

Dashain Came And Went In 2016 Siddhi B Ranjitkar

Nepalese celebrated the one-month long Dashain festival across Nepal following their tradition and belief. The hill people celebrate the Dashain as the victory of Goddess Durga Bhavani over the demon called Mahishasur; the folks in the terai areas celebrate the victory of demigod called Ram over demonic Ravan. More than two-and-a-half-million folks left Kathmandu for their homes to enjoy the Dashain festival with families, friends, and neighbors. Billions of NPR (Nepalese rupee) is spent on the festival causing a tremendous economic stimulus. Last year Nepalese did not have much fun in the Dashain due to the devastating quakes that had caused the tremendous loss to the lives and properties, and certainly due to the terai shutdown.

Two-and-a-half-million Nepalese left Kathmandu for their homes to enjoy the Dashain festival with the families and friends by the seventh day of the festival, and 400,000 of them have been back to Kathmandu by the 11th day of the Dashain. Assuming each folk traveling back and forth between Kathmandu and home spends NPR 1000 then the total amount spent on the travel comes to NPR 2.5 billion. However, the travel cost must be much more than the assumed amount depending on the distance each person has to travel back and forth.

I call the Dashain festival is a month long festival unlike the commonly believed the fortnight long festival because Nepalese make offerings to the ancestors two weeks before the Dashain actually starts. Starting on the first day of the dark fortnight of the Aswin month (September/October) ending on the 16th day, Nepalese make offerings to their ancestors. So, this period is also called 'sorah shrada' means the sixteen-day ancestor worship. Each family makes offerings to the ancestors on one of the sixteen-day period on the convenient day. Nepalese have the tradition of worshipping the ancestors before any significant religious cultural and social event. Nepalese believe that they cannot enjoy any significant event without feeding the ancestors.

Now, the real Dashain starts on the first day of the bright fortnight of the Aswin month. On this day Nepalese sow barely and other food grain seeds for offering to Goddess Durga Bhavani on the ninth day. So, this day is called 'jamara-rakhane' (Nepali) or 'Nala-swan-tayagu' (Nevah) means sowing seeds for growing shoots. Some people set up a holy water jar. So, they call this day as 'ghata-sthapana' means setting up a holy water jar. Other folks might have different ways to start off the Dashain but that have not come to my notice. However, everybody invokes the Goddess Durga Bhavani on the first day of the Dashain festival.

Starting on the first day of the Dashain festival, Nepalese make offerings to the nine different goddesses that are the different manifestations of Durga Bhavani in other words Durga Bhavani is the combined form of nine goddesses. So, She has 18 upper limbs and nine heads. Each of those limbs carries one or another weapon of destruction. Nepalese make offerings to one goddess at night. So, these nights are called 'nava-ratri' means nine nights.

On the tenth day, Nepalese complete the offerings to Goddesses. This day is called Dashami. The name Dashain is probably derived from Dashami. On this day, the eldest family member offers a 'tika' to each family member based on the hierarchy of age. 'Tika' is the blessing of the Goddess Durga Bhavani that the goddess has given after the victory over the demon Mahisasur. 'Tika' comprises the mixture of white rice and vermilion mixed together in yogurt or other sticky food material such as banana, or fluffy rice, and shoots grown for nine days and offered to Durga Bhavani. The eldest family member applies the

mixture on the forehead of each family member, and offers the shoots behind the right ear of the male members and on the plait of the female members of the family. The eldest person wishes each family member receiving 'tika' for the being the victorious as the goddess has been and certainly for the prosperous life in the coming year.

Nepalese go on getting 'tika' until the last day of the Dashain festival. The last day of festival is the full moon of the Aswin. Nepalese need to walk hours, a day or even days depending on where they live to reach the relatives for receiving 'tika'. So, Nepalese save the blessing of the goddess until the last day of Dashain to offer the relatives and friends and anybody that wants to receive.

Recently, the Dashain has been the cold war between the anti-and-pro-animal sacrifices to the Goddess Durga Bhavani and her nine different manifestations. The anti-animal-sacrifice activists argue that the goddess is the mother of all animals. So, she does not accept the blood of her own progeny. The pro-animal-sacrifice activists argue that the animal sacrifice has been mentioned in the 'sastra:' Hindu scripture, and it is for relieving animals of being the sins of animals.

If we really want to stop the animal sacrifices then we need to start at the grassroots level means starting at the school teaching the new generations about the animal sacrifices. However, fighting once a year on the media, Nepalese would certainly not stop animal sacrifices, as the belief has been so deeply rooted in the minds of the people, they would hardly trade it for anything.

The sacrifices of animals begin on the eighth day of the Dashain and reach the peak on the night day. Animals such as male water buffaloes, male goats (castrated and not castrated), roosters, and male ducks are sacrificed at the different field shrines of the nine manifestations of the Goddess Durga Bhavani, at the motor vehicles, and at the mechanical workshops. Meat of those sacrificed animals is eaten as the blessings of the goddess.

The Dashain is the greatest occasion in which Nepalese eat the meat and rice. Some Nepalese have to wait for a Dashain to eat the dish of meat and rice. Even this year, the local newspapers and the State-run Radio Nepal have stated that some remote areas in the far western regions have no rice even for the Dashain. Most of the mountainous regions grow only millet, potatoes and other high altitude food crops. The State has monopolized the transportation of rice to the remote areas. Often the State-run Nepal Food Corporation has not been so efficient to take the rice to the remote areas even for Dashain.

Now, the economics of animal sacrifices, hundreds of thousands of male buffaloes, goats, roosters, and ducks are raised specifically for the Dashain festival. Billions of NPR worth of buffaloes and goats are also imported from India. Surely, Dashain has helped the livestock economy, and rural economy not only in Nepal but also in the neighboring States of India. How many billions of NPR worth of such livestock is raised not known to me yet. Certainly, it must be several billions worth.

The Dashain festival has been the event for the ethnic folks to vent a grudge held against the injustice and insult the Shah-Rana rulers had done to them. One of the ethnic scholars called Manjul Yakthumba wrote an article titled "Dashain Forcibly Imposed On The Kirat Region" and posted on the blog called "The Himalayan Voice" on the occasion of the Dashain festival stating how Prithvi Narayan Shah had forcibly imposed the Dashain festival on the Kirats in the 18th century, and thereafter Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur strictly enforced it in the 19th century. The scholar stated that each house of Kirats need to have the right hand print of animal blood on the right side of the door and then the left hand print on the

left side of the door to make sure that Kirats have made animal sacrifices and celebrated the Dashain festival.

By force or by tradition, Dashain has been the festival of the majority of Nepalese even though they might be Hindus or Nepalese Buddhists or of any other sect because it is not only the religious performance but also the social and recreational event. On this occasion, each family member tries to be together. Friends and neighbors get together to celebrate the festival. Some rural people contribute to buy a water buffalo and then sacrifice it to the goddess and share the meat in proportion to the contribution and eat it as the blessing of the goddess.

Some scholars believe that the Dashain festival is recharging the human bodies with the energy required for a year in addition to continuing the culture. Folks eat so much of meat and other energy food that energizes the body. They also entertain so much during the Dashain festival that it recharges their bodies. Dashain has been the instrument to continue the Nepalese cultures the ancestors had developed and set the tradition of continuing them in the form of the religious events for entertainment and socialization with relatives and friends.

One of the cultures has been to wear brand new clothing for the Dashain. If anybody has noticed even the former Prime Minister KP Oli has worn a light blue new jacket for receiving 'tika' from President Bidhya Bhadrari on the 10th day of the Dashain festival. Having new clothing has been the tradition strictly followed even today.

People celebrate the Dashain festival following their own tradition. The Nepalese community comprises the Hindus and Buddhists, and the folks following both the Hindu and Buddhist tradition celebrate Dashain in one way or another. Buddhist Nepalese has the Vajracharya priest, and Hindu Nepalese has the Karmacharya priest. Both follow the tantric process of animal sacrifices. Both Vajracharya and Karmacharya priests make offerings to the Living Goddess Kumari, and Durga Bhavani also called Taleju Bhavani during the Dashain festival.

In Bhaktapur strictly following the tantric process, Karmacharya priests make offerings to the Nava Durga means nine goddess. They also give lives to the newly done masks of Nava Durga troupe at the shrine to Goddess Brahmyni. The Nava Durga troupe cremates the old masks at the end of the season, and wears new ones starting on the 10th day of the Dashain festival each year. Karmacharya priests make regular offerings to Taleju Bhavani at Layaku. Those priests make offerings to Living Goddess Kumari and Taleju Bhavani at each ancient city States.

Vajracharya priests make offerings to the Living Goddess Kumari, and nine other Living Goddesses: different manifestations of the main Kumari strictly following the tantric rituals in Bhaktapur. They take the nine Living Kumaris to Taleju Bhavani on the 10th day of Dashain strictly following the ancient path to the Layaku means Durbar Square where Taleju Bhavani resides in the magnificent temple decorated with 13 brass cones placed on the top of the roof.

Each Nepalese family has the tradition of sacrificing a male goat, male duck, or rooster to Durga Bhavani at the prayer room on the ninth day depending on the tradition ancestors had set. Other Nepalese make offering of vegetable called 'kubindo,' which is the best offerings hardly anybody knows without arguments but everybody follows the tradition.

In the terai areas, folks erect a huge spire depicting the demon king called Ravan, and burnt it down on the 10th day of the Dashain festival. Following the epic called Mahabharata, Ravan was the king of Lanka. He abducted Sita: the spouse of Ram. That was his crime for

which he paid by his life and the lives of hundreds of thousands of army men, and of course the civilians that suffered from the war between Ram and Ravan.

In the terai, some people have the tradition of making clay idols of Durga Bhavani and invoking the spirit of the goddess in them, and making offerings to them for nine days and then disposing them on the nearby streams on the 10th day. Each idol costs from barely NPR 10,000 to 100,000. Each community buys one idol for Dashain and sets it on the community ground for everybody to make offerings during the nine days of the Dashain festival.

Some Nevahs even don't have the tradition of celebrating Dashain. The Nevah community in the Khokana Village located to the south of Lalitpur enjoy celebrating the festival of Goddess Sikali for eight days during the Dashain days when other Nevahs are busy with performing various tantric rituals. Sikali also is the tantric goddess. Surely, the Khokana folks do everything in a tantric way. Another Nevah community in the Pachali area in Kathmandu also doesn't follow the Dashain festival rituals. They rejoice the festival of Pachali Bhairav also the tantric deity believed to be the incarnation of Lord Shiva.

The Khas ethnic group follows the simplest way of marking the Dashain festival. Starting on the first day of the Dashain festival they visit one goddess out of the nine goddesses: the manifestations of Durga Bhavani on each day for nine days. On the ninth or some even on the eighth day, they slaughter male castrated goats, and eat meat and rice dish on the day. Then, they go for receiving tika from the seniors and respectable persons.

Maybe, the tradition of celebrating the Dashain festival has started from the Vedic period. The Vedic scriptures have one of the deity mentioned is the fire god. Worship of fire as the supreme power must have started off from the Vedic time. Fire is the symbol of the supreme power as it could burn down everything and everybody no matter how powerful anybody has been.

If anybody notices the Durga Bhavani printed on a paper sold at the time of Dashain festival for worshipping at the prayer room of the Nevah community, s/he will find that the goddess is enclosed in a flame. The goddess is fire or fire is the goddess no matter how many upper limbs she has and how many weapons she carries she is a fire that could burn down everything and everybody either a demon or not.

This year's Dashain has brought the political controversy, too. The prime minister happens to be the Chairman of the Maoist-Center: Prachanda. He has not marked the Dashain festival for the last 40 years if anybody is to believe in the local newspapers. That is his personal business but he is not a simple folk. He is the prime minister of the country that is proud of its cultures and traditions.

So, some of the CPN-UML members also the so-called communists but strictly follow the Dashain tradition devoted their precious some time to make remarks on the Prime Minister Prachanda not celebrating the Dashain festival, and on his Dashain message to the people. Certainly, it is the beauty of Republican democracy that everybody has the rights to comment on the head of State or head of government for anything, and everybody has the rights to celebrate or not to celebrate the Dashain festival. Some ethnic scholars even took the Dashain festival as the opportunity to express their opinions against the despotic Shah-Rana rule.

Another episode of the Dashain festival is taking tika from the president. It had been mandatory for all the ministers including the prime minister to receive tika from the then king at the time of the autocratic Shah dynasty rule. Now, the country is a republic. Nobody needs to go anywhere against her/his will. So except for KP Oli, none of the former prime

ministers did show up at the presidential residence not to mention the ministers at the presidential residence to take the blessing of Goddess Durga Bhavani from the President.

Probably, Prime Minister Prachanda does not believe in the blessing of the goddess rather he believes in his own mastery in the politics. Vladimir Lenin: one of the communist divinities has once said that religion is opium means if anybody believes in it then s/he will be addicted to it. So, Prachanda did not show up at the presidential residence to accept the blessing of the goddess from the president. Surely, Prachanda did not want addicted to it.

Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba either did not want to take the blessing of the goddess from the president put up by the communists against the will of his party as his party lawmakers cast the votes against her candidacy at the time of electing the president or Deuba must be mourning for a year for the death of former Prime minister Sushil Koirala who had been also the president of the Deuba's party that has canceled the tea party held every year during the Dashain festival following the one-year mourning for the death of Sushil Koirala.

Why former prime ministers such as Madhav Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal did not show up at the presidential residence to redder their foreheads looks mysterious but it is not. Madhav Nepal must have thought the president Bidhya Bhandari is his creation, as he was the one that lifted her to the level of the national leader and ultimately to the topmost elected position in the country. So, he must have asked himself why he needed to go to her and take the blessing of the goddess from her. Khanal has cast the invalid votes for her at the election. So, Khanal must have held a grudge against her. However, they were not on the path of Prachanda that Lenin had shown for all communists to follow.

However, President Bhandari has held a reception on the 12th day of the Dashain, and invited all the former prime ministers. Prachanda joined others at the reception defying Lenin.

Economically, Dashain is the greatest stimuli in the Nepalese economy. Livestock alone supports most of the rural people. Each family raises a male goat or castrated goat or a male water buffalo in view of selling such small and large animals in Dashain. Selling a single such livestock fetches sufficient resources to the rural families for purchasing different items such as clothing, spices, and other necessary items required for celebrating Dashain. In the high mountain areas, the rural folks raise thousands of mountain goats for Dashain. Previously, Nepal used to import mountain goats from Tibet. Recently, most of the mountain goats come from the Mustang district in the mid high mountain region of Nepal.

Billions of NPR worth of livestock is raised for consumption in Dashain. The local media have rumored that someone has bought one billion NPR worth of the mountain goats, and set them free in the nearby forest obviously acting against the animal sacrifices during the Dashain.

Poultry has been another well-organized major industry in Nepal. No matter whether Dashain or not the poultry industry goes on but during the Dashain festival demand for the poultry products also goes high. However, such an organized poultry farm is not for the rural people. They benefit from it as the cheap meat and eggs, too but the transportation to the rural areas except for the market towns have been challenging to the industry and to the rural people, as both parties have difficulty in providing and getting the poultry products at the reasonable prices.

Those billions of NPR earned from the livestock sale are spent on other items in Dashain thus stimulating the economy. Rural folks raising a single large or small livestock spend all

those earnings on buying clothing for the family members following the belief that everyone in a family needs to wear new clothing during the Dashain festival.

Other people working for the State or any organized institutions or any foreign and national businesses get a Dashain bonus worth of one-month salary. Billions of those NPR go to the market causing crowds of customers at every store just before the Dashain festival. This has certainly increased the import as well as increased the production of the local industries.

Import of vehicles has increased because the vehicles sellers have discounted the prices of vehicles for the Dashain festival. Naturally, taking the advantage of the discounted prices of vehicles as well as for the comfort of travel during the festival, some people buy vehicles mostly cars. The taxes on imported vehicles are unbelievably high. So, import of vehicles brings tremendously high revenue to the State. Apparently, everybody wins.

Some folks have estimated that about one hundred billions of NPR (One billion dollar at the exchange rate of NPR 100 to a dollar) move from one pocket to another during the festival. However, the amount spent on the Dashain festival might be a number of times higher than that amount. For example, even only the half of the about 30-million Nepalese wear new clothing worth of NPR 5,000 means 75 billions of clothing. Folks traveling back and forth between Kathmandu and their homes if spend only one thousands NPR on the travel means NPR 25 billion. Many folks travel from other towns to their homes and back, too. It means another tens of billions of NPR spent on travel. Consumption of meat alone might be roughly of another NPR 25 billions.

So, Dashain is economically, religiously and socially very important event for the Nepalese. It stimulates the economy. It keeps the culture alive. Socially, Nepalese have the opportunity of meeting family members, friends and neighbors at least once a year during the Dashain festival.

The last year has been the disastrous year for the Nepalese, as they could not enjoy the Dashain festival as they do in a regular year. The last year has been the year of the great devastating-quakes year. On top of that the shutdown of the terai area has made the folks unable to travel for celebrating the Dashain festival. Some people complained that they have to keep their stores closed losing the good Dashain businesses. Consequently, the economy has down to the less than one percent growth in the fiscal year year 2015.

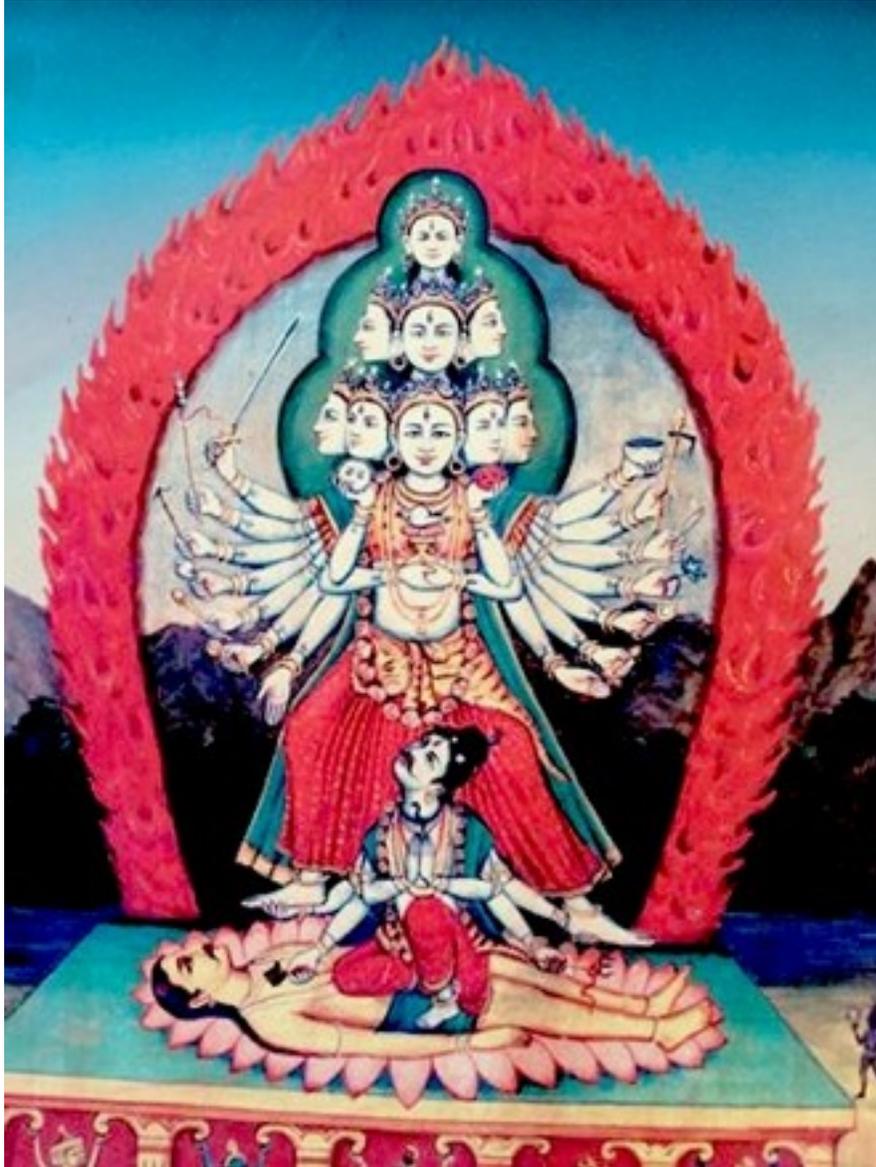
October 15, 2016



मोहनी नखःया लसताय् भित्तुना !

Nevah Mhashika

A lady with the container for the items of offerings to deities



The most powerful goddess called Siddhi Lakshmi enshrined at the core of the five-stories temple in Bhaktapur. The flame is enclosing Her Indicating She is the fire.



The eighteen-limb Bhagavati is enclosed in the flame indicating She is the fire. The Nevah community worships Her at the prayer room on the ninth day of the Dashain festival.



The eighteen-limb Bhagavati carved in stone is enclosed in the flame.



The eighteen-limb Bhagavati in a painting also is enclosed in the flame.



The Goddess Bhagavati is fighting with the Demon Mahisasur



Pachali Bhairav embossed on a Golden Jar gets the finishing touch



Dashain Revelers In Bhaktapur On The Tenth Day



Dashain Revelers In Bhaktapur On The Tenth Day



Giving Tika On The Tenth Day



Offering Oil Lamp to Brahmayani In Bhaktapur On The Tenth Day



Disposing Oil Lamp On A Nearby Stream In Bhaktapur On The Tenth Day



Dashain Revelers in Bhaktapur On The Tenth Day



Receiving Tika On The Tenth Day