

Socio-Cultural Significances of Teej Festival in Nepalese Society

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Abstract

Festival Teej fosters as a vibrant embodiment of religious devotion, cultural meaning and social unity among the Brahmin, Chhetri, and Thakuri community's women in Nepali Hindu society. It is deeply connected in Hindu myth and ritual with the symbolizing the ideal of marital bond, spiritual purity and the strength of feminine devotion. This study aims to explore importance of Teej festival among the Brahmin, Chhetri, and Thakuri community's women of Nepal.

This study has used a qualitative methods approach to investigate the socio-cultural importance of Teej in Nepali society. The qualitative information was collected through the emic approach. This study tries to explore the exact socio-culture scenario of Teej in Nepali society, and discussed different issues like, past records, traditional information for the proper explanation of the glory festival Teej in Nepali society.

The festival Teej has the socio-cultural and religious meaning among the Brahmin, Chhetri, and Thakuri community's women of Nepali Hindu are observed. It refers to dedication to Goddess Parvati and her union with Lord Shiva. The festive symbolizes marital devotion, spiritual purity, and the well-being of the husband and family. Unmarried girls also observe the festive and fast believing with getting an ideal husband. On the month of Bhadra (August–September), they use three days for the ritual and religious purposes like “Dar Khane” feasts, fasting (Nirjala Brata), and purification procession on Rishi Panchami. It is mythological rooted traditions under this festive Teej, women has a space for expressing womanhood and sisterhood through song, dance, and traditional attire.

The festival has undergone visible transformations because of globalization, commercialization, and political involvement, even it continues to develop as a significant platform for women to express about the personal and collective experiences. Any way it help to concerns about the dilution of traditional values, the changes have also help to open up the space for empowerment, awareness, and visibility in society. So, the festive Teej has a meaningful and significant role to intersect the tradition and modernity with upholding spiritual belief while reflecting the socio-cultural realisms in present Nepal.

Keywords: *Teej festival, nirjala barta, marital devotion, rishi panchami, ritual fasting and cultural preservations*

Introduction

It is the most important, significant, vibrant, intertwined socio-cultural and religious festival among the Nepali Hindu women especially from the Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri community but today all the caste and creed celebrates the festival from one month. It has the religious symbolism of dedicating to Goddess Parvati to her union with God Shiva (Bennett, 1983). It has the marital devotion, spiritual purified bond and well-being of husband life and family. Unmarried girls also observed the fast for getting good husband as lord Shiva. This festival usually falls on month of Bhadra (August-September) with last for three days with its own cultural and ritual significance (Mishra, 2011). On my experience and observation:

We go two to three days early bringing certain gift like Sari bangles and others along with Tika and some sweet for sister's mother in law. Then, after some hour, the sister is especially invited to her natal home for the occasion of the hilarious festival of Teej. She visits her natal home one day early, on the day of Dar, all female family members involve making delicious food at evening. This is followed by observing the Teej procession where women observe the Nilhar fast and worship god Shiva near the temple. After completing the temple visit, they celebrate with dance and song whole day. In the evening all the women who are in fasting observing the fast break it by taking water asking permission from their husbands. Early the next morning, they bathe and brush teeth with a kind of bush stem. They then proceed by worshipping the Sapta Rishi to cleanse their sins, pray for the longevity of their husband's lives, and seek a better life and well-being of the family.

Before the day of Teej, there is one kind of feast day organized for the women in every household name "Dar Khane". On this occasion, traditional vegetarian delicious food particularly sweets and rich dishes are served but today this tradition undergone or influence from globalization they take non vegetarian food and others. All the married women return to natal home to celebrate the festival. This Dar (Feast) is mainly provided from the brother and parents to show the dedication to sisters. On this occasion, female enjoy and express joy, happiness and sorrow through song and dance to share the friend and relatives. Women wear the red sari and ornaments according to their economic status and visit the temple of Lord Shiva. In recent years, this Dar khane program is celebrated with Teej parties in hotel, cafeteria, restaurant and others as well as media coverage and political leader involvement and speeches, highlights the women right, gender role and empowerment. For this action may harm the exact tradition of Hinduism definitely even though such a commercialization, politicization of Teej help to raise the voice of women. Second day of Teej is the actual date where married and unmarried female both observes the fast while day without taking food even water praying the Lord Shiva, purpose for

long life of husband, marital life long, family prosperity and peace. Devotees complete the fast next day with some rituals performance with Dantyun (traditional brushing the teeth from hundred eight stems from kind of bush) and worshipping the gods in the presence of Brahmin Priest that is offering Sapta Rishi (seven sages) to cleanse sins and seeks a virtuous life. "It is particularly concerned with official women, women in patrifocal and especially sexual role as wife. The Teej- Rishi Panchami complex expresses this dangerous and potentially divisive power of women and their sexuality. It also attempts, through myth and ritual, to reintegrate that power into the structures of family and kinship, which threatens" (K.C., 2015)

Sociological and theoretical perspectives

According to sociological point of view, festival Teej is a religious event with a dignified expression of social unity and collective identity of women (Altitude Himalaya, 2022). Teej festival helps to provide liberal space for female to unite, sing, dance and gather freely in public sphere where they share the sorrow and happiness (Shrestha P. R., 2025). Under this occasion there is the traditional song named as Teej geet help to serve cultural and social expression with satirical and coded manner includes the female frustration, sorrow, marital struggles, in-law relationship, patriarchal domination and happiness about their lives (ResearchGate, 2023).

In contemporary society, Teej festival is considered as a way to empower and social comment the women (Amazing Nepal Trek, 2025). Today, Teej song directly focuses the contemporary social issues or events that connect with gender inequality, women's right and education (Sathi, N.D.) Such a change focuses festival in a dynamic where female raise the voice about the social standards rather than sluggish mark of tradition and ritual. It is the development related consistent with theories of social change and cultural adaptation where keep the customs and gives the meaning to meet the demands and aims of the contemporary world (ResearchGate, 2023).

Research Methodology

A qualitative methods approach was employed to investigate the socio-cultural importance of Teej in Nepali society in this study. The qualitative information was collected through the emic approach. My own experience and understanding, being as the member of the Nepali society, I collected the information of contextual related to Teej. This study tries to explore the exact socio-culture scenario of Teej in Nepali society. This study discussed different issues, past records, traditional information for the proper explanation of the glory festival Teej in Nepali society. This study also used the women's present and past socio-culture status of Teej using both traditional and modern views of the society.

The day of Fasting during the occasion (Vrat)

Especially there is no provision of taking the food that called as Nilhar Vrat but some can take the food as the name of Falahar Vrat during the Teej occasion. The Nilhar Vrat means literally "without

water. “ Women should observe the fast abstain from all kind of food and water for approximately 24 hours starting from sun rise on the day of Teej until moonrise or next morning’s rituals which includes worshipping the moon and lord Shiva. This is performed for the longevity and prosperity of one’s husband (Upadhaya, 2018). Similarly the Falhar Vrat is a less strict fast where “Falhar” means “fruit-based.” On this observation, they abstain the food grains and cooked food but consume fruit, nuts, milk and water throughout the day. It is broken after the performances of the evening puja. This option is especially prefer for unwell, elderly or physical weaken demands of a waterless fast (Shrestha, 2021). Both fasts are accompanied by dedicate prayers, singing of Teej songs and listening to the Teej Vrat Katha(story).

Cuisine during Teej

It is a vibrant and integral part of festive where special kinds of cuisine are made during the Teej festival in Nepal. It’s a grand culinary event where specific foods are made into the rituals with fasting and dancing with joy of the occasion. The food culture during Teej can be divided into two distinct phases name as the ”Dar” and The “Vrat” the grand feast –day before the fast and the fasting day – day of the fast respectively. The term “Dar” is derived from the Sanskrit word “Dridha” meaning “strong” or “firm”, symbolizing the firm resolve women take for their fasting. During the "Dar", they enjoy with a noisy, joyful, and communal affair where women sing, dance, and enjoy this feast late into the night.

Day before the Fast (Dar)

Sel Roti: Sel roti is special kind of a sweet, ring-shaped rice doughnut which is made from rice flour, milk, sugar, ghee and spices that is then deep-fried until crispy on the outside and soft on the inside.

Mutton Curry (Masu): It is goat meat curry with rich spicy. It has full protein with a source of strength and is eaten in abundance.

Puri: It is deep-fried, puffy bread made from wheat flour. It's the perfect vehicle for scooping up the curry, vegetable dishes, and lentil soup.

Dal (Lentil Soup): It is made from different beans. A staple, but often made a bit richer for the occasion.

Mixed Vegetables (Tarkari): It is cooked from variety of seasonal vegetables with spices.

Chiura (Beaten Rice) with various sides: It is bitten rice. It is served with yogurt, spicy potato salad (aloo ko achar), or black soybeans (bhatmas).

Sweets (Mithai): It is made from sweet and some milk contains things. There is a variety of Nepali sweets name **Laddu, Julebi, and Peda**. It symbolizes celebration and sweetness in life.

Bari: Sun-dried lentil dumplings that are added to curries for extra protein and texture.

Fruits: The primary source of sustenance. Bananas, apples, pomegranates, and other seasonal fruits are consumed.

Sago (Sabadana) Khichdi: A very popular fasting food. It's made from tapioca pearls, peanuts, potatoes, and cumin seeds. Its light on the stomach yet provides energy.

Kutu Ko Dhau: A special yogurt made from buckwheat. It's considered a sacred and pure food, perfect for breaking the fast.

Rock Sugar (Mishri) and Fruits: Many women break their fast in the evening by consuming a little mishri and fruit as their first offering to Lord Shiva.

Root Vegetables and Certain Grains: Some communities allow potatoes, sweet potatoes, and buckwheat (fapar) during the fast.

Religious and Rituals Importance

It is the practices of honoring the divine couple named lord Shiva and Parvati. It is the recall of mythological history where Lord Parvati's devotion and intense penance to get the Lord Shiva as her husband. This festival is a tribute to Lord Parvati's perseverance and her dedication to lord Shiva is the ideal form of women to seek the marital bliss and devotion to husband (Altitude Himalaya, 2022).

There is the fasting name Nirjala Barta (fast without food and water) for longevity, prosperity, peace and well-being of the husband with believing to strength marital bond and bless. This activity is even observed by unmarried girls with praying to lord Shiva to get good husband too.

On the third day, purification and blessing day is called Rishi Panchami, where women bath with holy water near the river and pond, brushing the teeth with one hundred and eight Dantyun. After this, they pray the Sapta Rishi (Seven Sages) believing to cleanse the sins and seek to virtuous life. After the ritual, married women take the water and bless from her husband's feet to end the fasting. It is the symbol of ideals of Hindu sacrament, ideals fidelity, sacrificing and commitment in the marital relationships and inspiration and devotion to lord Parvati.

Social and Cultural Importance

It is the celebration of Womanhood and Sisterhood through Teej festival where women to come together with her irrespective of their social and economic status. It helps to develop the sense of unity, solidarity and sisterhood or womanhood while they share the joys, experience and sorrow with friends and relatives.

This vibrant festival has the cultural expression while women used the finest traditional dress red sari and ornaments that symbolized love, passion and marital bliss when green dress connect with new life, growth and fertility and pale for purity and peace. They also enjoy with various design of Mehndi on the hand and feet too.

Under the occasion, they perform joyful dances with music, dance through singing traditional folk songs name as Teej Geet or Sangini. The songs are connected with experiences of sorrow and happiness, love, devotion during the joy of the monsoon season specialty like rainy, greenery, natural scenario.

On the occasion, there is the reunion of family with exchanging the Teej gift and married women visit the natal homes for the festival. Mother traditionally sends the Baya (gifts of sweet, nuts, clothes and ornaments) to the new home particularly in the first year marriage.

This is the method of preservation of culture and traditional festival when women participate actively to empower themselves. It is the beautiful blend of religious, devotion and social attraction.

Conclusion

Festival Teej fosters as a vibrant embodiment of religious devotion, cultural meaning and social unity among the *Brahmin, Chhetri, and Thakuri community's women* in Nepali Hindu society. It is deeply connected in Hindu myth and ritual with the symbolizing the ideal of marital bond, spiritual purity and the strength of feminine devotion, especially through fasting and worship of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Teej fosters emotional bonding, sisterhood, and cultural identity through traditional music, song, dance, dress and collective celebration with its religious essence. Now the festival has undergone visible transformations because of globalization, commercialization, and political involvement, even it continues to develop as a significant platform for women to express about the personal and collective experiences. Any way it help to concerns about the dilution of traditional values, the changes have also help to open up the space for empowerment, awareness, and visibility in society. So, the festive Teej has a meaningful and significant role to intersect the tradition and modernity with upholding spiritual belief while reflecting the socio-cultural realisms in present Nepal.

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