

Celebrating Women's festival: Teej Siddhi B Ranjitkar

Every year Nepalese women enjoy celebrating the popularly known and unique typical Nepalese festival called Teej on the third day of the bright fortnight of the month Bhadra (August/September). Actually, the original name of the festival is 'Haritalika' means kidnapping Parvati and taking her to a secrete place in a forest, and let her meditate on the lord Shiva for getting him as her spouse. Parvati succeeded in her mission on the third day of the bright fortnight of the month Bhadra. That is why women celebrate this day emulating Parvati. Every third day of each fortnight in the lunar calendar is called 'tritiya' means a third day. "Tritiya" became Teej in the common folks' language.

'Teej' is a unique and typical Nepalese festival, as this festival is originated in Nepal but Nepalese women across the world celebrate it. This festival is a typical Nepalese because Parvati is a Nepalese daughter born of the mother and the father 'Himal' means the king of Himalayan Mountains. Lord Shiva is the indigenous deity. He dwells in Himalaya. He is a super deity in the Hindu world. Both Parvati and Shiva are of the Nepalese origins.

A myth has it that when Parvati has come of age, her parents following the request of the divine messenger called 'Narad' agreed to give Parvati in marriage to Lord Vishnu: another Hindu divinity. Then, Parvati got very upset because she had already dedicated herself to Lord Shiva. In fact, she had been a spouse of Lord Shiva in her previous incarnation as Satidevi mentioned in the Svosthani: a month long religious story told in every family during the month Magha (January/February) every year.

When the friends of Parvati found her so upset they wanted to know the cause of her suffering but she did not like to tell her story even to her best friends. However, the friends succeed in extracting the real story from her.

In order to save her from getting married to another wrong divinity, and to get her real choice of the divine spouse, they took Parvati to a solitary place in a forest and let her dedicate to Lord Shiva not even drinking water not to mention eating anything. Such relentless efforts of Parvati brought Lord Shiva to her; and she got what she wanted and deserved. The day was the third day of the bright fortnight of Bhadra. So it was called 'tritiya' which later on became the 'teej'.

Then, the friends of Parvati decorated her with the red clothing, red glass bracelet, red 'tika' on her forehead, and red sandal, as the victory of Parvati, as the good fortune, and certainly as the happiness. Surely, Parvati became the bride, and Lord Shiva and Parvati happily wedded on this auspicious day. This dress became the bridal dress for the Hindu women in Nepal.

On the third day of the bright fortnight of Bhadra, on the way singing and dancing, thousands of married women donned in red visit the temples of Lord Shiva elsewhere across Nepal. Unmarried women in the casual clothing visit Lord Shiva asking for what Parvati had once asked. Today, fasting has been optional unlike in the past.

In Kathmandu, anticipating hundreds of thousands of women visiting the lord, the four doors of the temple to Lord Pashupati: another name for Lord Shiva have been wide opened up since 3:30 am for the women to make offerings to Lord Shiva, the RSS news on therisingnepal.org.np stated on September 4, 2016.

The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) has made special arrangement to manage the women seeking the view of Lord Shiva. The PADT has opened up three paths:

Umakunda area to the north, Jaya Bageshwori to the west and Tilganga to the South, from where women could stand on line and reach the temple to Lord Pashupati.

Today, temples to Lord Shiva are opened up for the women only. No male creatures could disturb the women at any temple to Lord Shiva. Women have the monopoly on viewing Lord Shiva, as Parvati did.

Currently, in the name of emulating Parvati of the mythical character, unlike Parvati did in the past for getting Shiva as a husband for her, Nepalese women celebrate the eating day called 'dar-khane' one day before the 'teej'. Actually, only one day is allocated to enjoy eating before fasting the next day but women continue to eat until the early next morning to keep them not so hungry during the day when they emulate Parvati.

Even more than that, women have set the tradition of enjoying the 'dar-khane' even a month before the 'teej' in the urban areas where women have jobs and they have to work; they might not have the day off for the 'dar-khane' on the allocated day. So, friends, relatives, and colleagues assemble together at a hotel hall or any other hall for enjoying foods, drinks and dancing and singing.

Some agencies hold the 'teej' program selling tickets for participation. Thus, 'teej' becomes a fund-raising event for some people. Other agencies including the foreign development agencies working in Nepal have held the 'teej' events in honor of the women.

On the third day of the 'teej' event is the 'Ganesh chauthi' means the fourth day of Lord Ganesh: the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. None of the deities accepts the offerings without first making offering to Lord Ganesh: the elephant headed deity. Even Lord Shiva has no rights to accept any offering without first making offerings to Lord Ganesh. Lord Shiva himself has bestowed on Lord Ganesh this honor, again as mentioned in the Svosthani story.

The fourth day is the Rishi panchami means the fifth day of the Rishis: holy men of the Hindu world. This day is for the women to perform body cleanup rigorously, and then make offering to the seven prominent Rishis called 'sapta Rishi' in the Hindu world seeking the pardon from them if women have improperly followed the daily cleanup rituals.

A wise holy person like one of the Rishis must have prescribed the women for undergoing the thorough body cleanup as atoning for any oversight of following the code of cleanup during the workdays, and beg the Rishis for the pardon for anything women have not properly followed the rituals of cleaning up their bodies daily and then during the monthly periods.

So, on the fourth day, women gather at the nearby water sources, and perform various cleanup rituals, and put on the fresh clothing, and then, they make offerings to seven Rishis.

In Kathmandu, women congregate on the bank of the Bagmati River nearby the temple of Rishesvor Mahadev at Teku. The police seal off the area preventing any male creature creeping in. Thus, women have the perfect privacy to do what they need to do if they have missed something in a year.

After the cleanup rituals, women make offerings to Rishesvor Mahadev, and then to 'sapta Rishi.' That marks the end of the 'teej' festival.

Even after undergoing so terribly difficult body cleanup, women dare to enjoy the life singing and dancing the rest of the day.

Thus, the 'teej' festival is the four-day event. These days are the most enjoyable days for the women who need to bear not only the burden of the daily usual work but also taking care of the family. They not only want to wear the auspicious wearing such as the red clothing, red glass bracelets, and red strings of glass beads but also offer some of those items particularly the glass bracelet, glass bracelet, and strings of glass beads to their female siblings, relatives, and friends.

For the people engaged in the business of such items have the good annual business. They make special preparations of those items for the 'teej' events. They keep in stock the red saris, red blouses, red glass bracelet, and strings of glass beads. Thus, they contribute to the economic development.

Some people comment that women celebrating 'teej' have been more in the show off than actually following the traditional 'teej' events because women have indulged in marking the 'teej' events even a month before the actual 'teej' day, wearing expensive saris, jewelry and so on. They simply forget or ignore deliberately or ignorantly that women in the past also did so but people did not notice it or they noticed it but those things did not come to the public notice as of today.

In the past when women need to walk for days before reaching their parents, they start going to the parental homes even a month before the 'teej'. They took with them the bridal garments and jewelry for them to wear during the 'teej' days. Even today, some women might need to walk for some days to reach the parental homes in the remote areas.

Married women go to their parents just to emulate Parvati celebrating the day Parvati has wedded Lord Shiva. Parvati was surely at the home of her parents when she celebrated the divine wedding. She was the daughter of 'Himal': the mighty mountain, so are the Nepalese women. That is why they have the rights to celebrate the divine wedding or 'teej' as arrogantly as possible.

In the past, married women sang the songs expressing the sufferings they had undergone, and how their mothers-in-law treated them, and the hard daily work they have to do but today the situation has changed. Time has been that the mother-in-law congratulates the daughter-in-law on having a first baby, as the ads go on in the Radio Nepal. So, current women don't need to sing the songs of those days when women suffered the most. Today, they could sing the most enjoyable songs, and even have the disco dances at the disco halls, why not?

Some people comment that women have been spending extravagantly for buying the 'teej' clothing and items, and even golden jewelry for the show-off during the 'teej' festival. Again, it is not the business of some lazy people that don't make any money or even if they do, they don't spend, to make adverse comments on the women enjoying the 'teej' festival.

'Teej' is the festival of both women and men unlike the popular feelings are going on among the people that 'teej' is of the women's only festival. Men equally participate in the 'teej' events. They also drink, sing and dance during the 'teej' festival. The author of this article had an encounter with a man in Rukum in the western Nepal. He was drunk to death. He said to me, "I am a Upadhaya Brahmin, celebrating 'teej'."

'Teej' is the religious, social, and cultural event. Religious in the sense that it is the occasion of the divine Parvati-Shiva wedding. Nepalese women simply emulate the divine couple particularly the Parvati: the daughter of Nepal Himal. Social, it is because every person in

the society participates in this festival event. Cultural because Parvati: the daughter of Himal set this tradition for the people to follow many more generations to come.

September 4, 2016



Women in the festival mood

(Source: TRN, September 4, 2016)