

Chhatha Parva: Another Nepalese Festival Siddhi B Ranjitkar

The seventh day is the last day of the Chhatha festival, Nepalese celebrate every year from the fourth day of the bright fortnight of the Kartik (October/November) making offerings to the setting sun on the sixth day and rising sun on the next day. This festival is uniquely secular as anybody of any faith or caste celebrates together. This is the fantastic culture of the Mithila Nepal. No animal sacrifices no meat dishes no worship to any deity are done but the sun god only, devotees make offerings. Celebrating this festival will make the family prosperous and happy. That is the belief.

Worshipping nature and natural phenomena has been the practices of Nepalese since the Vedic time. They have set the tradition of worshipping fire, air, water, and surely the sun, moon, and many other planets in different names. Later on, they set the tradition of worshipping animals in appreciation of their contribution to the human life on earth.

Sun is one of the divinities the ancient people had identified. They knew that without the sun the earth would have no life. They also identified that the sun emits perpetually seven different color of its light. So, they have depicted the Sun as a divinity riding on a seven-horse-drawn chariot.

The Chhatha Parva is for making offering to the setting sun on the sixth day. This is done in appreciation of giving light and heat for making possible the life on earth. Then the next day, devotees make offerings to the rising sun in appreciation of again coming up and giving light and heat to the world. So, devotees make offerings to the setting sun and rising sun once a year on this occasion in appreciation of its contribution to the life on earth.

Devotees make offerings of a large dish of fruits, sweets and other food human like very much on a large wicker platter to the Sun god obviously pleasing the divinity for blessing the family. Sun does not need to eat anything. Even the Sun god does not need to eat anything, too if it is a divine. Only humans need to eat and drink to keep up their physical bodies made of flesh and bones. Without eating, the human-body machine will not work. However, devotees want to please the god even the sun offering whatever they think is the best food for them.

Usually women holding a wicker platter full of fruits, sweets and foods enter into the water in a pond or a river or any other water sources and get into the knee deep in water and then, offer the platter to the sun. It says, "We have traveled such a great distance, and crossed so many seas and oceans, and now we are almost down in water but we cannot reach you. So, now please accept our offerings from here."

Women do make offerings to the Sun god with such dedication that they believe the Sun god blesses them with whatever they have on their minds. Women are so generous they don't ask anything for themselves but for the long lives of their husbands, children, and their prosperous lives. Certainly, prosperous lives of family members are the prosperous lives of women, too.

Religiously, the Chhatha Parva is a secular one as it is not a Hindu only festival but open to the humans of any faith or caste or color. In fact, humans of every faith or of caste or color participate in making the offerings to the Sun God believing the deity meets their wishes they have on their minds. So, Hindus, Muslims, and so on standing side-by-side make offerings to the Sun God. They distribute the 'prasad' means the foods offered to the Sun God as the blessing of the deity to everybody.

People of all castes or color together make offerings to the Sun God. The festival is for the social harmony. It breaks down a caste barrier as it has broken down the religious barrier. Women belonging to different castes standing together make offerings to the Sun god. They offer the 'prasad' means the blessing of the deity to each other.

Nobody needs a priest. Every woman devotee is a priest. Everybody knows how to make offerings. It is not a priest-guided offering. It is the heart-felt offering of each woman or man devotee. Thus, the devotees have the direct link with the Sun god.

Every family makes its own items of offerings. Most of the items are homemade or homegrown for offering to the Sun god. The only things each family buys in the market are that it doesn't have in the family but the family needs to offer the deity.

Most of the sweets are homemade. Each devotee taking fast for making offering to the deity meticulously prepares the sweet items and other food items. Other family members help her but certain things only the devotee taking fast can make.

So, the festival actually starts on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Kartik. On this day, each devotee dries the items required for making food item on the sun. She makes it sure that even a bird does not fly over it. Then, she carefully grinds it so that nothing will pollute it. Certain food items are considered as inauspicious so each devotee make sure that such items do not mix with the items prepared for making offerings.

On the fifth day, each devotee fasting cooks the food items for making offering to the Sun God. Each person needs to fast as everybody believes that eating pollutes the human body. So, keeping stomach empty means the body is clean and each person needs to fast to make offering to the Sun God or any deity.

Singing hymns is part of making offerings. Male family members play musical instruments for men and women to sing. Men also help the women to carry the items of offering to the Sun god to the bank of river or pond or any other water source. So, the banks of ponds or rivers host the devotees with their items of offerings giving the unique scenes of the Chhatha Parva on the sixth and seventh days.

Each municipality decorates ponds and riverbanks with tiny electric bulbs to make it look like a bride. Everybody enjoys this festival amicably and harmoniously.

Devotees making offering to the Sun god fast the whole day on the sixth day for making offering to the setting sun, and then they continue their fast until the next morning to make offering to the rising Sun. Only after making offering to the rising Sun on the seventh day, the devotees break their fast eating the 'prasad' means the food the Sun god has blessed. They share the 'prasad' with family members, relatives and friends.

The beauty of this festival is no animal sacrifice, no meat dishes, and religious and social harmony among the people of different faiths and castes and color. Every family member wears brand new clothing for the festival. This is one of the festival Nepalese have been celebrating since the Vedic times.

November 7, 2016



Sun god riding on A seven-horse-drawn Carriage



Devotees Making offerings to Sun

(Source: ratopati.com)



Devotees Waiting for Sun

(Source: ratopati.com)



Items of Offerings on the Bank Of a POND

(Source: ratopati.com)



A Man Making Offering To Sun

(Source: ratopati.com)



President Bidya Devi Bhandari visit Kamal Pokhari in Kathmandu to perform Chhath puja on the occasion of Chhath festival on Sunday. (Photo: Bikash Dwaze/TRN)



Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda paying homage to the Sun God and Goddess in the capital on the occasion of *Chhath* festival, Sunday. (Photo: TRN)



Arranging Items of Offerings On The Bank Of a Pond

(Source: Myrepublica.com)



Women Making Offerings To Sun

(Source: Myrepublica.com)