

Glorious Mother's Day in Nepal
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The new moon day in Vaishak (April-May) is the unique and wonderful day for all Nepalese. This day is for revering superb mothers. They call this day 'mata-tirtha aushi' means the day dedicated to fabulous mothers living or dead. For Nepalese, Mother is above any deity. Mother remains above all the people throughout the lives of Nepalese. Every day Nepalese honor mothers dearly and respectably but especially on this day. None of good offspring misses this day to make special offerings to Mother.

Mother is everything for Nepalese. She protects every child with all her might, takes care of her children throughout her life. She even skips her meal only to feed her kids in case such need arises. She keeps watching her kids to come home until they are not in. Mother is armor for every child. So, whenever somebody is in distresses, s/he says, "O! My mother."

I don't know when Nepalese have started this extraordinary day of honoring the mothers living or dead. It must be since time immemorial. On this day, living mothers are venerated at their homes, and souls of departed mothers are at 'mata-tirtha'. Nepalese believe that souls of deceased mothers appear in the water of a holy pond there on this day once a year. Thousands of men and women make pilgrimage to this pond. They make the special offerings of foods whatever mothers had liked in their lives nearby the pond. Some men devoted to mothers make the memorial offerings called 'shradha' there.

At home, daughters, sons and grandkids surround a mother or mothers. Everybody offers a plateful of delicious foods to the mother. She blesses everybody around her accepting whatever whoever has offered her. No matter where sons and daughters have been they visit mothers on this day. They come with sweets, fruits, yogurts and other items pleasing to their mothers.

Married daughters bring various kinds of sweets, fruits, yogurt and other food items to mothers. Sons need not go to the mothers, as sons are with parents. Each family cooks the best food the mother likes. Celebrating the mother's day is the whole day affairs but family members usually get together after work in the evening to honor the mothers.

For sweet stores and fruit stores, the Mother's Day is the marvelous moneymaking day. Sweet buyers rush to sweet stores even three days before the Mother's Day. Buyers empty every sweets store in a town by the evening of the Mother's Day. Sweet makers start off making sweet months ahead of the Mother's Day. Fruit stores become equally busy with selling various sorts of fruits.

Married daughters take the first turns to offer the plateful of sweets, fruits and eggs to their mothers, and then sons take turns, and then grandkids. So, a mother also grandmother in one becomes the most revered and the center of the celebration of the day.

Other mothers of younger generations in turns also receive the lovely offerings from the sons and daughters. So, all the family members have something to celebrate on the day. All the mothers bless the sons and daughters and wish them long and prosperous lives. Together they have a nice feast.

Missing to visit mothers on this day would be the most unfortunate to any offspring. Every offspring rarely misses to see his/her mother on this day hence this day is practically called the day to see the mother's face.

The Nevah community has the tradition of offering 'khen sagan' to mothers on this day. The senior most daughter in each family makes offerings of 'khen sagan'. She holds a hard-boiled and then fried egg, and a small single-dried-and-fried fish in a plate in her left hand and a glass of alcohol in her right hand. She crosses the hands and offers those items to the mother. This is a life offering. Those three items represent the five life-supporting elements: water, air, heat, land (earth) and ether (mind). Then, other offspring in the family offer other items. Sons bow down to touch the feet of mothers with their foreheads.

For recently married women, this day is the most cheerful and the superb day for a show off. For the first time in their married lives, they come to mothers from their husband's home to celebrate Mother's Day. Dressed in bridal attires and wearing wedding jewelry, they walked majestically with a porter load of appetizing food for their mothers in the past. That was when people did not have any vehicles to ride on. So, traffic of women dressed in their best had been heavy throughout the Mother's Day at that time is even now, too but on motorbikes, cars, buses, and taxis.

Nepalese not having their mothers on earth go to 'mata-tirtha'. It is at about 15 km to the west of Kathmandu on the way to Thankot. Mata means mother; tirtha means a holy place. Thus, the name suggests the holy place for sons and daughters to visit for making offerings to the deceased mothers once a year. Daughters and sons walked to this place to see the reflections of mothers coming down from heaven to a pond there in the past. They believe that on this day mothers descend on this place from heaven. Currently, thousands of motorbikes and hundreds of cars take them to this place.

Sons and daughters take a purification bath in the water flowing out of several stone spouts there. Then, they make offerings to various deities around there in the names of their beloved mothers departed from the mundane world for the heaven. Thereafter, they worship Lord Shiva in lingam located next to the holy pond. Then, the time is for going to the pond to watch the reflections of their beloved mothers in the water. The belief is that souls of mothers come down from the heaven and wandering around this holy area, and appear in the water of the pond on this day.

This miraculous pond at 'mata-tirtha' also is a mythical one. A legend has it that once a shepherd hot and thirsty at the sunny midday went to drink water from the pond. While approaching the water in the pond, the woman shepherd saw the reflection of her deceased mother in the water. Excited to death, she went wild to tell her colleagues what she had seen in the water of the pond. All shepherds rushed to the pond. Their cheeks were flushed with the excitement of seeing everybody's-mother's reflection in the water. That day happened to be the new moon day in the Vaishak month in the Vikram calendar. Since then this day has become the most auspicious day. It became the day of holding a religious festival of revering the departed mothers at 'mata-tirtha' for a whole day. Probably that is why everybody started off calling the day as the Mother's day.

Since then Nepalese have believed that they could see the reflection of the images of their deceased mothers in the water of this holy pond. So, Nepalese from different parts of the country make a pilgrimage to this pond on this day hoping to see the images of their departed mothers. Thus, this place became a holy place for those who have lost the mothers. Therefore, daughters and sons visit 'mata-tirtha' every year on this day, partly believing to see the images of their mothers partly paying an annual tribute to the mothers.

Hundreds of men perform 'shradha' on this day at 'mata-tirtha.' Wearing only yellow silk dhoti, clean-shaved men sit in a row to make memorial offerings called 'shradha' to their deceased mothers. Vajracharya priests for Buddhists, and Brahmin priests for Hindus

perform rituals of 'shradha'. They believe that the departed mothers' souls come down from heaven to this place to accept the offerings on this day once a year.

Sons and daughters missing to make a pilgrimage to the 'mata-tirtha' visit holy places elsewhere in their areas. Holy places are usually the temples to Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu and other innumerable deities in the Hindu world. They make offerings to the souls of their departed mothers there.

Kathmanduites unable to visit 'mata-tirtha' go to Pashupati in Kathmandu or to any other holy place elsewhere to honor their departed mothers. At those holy temples, men and women offer the foods and gifts their mothers liked to the priests. They believe that the priests will deliver those offerings to the souls of their mothers in heaven.

Hundreds of priests lined up to accept the offerings made by thousands of sons and daughters in the names of the departed mothers at Pashupati. Every visitor buys a set of offerings at Pashupati and then line up to offer it to the priests standing in a line to accept the offerings on behalf of the deceased mothers.

Recently, seeing the chance of benefiting from the crowd of so many revelers, even non-priests pose as priests to take the offerings. So, careful revelers make sure that they are offering the set of offerings to the right priests. Some priests make home visits to their clients to accept the offerings made in the names of the deceased mothers. They receive additional fees for visiting homes.

Bereaved sons and daughters neither could visit 'mata-tirtha' nor any other holy site take a shower at home or a quick dip in the water of a nearby holy river early in the morning then they offer a platter of sweets, fruits and so on to the priests in the memory of their departed mothers.

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Note: Nepalese celebrated 'Mother's Day' on April 18, 2015