

The Sacred Citadel is priceless



I'D ALWAYS BEEN KEEN TO MEET THE OWNER OF THE Sacred Citadel, after hearing about it so often from friends and Andy himself. Dr Premendra Verma, the owner, is a good friend, and Andy's always been impressed with what Prem is accomplishing at his boutique brimming with lovely Kashmiri region, Tibetan and Indian tribal crafts and items.

Prem is married to a local lady, but he is an expat himself. Born in the Kashmiri region, he is a highly educated scholar who was on the faculty of Georgetown University in Washington, DC, among other prestigious postings.

As I walked into the first floor shop, I immediately sensed the timelessness of the objects within. The ambience which emanated is one of exotic foreignness. This does delight me, particularly as an American, always quite entranced by the Eastern mysticism and their spiritual interpretations of their existence. Sipping on a delicious and heavily spiced Indian tea, I asked Prem how he came to be sitting in the middle of a shop selling eastern exotica.

And after his explanation, I realised that here was a story waiting to be told. So, of course, I'm your on the scene reporter.

Expats know we will be buying local art items, knick-knacks, keepsakes, even large items such as the stunning carpets and furniture we find during our stay here (all of which Prem takes orders for and sells). The affordability, plus the uniqueness will make them extra precious back in our home countries. They will always be there with their memories carried from the moments of our Malaysian experiences.

What Prem does is to keep ancient craftsmanship trades alive. He orders his stock in a way that results in the truly poor of remote villages, being able to survive in their own villages and to enjoy a standard of life that is respectful of their humanness. These are the genuine,

tribal crafts that have made these regions famous throughout the ages.

The only 'jobs' available to these remote villagers, scattered throughout the mountainous ranges of the vast Kashmiri area including Tibet, are the ones where the skills have been handed down through countless generations. All is hand woven, hand painted, hand moulded, ...you get the idea.

When Prem's customers, or friends as he calls them, place their orders for one of a kind items, they are in effect financing the village back where it originates.

Prem's shop is stocked with items for ideas. He will, for example, have a basic set or piece, and several different colours, or textures it can be replicated with. You are always assured of a one of a kind piece, and the money does not go into someone's mutual fund portfolio, but rather back to the hands that so laboriously and painstakingly created the pieces. To me, this makes them priceless.

The villagers create and make their own colours and paints. They originate just about everything on their own. What we have taken for granted, as even artisans have for centuries, are not part of these craftsmen's tool kits.

They make rugs from the materials they generate. And the beauty is awesome. The best way to get a sense of the other 'worldliness' that accompanies these items is to drop by Sacred Citadel yourself. Prem loves nothing better, than to have a guest partake of an old world beverage while they listen to a genuine expert, discuss a world we would never know ourselves.

Located right on Telawi 5 across from the MPH Bookstore, Sacred Citadel is at #44-A. Call Prem at 03-2284-8412 or 012-906-5966. He will also enjoy hearing from you at sacdel@streamyx.com

I had a lovely late afternoon visit, which has lingered in my mind ever since. Next month, I will write some more about what some of these amazing items are.