

Festivals of Nepal

Mata Tirtha Snan (Mother's Day)

This is one of the widely celebrated festivals that falls on the first month, Baisakh (April/May), of the Nepali Year. It is also called Mata Tirtha Aunsi as it falls on a new moon night.

The Nepalese people have always been family oriented. They take great pride in their ancient tradition of closely-knit family unit. This sort of kinship is not only the result of religious teachings, but also due to various festivals and ceremonies, which brings the family together and strengthens the family ties in the Nepalese society.

Such is the festival of "Mata Tritha Puja" which in English is "Mother's day" . This festival falls on the last day of the dark fortnight of April or early May. It is a day when one shows appreciation and gratitude to his/her mother for her unconditional love and undying support.

On this day, each house bustles with activities and everyone, regardless of age, participates. There aren't much religious ceremonies but the fact that it is a day for mothers, calls for celebrations for she is the one who keeps the family together through ups and downs in life. Even the small children dig into their savings to buy gifts for their mothers. Sons and daughters living separately, come with presents and delicacies to spend time with their mother. It is a day of reunion for married daughters with their mothers. The entire day is filled with festivities and merry making.

Those who don't have a mother pay obeisance to Mata Tirtha, which is a sacred site of pilgrimage and holy bathing. It lies six miles south - west of central Katmandu, consisting of two pools-the larger for bathing and the smaller is famous as the place where one "looks upon one's mother's face".

Legends reveal that in the ancient times the region was ruled by a cowherd king. One of his cowherds was so depressed by his mother's death that he went to pray and make offerings at a water storage pond in the forest on this day. Miraculously his mother's face appeared and her hand accepted the offerings. Thus its called Mata Tirtha, where many hope to see their mother's face. A lot of folklores are attached to this site, some of which are tragic. But whatever it maybe, people still believe that paying homage to this site will bring peace to their mother's departed soul. So for this reason people come from distant places, on this day, to show their reverence.

Thus, Mata Tirtha holds a very profound meaning in each person's life. For a mother, is a figure present in everyone's life. This day gives each child a chance to show the depth of his/her feelings for her.

Article by Padmakshi Rana

Buddha Jayanti

This day is celebrated to mark the birthday of the Lord Buddha which dates back in about 543 BC. It falls on Jestha Purnima (Full moon night-May/June).

The belief and the practice of Buddhism in Nepal dates back to the time of Prince Siddharth Gautam, who was born in the southern Terai region of the country in about 543 BC. Till he was 29, the young prince led a very sheltered life in the royal palace of his father. He was completely unaware of the tragedies of everyday life. One day, he

convinced his charioteer to take him outside the walls of his palace and he was shocked to see the sight of an old man, a cripple, and a corpse.

The realization that there was more to life than the lavish and luxurious life he was leading, made him abandon all the worldly pleasures and search for enlightenment and



the true meaning of life. After much wandering and searching, Gautam finally attained enlightenment while meditating under a pipul tree.

Henceforth, known as the "Buddha" or "the enlightened one" he began to preach "The Four Noble Truths" to all who would listen. According to this doctrine, people suffer because of their desires and the root cause of all misery is desire.

These desires and consequently all problems can be totally eliminated by following the "eightfold path" - right views, right intent, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation.

Buddha journeyed from place to place, teaching and converting hundreds of followers. He died at the age of eighty. However, his disciples continued to spread his teachings. Because of his wise teachings Lord Buddha is revered by many Nepalese and Buddha Jayanti is celebrated with much enthusiasm throughout the Kingdom. This day falls on the full moon of the month of Baisakh and is celebrated to commemorate the birth, attainment of knowledge and the death of Lord Buddha. Thus, it is a thrice blessed day. Prayers are sung and the Buddhists offer worship in all the major Buddhist shrines such as Swayambhu and Boudhanath. At Swayambhunath, for example millions of devout Buddhists gather to chant prayers and to burn butterlamps. The next morning a giant figure of Lord Buddha is displayed to all the followers and hundreds of small shrines are visited and worshipped. Large groups of people parade through the streets praising the Lord and his teachings. Special flags, usually red, blue; yellow and white can be seen flying high above all the Buddhist households.

Article by Vani Shah

Ghanta Karna Chaturdasi

This festival celebrates the exorcism of the mythical demon Ghantakarna. It is also called Gathemangal festival which falls on trayodashi of the month Shrawan (July/August).

This festival celebrates the exorcism of the mythical demon Ghantakarna. According to a local legend a savage by the name of Ghantakarna used to terrify the public by stealing their children and womenfolk. The demon made a grotesque sight with his body painted in red, blue, and black. He had a pair of bells on his ears so that, at every moment, he made a jangling noise. Because of these bells, he was called Ghanta (bell) Karna (ears). Ghanta Karna was a big bully and demanded money and other gifts be made to him by the villagers.

The rains came and went, but the farmers dared not to go out in fear of the ogre. There was a look of desolation on every farmer's face. But, succor came unexpectedly. A large number of frogs came to the place where the fearsome demon was staying and all of them started to croak. Ghantakarna got very agitated and tried to catch the frogs. But the clever

frogs jumped ahead and continued to croak. They led him on to a swamp and then they jumped into the water. He too plunged into the water and was soon up to his ears in the mud. The frogs then swarmed all around his head and the demon sank to his death. Thus, the clever frogs were able to free the residents of the Valley from the tortures of Ghantakarna.



The festival of Gathemangal is celebrated towards the end of the Nepalese month of Shrawan. The festival is celebrated by acting out the legendary drama in the streets. To begin with, children from every neighborhood collect money from passersby, which is then used to make an effigy of the demon. While this effigy remains in the center of a rough tent-like structure erected from bamboo poles, one man impersonates Ghantakarna by smearing himself with paint and roaming the streets with a begging bowl asking for donations. At the end of the day, the person imitating Ghantakarna is placed on the bamboo poles, now taken down, and is dragged to a nearby river. This colorful festival, though celebrated mostly only in the Newar community, is especially fun-filled for children. They run around the effigy laughing gaily and enjoying them thoroughly.

Article by Vani Shah

Photographs by Min Bajracharya.

Janai Purnima, Rakshya Bandhan, Khumbeshwor Mela Patan

Janai Purnima is the festival of Sacred Thread. On this day every Hindu ties a sacred thread on the wrist. It is also called Rakshya Bandhan. On this day, there is a big Mela (fair) at Khumbeshwor, Lalitpur. It is again on a full moon night. Janai Purnima is known as the Sacred Thread Festival. On this day Hindu men, especially the Brahmans and Chettris perform their annual change of Janai, a yellow cotton string worn across the chest or tied around the wrist of the right hand. This thread is only given to males during a lengthy and impressive religious ceremony called the 'Bratabandhan'. This cord initiates them into manhood and commands them to faithfully follow the religion. The Janai must be worn everyday of their lives from this day onwards. The 'triple cord' is a symbol of body, speech and mind, and when the knots are tied the wearer is supposed to gain complete control over each. This cord is changed if it becomes frayed or defiled, for example, when the wearer touches a woman in menstruation, during which she is considered 'unclean'. But according to Hindu rules the cord must be changed without fail by a Brahman on this day, Janai meaning sacred thread, and purni meaning Purnima or the full moon, thus pointing to the change of the thread on the auspicious full moon day.



On Janai Purnima, there is a big mela (fair) at Kumbeshwor in Lalitpur. Devotees come here to worship Lord Mahadev and to tie a knot around their wrists. On the preceding day the wearer makes himself 'clean' by shaving, cutting the hair and bathing. He undergoes a partial fast, taking only one meal of foods considered to be 'clean' - no meat, onions or garlic. The next morning the family priest comes to the house. The entire family gathers around him as he reads from a holy book, performs a ceremony, which sanctifies the new thread, and places it about the recipient's neck across the chest. In payment the priest is given foodstuffs and some money.

Raksha Bandhan

This is also the day when male, females, and children regardless of station and caste tie a sacred yellow thread around their wrist. The males tie the thread around their right and the women tie it on their left. Raksha means 'protection' and Bandhan means a bond. The wearer believes that it will bring him good luck. It is believed that this thread should only be removed on Laxmi Puja, which falls three months later, and tied to the tail of a cow.



Thus when death comes to the wearer the cow will help him to cross the river Bhaitarna, by allowing the dead to cling to her tail.

On the morning of Raksha Bandhan the people crowd around the Brahman who ties the yellow thread around the buyers wrist intoning a quick prayer which goes, 'Thus I tie the Raksha round your wrist, the same which bound the arm of the mighty Bali, King of the Danavas. May its protection be eternal.' Perhaps this is a reminder to the people of the extraordinary acts of charity performed by King Bali.

It seems that King Bali had taken the vow of Charity, according to which he would grant every wish made to him.

His deep devotion and boundless benevolence won him a place higher than even Lord Indra, the King of of Heaven did.

Seeing their realms under a mere "Danava"(demon), for Bali was the King of the Danavas, the Gods appealed to Lord Vishnu, who came to their assistance disguised as a dwarf. Knowing that Bali had taken the Vow of Charity; the dwarf begged him for as much land as he could cover in three strides. The moment Bali agreed, the dwarfed Vishnu swelled to the size of a tremendous giant and in two mighty strides stepped across Heaven and Earth. When he demanded were he might take the promised third step, Bali who had already recognized Vishnu placed the giant's foot atop his own head and was pushed far into the bowels of the earth. Thus Vishnu restored the Three Worlds to the rightful ruling Gods, and repaid Bali for his last act of earthly charity, by making him the King of the Underworld, where he is believed to be still ruling.

Article by Vani Shah

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya and Madhup Mangal.

Gaijatra

The festival of "Gai Jatra" (the procession of cows) which is one of the most popular festivals, is generally celebrated in the Nepalese month of Bhadra (August-

September). This festival has its roots in the belief that the god of death, Yamaraj, must be feared and hence worshipped. The festival of "Gai Jatra", the procession of cows, is generally celebrated in the Nepalese month of Bhadra (August-September). The festival of cows is one of the most popular festivals of Nepal. The whole complex of Gai Jatra festival has its roots in the ancient age when people feared and worshipped Yamaraj, "the god of death". However, the ironical sessions synonymous with the Gai Jatra festival came into tradition in the medieval period of Nepal during the reign of Malla Kings. Hence, the present form of Gai Jatra is a happy blending of antiquity and medievalism.



According to the traditions since times immemorial, every family who has lost one relative during the past year must participate in a procession through the streets of Kathmandu leading a cow. If a cow is unavailable then a young boy dressed as a cow is considered a fair substitute. In Hinduism, a cow is regarded as the most venerated among all the domestic animals.

It is believed that the cow, revered as a holy animal by Hindus, will help the deceased relative's journey to heaven.

In terms of historical evidences, once when King Pratap Malla lost his son, his wife, the queen remained dumbstruck. The king was very sad to see the condition of his

beloved queen. The king, in spite of his several efforts, could not lessen the grief of his wife. By all means he wanted to see little smile on the lips of his sweetheart. He announced that someone who ever made the queen laugh would be rewarded adequately.

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Hence, the present form of Gai Jatra is a happy blending of antiquity and medievalism. During the festival of Gai Jatra, the cow procession was brought before the grief-stricken queen. Then the participants began ridiculing and befooling the important people of the society. Finally when the social injustice and



other evils were highlighted and



attacked mercilessly, the queen could not stop smiling. The queen laughed, and Pratap Malla, the king ensued a tradition of including jokes, satires, mockery and lampoon in the Gai Jatra days. After the procession is over, in the

afternoon, nearly everyone takes part in another age-old tradition in which the participants dress up and wear masks. The occasion is filled with songs, jokes, mockery and humour of every kind become the order of the day until late evening. Hence, Gai Jatra is a healthy festival which enables the people to accept the reality of death and to prepare oneself for the life after death. According to Hinduism, "whatever a man does in his life is a preparation to lead a good life, after death".

Article by Prabhakar Chettri

Photographs collected from Min Bajracharya and Deependra Bajracharya.

Shree Krishna Janmastami

Sri Krishna Janmastami marks the celebration of the birth of Lord Sri Krishna. This festival is also known as Krishna Jayanti or Janmashtami. Lord Krishna is regarded as the 8th avatar or 'incarnation' of Lord Vishnu. It falls on Saptami of Bhadra (August/September). Sri Krishna Janmastami marks the celebration of the birth of Bhagavan Sri Krishna. This festival is also known as Krishna Jayanti or Janmashtami. Lord Krishna is regarded as the 8th avatar or 'incarnation' of Vishnu. The life of Sri Krishna is the most stirring saga of one of the greatest saviors and propounders of 'Dharma'. His life is filled with numerous dangers over which he ultimately gained victory. The stories of how he killed, one after the other, all the demonic adversaries- Pootana, Shakata, Agha, Dhenuka, Bakaa, Keshi, Kansa, Shishupala, Jarasandha etc. - has made him the peerless savior of mankind.

Krishna's Birth

Mathura was the capital of a kingdom in North India. Ugrasen was the king of Mathura. He had a son, Kansa and a daughter, Devki. During the lavish wedding of Devki to Vasudev, Kansa heard a celestial voice announce, 'O Kansa, Thy death is written at the hand of the eighth son born to this union.' Through the ensuing years the demon king put to death six children born to Devki in the dungeons of the Palace. On the day that Sri Krishna was born it was raining and dark. At midnight a bright light appeared in the room of Devki. Then the child was born. Vasudev, terrified for the bay's safety, carried it in a

basket through the opened gates of the dungeon. On account of the heavy rain the river Yamuna was swollen. But as he stepped out of the prison the rain stopped and the dim light of the moon showed the way. A huge snake taking the shape of an umbrella protected the child. As he reached the river the waters were divided leaving a dry path for Vasudev to cross. Vasudev went to the home of his friend Nanda. He exchanged the baby boy with a baby girl and went back. The following day, when Kansa tried to kill the baby



girl she slipped from his hands and the image of Devi appeared. She spoke to Kansa, "The one who is destined to kill you has already taken birth elsewhere." Sri Krishna flourished under Nanda's and Yashodha's care and later on slew the wicked Kansa.

Krishna Mandir

On Krishna Janmashtami numerous devotees flock to the ancient Krishna temple in old Patan Durbar Square to keep vigil through the glorious night of his birth. As they sit huddled together their bodies rocking in humble obeisance, the women chant the many names of the Lord, 'Narayan, Narayan' and Gopal, Gopal'. Some sing ancient hymns, others clap their hands, while some pray.

Crowds of men and women edge their way slowly up narrow steps through the seated devotees to the temple's dark interior to where the main idol stands. There they offer flowers, coins and food and wait for a glimpse of Krishna Janmastami festival at Krishna Mandir the idol. After the temple priest gives them 'prasada' they make their way down to join the multitude of devotees in the streets.

Article by Vani Shah

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya and Madhup Mangal.

Gokarna Aunsi (Father's Day)

The most auspicious day to honour one's father is Gokarna Aunsi . It falls on the dark fortnight of Bhadra or in August or in early September. It is also known as Kuse Aunsi. The Nepali religion , tradition and culture holds a lot of reverence for a father . He is considered the pillar of strength , respect and support of a family. The most auspicious day to honour one's father is Gokarna Aunsi . It falls on the dark fortnight in August or in early September.

A day when children show their gratitude and appreciation for his guidance and teachings in life. Sons and daughters, near or far, come with presents and confessions to spend the day with their fathers. Children spend their hoarded coins on presents, which expresses honour and love in their own special ways. The streets are a gay scene of married daughters on their way to their parents' home with delicacies . After the offering of gifts, they touch their father's feet with their foreheads , this act of veneration is done by the sons only , the daughters touch the hand. The ceremony is also known as "looking upon father's face".

People with or without fathers worship the Gokarneswor Mahadev on this day. It is a sacred shrine of lord Shiva , renowned for his singularly close communion with the souls of dead . The shrine lies in Gokarna village, five miles east of Kathmandu. The fatherless people honour the memory of their fathers and promote welfare of his soul here.

Mythology has placed the Gokarna shrine in prehistoric times when Lord Shiva hid himself in the Pashupatinath forest, disguised as a one-horned golden deer, from the gods and mankind. While he spent his days frolicking, the world suffered so Lord Vishnu, the preserver, Lord Brahma, the creator and Lord Indra, the king of Gods, took matters into their hands and searched for him. Finally a goddess revealed Shiva's disguise. So when they finally caught the deer by the horn, it burst into fragments and Shiva revealed himself. He asked the other three gods to establish his horn in their three worlds. So, Vishnu installed his section in his abode in Vaikuntha, Indra in his realm in heaven and Brahma enshrined it at the sacred site of Gokarneshwor. The following day the gods and goddesses descended and bathed in Bagmati river, paid homage to Shiva and established the present day tradition of ancestor worship at gokarna.

Gokarna Aunsi is yet another festival in the continuous procession of holy days, wherein homage is paid deities and the bonds of family and kinship is renewed and strengthened.

Article by Padmakshi Rana

Teej

"Teej" is the fasting festival for women. Through this religious fasting, hindu women pray for marital bliss, wellbeing of their spouse and children and purification of their own



body and soul. It takes place on Tritiya of Bhadra (August/September). "Teej" is the fasting festival for women. It takes place in August or early September. The festival is a three-day long celebration that combines sumptuous feasts as well as rigid fasting. Through this religious fasting, hindu women pray for marital bliss, well being of their spouse and children and purification of their own body and soul. Traditionally, the ritual of Teej is obligatory for all Hindu married women and girls who have reached puberty.

Exception is made for the ones who are ill or physically unfit. In such circumstances a priest performs the rites. According to the holy books, the Goddess Parbati fasted and prayed fervently for the great Lord Shiva to become her spouse. Touched by her devotion, he took her for his wife. Goddess Parbati, in gratitude sent her emissary to preach and disseminate this religious fasting among mortal women, promising prosperity and longevity with their family. Thus was born the festival of Teej.

The first day of Teej is called the "Dar Khane Din". On this day the women, both married and unmarried, assemble at one place, in there finest attires and start dancing and singing devotional songs. Admist all this, the grand feast takes place. The jollity often goes on till midnight, after which



the 24 - hour fast commences. Some women without a morsel of food or drops of water while others take liquid and fruit.

Gaily dressed women can be seen dancing and singing on the street leading to Shiva temples. But the main activities take place around the Pashupatinath temple where women circumambulate the Lingam, the phallic symbol of the lord, offering flowers, sweets and coins. The main puja (religious ceremony) takes place with offerings of flowers, fruits etc made to Shiva and Parvati, beseeching their blessing upon the husband and family. The important part of the puja is the oil lamp which should be alight throughout the night for it is bad omen if it dies away.

The third day of the festival is Rishi Panchami. After the completion of the previous day's puja, women pay homage to various deities and bathe with red mud found on the roots of the sacred Datwan bush, along with its leaves. This act of purification is the final ritual of Teej, after which women are considered absolved from all sins. The recent years have witnessed alteration in the rituals, especially concerning the severity, but its essence remains. No matter how agonizing the fast may be Nepalese women have and will always continue to have faith in the austerities of Teej.

Article by Padmakshi Rana

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya and Min Bajracharya.

Indrajatra

This festival falls in the end of Bhadra (August/September). Both Hindus and Buddhists unite to celebrate the festival of Indra Jatra with great enthusiasm. It is a well known fact that Hinduism and Buddhism are the two major religions of Nepal, each having its own rules and rituals. However, like most festivals of Nepal, both Hindus and Buddhist unite to celebrate the festival of Indra Jatra. This festival is celebrated by both Hindus and Buddhists with great enthusiasm. It is also believed that Indra Jatra is a festival of classical dances. It is on this very day



when one is able to observe numerous varieties of traditional dances. The festival is named after Lord Indra who is known as the god of rain and also as the king of heaven.

The festival of Indra Jatra continues for eight days with much rejoicing, singing, dancing and feasting. People from all over Nepal, mostly those who live within the Kathmandu Valley, gather at the Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu.

The first day of the festival is viewed by a large number of people. On that day, a long wooden pole is erected in front of the ancient Royal Palace at Hanuman Dhoka, in order to propitiate Lord Indra, the "god of rain". Classical dancers also assemble at the spot, wearing different kinds of traditional

masks and costumes and dancing around the courtyard of Hanuman Dhoka to celebrate Indra's visit.

On the third day of the festival of Indra Jatra, the living goddess Kumari is taken out in a procession in a chariot.

"Kumari", the "living goddess", is considered to be an incarnation of the goddess "Taleju". Chariots of Kumari, Ganesha and Bhairav are taken around the city for three days. According to Hindu beliefs Ganesha is the son of Shiva and Parvati who has a head of an elephant and Bhairav is another form of Lord Shiva himself.



The king of Nepal, the only Hindu king in the world, also pays homage to the

Kumari during this period. The festival's many interesting dances, including the Procession of Living Goddess-Mahakali, Mahalaxmi and Dasha Avatara masked dances are staged in Kathmandu Durbar Square, near the Kumari Temple. The "Dasha Avatara" refers to the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu who is one of the Hindu's Holy trinity. The excitement of the festival of Indra Jatra comes to an end on the last evening of the festival when the long wooden pole erected on the first day is lowered with religious ceremonies, animal sacrifices and ritual gestures.



Article by Avigya Karki

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya and Min Bajracharya.

Dashain

During the month of Kartik in the Bikram Sambat calendar (late September and early October), the Nepalese people indulge in the biggest festival of the year, Dashain. Dashain is the longest and the most auspicious festival in the Nepalese annual calendar, celebrated by Nepalese of all caste and creed throughout the country. The fifteen days of celebration occurs during the bright lunar fortnight ending on the day of the full moon. During the month of Kartik in the Bikram Sambat calendar (late September and early October), the Nepalese people indulge in the biggest festival of the year, Dashain.

Dashain is the longest and the most auspicious festival in the Nepalese annual calendar, celebrated by Nepalese of all caste and creed throughout the country. The fifteen days of celebration occurs during the bright lunar fortnight ending on the day of the full moon. Thorough out the kingdom of Nepal the goddess Durga in all her manifestations are worshiped with innumerable pujas, abundant offerings and thousands of animal sacrifices for the ritual holy bathing, thus drenching the goddess for days in blood.

Dashain commemorates a great victory of the gods over the wicked demons. One of the victory stories told is the Ramayan, where the lord Ram after a big struggle slaughtered Ravana, the fiendish king of demons. It is said that lord Ram was successful in the battle only when goddess Durga was evoked. The main celebration glorifies the triumph of good over evil and is symbolized by goddess Durga slaying the terrible demon Mahisasur, who terrorised the earth in the guise of a brutal water buffalo. The first nine days signify the nine days of ferrous battle between goddess Durga and the demon Mahisasur. The tenth day is the day when Mahisasur was slain and the last five days symbolise the celebration of the victory with the blessing of the goddess. Dashain is celebrated with great rejoice, and goddess Durga is worshiped throughout the kingdom as the divine mother goddess.

In preparation for Dashain every home is cleansed and beautifully decorated, painted as an invitation to the mother goddess, so that she may visit and bless the house with good fortune. During this time the reunion of distant and nearby relatives occur in every household. The market is filled with shoppers seeking new clothing, gifts, luxuries and enormous supplies of temple offering for the gods, as well as foodstuffs for the family feasting. Thousands of sheep, goats, ducks, chicken and water buffalo are prepared for the great slaughter. All types of organisations are closed for ten to fifteen days. Labourers are almost impossible to find; from the poor to the rich, all enjoy the festive mood.



Anywhere you go the aroma of 'Vijaya Dashami' is found.

The first nine days of Dashain are called nawa ratri when tantric rites are conducted. In Nepal the life force is embodied in the divine energy and power of the female, depicted as goddess Durga in her many forms. All goddess who emanated from goddess Durga are known as devis, each with different aspects and powers. In most mother goddess temples the deity is represented simply as a sacred Kalash, carved water jug or multiple handed goddess holding murderous weapons. During these nine days people pay their homage to the goddess. If she is properly worshiped and pleased good fortunes are on the way and if angered through neglect then misfortunes are around the corner. Mother goddess is the source of life and everything.

The first day of Dashain is called Ghatasthapana, which literally means pot establishing. On this day the kalash,

(holy water vessel) symbolising goddess Durga often with her image embossed on the side is placed in the prayer room. The kalash is filled with holy water and covered with cowdung on to which seeds are sown. A small rectangular sand block is made and the kalash is put in the centre. The surrounding bed of sand is also seeded with grains. The ghatasthapana ritual is performed at a certain auspicious moment determined by the astrologers. At that particular moment the priest intones a welcome, requesting goddess Durga to bless the vessel with her presence.

The room where the kalash is established is called 'Dashain Ghar'. Generally women are not allowed to enter the room where Dashain puja is being carried out. A priest or a household man worships the kalash everyday once in the morning and then in the evening. The kalash and the sand are sprinkled with holy water everyday and it is shielded from direct sunlight. By the tenth day, the seed will have grown to five or six inches long yellow grass. The sacred yellow grass is called 'Jamara'. It is bestowed by the elders atop the heads of those younger to them during the last five days when tika is put on. The jamara is taken as a token of Goddess Durga as well as the elders blessing.



As days pass by regular rituals are observed till the seventh day. The seventh day is called 'Fulpati'. On this day the jamara to be used by the royal household is brought from their ancestral royal house in Gorkha about a hundred and sixty nine kilometres away over the hills north west of the valley of Kathmandu. A parade is held in the Hanuman Dhoka Royal Palace. The fulpati, i.e. the procession bearing the jamara and other items necessary for the tika, is brought from Gorkha after a three day walk and most of the government officials are eagerly waiting for the fulpati parade to arrive at Rani Phokari in the afternoon. Rani Phokari area is filled with hundreds of government officials meticulously attired in the traditional formal dress. In fulpati, the royal kalash filled with holy water, banana stalks, jamara and sugar cane tied with red cloth is carried by Brahmans from the ancestral royal house on a decorated palanquin under a gold tipped and embroidered umbrella, led by the military platoon of the royal priest. The government officials also join the fulpati parade. Whilst the fulpati parade is heading towards the old royal palace, His Majesty the King observes the ceremonies taking place in Tundikhel, the army parade ground in the center of the city.



There a majestic display of the Royal Nepalese Army is held. Guns are fired and the entire valley echoes with the resonance sound of it. The firing continues for ten to fifteen minutes to honour the fulpati. By the time the function ends the royal fulpati is already taken inside the Dashain ghar in Hanuman Dhoka Palace. With this the Dashain feasting starts.

The eighth day is called the 'Maha Asthami'. The

fervour of worship and sacrifice to Durga and Kali increases. On this day many orthodox Hindus will be fasting. Sacrifices are held in almost every house through out the day. The night of the eighth day is called 'Kal Ratri', the dark night. Hundreds of goats, sheep and buffaloes are sacrificed at the mother goddess temples. In the darkness of the night Durga temples, army barracks, and old palaces all over Nepal hold sacrifices for the mother goddess. The sacrifice continues till dawn. The old palace in Basantapur Hanuman Dhoka, is active throughout the night with worships in almost every courtyard. While the puja is being carried out great feasts are held in the homes of common people where large amount of meat are consumed.

The ninth day is called 'Nawami'. The Taleju temple at Hanuman Dhoka is opened for the public only once a year on this day. Thousands of people go and pay their respect to the goddess day. Temples of mother goddess are filled with people from dawn till dusk. On this day the official military sacrifices are held in the 'Kot' courtyard at Hanuman Dhoka. The government allows foreigners to witness this function so hundreds of tourists and diplomats eagerly gather here. Animals mostly black buffaloes are slaughtered by hundreds to honour Durga the goddess of victory and might and to seek her blessing. Military bands play war tunes, guns boom and officers with beautifully decorated medals in full uniform stand there. When the function ends



the courtyard is filled ankle deep with blood. On this very day the god Vishwas Karma, the God of creativity is also worshiped. All factories, vehicles, any machinery instruments and anything from which we make a living are worshiped. We also give sacrifices to all moving machinery like cars, aeroplanes, trucks etc. to get the blessing from goddess Durga for protection for vehicles and their occupants against accidents during the year. The entire day is colourful.

The tenth day is the 'Dashami'. On this day we take tika and jamara from our elders and receive their blessing. We visit our elders in their home and get tika from them while our younger ones come to our home to receive blessing from us. The importance of Dasain also lies in the fact that on this day family members from far off and distant relatives come for a visit as well as to receive tika from the head of the family. This function continues for four days. His Majesty also receives tika from the royal priests and then gives on tika to his loyal subjects. Thousands of loyal Nepalese

people as well as foreigners also receive tika from His Majesty the King as this is said to be auspicious. After four days of rushing around and meeting your relatives Dashain ends on the full moon day, the fifteenth day. In the last day people stay at home and rest. The full moon day is also called 'Kojagrata' meaning 'who is awake'. The Hindu goddess of

wealth Laxmi is worshipped. On this day the goddess Laxmi is given an invitation to visit each and everyone.

After Dashain the nation settles back to normal. After receiving the blessing of goddess Durga, people are ready to work and acquire virtue, power and wealth. Dashain thus is not only the longest festival but also the most anticipated one among all the festivals of Nepal.

Article by Avigya Karki

Photographs by Min Bajracharya, Deependra Bajracharya and Madhup Mangal.

Tihar

Tihar, the festival of lights is one of the most dazzling of all Hindu festivals. In this festival we worship Goddess Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth. It heralds the month of Kartik (October/November) starting with Kukur Puja-Narak Chaturdashi. Tihar, the festival of lights is one of the most dazzling of all Hindu festivals. In this festival we worship Goddess Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth. During the festival all the houses in the city and villages are decorated with lit oil lamps. Thus during the night the entire village or city looks like a sparkling diamond. This festival is celebrated in five days starting



from the thirteenth day of the waning moon in October. We also refer to tihar as 'Panchak Yama' which literally means 'the five days of the underworld lord'. We also worship 'yamaraj' in different forms in these five days. In other words this festival is meant for life and prosperity.

Goddess Laxmi is the wife of almighty Lord Vishnu. She was formed from the ocean and she has all the wealth of the seas. She sits on a full-grown lotus and her steed is the owl. On the third day of the festival at the stroke of midnight she makes a world tour on her owl looking how she is worshipped.

There is a story, which tells why this revelry is celebrated so widely. Once there was a king who was living his last days of life. His astrologer had told him that a serpent would come and take his life away. The king did not want to die so he has asked the astrologer if there was any way to escape death. The king was advised to sleep with lit oil lamps all around his bed and decorate the palace with oil lamps on laxmi puja day. So goddess laxmi would talk to the serpent not to take his life. It did happen, the serpent was convinced by goddess laxmi. The serpent took the king to Yama Raj and told him that it was not yet the king's time to come to the underworld. So Yama Raj opened his ledger and in it the king's remaining age was written zero, but the serpent cleverly put seven before zero. Thus the king lived for seventy more years. So onwards tihar is widely celebrated worshipping the underworld and goddess laxmi.

The first day of tihar is known as 'Kag tihar', crows day. Crow is an underworld henchman. On this day crows are offered food on a plate made out of leaves in the morning before anyone in the house takes in food. In the kingdom of Nepal crow is not killed cause as a legend says that one crow had happened to drink the water of life. Thus you can see crows everywhere sitting without the fear of human beings. Crow the messenger of death is honoured on the first day of tihar.

The second day is called 'Kukur tihar', dogs day. A dog plays many roles in our society. We have dogs in our houses as guardian of the house. As the legend also says that there is a dog at yama's gate guarding the gate to the underworld. The dog is also the steed of the fearful Bhairab, the god of destruction. So on this day a big red tika is put on a dog's forehead and a beautiful garland around the neck. After worshipping the dog, it is given very delicious meal. This day the saying 'every dog has his day' comes true; for even a stray dog is looked upon with respect. We pray to the dog to guard our house as he guards the gate of the underworld and to divert destruction away from our homes. On this day you can see dogs running around with garlands on their neck.

The third day is the most important day of the festival. It is called 'Laxmi puja', The day when we worship goddess of wealth. On this day, early in the morning the cow is worshipped. Tika is put on her head and a garland around her neck then she feasts with delicious food. A cow also symbolises wealth and she is the most holy animal for Hindus. Cow is the national animal of Nepal.

In the evening goddess laxmi is worshipped. Days before the house are cleansed and decorated. For goddess likes clean and tidy places. In the evening a small portion of the house outside the main door is painted red with red mud and an oil lamp is lit on it. A pathway is made from here to the place where the old money box and valuables are kept in the house that is the puja room. All the Nepalese have a box where from generation to generation money is put every year worshipping goddess laxmi. This



money is never used unless extreme emergency. The entire house is decorated with lit oil lamps in every doors and windows. Laxmi, goddess of wealth is worshipped performing the traditional rituals and when the rituals are over then gambling in the house starts. This is a festival when gambling is not illegal. On this day throughout the evening groups of girls come to houses singing song of praise of the goddess and they are taken as guests and given gifts. This day the entire place is lively through out the night.

The fourth day is bit different. Today the things you worship depend on your specific cultural background. Normally most of the people perform 'Guru puja', ox worshipping. The ox is worshipped with tika, garland and then a delicious meal is fed to it. On the other hand people who follow lord Krishna perform 'Gobhardan puja'. These people build a small hill made out of cowdung and put some grass on it then do puja on it. This puja symbolises the act of lord Krishna when he lifted the gobhardan hill and saved millions of people and cows from floodwater.

If you belong to the Newar community, you perform 'Mha puja' which literally means worshipping yourself. The newar community people are worshipping life by doing puja on themselves. On this very day the newar New Year also starts. Nepal has many minor community calendars and newar calendar is one of them but the nation follows the Bikram Sambat calendar.

The last day of tihar is 'Bhai tika', putting tika on your brothers by your sisters. The royal astrologer gives the appropriate time to put the tika through the national radio a day before and the entire nation abides by it. Even his majesty receives tika from his sisters. When his majesty receives tika a thirty-one-gun salute is given to honour the function. At

this moment the entire nation will be observing bhai tika. The main theme behind bhai tika is the sisters praying for their brother's long life from Yama Raj, god of the underworld.

The most exotic and dazzling festival comes to an end after these five magnificent days of worship and honour to the goddess Laxmi and the underworld kingdom.

Article by Avigya Karki

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya

Maghe Sankranti

Maghe Sankranti is the beginning of the holy month of Magh, usually the mid of January. It brings an end to the ill-omened month of Poush (mid-december) when all religious ceremonies are forbidden. Even if it is considered the coldest day of the year, it marks the coming of warmer weather and better days of health and fortune. Maghe Sankranti is the beginning of the holy month of Magh, usually the mid of January. It brings an end to the ill-omened month of Poush (mid-december) when all religious ceremonies are forbidden. Even if it is considered the coldest day of the year, it marks the coming of warmer weather and better days of health and fortune.



This day is said to be the most significant day for holy bathing despite the weather. This ritual usually takes place at the union of sacred rivers and streams. Sankhamole, on the banks of the holy Bagmati river, below Patan, is thought to be amongst the most sacred sites for this purpose, though there has been a decline in the fulfillment of this ritual in the recent years due to water pollution in the river. But people still go in the wee hours of dawn just to sprinkle themselves



with the water. They pay homage to various deities specially the temple of Red Machindranath and Agima Ta.

In addition to holy bathing and worship of shrines, certain auspicious foods like till laddoos (sesame seeds ball cakes), chaku (molasses), ghee (clarified butter), sweet potatoes, khichari (mixture of rice and lentils) and green leaf spinach are taken on this day. Families come together and share these delights. Married daughters and families are invited to parental homes for festivities and blessings. Yet another occasion to renew family ties. Many homes have pujas (religious ceremonies) conducted by priests with chanting from holy books, for which they receive alms.



Like any other holy celebration Maghi Sankranti also has a legend of its own. It recalls that once a merchant from the town of Bhadgoan despite of his thriving business noticed that his supply of sesame seeds hadn't diminished. When looking into the matter he found an idol of the Lord Vishnu hidden deep beneath the seeds. Since, then on this day the Til Madhav idol is worshipped with the belief that god will continue to be generous in the supply of food and wealth on the Bhadgoan community. It's also the day commemorating the death of Viswapitamaha, the elderly grandfather of two families of Pandavas and Kauravas, between whom the famous battle of Mahabharat took place. He was determined not to die until the way to the region of gods opened. While lying on the bed of arrows he discovered words of wisdom on life and death. Eventually, through his free will he succumbed to death. Hence it's believed that

those who die on this day go to heaven, released from the burden of rebirth.

Maghi Sankranti, is yet another occasion which renews the faith of Nepalese people in the heavenly powers.

Article by Padmakshi Rana

Photograph collected from Min Bajracharya.

Shree Panchami

This festival falls in mid Magh (January/February). It is celebrated as the birthday of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. She is the lily-white daughter of Shiva and Durga in spotless white robe and seated in a full-blown lotus. This day is celebrated as the birthday of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, She is the lily-white daughter of Shiva and Durga in spotless white robes and seated in a full-blown lotus. Her carrier is a snow-white swan. Her brother Ganesh, the elephant God, is invariably close at her side, and he receives animal sacrifices in her stead. In her hands Saraswati holds a book, a vina harp, and sometimes a great sword because of which many believe that she and Manjushri are one and the same.

Shri panchami brings people of all castes, ages and creeds together to the temples of Divinity, especially to the idol behind Swayambhunath. The image is inundated with gifts, sweets, fruits, flowers in the hope of gaining Saraswati's favor. As she rules over the realm of speech, letters, arts and sciences, students, scholars, writers, poets, artists, musicians and also spinners and weavers lavishly fete her. All her tools like pens, books, ink, etc. are also worshipped. According to popular belief, if a person swallows seven rice grains, which are offered to the Goddess, he/she will become wise and knowledgeable.

So, students and children clamor for the rice grains strewn around the idol.

This is also the day when children of 5 to 7 are taught their first alphabet, which is repeated after the parent or teacher and traced on wooden slabs. And around the city numerous wedding processions followed by musicians and relatives can be seen, as this

day is the most auspicious and popular day in the year for marriages, when the union is blessed by the Goddess Saraswati herself.

This day also coincides with the advent of spring. The ancient royal palace at Basantapur was first inaugurated in Kathmandu on Basant Panchami day with rites still officially commemorated at Hanuman Dhoka by the mid-morning gathering of hundreds of government officials, in formal attire and military officers laden with ribbons and medals. The King arrives in a motorcade, escorted by mounted cavalry officers and military band. Inside the old palace they all stand to attention through the strains of the traditional Song of spring. Then the season is inaugurated with gun salutes, while the royal priest conducts elaborate ceremonies in the honor of Goddess Saraswati.

Article by Vani Shah

Maha Shiva Ratri

This day is the celebration dedicated to the Lord Shiva which falls on the Trayodashi of the month Fagun (February/March). Nepal was the only Hindu kingdom in the world and



thus the land of Lord Shiva, Lord of all Lords, for here you can feel his presence everywhere. Even in the sacred texts of the Hindus it has been stated that Mt. Kailash in the Himalayas is the abode of Lord Shiva or Mahadeva as he is also known.

Shiva the Destroyer of Evil is among the most praised and worshipped of all the gods in the Hindu religion. Hindus all over the world know him through different names and forms. The country has thousands of idols and monuments,

which glorify his name, the most common one being the Shiva Linga or the phallus of Shiva that represents him. For it is the Shiva linga that Hindus regard as the symbol of creation, the beginning of everything.

Shiva Ratri is the night of Lord Shiva when He himself was created by His own Divine Grace and Hindus all over the world celebrate this day with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm.

Shiva Ratri literally means 'the night consecrated to Shiva'. This auspicious festival falls on the fourteenth day of the waning moon in the month of Falgun, (February - March in the Gregorian calendar). The temple of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu which is considered as one of the holiest shrines of the Hindus, glorifying Lord Shiva, thus receives more than 100,000 worshippers during the festival of Shiva Ratri. These worshippers come from far and wide to pay their respects and homage to Mahadev on his sacred day.



Pashupatinath temple is located at the eastern part of the Kathmandu valley on the banks of the holy river Bagmati. Pashupatinath, which literally means 'the Lord of animals', is one of the many forms of the Lord. He is the guardian deity, protector of our Hindu

Kingdom of Nepal, thus Shiva Ratri is one of the major festivals of Nepal. Pilgrims from all over Nepal as Pashupatinath Temple well as India come to Pashupatinath to worship and pray to the deity on his birthday and wash away all the sins committed by them. Only Hindus are allowed inside the temple and tourists are only permitted to observe the festival from across the Bagmati river.

Shiva Ratri is a much anticipated festival by all Hindus. Pilgrims and yogis (holy men), from all over Southeast Asia come to Kathmandu weeks before the festival. On this holy day people fast throughout the day. At dawn, worshippers take a holy bath or dip in the river and go to the temple to worship.

One of the interesting aspects of Shiva Ratri is that on this day devotees and non-devotees alike freely indulge in smoking intoxicating substances such as marijuana and bhang for it is the only day in the annual calendar when marijuana is legal. Many people take these intoxicants in the belief that it pleases Lord Shiva for he too is said to be fond of it. Thus marijuana is taken as prasada, holy food blessed by the Gods and one can see eager tourists and faithful Nepalese flocking around the temple complex of the Ram Janaki Mandir across the Bagmati river opposite to the main temple complex of Pashupatinath lingering around sadhus and babas in the hope for some prasada from them. The Puran, one of the many holy texts of the Hindus, tells us that if you worship Lord Shiva on this day all your sins will be forgiven. Giving an example the puran talks about an event that occurred ages before about a hunter from Benares. This man worshipped Lord Shiva unknowingly on Shiva Ratri and he was forgiven for all his sins.

On Shiva Ratri the temple of Pashupatinath is filled with worshippers. Devotees are not distinguished as poor or rich but treated equally for Lord Shiva treats us all equally. Even the King of Nepal and the royal family pay homage to the Pashupatinath on this day along with the thousands that gather to celebrate the festival. Thus the festival of Shiva Ratri shows the devotion and faith Nepalese have towards the Hindu religion.

Article by Avigya Karki

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya and Madhup Mangal.

Fagu Purnima (Holi)

The ancient Hindu festival of Holi falls on late February or on early March. Allegedly named after the mythical demoness Holika, it is a day when the feast of colours is celebrated. The festival is of a week. However, it's only the last day that is observed by all with colours. The ancient Hindu festival of Holi falls on late February or on early March. Allegedly named after the mythical demoness Holika, it is a day when the feast of colours is celebrated. The festival is of a week. However it's only the last day that is observed by all with colours. Phagu is another name for Holi where Phagu means the sacred red powder and Purnima is the full moon day, on which the festival ends. People can be seen wandering through the streets either on foot or on some vehicle, with a variety of colours smeared over them.

Families and friends get together and celebrate the occasion with a lot of merry making. This spring time celebration is also an outburst of youthful exuberance in which throwing colours and water balloons (lolas) on passer-by is acceptable. But, the Indian community, that is, the Marwari



class who have settled down in Nepal for centuries and the people of Terai celebrate it a day later with more pomp and ceremony. The days prior to the last don't have a lot happening except, the installation of the ceremonial pole called "chir", on the first day. It's a bamboo pole, fringed with strips of cloth representing good luck charms. It is said to symbolize the tree on which lord Krishna hung the milkmaids' garments while they were bathing, unseen as they thought, in the Jamuna river of northern India. As the pole is put up in the street at Basantapur, the festivities and worship commences for the week. At the end of which its taken to a bonfire.



The myth following Holi, reveals that a fiend named Holika together with her brother, an atheist king by the name of Hiranyakasyapu conspired ways to kill his son Pralhad because Pralhad was an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu. But their attempts always failed for Lord Vishnu protects those who love him. Finally, Holika who having received a blessing from Lord Brahma to be immune to fire, jumped in with Pralhad. But

Brahma's blessing could only be used for good purposes and so Holika was consumed by the fire where as Pralhad was saved by the grace of the Gods. Thus, Holi is said to be celebrated to rejoice Holika's extermination and the traditional bonfires are believed to commemorate her death.

According to another story, from the Puranas and the Bhagvat, Kansa sent a female demon named Putna to kill his nephew Lord Krishna. Taking the form of a nurse Putna went to Brindaban where the child Lord Krishna was growing up and tried to feed Him her poisonous milk but the attempt backfired and she was killed. Her body was burnt on the night of Holi. So some consider Holi, the festival of fire also.

Holi for everyone is a time for fun and frolic. A day when one forgets the worldly anxieties and just enjoys the finer things in life.



Written by Padmakshi Rana

Photographs collected from Min Bajracharya and Madhav Mangal.

Ghode Jatra

Ghode Jatra, the Horse Racing Day falls on Darhsa Shrad Aunsi of the month Chaitra (March/April). A grand horse parade takes place at Tundikhel, the central point of the city reputed to have been in the former days the largest parade ground in Asia. Ghode Jatra, the Horse Racing Day falls on the month of mid March or early April. A grand horse parade takes place at Tundikhel, the central point of the city reputed to have been in the former days the largest parade



ground in Asia. It is said that in the olden days the Kings of Kathmandu use to go to worship the Bhadrakali temple in a courtly cavalcade following the Living Goddess Kumari. This visit could have been modified into the parade of horses and finally the horse athletics and racing contest as it is today, held by the army in the presence of the King.

There was a time when the festival was considered only for the residents of Kathmandu. But today it's popularity has attracted people from all over Nepal. It's said to be a propitious day for consuming a large amount of garlic and meat, some even consider it a day when citizen in the streets may inebriate themselves.

Legend reveals that this festival was held to celebrate the victory over a demon named Tundi who resided over the meadow, today known as

Tundikhel. Tundi was a terror, so when he met with his death people rejoiced by dancing on his body with horses. So it's believed that the clamor of horses' hooves on Ghode Jatra at Tundikhel keeps the demon's spirit at bay as it still threatens to ruin the city. It's said, the faster the horses run quicker will Tundi's spirit be dispelled. The swift running of the horses on this day is also considered to be a good omen for the Nepalese people.

Another event takes place on Ghode Jatra at Bal Kumari area in Patan where a horse is intoxicated with spirits and an equally drunk person in a traditional Newari attire rides it. People shout to frighten and enrage the animal until it runs widely with the rider clinging to it. This race is thought to have been commenced in the olden times by a certain king of Patan to give a better show in comparison to Tundikhel's parade, as in those days no one from Patan could attain it. The most worshiped goddess on this day in Bhadrakali also known by the Newari people as Lumarhi Devi.

Ghode Jatra is a festival, which doesn't have a lot of religious ceremonies, but the horse parade, is a big attraction and people always look forward to it.



Article by Padmakshi Rana

Photographs collected from Deependra Bajracharya and Min Bajracharya

Shree Ram Nawami

Ram Nawami is celebrated in the mid of Chaitra (March/April) as Lord Ram's Birthday. It is celebrated with much pomp at Janaki temple in Janakpur city, which lies in southern



Nepal. Lord Rama is regarded as another incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Nepalese, therefore, have deep belief and extreme faith in him. His strength, courage, purity of heart, compassion, sweetness of speech, serenity and abiding wisdom made him the favorite idol of his people.

His life story is told in the much beloved epic- the "RAMAYANA". Before the birth of Sri Ram, the world was under the reign of an evil and fiendish demon king Ravana. Ravana had

pleased Lord Brahma, who bestowed on Ravana the boon that no God or demon could kill him. This gave Ravana immunity from everyone except a mortal man. Thus, to save the world from evil, Lord Vishnu took birth as Ram in the city of Ayodhya. King Dasharath, who ruled over Ayodhya, had one misery - his three queens bore him no sons. Lord Vishnu gave them nectar to drink, and soon the eldest produced Ram, the next gave birth to Bharat and the third had twins, Lakshman and Shatrughana. All four of them became exemplary youths but it was Ram who grew in grace and virile beauty. Another king Janak, who ruled over Mithila in southern Nepal, had a beautiful daughter called Sita. When she was about sixteen Janak held a great tournament wherein it was announced that the one that onw ho could string the divine bow of Lord Shiva would win the fair Princess Sita's hand. Princes and kings from far and wide tried to do it but all failed. But Lord Ram not only curved the bow but also snapped it in two. Thus, Lord Ram won the hand of Sita, who is regarded as the most exalted epitome of womanhood-beautiful, pious, loyal, gentle and modest. During the 14-year exile of Ram, the demonic Ravana abducted Sita but she resolutely resisted his advances. It was the loyal monkey Hanuman, son of the Wind god who discovered Sita's whereabouts. Ravana had taken her to his realm Lanka, a mythical country now believed to have been Ceylon.Eventually, with the help of Hanuman and the monkey horde Ram and Lakshman slew the evil Ravana and eradicated the whole dynasty of demons from the earth. Ram Nawami is thus celebrated as Lord Ram's Birthday. It is celebrated with much pomp at Janaki temple in Janakpur city, which lies in southern Nepal. Huge processions of elephants, bullock carts and sometimes upto 100,000 pilgrims go through the city, dancing and singing the lord's praises. In Kathmandu many people, including the royal family, go to the temples to pay homage to Ram, while symposiums are held to exalt the ideal life he lived. In Bhaktapur, the neighboring town of Kathmandu, the people go to the banks of the river Hanumante, where a temple bearing the idols of Ram and his loyal servant Hanuman is situated. Thus, Ram Nawami is celebrated throughout the Kingdom with great fanfare.

Article by Vani Shah

Bagh Jatra

The Bagh Jatra of Pokhara is another cultural baggage brought by Newars from Kathmandu, celebrated in early august. The festival has been celebrated in Pokhara for about 150 years. It expresses the people's joy at their deliverance from a marauding tiger. On the first day, people dress up like hunters and make an appearance accompanied by musical bands. The next day is an interlude devoted to the showing of comic programs. For three days,the hunting party parades through different parts of the town before "slaying" the beast to end the festivities.

Bhairav Kumari Jatra

This is one of the major religious celebrations in Dolkha, an historic town in north-eastern Nepal (133 km from Kathmandu off the highway to Tibet). The festival falls on early August; and consists of masked dances that go on non-stop for five days. Escorted by musical bands, dancers representing the deities Bhairav and Kumari and other gods

and goddesses swirl and sway through Dolkha, visiting its many temples. On the occasion, devotees also undergo fasting and worship Bhairav and Kumari. The ceremony has a history going back more than five centuries.

Chaite Dasain

Chaite Dasain used to be the original day of the grand Dasain festival (which takes place exactly six months later now), but because people got their stomachs upset after feasting on spicy food during the warm month of Chaitra, the grand celebration was shifted to the cooler season. But the religious fervor is still evident in the celebrations of the day.

Gaura Parva

Gaura Parva is another celebration honoring Lord Krishna's birthday. It is celebrated in far western Nepal with much gusto for two days (August/September). Apart from the many ceremonies that happen during this festival, it is the occasion for married women to put on the sacred thread. The deuda dance is a major part of the festivities in which participants hold hands and form a circle as they step to traditional music.

Gunla

Gunla is a sacred month dedicated to Lord Buddha. This festival commemorates the auspicious "rains retreat" when the Buddha, over 2,500 years ago, led his close disciples into solitary meditation and preached to them the essence of his principles. Accordingly, monks and nuns go into retreat during the rainy season. Lay Buddhists also spend the month in prayer and fasting. They visit Swayambhunath and other shrines every day early in the morning. Groups of people can be seen making their way to Swayambhunath in the misty morning accompanied by musical bands with thumping drums carrying small clay figures of the Buddha and stupas. The Gunla Lakhe masked dancer enlivens the festivals with his street performances. A number of religious events are held during this period. Sacred texts (saphu) and ancient scroll paintings (paubha) are brought out for display at monastic courtyards all over the city. The most extraordinary collection of centuries old texts written in gold and silver paint can be seen within the courtyard of Thambahi (Thamel). The festival of Gunla climaxes on the day of Poncho Daan, the Festival of Five Offerings which is held in Patan, the auspicious ceremony during which offerings are made to monks and household priests. The priests chant prayers as they accept the gifts and shower blessings in return.

Guru Purnima

Teachers come second (after the gods) in the Hindu hierarchy of respect. The full moon day of the month June/July is set aside for students to pay homage to their teachers and receive blessings from them in return. At a place called Vyas on the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway, special worship is performed to Maharishi Vyas, the saint who wrote the great Hindu epic, Mahabharat. For Buddhists, the occasion (Dilla Punhi) is sacred as the day when the Buddha-to-be entered the womb of Queen Mayadevi. Religious functions are held at monasteries and temples to commemorate the event.

Lhosar

Lhosar is the Tibetan New Year which falls on February/March. This festival is most

impressively observed by all the Tibetan-speaking populations. They organize folk songs and dances on this occasion. These dances can be seen in Khumbu, Helambu and other northern regions of Nepal and also at Boudhanath in Kathmandu.

Rato Macchendranath Jatra

This is the longest as well as the most important festival of Patan. It begins with several days of ceremonies and the fabrication of a wooden-wheeled chariot at Pulchowk, near the Ashoka Stupa. This is the longest as well as the most important festival of Patan. It begins with several days of ceremonies and the fabrication of a wooden-wheeled chariot at Pulchowk, near the Ashoka Stupa. The chariot bears the shrine of the Rato (Red) Macchendranath (the Tantric expression of Lokeshwar) and carries a very tall spire fabricated from bamboo poles raised from four ends of the chariot. This unwieldy spire is around 10 meters tall and on account of which, the chariot balances precariously. It is said that calamity is certain to strike the land in the event of the chariot overturning or breaking down during the course of this festival. (Quite often, it does collapse!). Following the construction, the chariot is towed through the streets of Patan by throngs of devotees every day. Each day, it is put to rest in one of the many venerated spots in the city. This goes on for a month until it comes to rest on the big field outside the zoo and end with the Bhoto Jatra, another major festival, during which the bejewelled 'bhoto' of Machhendranath is displayed to the public.



Mani Rimdu

(Full moon of the 9th Tibetan month) Mani Rimdu is the biggest event of the year for the Sherpas of the Khumbu region. Sherpas from the Khumbu region congregate at Thyangboche Gompa, the picturesque monastery situated on a spur at 3,870 meters from where both Mt. Everest and Ama Dablam can be seen. Mani Rimdu is the biggest event

of the year for the Sherpas of the Khumbu region. Sherpas from the Khumbu region congregate at Thyangboche Gompa, the picturesque monastery situated on a spur at 3,870 meters from where both Mt. Everest and Ama Dablam can be seen. The three-day celebrations of Mani Rimdu follow the ten days of non-stop prayer sessions addressed to the patron deities seeking blessing from the god of all mankind. The deity propitiated is Guru Rinpoche, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. The ceremony begins with the blowing of horns in the afternoon after which the abbot of the monastery accompanied by other monks chant prayers. The congregation is blessed and given holy water and auspicious pellets for good luck and longevity. An orchestra of cymbals, horns, flutes, and conch shells announces the start of the second day's celebrations. Monks in colorful robes and huge glowering masks perform dances symbolizing the destruction of evil. On the last day, tormas (figures made of dough) are consigned to a sacred fire. This implies the end of negative forces and the advent of a blessed new year.



Mata-yaa

Celebrated in mid-August Mata-yaa is one of Patan's popular festivals. It consists of a day-long procession of devotees going around the Buddhist courtyards of the town and offering worship at the shrines there. Carrying lighted tapers and joss sticks in their hands, Mata-yaa participants rush in a meandering file and visit the hundreds of Buddhist sites scattered all over Patan. They toss rice grains, flowers and coins at the shrines as they pass by. Some devotees wear elaborate and amusing costumes. Musicians also take part in the parade.

Neel Barahi Pyakhan

Neel Barahi Pyakhan is a sacred masked dance which is shown over four days(August/September)in different parts of Bode. Nineteen persons representing the town's guardian pantheon take part in the dance performance. Music is provided by a 27-

piece traditional orchestra. The ceremony invokes peace and harmony, and is dedicated to the deity Neel Barahi whose temple is located in a jungle outside Bode. Bode adjoins Thimi which is 8 km east of Kathmandu.

Rath Yatra

Biratnagar in south-eastern Nepal brings out a spectacular chariot procession to mark Lord Krishna's birthday (August/September). The parade sets out from the Radha Krishna temple and goes around the town. The six-meter tall chariot carries the images of Krishna and his consort Radha and is drawn by hordes of devotees. The annual chariot festival was started in 1932 to commemorate the building of a temple dedicated to Krishna.

Sita Vivaha Panchami

This festival, commemorating the marriage of Sita to Ram, is particularly celebrated in Janakpur. Each year in Janakpur, idols of Ram and Sita are brought out in bright processions and their Hindu wedding ceremony is enacted. This festival, commemorating the marriage of Sita to Ram, is particularly celebrated in Janakpur. Ram, hero of the epic Ramayana and an incarnation of Vishnu had come to Janakpur, was the kingdom of Sita's father King Janak, to marry Sita. Each year in Janakpur, idols of Ram and Sita are brought out in bright processions and their Hindu wedding ceremony is enacted. The wedding takes place during an exciting week-long *mela*, or religious fair. The occasion attracts thousands of pilgrims from India.



Tamu Dhee

Tamu Dhee (also known as Trahonte) is a Gurung holiday (August). Ceremonies are performed to purge the neighborhood of evil spirits and to safeguard one's farm and farm animals from hostile elements. The festival can be observed in Pokhara. Groups of people beating on different kinds of drums form a colorful procession and make house-to-house visits. Participants with their faces smeared with soot and wearing feather headdresses parade through the town to drive away negative influences and ensure peace and security.

Tansen Jatra

The hilltop town of Tansen in central Nepal exults in a week-long festive spree beginning with Janai Purnima, when Hindus change their sacred threads. The next day, Gai Jatra is marked by parading figures of cows made of bamboo and cloth. Ropai Jatra is the rice planting ceremony and participants perform plowing and planting acts on the streets. During Bagh Jatra, actors dressed up like tigers and hunters march through town. Then there are the parades. Images of Ganesh, Bhimsen and Narayan are placed on palanquins and carried around Tansen. The celebrations climax on August 12 with Bhagawati Jatra, the procession of the town's protective goddess.

Taya Macha

The Taya Macha dance is shown in different parts of Pokhara as part of the Gai Jatra observances. The five dancers, four dressed up as angels and one as a clown, are accompanied by a group of traditional musicians. It is believed that the performance will bring peace to the souls of those who have passed away during the previous year. The festival has its roots in the Kathmandu Valley. It was brought to Pokhara by Newars who migrated here centuries ago.

Yomari Punhi

Yomari Punhi is one of the popular Newar festivals observed every year during the full moon of December. A yomari is a confection of rice-flour (from the new harvest)dough shaped like fig and filled with brown cane sugar and sesame seeds, which is then steamed.

Yomari Punhi -meaning full moon of yomari-one of the popular Newar festivals is observed every year during the full moon of

December. A yomari is a confection of rice-flour (from the new harvest)dough shaped like fig and filled with brown cane sugar and sesame seeds, which is then steamed. This delicacy is the chief item on the menu during the post-harvest celebration of Yomari Punhi. On this full moon day, people of the Kathmandu Valley offer worship to Annapurna, the goddess of grains, for the rice harvest. Groups of kids go neighborhood to beg yomari cakes from housewives in the evening. Sacred masked dances are performed in the villages of Hari Siddhi and Thecho at the southern end of the Valley to mark the festival.

The Newars, upon munching a mouthful of yomari, a sweet dish, await the end of their four days of devotion of god, following which they will be blessed with wealth, according to their belief. The people prepare yomaris, in the form of gods and goddesses such as Kumar, Ganesh, Laxmi and Kuber. In keeping with the culture, parents bless children from two to twelve years who are then offered yomaris. The children on the other hand perform the customary song and dance and ask for food and other gifts from the elders during the festival.

The festival is said to have started from Panchal Nagar (present day Panauti). Myth has it



Yomari cakes are filled with sesame seeds mixed with molasses

that Suchandra and Krita, a married couple, first experimented with fresh yield of rice from their field. And what took shape turned out came to be known as yomari. The new delicacy was eventually distributed among the villagers. As the food was liked by all, the bread was named yomari, which literally means 'tasty bread'. The myth further states that on the same day the couple offered the god of wealth, Kuber, the new delicacy, who was passing by in a disguise. Following this Kuber disclosed , his real identity and blessed the couple with wealth. He also declared that whoever will prepare yomari in the form of gods and goddesses on the full moon of December and observe four days of devotion to god, will get rid of poverty. The festival is celebrated on the second day when prayers are offered during which the yomaris are stored and not eaten on that very day. On the fourth and the final day the people belonging to the Newar community consume the sweet bread as a gift from gods and this practise also marks the end of the festival.

Source: <http://www.nepalhomepage.com/society/festivals/festivals.html>

Chhath

The Chhath festival, celebrated by the people of this ancient capital of the Mithila region, has been a cultural convergence of both the Maithili-speaking people and the people migrated here from hill areas. Janakpur is believed to be the capital of the legendary king Janak, the foster father of Sita, who was married to Lord Ramchandra from Ayodhya in India . People of the Mithila region are of the opinion that the Chhath festival, also known as Surya Pooja (worshipping the sun) has been described in the Rig Veda, which is believed to be the oldest text available in the world.

Chhath emerged as a traditional festival after Draupadi, wife of the Pandavas, began worshipping the sun during their one-year disguise in the palace of king Birat. People believe that worshipping the sun would help cure the disease like leprosy and bring about prosperity and longevity to their family members. Local people say that the festival has become more important after migrants from the hills also adopted it as their own cultural asset. Women of the Mithila region were busy in purchasing varieties of articles to offer to the sun god.

The Chhath festival is marked for four days. Men and women prepare special dishes made up of special rice and molasses and taste them after an audience of the moon. They took a dip in Ganga Sagar and Dhanush Sagar, the famous lakes of the area. During the four-day-festival, the devotees worship the rising and setting sun.

Source: http://www.magical-nepal.com/nepal_festival_chhat.htm