

Riveting Nepal: A Cultural Flash!

By Ms. Mahua Sen

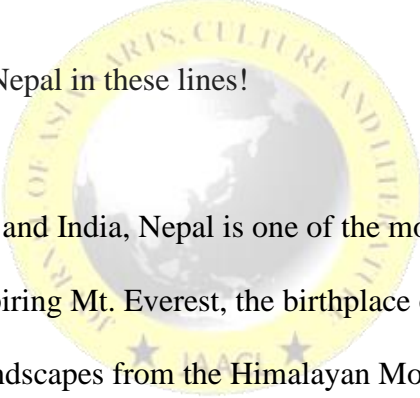
Sen.mahua5@gmail.com

Abstract

“A Nepali outlook, pace and philosophy had prevented us being swamped by our problems. In Nepal, it was easier to take life day by day.”

-Jane Wilson-Howarth, A Glimpse of Eternal Snows: A Journey of Love and Loss in the Himalayas.

We do sniff the essence of Nepal in these lines!



Squeezed in between China and India, Nepal is one of the most fascinating places to visit on earth. Home to the awe-inspiring Mt. Everest, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, this exquisite country stretches diverse landscapes from the Himalayan Mountains in the North to the flat expansive plains in the south. The birth of the nation is dated to Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest of the Kathmandu Valley kingdoms in 1768. Deep gorges, sky-scraping mountains, exuberant culture and charismatic people – Nepal is the ideal destination not only for adventurers but also for people seeking a peaceful sojourn in the lap of serenity.

Keywords

Nepal, culture, festival, Hindu, Buddhism

Festival Flavors

Customs and culture vary from one part of Nepal to another. The capital city Kathmandu is drenched in a rich drapery of cultures, a unique silhouette to form a national identity. Nepali culture portrays an amalgamation of Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Mongolian influences, the result of a long history of migration, conquest, and trade. To drench the lives of Nepalese with myriad colors, there are festivals all year round that they celebrate with much pomp and vigor.

Major Festivals of Nepal include **Dashain** which is the Nepali equivalent of Durga Puja. It marks the victory of Goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura thus the proclamation of good over evil. It is one of the most sought-after festivals of the year and is celebrated by Nepali Hindus with great pomp and joy. It is celebrated for fifteen days in the month of Sept-Oct.

Tihar (Diwali), also called as **Swanti** and **Yamapanchak** by some communities, is another popular festival celebrated for five days with much gusto!

Other popular festivals of Nepal are **Phagu Purnima** (Holi), **Janai Purnima** (Raksha Bandhan), **Gaijatra**, which is a procession of cows that are decked up aesthetically to commemorate the dead and also involve a masquerade (mask dance), mockery, and traditional dance that is called **Ghinta Ghisi**.

Apart from this, Nepalese have their own unique traditions with idiosyncratic significance. Many traditions are based on myths and superstitions and their beliefs on Tantriks and shamans. Some communities in Nepal have quirky marriage traditions

like marrying a wood-apple and the sun, some communities marry their first-cousin, some their sister-in-law, and some communities even marry another man's wife by paying a remittance which is termed as **Jari Vivaha**.



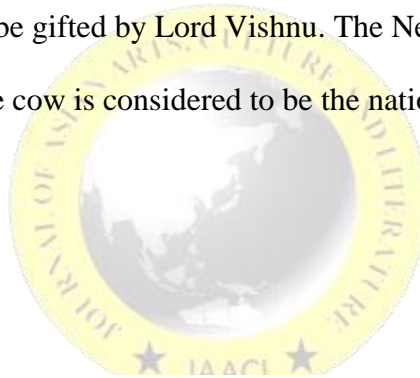
Image 1: Riveting Nepal

Another distinctive tradition is celebrating the birthdays of old people when they turn specific ages. It is called **Janku** celebrated by Newari tradition. After Janku is performed, an elderly person in Newari Tradition is considered to be a symbol of divinity.

Religious Milieu

A quintessential factor in a Nepali's everyday life is religion. Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual and multi-religious country with deep-rooted cultural values.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in Nepal with around 81% of the population being Hindus. This is conspicuous from the many Hindu temples spread throughout the tapestry of the country. Legend has it that a sage named 'Ne' Muni was the one to introduce the religion in Nepal in prehistoric times. Nepal is supposed to have derived its name from the sage Ne. He dwelled in the Himalayas for teaching his doctrines. He also chose the first ever king of Nepal – named Bhuktaman. The double triangular Nepali flag with sun and moon is also believed to be gifted by Lord Vishnu. The Nepalis consider Lord Shiva as their guardian deity while cow is considered to be the national animal of Nepal and is being worshipped.



Buddhism traces back its roots to the country, with Lumbini in Nepal being the birthplace of Lord Buddha. His clan, the Shakyas helped in the initial foundation of Buddhism in the Kathmandu valley, and thereafter, the religion blossomed during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. Around 9% of the total population of Nepal follows Buddhism and three main schools of thought are practiced- Tibetan, Newar, and Theravada Buddhism.

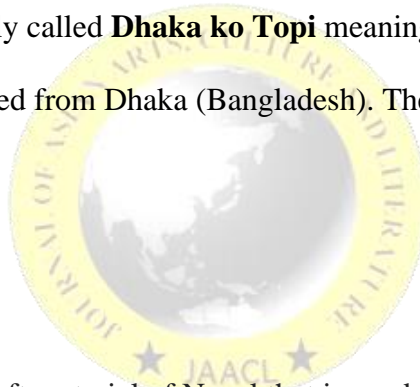
Apart from these two major religions, there is a minuscule population practicing Christianity, Islam, Kiratism, Sikhism, Bahá'í and some minority religions.

The Kaleidoscope of Art and Craft

Nepal is synonymous with monasteries that are adorned with exquisite paintings. The vibrant paintings are called **Thangka** or **Paubha** paintings, depicting Hindu and Buddhist deities. These paintings are quintessential of Nepal culture. In recent times, they are being procured in great numbers as the tourists love buying them for keepsake and gifting. The handicrafts play a major role in the culture of Nepal as it defines the arts and crafts shade of the nation.

Dhaka Products

When we think of Nepali men, we visualize a smiling face with a cute little ‘topi’(cap) on his head. They are actually called **Dhaka ko Topi** meaning headgear. These ‘topis’ are made from cotton imported from Dhaka (Bangladesh). They signify the essence of Nepalese culture.



Felt Products

Felt is an age-old handicraft material of Nepal that is used abundantly in musical products, art, and design instruments, automotive industry etc. You can find a plethora of Felt products like slippers, handmade balls, home decorative items, and felt mats in the street shops of Nepal.

Jewellery

Nepal is the ninth-largest silver jewellery producing country in Asia. The exclusive collection of jewellery can be found in the local markets of Kathmandu. Nepal is popular for selling items that are authentic and made in Nepal itself, not imported.

Singing Bowls

You can find different types of these singing bowls in Nepal at different places. These are made up of brass or some other metal. Oftentimes different patterns are aesthetically engraved on them. When a wooden stick is patted on their rim, these bowls emanate a vibration and a soothing sound that fills the surrounding milieu with serenity and is believed to have healing powers.

Dance and Music

Daandi Naach, Dhan Naach, Chaandi Naach, Panchabudhha Nritya, Bhairab Nritya are some of the popular dance forms here in Nepal.

Music is an integral part in the lives of people in Nepal. It is one of the main source of entertainment for them.





Image 2: Nepalese Dance

Greeting

The customary greeting of Nepal is to press one's palms together and say *namaste* although people in urban areas have adopted the custom of shaking hands.

Literature

Nepal's literary portal dates back to the nineteenth century with Bhanubhakta Acharya's adaptation of the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*, for a Nepali readership. when it came to

literature, there was rigid government control and censorship thus forcing the authors to publish their works out of Nepal until 1930. Nepal's first literary journal *Sharada* brought a paradigm shift by creating a more open venue for the writers. Some of the famous writers and poets of Nepal are Lekhnath Paudiyal, Balkrishna Sama, Lakshmi Prasad Devkota and Balkrishna Sama.

Traditional Attire

The traditional apparel worn by the Nepali people are very popular. They are called Daura-Suruwal for men and Gunyo-Cholo for women and constitute a major portion in the culture of Nepal. The Daura is a type of double-breasted kurta adorning the upper body and fastened with eight strings, (8 is considered to be a lucky number for Nepalese people) while the Suruwal is the trouser. Gunyo Cholo consists of a cholo (blouse) and a skirt accompanied by colorful jewellery.

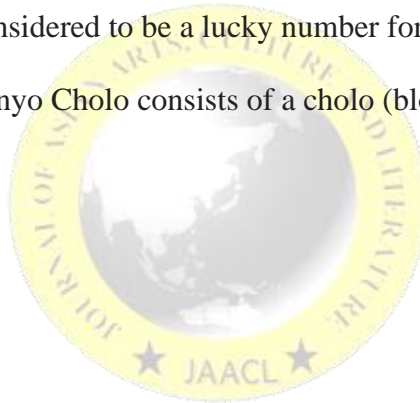




Image 3: Traditional Attire

The Nepalese people are resilient. They take pride in their culture and their land. They sustain hope even in the darkest hours.

They see beyond a two-dimensional image of things. Nepal teaches us to compassionately acknowledge the gift that is in the ‘Now’!

Nepal has been an enigma to the world and enchanting to everyone.

‘Hami yo sansar ma ekchin to lagi matrai aako ho. Kina hatar. Kina chinta.

‘Maya garera jinu ra jivan ma phool ko sugandha liyera basnu.’

‘You’re only here for a short visit. Don’t hurry, don’t worry. And be sure to smell the flowers along the way.’ —Walter Hagen

This sums up the Nepali outlook.

The culture of Nepal is pronounced through festivals, celebrations, language and literature, music and dance, art and craft, food and drink, and their outlook towards life!



Image 4: Swayambhunath Stupa

References

- [Holidify.com](https://www.holidify.com)
- [Kathmandu post.com](https://www.kathmandupost.com)
- [Everyculture.com](https://www.everyculture.com)
- [Wikipedia](https://www.wikipedia.com)
- Image credit: Various sources on internet

About the Author

Ms. Mahua Sen is a Poet based out of Hyderabad. She is a recipient of Grand Queen's Leadership Award - 2021, Distinguished Poet Award in the 10th Rabindranath Tagore International Poetry Award-2021, Poesis Award for Excellence in Literature in 7th Bharat Award-2021 apart from many other awards.

She is presently working with Bulls Eye Outsourcing as the Regional Director (South).

