

Happy Teej And Rishi Panchami
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On the third day of the bright fortnight of Bhadra (August/September) every year, women celebrate the Teej festival, which means they visit Lord Shiva at the nearest temple, and then dance on the way back and forth between the temple and home not eating and even not drinking water if possible for the auspicious day to appease the god for the long lives of husbands. Women did everything for husbands in the past probably some do even today. On the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadra every year, women starting early in the morning clean up their bodies for a year brushing teeth by special twigs 365 times, and then washing the body 365 times in presence of seven ascetic called Sapta Rishis. These are the rituals of celebration performed on the Rishi Panchami day.

The Teej festival has recently crossed oceans and reached America and Australia just to mention a few major countries: one in the west and another in the east. Women have celebrated the festival elsewhere in the world. The festival also has encompassed the women of all ethnic groups, castes and creeds. It has been a national even a universal festival of women.

Women usually go to the parents' home for celebrating the Teej festival. In the past even today some of the remote areas have the accessibility problem. They needed to walk for days to reach the destinations. On the ways there were no guesthouses, lodges or even villages where they could spend a night. They needed to go uphill and downhill, walk along the dense forest and large rivers, and cross the roaring mountain rivers on the rudimentary bridges often done by the local people. So, the husbands escort them to the points where her parents or brothers pick them up.

Married and unmarried sisters get together to celebrate at the parental home. What they do on the eve of the Teej is to eat heavy dinner often extending the time up until dawn so that they could have sufficient fuel and energy to keep their bodies going on the day of Teej when they were not supposed even to drink water.

Certainly, they have sufficient time to swap the views and ideas with other female siblings, and talk about how they have lived, and how they have managed to live comfortably. They talk about their lives, about the children, husbands, and in-laws.

Most of the burden of the household is on the women that also the youngest ones who were recently married. Women have to start the day quite early probably at four in the morning. First, they have to grind the cereals for preparing the morning meal. Then, they go to collect water from the nearest waterspout or well. It might take hours to bring a single pitcher of water during the dry season. Then, they need to cook the morning meal and feed everybody in the family, and themselves, too.

The next work in line for women after the morning meal is to go to collect the fodders for the livestock. They put together popcorn and roasted soybean for an afternoon meal in a long strip of linen rolled around their waist to hold the sari, and the back together. They go to the nearest forest and collect the fodder, and eat the afternoon snacks of popcorn and soybeans mixed together, and come back home. By the time, it becomes time to cook an evening meal for the family. They cook the evening meal, feed all the family members, eat the meal after everybody has done, take the children to bed, and wash all the pots and pans, and dishes. That is not the

last work done, yet. They have to massage the legs of their mothers-in-law before they could retire from the day's work.

Mothers-in-law have been the bosses of rural households. They ran the household businesses most of the time autocratically in the past. So, their words become the final decisions what the daughters-in-law have to do and not have to do. Naturally, most often than not, daughters-in-law are subjected to even inhuman treatment. Even after completing the whole long day family work, daughters-in-law have to massage the legs of the mothers-in-law. That becomes the final act of daughters-in-law before they go to sleep.

Nepalese women are the brave women. They have to shoulder the whole family burden. They have a little time to think about anything. Every hour of every day of 365 days of a year, women have to work without rest. That is why the women population is lower than the men. Nepal might be the only country where women have so short life span.

All these things and other sufferings they have undergone, they express their sufferings in the songs during the Teej festival. Only during this festival, women don't need to do any work. So, they could sing and dance. Their songs become the expression of their concerns of their daily lives; they sing songs about how their mothers-in-law have treated them, and about their own lives and deeds. In doing so, they unload the troubles they have accumulated in their minds, and get relief from pains and pangs for at least a few days. These expressions in songs become the Teej songs.

Currently, these things of the women's sufferings might be the part of history in the urban areas. However, they might persist in the remote rural areas even today.

Now, let us see how the celebrations of the Teej festival have changed from the traditional to the modern ones.

Nepalis have spread all over the world. Anybody having an access to the facebook and other social media could watch and see in the videos how Nepali women have started off the Teej celebration in America, Australia and other western countries. Women have to adjust their work with the Teej celebration there; and they needed to celebrate whenever they could come together. So, the day might be two weeks or one week or a few days before the actual Teej celebration day in Nepal.

In Nepal too, workingwomen also have to have the day when they could come together and then hold the Teej feast. So, some office women do it two weeks in advance, others a week or so and even some others a few days before the Teej. They hold drink-and-dance parties, as we see in the videos posted on the facebook.

Women in their wedding attires love to dance not to mention drink and eat at such parties. Some women dance for hours. Probably, they don't feel tired. At least they don't show it. Surely, it is once a year, so, they could do it.

If they have a large number of women to assemble together then they need to have a large hall. Currently, Nepal in fact Kathmandu has many Banquet Companies that cater the needs of people feasting or holding feasts. Women hold their Teej parties in such banquet halls. With the roaring music, they dance probably after having some hard drink to energize their bodies for a long hour dancing.

On the eve of the Teej festival every family holds a Teej feast. They eat and eat until the dawn so that they have enough energy for the next day fasting without even drinking water for the whole day. That has been the past tradition. Probably, modern day women don't eat the whole night; however, they might enjoy the hard drink, good and juicy non-vegetarian dishes. Probably, Lord Shiva might smell whisky in some modern women visiting him. Some of them might even drink tea or soft drink on the Teej day to keep their body running for the day.

On the Teej day, women in their wedding attires means mostly in red go to the temple to Lord Shiva on the way dancing and singing. Some women love to dance for hours at some open areas. Such dancing is not only for the self-entertainment but also for attaining some thing for the next life. Some women believe that if they could dance and please the lord then they might be born as the angels in the next life. Thus, the dancing for a few hours on the Teej day might pay them high in their next lives.

The Teej day is the most auspicious day for women to visit the nearest temple to Lord Shiva, and make offerings to the lord. The day is auspicious because on this day the spouse of Lord Shiva called Parvati succeeded in persuading Lord Shiva to wed her. So, women believe that they could appease the lord for giving the unmarried women the husbands of the similar strength and power or even more, and the married women the long and prosperous lives to their husbands so that they could have the better family lives.

Lord Shiva is very generous deity, who could give any sorts of boon to anybody provided if s/he could please him. Pleasing the lord is not so simple and easy. Lord Shiva himself loves to mediate sitting on the snow-covered high mountain without any outer clothing. It might take a whole life of dedication to the lord even might need to continue to dedicate the next life to please the lord. Once you get the boon from the lord then you could even challenge him, and even chase him to death. So, most of the women probably receive what they want provided they are sincere in dedicating the day of Teej to Lord Shiva.

Thousands if not hundreds of thousands of women visited Lord Shiva at his Pashupati residence in Kathmandu on September 12, 2018: the day of Teej. All of the large temple doors kept open from 3:00 AM to 8:00 PM so that women could have the view of the lord, who have six faces: four to the four directions, and one facing to the sky another to the earth. So, the lord has no problem of seeing the women visitors from each face on all four directions on this day, and bless the women with whatever they have in their mind.

Women have to wait getting the view of the lord when the priests made the regular daily offerings to the lord, and when the president visited the lord otherwise the flow of women kept for the whole day to the Pashupati temple.

The Trust taking care of the residence of Lord must have made a good profit from the offerings hundreds of thousands of women have made there. However, the Pashupati Area Development Trust has not set the tradition of making public the profit it has made. In the past once or twice, it has probably done so. I have the vague idea of reading the news about the money it has made on such auspicious day.

Some folks particularly women have complained about the spectacular shows women have made during the Teej festival. They complained about some women wearing expensive jewelry; some even competing with each other holding expensive Teej parties, and spending extraordinary amounts on the Teej celebration. They believe that the money spent on such celebration is the waste, and unproductive.

However, some economists argue that spending money on the Teej celebration does not go to waste; actually it fuels the economy. It creates the demands for many things such as foods and drinks used for the Teej celebration. The demands for foods and drink would help farmers to produce more foods and drinks, which means creating more jobs in farms and in the industry, too. If they buy jewelry for the Teej that also fuels the economy.

The catering companies have jobs to hold the Teej celebration parties. So, they make money for themselves, and for others, too, as they provide men and women with jobs in various occupations and professions. So many catering venues have come up in Kathmandu means folks have been well off to hold expensive feasts during the festival. It is an indicator of the well-being of Nepalis.

So, money spent on the Teej celebration really was not wasted rather it had created economic opportunities for the catering companies, food producers, and the drink companies, and the folks working in these sectors directly, and indirectly for the folks in transportation and communication and so on.

Now, the fifth day of the bright fortnight when women in advance clean up their bodies for a year. This day is called Rishi Panchami literally means the fifth day of Rishis. On this day, women revere Sapta Rishis means seven ascetics.

There is a shrine of Sapta Rishis on the bank of the Vishnumati River at Teku in Kathmandu. On this particular day, only women have the access to this area because only women are going to make offering to those seven ascetics. No living males are allowed because that might break the privacy of women.

Nobody could see the women on the bank of the Vishnumati River cleaning up their bodies except for the flying birds in the sky. So, they could open up not only their bodies even their minds to do whatever they like means to wash every organs of their bodies openly among the women.

Traditionally, women brush their teeth by twigs. When toothbrush and toothpaste were not invented, these twigs were popular among the folks for cleaning up their teeth. They cut the twig into about 10 cm long. They chew one end of the twig, which becomes a brush like, and then brush teeth. Women have to brush their teeth 365 times. So, some folks make a good business selling such twigs for the Rishi Panchami day.

The next thing women need to do is wash their bodies. Washing body means usually pouring water on their heads. Some women use perforated containers for making make-believe 365 times washing bodies. A woman holds such a container over her head for another to pour water on it. Such containers might have more than 365 holes; each hole passes water means one wash of the body. Is it not genius to think such a device to wash the body more than 365 times in a single wash? Practically, they could have better done in a shower; probably this idea has not hit the minds of women, yet. Soon, it would.

Thus, women have made sure that they washed their bodies for a year. They won't be punished for not washing thereafter, as they have already done. So, they could skip washing their bodies for any number of days a year. They are so overloaded with the household work probably they might not even have a time to wash their bodies at any time of a year except for the Rishi Panchami.

After meeting the formality of brushing teeth and washing bodies 365 times, women dressed up as brides in fresh clothing line up for making offerings to Sapta Rishis, who will surely bless the women with the clean bodies for a year, and even forgive women if they have mistakenly defile their bodies. So, women visit the Sapta Rishis every year to keep their bodies clean.

Annex

Arrangements at Pashupati for Teej

September 12, 2018: The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) made all necessary arrangements for the comfort of women celebrating the Teej festival for visiting Lord Shiva at the Pashupati temple in Kathmandu.

In order to provide women with better convenience and manage the large number of the devotees visiting the lord, PADT opened up all four gates to the temple from 3:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. breaking only for making the two regular offerings such as Shree Yantra Puja and Maha Bhog (offerings) from 8:30 to 9:30 and from 12:30 to 13:45, respectively.

The PADT made arrangements for devotees stand in any one of the three lines to enter the temple.

One line of devotees started at Mitrapark and then moved on through Umakunda, Rudragadeshwor, and Basuki and finally entered the temple premises from the north entry door.

Another line of devotees started at Jayabageshwori, then moved on to Bhubaneswori and entered the temple premises from the east gate while the devotees preferring to enter the temple from the southern gate stand in line at Bankali and move on through Charshivalaya, Panchadewal, Bajraghar and then made their entry from the south gate to the temple.

The three gates north, south and east were for the entry to the temple; the western gate was for the exit only. Visitors with disability and senior citizens could use any gates. The PADT instructed the volunteers to strictly cooperate with senior citizens.

PADT put the high-level security alert in place to ensure the safety of thousands of women visiting the Pashupati Temple. A large number of security personnel managed the safety of the visitors. Nepal police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army worked at the Pashupati area during the festival day.

Security, first aid service, drinking water, rest rooms and tent facilities were there on the temple premises.

Closed Circuit (CC) cameras set up on the temple premises, core areas and outside the temple areas closely kept the watch on the movement of devotees, and the lines of devotees.

A large screen set up at the Gaushala junction displayed all activities on the temple premises.

The open space at the Tilganga Eye Hospital, Siphah ground, and open space at Guheshwori were used for vehicle parking. The PADT premises were set aside for parking the vehicles of the staffers of the government organs, PADT employees and the media.

<http://therisingnepal.org.np/news/25827>



A woman taking 365 times wash
(Source of picture: Setopati.com)



A woman brushing her teeth with a twig
(Source of picture: Setopati.com)