

## The Festival of Lone Horse in Patan

The festival of a single horse is quietly held at Balkumari of Patan while Kathmanduites celebrate the festival of horses with fanfare on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month called 'chaitra' (March/April). The Bhimsen Guthi (trust) of the Jyapu community of Olkhu Chibaha holds this festival every year. The cavalry Gunj of the Nepal Army at the Singhadurbar provides the Bhimsen Trust with a horse.

Not knowing the history of this festival, some people sometimes get confused with this festival and call it the festival of a blind horse or a drunken horse. However, the horse provided by the Nepal Army is neither blind nor a drunken. Perhaps they must have thought the horse was blind because at one time the horse was brought blindfolded to keep the horse cool while bringing it to Patan.

One day before the single horse festival in other words on the day of 'Pa-han chare' festival, in preparation for celebrating the festival, the Jyapu community of Olkhu Chibaha makes offerings of the sacrifice of a buffalo to God Bhimsen at his temple at the Mangal Bazaar. During the time of making offering of the sacrifice of a buffalo, the hymn singers sing in praise of Bhimsen dedicated to his killing of Kinchak. The buffalo thus sacrificed is cleaned up roasting its skin on the northern side of the temple to Lord Krishna. The buffalo meat becomes the item of the three-day feast.

On this day, after making the offering of a sacrifice of a buffalo, the members of the Jyapu community eat a smoked-meat feast called 'chhu-yala bhu' comprising the sacrificed-buffalo meat roasted on the fire of rice straw, and other items such as fluffy and flattened rice, and a few pieces of ginger and a small portion of roasted black soybeans. All these foods wash down with the home-brewed white beer. This feast is believed to be the blessing of Lord Bhimsen.

This temple to Lord Bhimsen has the five idols of five brothers called Pandavas. They are five brothers including Lord Bhimsen. They were the main characters of the Mahabharat epic. Bhimsen is the second among the five brothers. In fact, they have a common spouse called Draupadi but she is missing in this temple. On this day, they make offerings to Pandavas at the temple and distribute 'sa-maya baji' means the mixture of fluffy and flattened rice, roasted buffalo meat, pieces of ginger and roasted black soybeans to all.

Next day at 2:00 PM, the Nepal Army brings a horse from the Singhadurbar to the Bhimsen temple. After receiving the horse from the Nepal Army at the temple, all members of the Bhimsen Guthi take the horse from the temple to the public building called 'taha falcha' at the Olkhu Chibaha. Then, following the tradition, the head of the Bhimsen Guthi makes offerings to one of the members of the Bhimsen Guthi for authorizing to ride the horse, and another man for helping him to ride, and offers the garlands of flower brought from the Bhimsen temple to each one of them to wear, and offers them 'tika' on their foreheads thus they were honored publicly before holding the festival of the lone horse.

After this ceremony of making offerings to a lone horse rider and his assistant, a lone horse festival begins from the Olkhu Chibaha. A man riding the horse and another walking along is the lone horse festival in Patan. The 'Guthi samsthan' provides a royal musical band to lead the lone horse festival. One of the staffs of the 'Guthi samsthan' holds a large knife called 'talawar'\* belonging to an ancient king called Sim Sim and follows the horse. Someone holds a large religious umbrella forming a canopy over the man holding the knife, the horse and its rider, and follows them. Then, all the members of the Bhimsen Guthi follow them, too.

The lone horse festival starts from the public building called 'taha falcha' at Olkhu chibaha, moves on to the neighborhoods called Neut and Lohalan, and reaches the temple to God Bholaganesh and then goes over the temple to Goddess Balkumari, and around it, goes back to the temple to God Bholaganesh again and then returns to the temple to Goddess Balkumari and goes around it. Thus, the lone horse festival goes back and forth between the temple to Bholaganesh and the temple to Goddess Balkumari twice and goes around the temple to Goddess Balkumari thrice.

Then, the horse rider alights from the horse, and stands on the right side of the temple to Goddess Balkumari. The head of the Bhimsen guthi offers parings of areca nut, lime and cinnamon wrapped in betel leaves as a symbol of successfully completing the horse festival. Thus, the lone-horse festival ends here. Singing the hymns of 'pa-han chare', all the members of the Bhimsen guthi return to the temple to Bhimsen.

Members of the Bhimsen guthi enjoy three-day-festival feast called 'guhay puja bhoya' means a secrete-offering feast. Only the 51 members of the Bhimsen guthi can enjoy this three-day feast. Nobody even the families of the members of the Bhimsen guthi are allowed to participate in this feast. This feast is strictly for the members of the Bhimsen guthi.

On the first day, the members of the Bhimsen guthi feast on the roasted meat of the buffalo sacrificed to Bhimsen. On the second day of the lone-horse festival, they feast on the cooked meat of the buffalo. Finally on the third day, they feast on the cooked meat of various head parts of the sacrificial buffalo. This last feast is called 'si-ka bhoya'. The head parts are cooked in oil and only salt is allowed to add to it nothing else.

A legend has it that one day a stableman did not bring a horse to the king as scheduled. The king had been waiting for a long time. Surprisingly, the stableman did not show up even after so many hours had passed. The stableman was supposed to bring a horse for the king for a ride. So, not having patience to wait anymore, the king went to the royal stable to see what happened to the stableman.

To the surprise of the king, the stableman was sleeping. A five-headed serpent with its head forming a hood over the head of the stableman was guarding him. Only Lord Vishnu enjoys such privilege of a five-headed-serpent-head hood over his head. So, the king realized that the stableman from the Olkhu was in fact the Lord Vishnu.

After sometime, the stableman woke up and found that he had been sleeping so long that he missed the time to take a horse to the king. He rushed to the king and apologized to the king for not bringing a horse to the king on time.

The king said, "you don't need to apologize to me for anything rather I need to apologize to you for making you a stableman."

The king took the stableman on a horse ride around the town stating the stableman was in fact the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, as the king saw him sleeping with a five-headed-serpent-head hood over his head in the royal stable. Only Lord Vishnu has the privilege of lying on the body of a five-headed serpent with its head as a canopy over his head.

Every year this man from the Olkhu was taken for a ride for the public show on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month called 'Chaitra'. Thus, the tradition of a man from the Olkhu taking around the town on horseback has been set since then. This tradition is called the lone-horse festival today.

The Jyapu community of the Olkhu is even today believed to be the descendants of the stableman and called them 'cao-ya khala' means the servant descendants. The Jyapu community of the Olkhu neighborhood continues the tradition of taking a man on horseback even today. This is called a horse festival of Patan. They have the trust to hold this festival of a lone horse every year.

1. Sim Sim Raja was in fact Shiva Singh Dev (a Licchavi King), according to the historian Prakash Shakya.

2. Guthi samsthan is the state agency responsible for funding and running such a national festival.

This write-up is based on the article titled 'Aklo Ghoda Ko Jatra' published in 'Gorkhapatra' of Saturday supplement of March 17, 2012 in the name of Astaman Maharjan.

\* Talawar is the symbol of guarding the horse rider from the State. Previously, the head of State used to hold such a knife and go with the festival horse.

#### Popular beliefs in Ghode Jatra in Kathmandu

The festival Ghode Jatra is celebrated as a victory of good over evil and the triumph over a demon called Tundi. The demon Tundi created terror and destruction in Kathmandu until it was slain.

Then, the people of Kathmandu overpowered the dreary demon with courage and determination, and then they danced on its body and they took a horse to trample on his remains.

The original festival was to take the white horse of Living Goddess Kumari to the open ground later known as the Tundikhel: the name derived from the demon Tundi to trample on the demon to death.

On the night of Ghode Jatra, a demon called Gurumapa is also worshipped and fed with the large portion of boiled rice, and buffalo meat. This ritual is known as 'Pa-ha-chare Puja'.

People of the Nevah community of Kathmandu celebrate this event with feasts and festivities for several days. During the festival, the idols of powerful goddesses such as Bhadrakali and Kankesvari in small shrines are taken around amid processions of revelers.

The Living Goddess Kumari presides over the Ghode Jatra. She was seated near the Nepal Airlines Corporation building to the western side of the parade ground in Kathmandu.



A Lone horse rider escorted by an army man: A Lone horse festival in Patan

(Source: Jhigu Mhasika facebook)