

Nepalese Folk Culture

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Stuti Sharma

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Stuti Sharma

Address:

Loksanskriti, Nepal Music Center Trust, Kathmandu Phone
Number: +977 01 4465463

Email: nmc@nepalmusiccenter.com [http://
www.nepalmusiccenter.com](http://www.nepalmusiccenter.com)

Contributors

Conception - Santosh Sharma

Coordinator

Jyoti Ghimire

Culture Authors

Late Ratnakar Devkota

Padma Raj Joshi –Prabhat|| Kanchhi Maharjan

Bina Sinha

K. B. Simple

Shiva Raj Panthi

Devika G.M.

Hansabati Kurmi

Prof Dr. Chudamani Bandhu

Dr Jay Raj Pant

Dr. Badri Sharma Binadi

Yamala Ghimire

Sabitri Malla Kakshyapati

Dr. Motilal Parajuli

Tulsi Diwas

Beni Jangam Rawal

Rambharos Kapadi Bhramar Kanjok Lama

Nirmal Kumar Bhandari Tiraskrit' Janardan Dahal

Chandra Kumar Hatuwali

Ram Saran Darnal

Krishna Prasad Parajuli

Dr. Bishnubibhu Ghimire Kusumakar Neupane

Dr. Jibendra Dev Giri

Haridev Koirala

Sushila Ghimire

Tulasa Waiba

Dilendra Rai

Dil Bikram Angdembe

Dr. Madhav Prasad Pokhrel

Dr. Hansapure Subedi

Dr. Shiva Prasad Paudyal

Dr. Bishu Raj Atreya

Guddi Panta

Advisors

Satya Mohan Joshi Janakabikeshari Dharmaraj Thapa Prof.Dr.
Chudamani Bandhu Prof.Dr. Abhi Subedi
Prof.Dr. Madav Prasad Pokharel Krishna Prasad Parajuli
Dr. Ramdayal Rakesh

Chief Editor

Dr. Govinda Acharya

Editor

Sandhya Pahadi

Editorial Team

Prof.Dr.Motilal Parajuli Prof.Dr. Jayaraj Pant Anil Poudel
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Regional Representative

Bulu Mukarung (Eastern) Beni Jangam (Centeral) Durga Rayamajhi
(Western) Ashok Tharu (Midwestern) Padmaraj Joshi (Far Western)

Translation

Mahesh Poudel

Nepali Folk Beliefs

By Dr. Madhav Prasad Pokhrel

Nepali society has run with different beliefs of its own. Such beliefs exist in our society for long. Most of the folk beliefs are worthless from scientific viewpoint but they have crucial and strong roles in society. This write up is primarily focused on to dig out the beliefs rooted in Nepali society and cultures.

Women: Nepali folk belief is not such positive to women. Feminists find out many such issues that are against gender equality inside the folk beliefs. Patriarchy seems strong in Nepali folk beliefs.

1. Women should not utter the name of their husbands.
2. Women are less sagacious than men.
3. Widows sign bad happenings.
4. Widows should not decorate themselves. They should not come before while a man is all set to start his journey. They should not remarry.
5. Women should not take a bath on the day her husband left for abroad.
6. Women should not take a bath on Thursdays, black moon nights (Aunsi) and Chaturdashi.

7. Menstruating women signal bad omen if they were witnessed just ahead of men.
8. Menstruating women are untouchable. They should not worship, cook food and should stay isolated.
9. Men should take a bath after touching the pregnant women.
10. Standing women will have heavy loads to the earth.
11. Parents should not witness their daughter being put Sindur/red vermilion on her forehead by the groom in the wedding ceremony.
12. Women having gray hair and eyes are not luck enough.
13. Women should not read Vedas. They should not attend religious ceremonies to offer services of pundits.
Somewhere, it is also in existence that men should not utter name of wives practice. Science has proved that gender and knowledge has no relations but Nepali folks believe that women lack knowledge than the men. The belief of women should not stand straight has a sign of male domination. However, from the point of view of patriarchy, a widower is not considered but trend of women not pronouncing her husband's name is more in

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an omen for carrying out any things. This very jaundiced-eye of patriarchy has made a set of unwritten code of conducts stating that widows should not use cosmetics, they should not be visible during a journey of a man and should not remarry. But, none of these charges to men exist in our folk belief. So, sometimes it is even heard that men get remarried before the completion of 13-day mourning of his first wife's death and also men get remarried even their wives have sound health. Similarly, a woman is barred from taking a bath on that day her husband left for abroad but this does not apply to a man when his wife takes an international flight.

Menstruation is taken as a restriction in Hindu society. Women menstruate in every month and blood is discharged for three days continuously from the vagina. In Nepal, people call it menstruation, monthly periodic and untouchable as well. Just two weeks ago, the mature ovum arrives in womb from ovary and there remain no chance of pregnancy after the ovum leaves the ovary. There is no possibility of pregnancy after three days of the menstruation. In basics, all religions are forms of social justice and discipline. In Hinduism, copulation is banned for three days during menstruation. The only thing restricted thing in menstruation is copulations but the culture of illusion, restriction and ostentation has been extreme in the society. In the far-western region, the women are forced to live in a cowshed or a hut separately during the menstruation in the name of Chhaupadi. Women cannot give birth to a baby until she has menstruation cycle. So, stages of menstruation, pregnancy

and giving birth to a child are the holiest stages for a woman. Only sexual intercourse is banned but social boycott in the name of menstruation is none other than an example of a religious injustice and a system of conservative.

I believe the practice of bathing after touching a pregnant woman is also a transformed perception of restriction in intercourse.

Similarly, the belief behind the family members preventing from seeing the scene of putting red vermilion/Sindur on bride's forehead could have relation with vulgarity. In human society there exists an untold consensus regarding the scenes of and discussions on sexual relations. An article in a science magazine entitled —What Makes Women Beautiful||, mentions that youth of every community like the people of their own community having decorated appearances with matchable costumes. So, beautiful and ugly is not an objective feat. Similarly, grey-eyed women are considered as the most beautiful in Europe while they are believed to be ugliest in our context.

So many verses of Rig-Veda are written by women. So, the belief those women are not allowed reading the Veda, though they have written it, could have been developed during the middle age due to extreme thoughts against women.

Likewise, the nature of Nepali society is deep rooted in feudalist customs. It becomes clear that if we analyze the dream interpretation and beginning of a journey. Society believes that dreaming king, queen and a rich people is a good symbol while dreaming poor signifies something bad.

14. Dreaming king, queen, Brahmins, cow, rich people is good while seeing a poor is not a good symbol.

15. Seeing poor people in dreams and a journey is an omen.

16. Seeing a mad person is also a sign of something bad at the starting of a journey.

Caste

The traditional Nepali society being a victim of a barbarian act of caste discrimination is proved by our existing folklore as well. The practice of caste discrimination is likely to exist in this or that form until the Nepali society is fully educated. Similarly, it is unlikely that all people in Nepal would be educated in the near future as government priority and management in education seems not to be encouraging. Caste based discrimination will not be omitted from the society though the Marxists would win the seats in the elections until all Nepalis were educated. Traditionally, rice was a demarcation to distinguish the people of so-called high and low caste. Those eating rice offered by a person were considered either equal or lower than him in caste hierarchy while those not eating rice offered by him were taken as senior to him in the caste system. Traditionally, the Nepali society aspires to marry his/her daughter to the son of a high caste or at least the same one. Though they are progressive in nature, most of them knot their nuptial ties with the bride or groom of the same caste. Those considering themselves as progressive and living in the city areas eat foods offered by the lower castes but there are very few opting for inter-caste marriages with the bride or groom of the lower caste. Most people in Nepal don't feel happy to marry their daughter with the boys from lower caste. Our folklore depicts the same.

17. Daughters should not marry to the boys of lower caste.

18. People of upper caste should be food touched by lower caste.

19. People of upper caste should not drink water touched by Kami, Damai, Sarki, Pode, Satar, Jhagand; people of upper caste should enter their houses. They should not be seen just ahead of a journey.

20. Leading a journey by a member of a Damai community becomes auspicious.

Even during the Rig-Veda and the Mahabharata a era, caste system was based on occupation which is proved by the birth of Vyas Rishi to Parashar Rishi and Satyawati, a girl from Nishad community. Similarly, birth of Astik Muni to Jaratkaru Rishi and Nag Kanya, and shift of Bishamitra from Chhetri to Brahmin community is also an indication that hierarchical caste had a big say in that time. The system of caste discrimination and untouchability started from the middle age. The folklore existing in Nepal has an influence of customs of the middle age.

Twitching of eyelashes

There exists social semiotics in the tradition of human civilization round the globe. Such things are also available in the Hindu mythologies as well. Our folklore are unique and all our folklore are not inscribed so far. So, they fall under the category of folk literature, folk culture or folk dialects.

21. Sneezing at the beginning of a journey indicates ill-luck.

22. Expanded right backbone of men and left backbone of women is a sign of rosy.
23. Expanded forehead and palate is auspicious.
24. One receives or loses money if palm itches.
25. If the heart was hot it is believed that it would affect the family members.
26. One falls sick while sleeping in dream
27. Guests will visit you if feet itch or one should bow down after feet itching.

Bodily actions

Nepali folk tradition considers right as pious, complete and superb and just opposite to the left. So that in Hindu tradition the groom picks up the bride and keeps her to his left side and teaches her to remain under his control lifelong. Similarly, the left hand is used for toilet purpose and the mothers train their babies not to eat and worship goddesses with the left hands but they take a seat to the left to their hubbies. So, the following folklore would have been introduced in the society.

28. Starting a journey beginning with the right leg helps fulfill the desired goals.
29. Whistling inside the house takes away an augury of the house.
30. Legs should not rub legs

31. Bending out the lower lip for neglecting or as contempt of others, showing off thumb and touching with the legs to the seniors are restricted.

In Maharashtra, no one gets angry by bending out the lower lip and pointing out the thumb by not understanding its negative meaning. This is to say that there is no culture of bending out the lower lip. The Chinese students don't get angry even by sounding off with the legs to their fellow girls. But, this is not in practice in our case. This is culturally restricted in our case.

Days and dates

Restriction is also prevalent regarding dates in Nepali folklore.

32. Not to trim nails and cut short hair on Sunday, Tuesday and Saturday.

33. Not leave for abroad on Sunday and Chaturdashi (day after the dark fortnight of a lunar month).

34. Acts done on the birthday would be successful.

35. Not to give anything to others on Chaturdashi and Parewa (day after full moon night) without any proof or evidence.

Broom

36. Good luck of the house would be washed out if the house was cleaned at night with the broom.

37. The broom should be kept upside down.

38. People should not cross the broom.

To read further contact nmc@nepalmusiccenter.com