuli River, with its timeless flow, seemed to guide us forward, reminding us of the spiritual and historical richness of the land we were traversing.

As the journey continued, the conversations shifted to what awaited us in Kathmandu. The excitement for the adventures ahead mingled with the reverence for the places we had passed, creating a tapestry of emotions that made the journey all the more memorable.

As our bus continued its journey, the first drops of rain began to fall, quickly transforming into a steady downpour. The rhythmic pattern against the roof created a soothing backdrop to our adventure. The night had settled in, and it was around 10:30 PM, the darkness deepening around us, punctuated only by the glow of the bus headlights cutting through the rain.

The driver, undeterred by the weather, pointed out the scenic beauty of Seti-Trisuli Dovan once more. "Look to your left," he called out, his voice filled with enthusiasm. "That's where the Seti River meets the Trisuli River. The merging of these two rivers creates a stunning view, especially during the rain when the waters swell and become a spectacular sight."

We all leaned closer to the windows, eager to catch a glimpse of the picturesque confluence, but the rain blurred our view. Still, we could hear the sound of rushing water, powerful and invigorating, echoing in the night.

Grandfather, who had been looking out thoughtfully, turned to his fellow passengers. "You see that? That's the Sumeri Parbat," he said, pointing to a distant peak that was now shrouded in mist. "It's known for its majestic beauty and the folklore surrounding it. Many believe it's a sacred mountain that brings good fortune to those who visit."

The middle-aged man from earlier leaned in, intrigued. "I've heard tales about Sumeri Parbat. They say that if you climb it, you can see all the way to Gaighat. It's quite the journey, though!"

The bus continued to glide along the winding roads, maintaining its steady speed. The rain added a layer of mystery to the landscape, transforming the rolling hills and terraced fields into a velvety green canvas. The atmosphere was charged with excitement as the conversation flowed easily among the passengers, sharing thoughts on the beauty surrounding us.

Sujan pointed toward a shimmering body of water in the distance, barely visible through the rain.

"Look! Is that Simal Tal?" he asked, his voice filled with wonder despite the weather. The lake,

nestled among the hills, must have been a glimmering gem under the moonlight, but all we could see was a dark silhouette.

"Yes, it is!" I replied, imagining its beauty. "They say it's a great spot for picnics and relaxation. The views from there must be incredible, especially now with the rain making everything so lush." Maya, ever the photographer, attempted to capture the moment, her camera clicking softly. "This place is a photographer's paradise," she remarked. "Even in the rain, I can feel the magic of this landscape."

As the bus kept moving forward, the chatter among the passengers continued, filled with stories and laughter, though the rain occasionally drowned out our words. The driver expertly navigated the twists and turns of the road, ensuring a steady pace that allowed us to appreciate the surreal beauty of the night.

The journey felt like a beautiful tapestry being woven with each passing moment. The conversation about Sumeri Parbat and Gaighat lingered in the air, enriching our appreciation for the majestic land we were traversing. The rain, rather than dampening our spirits, seemed to enhance the experience, wrapping us in a cocoon of adventure.

As we approached Simal Tal, the vibrant colours of the landscape became more pronounced, even in the rain. The atmosphere was charged with anticipation, as if the rain itself was a reminder of the beauty that awaited us. With every passing moment, the bus carried us onward, weaving through the rain-soaked hills, promising new adventures and stories yet to unfold.

As the bus rolled into Muglin, a sense of urgency filled the air. The driver pulled over briefly, allowing a few passengers to disembark. The rain had softened somewhat, but the night still carried a cool breeze that rustled the leaves nearby. We watched as they hurried away, some of them glancing back at us with sleepy smiles.

After just a few minutes, the bus was once again in motion, the engine humming steadily as it resumed its journey. Most of the passengers had succumbed to the comfort of sleep, heads bobbing gently as the bus navigated the winding roads. However, Sujan and I remained wide awake, our eyes glued to the world outside.

The landscape transformed as we drove on, illuminated intermittently by the bus's headlights. I felt a thrill of excitement as I noticed the familiar signboards pointing toward Manakamana. "Look, Sujan!" I exclaimed, pointing out the signs. "We're getting close to Manakamana Temple!"

Sujan leaned forward in his seat, peering out the window. "And look at those cable cars!" he said, his voice barely above a whisper. The cable cars glided gracefully above the hills, their bright colours contrasting against the dark night sky. "They look so inviting. I would love to take a ride on them one day."

I nodded, imagining the stunning views one would have from the cable cars as they ascended toward the temple perched high on the hill. "It's such a beautiful place, but unfortunately, we won't be able to visit this time since our destination is Kathmandu," I replied, a hint of disappointment in my voice.

Despite the sadness of not being able to explore Manakamana, the beauty of the night and the rain-soaked landscape kept us captivated. The hills were alive with a lush green hue, and the distant sounds of nature filled the air, creating a serene atmosphere.

As we continued our journey, the bus wound through the hills, the rain now a light drizzle, adding a gentle sheen to the roads. The tranquillity of the night made it feel like we were gliding through a dream, each moment rich with the promise of adventure.

Sujan and I shared stories and laughter, our excitement for the journey keeping us awake. We pointed out various landmarks as we passed, our eyes sparkling with curiosity and wonder. The night felt alive, and we made the most of the moments, embracing the beauty of the journey we were on.

As the bus pressed forward toward Kathmandu, the scenery continued to change, revealing hidden gems of nature and glimpses of life along the way. Even if we couldn't visit Manakamana Temple this time, the adventure itself was unfolding beautifully, and we were grateful for every moment of it.

As we left Muglin behind, the bus transitioned onto the Puspahal Highway, also known as Prithvi Highway. The road felt more expansive, and the gentle curves seemed to invite us into the heart of the landscape. The rain had eased, allowing the cool night air to filter in through the slightly cracked windows, refreshing and invigorating.

The driver, with a hint of pride in his voice, informed us, "As we continue on this highway, we'll be passing by Gorkha, which lies to the west along the Trisuli River. You can see Manakamana Temple in the distance as well."

Sujan and I exchanged excited glances. The mention of Gorkha brought forth images of its historical significance and the fortress that stood proudly on the hilltop. "I've always wanted to visit Gorkha," I said, my voice filled with eagerness. "It's such an important place in Nepal's history!"

The bus rolled smoothly along the highway, the headlights illuminating the path ahead. Outside, the tranquil beauty of the night enveloped us. The Trisuli River flowed beside us, its waters shimmering under the moonlight, weaving through the landscape like a silver ribbon.

The hills around us were dotted with patches of forest, their silhouettes stark against the night sky. Occasionally, we would catch glimpses of small villages nestled among the hills, their lights twinkling like stars, adding to the enchanting atmosphere.

Grandfather, who had been resting, stirred slightly and glanced out the window. "You can feel the history in this land," he remarked, his voice soft yet resonant. "Gorkha is where the unification of Nepal began. It holds a special place in our hearts."

The bus continued its journey, the peaceful hum of the engine creating a comforting rhythm. Most of the passengers remained asleep, the gentle motion of the bus lulling them into a deeper rest. Meanwhile, Sujan and I remained wide awake, our excitement fueling our energy as we took in the breathtaking scenery.

As we had approached the area near Manakamana, the landscape had opened up even more, revealing the stunning views of the hills and valleys. The cable cars glided silently above us, their bright colours standing out against the night sky, and I could almost envision the thrill of riding them.

"This is such a beautiful part of our journey," Sujan had said, his voice filled with awe. "Even though we can't stop at Manakamana, just seeing it from here is incredible."

I had nodded in agreement, feeling grateful for the experiences we were having. The peacefulness of the ride, coupled with the beauty outside, made every moment feel special.

As the bus rolled steadily along the Puspahal Highway, we were reminded of the rich tapestry of culture and history that surrounded us. With each passing mile, we felt more connected to the land and the stories it held, all while making our way toward the vibrant city of Kathmandu.

As we reached Darechowk, then Bhumi Chowk, and finally Jogimara, the bus continued its journey without making any stops. The night had fully settled in, and it was now past midnight, with my watch reading 12:27 AM. The atmosphere inside the bus was calm, punctuated only by the soft sounds of breathing from the passengers who were lost in sleep.

The driver, with his steady hands on the wheel, informed us that we were nearby Krishna Bhir. The road had become narrower, winding through the hills with many sharp turns. The darkness outside seemed to amplify the size of the hills, their looming presence creating a sense of awe and respect for nature's grandeur.

I turned back in my seat, glancing at the other passengers. Most were asleep, their faces relaxed and peaceful, illuminated softly by the faint glow from the bus's lights. It was a comforting sight, knowing that everyone was safe and at ease as we journeyed through the night.

Sujan leaned over to whisper, "Can you believe we're travelling through such beautiful terrain at this hour? It feels surreal." His eyes sparkled with excitement, reflecting the wonder of the journey. "I know! Even in the dark, the hills seem alive," I replied, my voice barely above a whisper. "It's like we're in a dream, gliding through a landscape that's both familiar and new."

The driver expertly navigated the narrow road, the bus swaying gently with the curves. Outside, the moon cast a silvery light over the hills, revealing their contours and the shadows of trees that danced in the breeze. The Trisuli River continued to flow alongside us, its soft murmurs a reminder of the life that thrived in the darkness.

As we approached Krishna Bhir, I couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. The combination of the night, the rain, and the rolling hills created a magical ambiance, making the journey feel even more special. It was a reminder of the beauty of travel — the shared experiences, the breathtaking landscapes, and the stories waiting to unfold.

I leaned back in my seat, allowing myself to soak in the peacefulness of the moment. The bus continued its steady pace, carrying us onward toward Kathmandu, where new adventures awaited us. In that quiet space, surrounded by the beauty of the night, we were part of a larger story — one that connected us to the land and each other.

As we approached Krishna Bhir, the tension in the air was palpable. The winding road snaked along the edge of steep hills, the dark abyss of the ravine looming ominously just beyond. The headlights of the bus barely pierced the thick shadows, illuminating the rocky outcrops and lush foliage that seemed to reach out toward us. Each turn felt perilous, a reminder of the dangers that lurked on this narrow path. The steep cliffs and the sheer drop on one side made the journey feel like a tightrope walk, heightening the sense of vulnerability we all shared. In that moment, I turned back in my seat and shouted, "Grandfather! Geeta Didi! Don't miss the view of Krishna Bhir!" My voice cut through the stillness, and both of them stirred awake.

Grandfather blinked a few times, the lines on his face deepening as he focused on me. "What is it, my child?" he asked, his voice still thick with sleep but now tinged with curiosity.

Geeta Didi rubbed her eyes and looked around, momentarily disoriented. "What's happening? What are we missing?" she inquired, glancing out the window to catch a glimpse of what lay beyond the bus.

Just then, a sudden jolt rocked the bus as the driver made a sharp turn to navigate the treacherous curve. A passenger in the back seat was abruptly jolted awake, his wild eyes scanning the dimly lit interior. He looked dishevelled, with unkempt hair sticking out in various directions and sweat glistening on his forehead. His shirt was wrinkled, and there was a bewildered expression on his face, as if he had just been pulled from a deep, vivid dream.

Without warning, the man sprang to his feet, panic etched across his features. "My calf! My calf is unleashed!" he shouted, his voice frantic and desperate. He stumbled forward, his movements erratic as he tried to make his way to the front, his eyes wide with fear.

"Sir, sit down! You're safe!" a fellow passenger urged, trying to grab his arm to steady him, but he was too consumed by his panic.

"I have to catch it!" he yelled, his tone a mix of urgency and confusion, as if he believed he was still in his own field rather than on a moving bus.

The conductor quickly intervened, attempting to calm the man. "Please, sir, we can't stop here! Just breathe!" he said, his voice steady and reassuring.

The driver, his expression a mix of disbelief and irritation, glanced back. "Is he mad? The bus can't stop even for a moment on this dangerous road! Someone make him stop!" he exclaimed, the tension in his voice underscoring the seriousness of the situation.

Finally, the man's wife, who had been sitting quietly beside him, spoke up, her voice laced with familiarity. "He must have dreamt of his farm! The sudden turn of the bus woke him up, and now he thinks he's still there," she explained, a hint of amusement creeping into her tone despite the chaos.

With a sigh of relief, the passengers began to relax, and the conductor continued to speak to the man gently. "You're safe on the bus, my friend. No one is cutting your irrigation canal," he reassured him.

The woman added with a chuckle, "Just last year, he woke up suddenly in the middle of the night, took out his khukuri, and shouted that whoever cut his irrigation canal would have their head chopped off! It took me a whole hour to calm him down!"

Laughter erupted in the bus, surprising everyone, including the man who had been so panicked just moments before. He blinked, finally beginning to understand where he was, and the tension in the air began to dissipate.

"Ah, sorry everyone," he mumbled, a sheepish smile breaking through his earlier fear. "I guess old habits die hard."

The atmosphere lightened, and the bus continued its journey through the perilous hills of Krishna Bhair, the shared laughter creating a sense of camaraderie among us as we navigated the night together.

As the bus continued its journey through the hills, I caught sight of a large signboard outside the window that read "Charaundi." It marked our progress along the winding roads, and I felt a sense of excitement as we moved through the different towns and landscapes.

We passed through Dhussa and Bishaltar, each place a fleeting glimpse of life in the hills. The roads twisted and turned as we made our way toward Bahuntar, where the Budhi Gandaki River and Trisuli River converged. The sight of the rivers meeting was breathtaking, their waters swirling together in a dance of blues and greens, reflecting the moonlight in a shimmering display. The sound of rushing water filled the air, a soothing backdrop to our journey.

As we approached Benighat, I marvelled at the beauty of the landscape surrounding us. The hills were alive with lush greenery, the trees swaying gently in the cool night breeze. The air smelled fresh and earthy, invigorating our senses and reminding us of the natural splendour of this region.

We rolled through Sital Bazaar, where the dim lights of small shops flickered in the darkness, casting a warm glow over the street. The buzz of life seemed to be in the air, even at this late hour. Malekhu soon followed, and the bus navigated through the heart of the town, where the hills rose majestically around us, creating a sense of being enveloped by nature.

At around 2 AM, we passed through Dhading, where the Furkey River glistened under the moonlight, its waters flowing swiftly as if eager to reach its destination. It was a sight that made me reflect on the power and beauty of nature, a reminder of the life-giving force of these rivers as they carved their paths through the landscape.

Adamghat came next, and I gazed out at the hills that surrounded us, their silhouettes dark against the starry sky. Each hill seemed to tell a story, shaped by time and nature. As we moved on to Baireni, the bus continued to weave through the terrain, giving us glimpses of terraced fields and small settlements nestled in the valleys.

Finally, we approached Thakre, the first stop before we would begin the final stretch toward Kathmandu. It was 3:30 am. The beauty of the night was ending and the new morning aroma began captivating, and I couldn't help but feel a sense of connection to the land. The moon hung high, illuminating the hills and valleys, creating a magical atmosphere that felt almost surreal.

As we travelled, the landscape transformed before our eyes, with each turn revealing new vistas. The sound of the bus's engine blended with the whispers of the night, and the gentle sway of the vehicle added to the sense of tranquillity. It was a journey steeped in beauty, adventure, and the allure of the unknown, and I felt grateful to be a part of it, witnessing the natural wonders that surrounded us as we made our way through the heart of Nepal.

As we approached Dharke, the first light of dawn began to break over the horizon, casting a soft golden hue across the landscape. The bus rolled along the winding roads, and I eagerly leaned closer to the window to take in the beauty of the early morning. It was 4:51 AM, and the world outside was awakening in a spectacular display of nature's artistry.

The hills surrounding Dharke were draped in a lush green blanket, glistening with dew that sparkled like tiny diamonds in the morning light. The air was crisp and fresh, filled with the earthy scent of damp soil and foliage. As the sun began to rise, the sky transformed into a canvas of pastel colours — soft pinks, warm oranges, and gentle yellows blending seamlessly together.

Through the window, I could see terraced fields cascading down the slopes, each level a patchwork of vibrant greens and browns. Farmers were already beginning their day, their silhouettes moving gracefully against the backdrop of the rising sun. They worked diligently, tending to their crops with a sense of purpose, embodying the rhythm of life in this rural landscape.

Just beyond the fields, the river flowed serenely, its waters shimmering as they caught the first rays of sunlight. The sound of the water rushing over rocks created a soothing melody that complemented the chorus of chirping birds welcoming the new day. The beauty of Naubise, which we were approaching, added to the scenic charm — the village nestled among the hills, its quaint houses adorned with colourful rooftops, creating a picturesque scene.

As the bus continued its journey, I felt a sense of awe wash over me. The natural beauty of this region was breathtaking, each turn revealing new vistas that seemed almost unreal. The hills stood tall and proud, their slopes dotted with clusters of trees that swayed gently in the morning breeze.

The sky above was a stunning contrast to the greenery below, with wispy clouds drifting lazily, creating a perfect backdrop for the sun as it rose higher. It was a moment of pure serenity, a reminder of the beauty that exists in the world, often unnoticed in the hustle of daily life.

As we moved closer to Naubise, I couldn't help but admire the harmony between nature and the lives of the people who called this place home. The beauty of Dharke and its surroundings filled me with a sense of gratitude for the journey we were on, and I made a silent promise to cherish these moments, the breathtaking views, and the stories woven into the fabric of this land.

As we rolled into Naubise, the sun was beginning to rise higher in the sky, casting a warm glow over the village. It was 5:47 AM, and the atmosphere felt alive with the promise of a new day. The quaint village was a tapestry of rustic charm, with houses built from stone and wood, their walls adorned with vibrant flowers that seemed to bloom even more brightly in the morning light.

The bus came to a stop at a small village restaurant, a welcoming sight after our journey through the hills. The aroma of freshly brewed tea wafted through the air, mingling with the earthy scent of the surrounding landscape. The restaurant was simple but inviting, with wooden benches and tables set outside, allowing us to enjoy the beautiful scenery as we took a break.

As we disembarked, I could hear the lively chatter of locals starting their day. The sound of laughter and the clanging of pots filled the air, creating a warm and welcoming ambiance. I glanced around, admiring the view of the rolling hills that framed the village, their slopes painted in shades of green illuminated by the early morning sun.

"Let's grab some tea," I suggested to Sujan, who had just stepped down from the bus beside

"Absolutely! I could use a warm cup right now," he replied, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

We made our way to the counter, where a friendly woman was preparing cups of steaming tea.

"Good morning! Would you like some snacks with your tea?" she asked with a smile, her eyes twinkling with warmth.

"Yes, please! What do you have?" Geeta didi responded eagerly.

"Fresh samosas and pakoras with tea!" she said, gesturing to a plate piled high with golden-brown snacks. "Perfect for the chilly morning

"We'll take some of those!" Sujan chimed in, his mouth watering at the thought.

As we waited for our order, Grandfather took a moment to admire the surroundings. The village was waking up, with children running playfully in the streets, their laughter ringing out like music. The hills in the background were a stunning sight, their greenery contrasting beautifully with the clear blue sky. He felt a sense of peace wash over him; this was the essence of rural life, simple yet profoundly beautiful.

When our tea and snacks arrived, we settled at a wooden table outside. The warmth of the tea was comforting, and the first bite of the crispy samosa was a burst of flavour. "This is incredible!" I exclaimed, savouring the spice

Sujan nodded in agreement, "I could eat these every morning! What a perfect way to start the day."

Grandfather laughed with a smile on his face.

As we enjoyed our breakfast, other passengers joined us, sharing stories and laughter. The atmosphere was filled with fun, and for a brief moment, it felt like we were all part of something special.

"This place is amazing," Geeta didi said, looking around at the beauty of Naubise. "It's so peaceful and picturesque."

"Yeah, it really is. I love how the village feels so connected to nature," Grandfather replied, taking another sip of his tea.

With our hearts and bellies full, we finished our snacks, and I couldn't help but think how moments like these — simple yet meaningful — made the journey worthwhile. As we prepared to board the bus again, I took one last look at the charming village, grateful for the experience and the memories we were creating on this adventure through the journey to Kathmandu.

As we left Naubise behind, the bus began to roll forward, the gentle hum of the engine blending with the sound of wheels crunching over the gravel road. The village gradually faded from view, its vibrant colours and lively atmosphere replaced by the lush greenery of the hills that surrounded us.

Through the window, I watched as the landscape transformed, each curve in the road revealing new vistas of rolling hills and terraced fields that seemed to stretch endlessly. The sun continued to rise, casting a golden light that danced on the leaves and illuminated the path ahead, guiding us into the heart of the mountains.

The conversations among passengers faded into a comfortable silence, each of us lost in our thoughts, reflecting on the beauty we had just witnessed. The warmth of the tea and the delicious snacks we had shared lingered, a reminder of the simple joys that come with travel.

As we journeyed onward, I felt a sense of anticipation for what lay ahead, knowing that each mile brought us closer to new experiences and discoveries. The road ahead, though winding and uncertain, held the promise of adventure, and I was eager to embrace it.

With a final glance back at the receding hills of Naubise, I took a deep breath, letting the fresh mountain air fill my lungs. This chapter of our journey was coming to a close, but the story was far from over. As the bus continued to roll forward, I smiled, ready to face whatever awaited us on the path ahead.

Chapter 6: The Final Stretch to Kathmandu.

Day five of our journey dawned with a breathtaking sunrise that painted the sky in a stunning array of colours — deep oranges, soft pinks, and hints of lavender. As the bus named "Lalima Yatayat" rolled down the winding roads, the beauty of the landscape enveloped us, a constant reminder of the wonders we had encountered throughout our travels.

The hills rose and fell like waves, their lush greenery contrasting beautifully with the clear blue sky.

As we made our way toward Kathmandu, the air was filled with the crispness of early morning, invigorating our spirits for the day ahead. The winding roads offered glimpses of terraced fields and small settlements nestled in the hills, each scene more picturesque than the last.

However, our journey had not been without its challenges. We faced numerous difficulties along the way, each one testing our resolve and turning into an adventure of its own. One of the most memorable challenges was the devastating breach of the Saptakoshi River. The force of nature had caused significant damage, and we found ourselves needing to cross the river by ferry. The experience was both exhilarating and nerve-wracking as we boarded the small boats, the roar of the rushing water echoing around us. With every wave, we felt the thrill of adventure mixed with a hint of fear, but we made it across with stories to tell.

Road closures were another hurdle we had to navigate. Landslides and heavy rains had made certain routes impassable, forcing us to take detours that sometimes added hours to our travel time. Each unexpected stop turned into an opportunity for exploration. We would often find ourselves in charming villages or scenic viewpoints, where we could stretch our legs and take in the beauty surrounding us.

The landscape itself was both stunning and intimidating. The roads were often narrow and winding, clinging to the sides of steep hillsides. As we navigated these fearful roads, the steep drops on one side were a stark reminder of the power of nature. Yet, the breathtaking views of the valleys below and the majestic peaks in the distance made every moment worthwhile.

Heavy rains accompanied us on several days, transforming the roads into muddy trails and creating a sense of urgency to reach our destinations. The sound of raindrops hitting the roof of the bus was soothing yet relentless, and at times, the downpour made visibility difficult. Despite the challenges, the rain brought the landscape to life, enhancing the vibrancy of the greens and the richness of the earth.

Through it all, a sense of camaraderie grew among the passengers. We shared laughter, stories, and even fears, transforming the difficulties into cherished memories. Each challenge we faced deepened our appreciation for the journey, reminding us that sometimes the most beautiful moments arise from the trials we overcome.

As we continued on our path, the scenery began to shift. The rugged mountains gradually gave way to the more urban landscape, yet the beauty of the natural world remained ever-present. The bus rolled past vibrant fields of flowers, their colours bursting forth like confetti against the green backdrop. The scent of blooming wildflowers wafted through the air, mingling with the earthy aroma of the hills.

Looking out the window, I marvelled at the majestic peaks in the distance, their snow-capped summits glistening in the sunlight. They stood like sentinels, watching over us as we made our way toward the capital city. Each twist and turn of the road revealed new vistas, and I felt a sense of gratitude for the experiences we had shared — the friendships forged, the laughter exchanged, and the beauty discovered along the way.

With a renewed sense of purpose and excitement, I settled back into my seat, ready to embrace whatever awaited us in our journey. The journey was far from over, and as the bus continued its steady roll forward, I felt a sense of anticipation for the stories yet to be written in this remarkable adventure.

As we made our way through the winding roads, we passed notable landmarks like Naag Dhunga and Baad Bhanjyang, each with its own unique charm and significance. Naag Dhunga, known for its picturesque views, served as a gateway to the Kathmandu Valley, with the majestic hills surrounding it creating a stunning backdrop. The lush greenery and vibrant wildflowers made it a breathtaking sight, a reminder of the natural beauty that Nepal is renowned for.

Continuing onward, we reached Baad Bhanjyang, a quaint hill station that offered panoramic views of the valley below. The fresh mountain air and the sound of birds chirping created a serene atmosphere that invited us to pause and appreciate the beauty of our surroundings. It was a place where time seemed to stand still, and the hustle and bustle of city life felt worlds away.

As we approached Thankot, the bus slowed down and eventually came to a stop at the Thankot bus park. This bustling hub was a vital junction where many passengers disembarked to continue their journeys within the Kathmandu Valley. The bus park was alive with activity — vendors selling snacks and drinks, people greeting each other, and the chatter of conversations filled the air. The driver announced, "We'll be stopping here briefly for those getting off in Thankot," allowing us a moment to stretch our legs and take in the vibrant atmosphere. I stepped outside, feeling the warmth of the sun on my skin as I watched the scene unfold. Locals greeted each other with smiles, and the scent of freshly made momos wafted through the air, tempting our senses.

After a short while, the passengers from Thankot gathered their belongings and stepped off the bus. With a final wave and smiles exchanged, they disappeared into the bustling crowd, while the rest of us settled back into our seats.

With the bus now ready to continue its journey, the driver honked the horn, signalling that it was time to move on. As we pulled away from the bus park, conversations among the remaining passengers began to flow.

"Can you believe how beautiful the scenery has been?" Sujan remarked, leaning over to me. "I've never seen anything quite like it."

"I know! Each place we stop feels like a postcard," I replied, my eyes sparkling with excitement. "I can't wait to see what lies ahead."

The bus continued forward, the road winding gently as we approached Chandragiri. The time was 8:16 AM, and I could feel the anticipation building within the group. The hills around us were gradually rising, and I caught glimpses of the cable car that led to Chandragiri Hill, a popular destination known for its stunning views of the Kathmandu Valley and the Himalayas.

"Once we reach Chandragiri, we should definitely take the view of the cable car station!" someone suggested from the back of the bus.

"Absolutely! I've heard the views from the top are breathtaking!" another passenger chimed in,

"But I don't think the bus would stop there as we must reach Kathmandu sooner."

The buzz of excitement spread throughout the bus from the back seats and began to slow down.

As we continued on our journey, the beauty of the landscape and the camaraderie among the passengers made every moment feel special. The road ahead promised more adventures and stories yet to unfold, and I couldn't help but smile, eager to embrace whatever awaited us in the heart of Kathmandu.

Chandragiri is a popular hill station located near Kathmandu, Nepal. Known for its breathtaking panoramic views of the Kathmandu Valley and the majestic Himalayas, it serves as a serene getaway from the hustle and bustle of the city.

One of the main attractions of Chandragiri is the Chandragiri Cable Car, which offers a scenic ride up the hill. The cable car journey itself is a highlight, providing passengers with stunning landscapes and an exhilarating experience as they ascend the slopes. Once at the top, visitors can enjoy expansive views that encompass the entire valley, as well as sights of famous peaks like Manaslu, Langtang, and even the towering Everest on clear days.

Chandragiri is also home to a historic Bhaleshwar Mahadev Temple, which adds a cultural touch to the natural beauty. The area is surrounded by lush forests and hiking trails, making it an excellent destination for nature lovers and adventure enthusiasts.

Overall, Chandragiri is a perfect blend of natural beauty, cultural significance, and recreational opportunities, making it a must-visit spot for both locals and tourists seeking to experience the tranquillity and splendour of Nepal's landscapes.

As we reached Chandragiri, the morning beauty unfolded around us like a picturesque painting. The sun was just beginning to rise higher in the sky, casting a warm golden light that illuminated the lush greenery of the hills. The air was crisp and fresh, filled with the invigorating scent of pine and earth, awakening our senses after the long journey.

From our vantage point, the sweeping views of the Kathmandu Valley were nothing short of breathtaking. The valley lay below, dotted with quaint villages and terraced fields that seemed to cascade down the hillsides. Wisps of fog lingered in the lower elevations, creating a mystical atmosphere that enveloped the landscape.

The distant Himalayas stood majestically against the backdrop of the clear blue sky, their snow-capped peaks shimmering in the sunlight. It was a sight that inspired awe and gratitude, a reminder of the natural beauty that surrounded us.

As we took a moment to soak our eyes from the bus window in the scenery, the gentle rustling of leaves and the distant chirping of birds added to the serene ambiance. Travellers shared smiles and laughter, each of us appreciating this beautiful pause before continuing our journey.

But soon, it was time to move on. The bus continued forward, leaving behind the enchanting views of Chandragiri. The road ahead promised further adventures as we descended from the hill, our hearts filled with the beauty we had just witnessed. Excitement lingered in the air as we anticipated what awaited us in Kathmandu, eager to embrace the vibrant energy of the city.

The bus made a brief stop at the Checkpost in Thankot, a bustling area that serves as one of the main entry points into Kathmandu. Here, travellers often take a moment to stretch and refresh, while local vendors might offer snacks and drinks. The atmosphere was lively, filled with the sounds of conversations and the occasional honking of horns as vehicles moved through the checkpoint.

As we resumed our journey, we passed through Gurjudhara, an area known for its scenic beauty and traditional charm. The hills here are adorned with terraced fields and small houses, creating a picturesque landscape. The peaceful surroundings made it an inviting spot for those looking to escape the city's hustle.

Next, we continued through Balambi, a vibrant neighbourhood filled with a mix of residential homes and local businesses. The streets were alive with the energy of daily life, where locals engaged in their routines, and vendors sold fresh produce and traditional goods. The atmosphere reflected the rich culture and community spirit of the area.

Driving onward, we approached Satunjel, another lively area characterised by its busy streets and local markets. The blend of modernity and tradition was evident here, with shops selling everything from everyday essentials to handcrafted items. The hustle and bustle added a layer of excitement as we made our way through.

Finally, the bus headed toward Kalanki, a major junction that acts as a hub for various routes within Kathmandu. Known for its heavy traffic and commercial activities, Kalanki is a bustling area where people from different parts of the city converge. As we navigated through the busy streets, the anticipation of reaching our destination grew, with the vibrant energy of Kathmandu drawing ever closer.

Kalanki is a bustling and significant area in Kathmandu, Nepal, known as a major junction that connects various routes within the city and beyond. This lively neighbourhood is characterised by its heavy traffic, making it a central point for commuters and travellers alike.

The atmosphere in Kalanki is vibrant and dynamic, filled with the sounds of honking vehicles, chatter among pedestrians, and the calls of street vendors. The streets are often lined with shops, markets, and small eateries, offering a diverse array of goods and local delicacies. This blend of commercial activity and daily life creates an energetic environment that reflects the spirit of Kathmandu.

Kalanki also serves as a vital transportation hub, with buses and microbuses frequently departing for different parts of the valley and surrounding areas. This accessibility makes it a popular spot for both locals and visitors looking to explore the city.

In addition to its practical significance, Kalanki is also a place where you can experience the local culture firsthand. The mix of people, from vendors to shoppers, creates a lively tapestry of life in Kathmandu, making it an interesting place to observe and engage with the community.

Overall, Kalanki is a vibrant intersection of commerce, transportation, and culture, embodying the essence of urban life in Kathmandu while serving as a gateway to further adventures in the city and beyond.

As we reached Kalanki at 10:43 AM, the lively atmosphere enveloped us. The sun was now higher in the sky, casting a warm glow over the bustling streets and creating a vibrant scene filled with energy and life.

Nature, though mingled with urbanity, still held its charm here. The surrounding hills, lush and green, framed the area beautifully, reminding us that even within the city, nature's presence is never far away. The trees lining the roads offered patches of shade, swaying gently in the breeze, as if welcoming us to this vibrant junction.

The sounds of the city blended with those of nature—the rustling leaves, the distant chirping of birds, and the occasional flutter of butterflies that danced around the flowers planted along the streets. It was a moment where urban life met the tranquillity of the natural world, creating a unique ambiance that resonated with the essence of Kathmandu.

As we stepped off the bus to stretch our legs, the aroma of local street food wafted through the air, enticing us to explore further. Vendors were busy preparing delicious snacks, and the colourful displays of fruits and vegetables added to the lively scene.

Kalanki, with its mix of nature and urban energy, offered a glimpse into the heart of Kathmandu, showcasing a harmonious blend of life, culture, and the beautiful landscapes that define this remarkable city.

As the bus travelled along the ring road of Kathmandu, moving northward, the iconic Swayambhunath Temple came into view through the bus window. The stupa, with its golden spire and the all-seeing eyes of Buddha, stood majestically atop a hill, surrounded by lush greenery. The sight was breathtaking, and many passengers turned their heads in awe.

The bus slowed down for a brief moment, giving everyone a glimpse of the sacred site, but the driver reminded us, "Passengers are not allowed to get off the bus here."

In the excitement, Maya turned to her seatmate, Grandfather and Geeta didi, and said, "I need to get off here. My brother lives near Swayambhu, and I promised to visit him today."

Grandfather replied, "Oh, that's wonderful! Swayambhu is such a beautiful place. I hope you enjoy your time with him."

Maya smiled and nodded, "Thanks! I'll miss the rest of the journey, but family is important."

As the bus continued, Maya waved goodbye to her fellow passengers and us, making her way toward the temple, where she could already see the colourful prayer flags fluttering in the breeze. The bus then resumed its journey, passing through Dhungedhara, a quaint area known for its natural springs and beautiful surroundings. The scenery shifted to a mix of residential

neighbourhoods and bustling local markets, showcasing the daily life of the people living in this part of the city.

Next, we moved past Balaju, a busy area famous for its water supply and vibrant streets. The bus navigated through the hustle and bustle, where vendors sold everything from fresh produce to traditional snacks, adding to the lively atmosphere.

Continuing along the Chakra Path area, the bus journeyed through a mix of urban landscapes and pockets of greenery. The roads were lined with trees, and the vibrant energy of Kathmandu was palpable. As we travelled, conversations among passengers filled the air, sharing stories and experiences, all while marvelling at the sights of the city unfolding outside the windows.

As the clock struck 11 AM, we arrived at Gongabu Bus Park, a vibrant and bustling hub that seemed to pulse with the rhythm of daily life in Kathmandu. The atmosphere was lively, filled with the sounds of voices mingling with the clattering of bus engines and the distant honks of horns. The park was alive with people—travellers arriving and departing, vendors shouting their offerings, and families reuniting after long journeys.

The weather was pleasantly warm, with the sun shining brightly overhead, casting a golden glow over the surroundings. A gentle breeze swept through the park, bringing with it a refreshing coolness that offered relief from the sun's rays. The combination of warmth and air made it a perfect day to be out and about, contributing to the cheerful spirits of everyone present.

As we stepped off the bus, the diverse architecture around us caught our attention. The buildings that framed the park were a blend of old and new, showcasing Kathmandu's unique character. To our left, a series of traditional brick buildings, adorned with intricate wood carvings and colourful prayer flags, stood proudly. These structures held stories from the past, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the city. The wooden balconies, often embellished with traditional motifs, hinted at the craftsmanship that has been passed down through generations.

On the right, modern concrete structures rose higher, housing shops, eateries, and offices. The contrast between the traditional and contemporary architecture was striking, and it highlighted the city's evolution over time. Here, a trendy café with large glass windows and a vibrant mural attracted a crowd of young people sipping coffee and sharing laughs, while next to it, a small shop sold handwoven textiles and handicrafts, inviting passersby to explore its treasures.

In the midst of this bustling scene, my grandfather's phone rang. He answered with a smile, expecting to hear from his youngest son, my uncle, who had promised to pick us up. However, to our surprise, a different voice came through the line. "Hello, Kamal dai is away," the person said. "He asked me to pick you up instead. My name is Sohm, and I'm a friend of Kamal."

My grandfather nodded, reassured but intrigued. "When will you arrive?" he asked. Sohm responded, "I'll be there in half an hour." With that, my grandfather ended the call, and we began to settle in while waiting for Sohm to arrive.

The park bustled around us, and as we waited, we took in our surroundings. A group of children played nearby, their laughter ringing out as they chased each other, the sound of joy echoing through the park. Vendors hawking their goods—colourful fruits, spicy snacks, and refreshing drinks. The savoury smell of fried foods wafted through the air, tempting our appetites.

We noticed a small temple nestled among the buildings, its carved stone structure adorned with offerings of marigold flowers and incense. Locals paused to pay their respects, adding a spiritual touch to the vibrant atmosphere. The sight of the temple reminded us of the deep-rooted traditions that coexist with the modernity of the city.

As we continued to observe our surroundings, the diverse crowd caught our attention. Young couples strolled hand in hand, families gathered around food stalls, and solo travellers examined maps and itineraries, all adding to the tapestry of life in Gongabu. The blend of languages, laughter, and the occasional sound of a street musician playing a traditional tune created a symphony that was distinctly Kathmandu.

After a while, the sun began to climb higher in the sky, and the air felt even warmer, but the gentle breeze continued to provide a refreshing contrast. As we waited for Sohm, we shared stories and looked forward to the next part of our journey, excited about what lay ahead.

With half an hour to spare, we took a moment to absorb everything—the sights, the sounds, and the vibrant life surrounding us at Gongabu Bus Park. It was a reminder of the beauty of connection, as we awaited a friend of the family to escort us onward, bridging the past and present in this remarkable city.

As we waited under the gentle sun at Gongabu Bus Park, the vibrant atmosphere around us continued to pulsate with life. The air was filled with the sounds of laughter, the enthusiastic chatter of vendors calling out to potential customers, and the occasional honk of horns from the buses that arrived and departed in a steady rhythm. My youngest Uncle, whom Sohm affectionately called Kamal dai, was away for work, which is why Sohm would be here to pick us up. Anyway we were fortunate to have Sohm stepping in to help us.

Before, at the bus park, Sohm had called my grandfather again to confirm our identities and ensure that he recognized us when he arrived. “I just wanted to make sure I recognize you all when I get there,” he had said in a cheerful tone. Here we stood—my grandfather, Geeta didi, Sujan, and me—eagerly awaiting Sohm's arrival.

The weather was pleasantly warm, with the sun shining brightly overhead, casting a golden glow over everything in sight. A gentle breeze swept through the park, creating a refreshing coolness that offered relief from the sun's rays. The combination of warmth and air made it a perfect day to be out and about, contributing to the lively spirits of everyone present.

Suddenly, the unmistakable roar of a motorcycle engine cut through the din, drawing our attention. We turned to see a figure approaching, clad in a casual jacket and jeans, with a friendly smile that radiated warmth. It was Sohm, my grandfather's youngest son's friend.

He pulled up next to us and parked his motorcycle with practised ease before stepping off and extending his hand toward my grandfather. “Namaste, Grandfather! Namaste Geeta didi!” he greeted, his voice cheerful and inviting. “I hope you haven't been waiting long.”

“Not at all, Sohm,” my grandfather replied, shaking his hand firmly. “It's good to see you. Thank you for coming to pick us up.”

Sohm nodded, his eyes sparkling with friendliness. “Of course! Kamal dai's family is my family. I wouldn't miss the chance to help out.” He then pulled out his phone and dialled my grandfather's number again.

“Just wanted to let you know I'm here,” he said in a funny way.

“Perfect timing,” my grandfather chuckled, glancing at us. “We were just discussing about you.”

Sohm looked between us, and his easy-going charm became instantly apparent. He exuded a friendly demeanour, making it clear that he was someone comfortable in any situation. His laughter was infectious, and he carried an air of confidence devoid of any hint of arrogance. The way he engaged us, asking about our journey and showing genuine interest in our well-being, put us all at ease.

After finishing his call, Sohm turned back to us. "I'll call a taxi to take us to Dallu. It's not far, but the traffic can be a bit tricky."

"Good idea," my grandfather replied. "I appreciate it."

Sohm quickly flagged down a taxi, and it pulled up beside us. "This one should do," he said, opening the door and gesturing for us to get in. "Just give me a moment to manage the fare."

As we loaded our belongings—two hefty backpacks and two large sacks filled with rice and potatoes—into the trunk of the taxi, Sohm turned to the driver, a middle-aged man with a friendly face. "Bhai, we're heading to Dallu, across the Bishnumati Bridge. How much will that be?"

The driver squinted at the sun, calculating the distance. "Around 300 rupees," he replied, his voice steady and clear.

Sohm nodded, then turned to my grandfather. "Is that all right, Grandfather?"

"Sounds good to me," my grandfather confirmed, reaching into his pocket for his wallet.

As Sohm handed over the fare, he kept the conversation light, asking, "How has everyone been back home? I've heard your eldest son has been busy with his new job."

"Yes, he has," my grandfather replied, a proud smile crossing his face. "He's been working hard, and we're all very proud of him."

With the fare settled, Sujan climbed into the front passenger seat while we settled into the back, the two large sacks of rice and potatoes wedged between us. The taxi driver started the engine, and we pulled away from the bus park, navigating through the lively streets of Kathmandu.

The journey to Dallu was filled with the engaging beauty of big buildings and horns.

Geeta didi huckled, "You've always had a spirit for adventure, Sujan. I remember when you were just a boy, climbing trees and dreaming about Kathmandu. Are you excited?"

Sujan laughed good-naturedly, nodding in agreement. "And now I'm enjoying it!" He gestured animatedly, his excitement infectious.

As we made our way across the Bishnumati Bridge, the view opened up to the river below, reflecting the clear blue sky. "This bridge is beautiful," I commented, admiring the scenery.

"It's one of my favourite spots in the city," The taxi driver said. "Every time I cross it, I feel grateful to live in such a wonderful place."

The taxi continued along the winding roads, and soon we arrived at my uncle's house in Dallu. The area was peaceful, with trees lining the streets, their leaves rustling gently in the breeze, and the sounds of nature blending seamlessly with the urban landscape. As we got out, Sohm helped us carry the bags, the rice and potatoes a bit cumbersome but manageable.

"Thank you for your help, Sohm," my grandfather said, offering a warm smile. "You've been a great friend of my son."

"It's my pleasure, Grandfather," Sohm replied, waving off the gratitude. "It's always nice to see family come together. I'll catch up with you later!"

With that, he hopped back onto his motorcycle, waving goodbye as he rode off into the distance, leaving us with a sense of warmth and connection that only friends and family can bring.

As we approached my uncle's house, the familiar scent of spices wafted through the air, mingling with the fresh morning breeze, welcoming us home. The moment felt special—a beautiful blend of stories, laughter, and shared joy of family that would linger long after the day was done. It served as a poignant reminder of the bonds that tie us together, rich in love and culture, waiting to be celebrated in the warmth of family reunions.

We had travelled to Kathmandu to celebrate my uncle's upcoming wedding, but the journey had unfolded into a tapestry of challenges and adventures.

As we approached my uncle's house, the familiar scent of spices wafted through the air, mingling with the fresh morning breeze, welcoming us home. This moment felt special—a beautiful blend of stories, laughter, and shared family joy that would linger long after the day was over. It served as a powerful reminder of the bonds that unite us, rich in love and culture, ready to be celebrated in the warmth of family gatherings.

The house itself stood as a testament to the memories and moments that had shaped our family.

The wooden doors, adorned with intricate carvings, creaked open to reveal a warm and inviting interior. The walls were decorated with photographs of past generations and vibrant tapestries, each telling a story of its own. The aroma of freshly cooked dal bhat and tarkari filled the air, tantalising our senses with anticipation.

As we settled in, the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu outside faded into a distant memory. The tranquillity of my uncle's home, nestled amidst the greenery, provided a comforting contrast to the lively journey we had just undertaken. We gathered around the table, sharing stories, laughter, and the simple joy of togetherness. The sounds of clinking glasses, the delicious aroma of food, and the warmth of familial love created a perfect symphony of connection.

In that moment, surrounded by family, I felt a profound sense of gratitude. Our journey to Kathmandu had been filled with its share of challenges and adventures, but it had led us to this beautiful moment of unity and belonging. As the sun began to set, casting a golden glow over the hills, I understood that the true essence of our journey lay not just in reaching our destination, but in the memories we had created along the way.

And so, as evening shadows lengthened and the first stars appeared in the sky, we raised our glasses in a toast to family, love, and the endless adventures that awaited us. With hearts brimming with joy and anticipation, we looked forward to the days ahead, knowing that together, we could face anything that came our way. In the heart of Kathmandu, amidst the laughter and love of family, we had truly found our home.

The End