

CULTURE & SOCIETY OF NEPAL

The **culture of Nepal** is rich and unique. The cultural heritage of Nepal has evolved over the centuries. This multi-dimensional heritage encompasses the diversities of Nepal's ethnic, tribal, and social groups, and it manifests in music and dance; art and craft; folklore and folktales; languages and literature; philosophy and religion; festivals and celebration; foods and drinks.

Culture of Nepal - Glimpse into the Vibrant Nepali Culture!



The culture of Nepal is as diverse as the ethnic-lingual groups of people present in Nepal. These groups - some natives, some arrived from other countries, together create a vibrant and vivid culture of Nepal, which is similar in some aspects to the culture of its neighboring areas with some unique and distinct features of its own.

Nepal's Unique Customs & Traditions



Nepalese have their own customs and traditions each with its own significance. They also indulge in animal sacrifices in their some of the religious procedures. Another unique tradition is celebrating the birthdays of old people when they turn specific ages - 77, 1000 months, 88, 99 and 110 years. This one is called **Janku**. Some communities, especially those residing in the highlands, have a way of bidding farewell with the dead known as **Sky Burial**. Instead of cremating or burying the bodies, it is left to be eaten by vultures and crows.

Festivals of Nepal



The varied culture of Nepal is seen through its many festivals. Nepalese celebrate numerous festivals throughout the year. Major festivals include ***Dashain (Durga Puja)*** which marks the victory of Goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura. It is one of the most anticipated festivals of the year and is celebrated by Nepali Hindus with great pomp and joy for fifteen days in the month of Ashvin (September-October). ***Tihar (Diwali)***, also called as Swanti and Yamapanchak by some communities, is another famous festival celebrated for five days. In addition to decorating the houses with lights, animals are also worshipped during this period.

Other popular festivals in Nepal:

- Phagu Purnima (Holi)
- Janai Purnima (Raksha Bandhan)
- Mahashivratri

- Krishna Janmashtami
- Gaijatra, which is a procession of decorated cows to commemorate the dead and also involves mask dance, mockery and traditional dance - Ghinta Ghisi.
- Buddha Jayanti
- Indrajatra (a street festival involving mask dance, consumption of Nepali liquor - Raksi, worship of Akash Bhairab and young girls, all to pray for a good harvest in the upcoming year)

Nepali Dance and Music



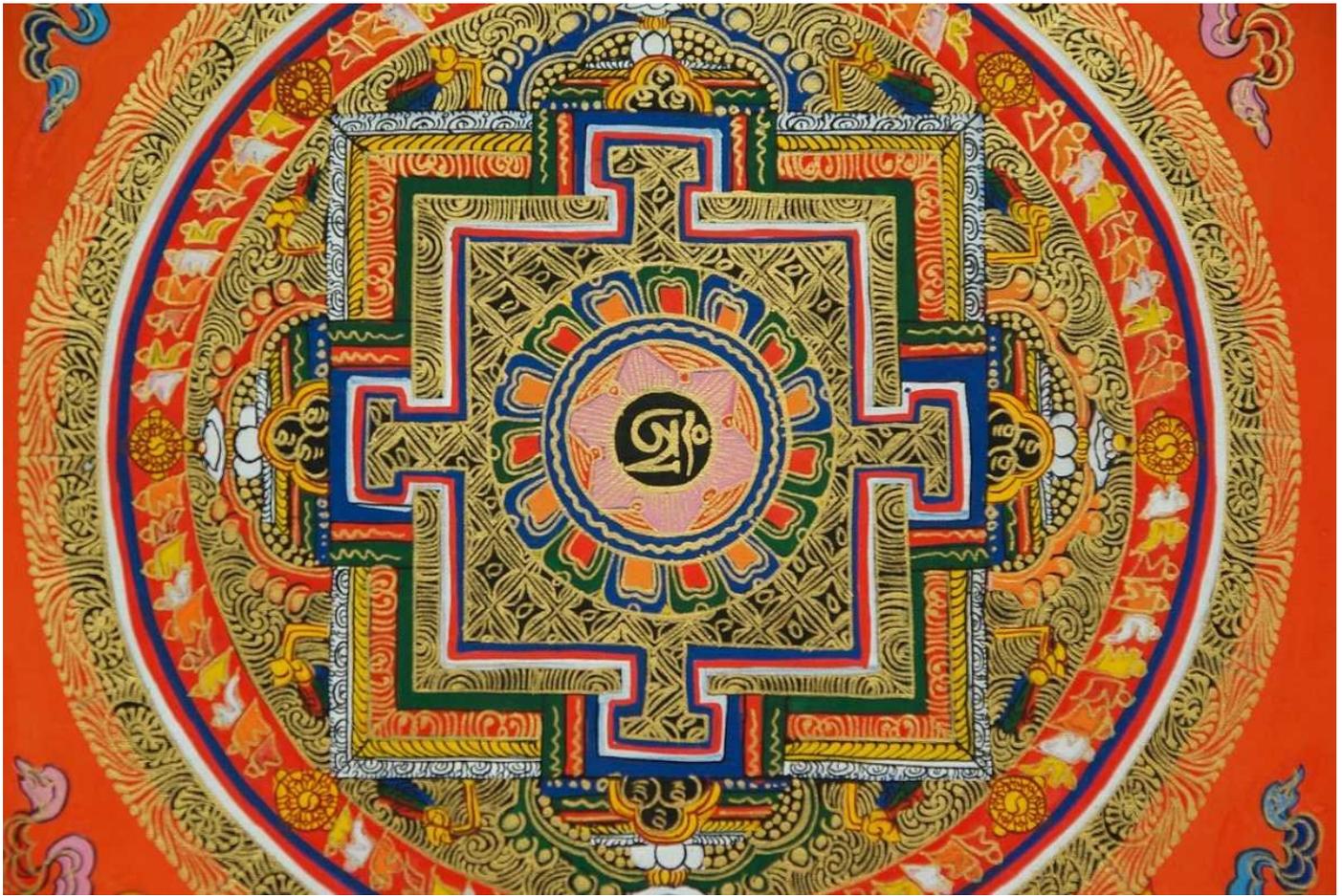
Nepal has a rich tradition of folk, as well as classical dances. According to Hindu mythology, Shiva, who is the God of dance in his Nataraja form, used to do his famous Tandava dance here in the Himalayas. Different communities have their own dance forms which are performed during various festivals, fairs

and family occasions. Some folk dances include popular dances of Nepal.

1. Dandi Naach, which is a stick dance performed during Phagu Purnima
2. Dhan Naach, which is performed by members of the Limbu community to celebrate the harvest of crops
3. Chandi Naach, performed by the Rais during Udhauli and Ubhauli
4. Panchabuddha Nritya, a Buddhist dance that has to be performed by five people
5. Bhairab Nritya, where the dancer dances dressed as Bhairab
6. Khyali Naach
7. Gauna Nritya
8. Hanuman Nritya
9. Kaura Naach
10. Devi Nritya

Music is also an important element of Nepalese culture. It has been a source of manifestation of their emotions, telling of stories and also a form of entertainment. Just like dance, Nepalese music is also classified according to the community - the Tamangs, Gurungs, Sherpas, Maithilis, Newas, Kirats, Magars and Tharus each have their own distinct music and singers. Musical instruments like Madal, Dhimey, Panchai Baja and Sarangi often accompany the songs

Art and Craft of Nepal



If you visit a monastery in Nepal, you may find its walls adorned with beautiful and vibrant paintings. These are actually Thangka or Paubha paintings, depicting Hindu and Buddhist deities. Although traditionally they have been important elements of Nepal's culture, presently they are produced for the market as tourists love buying them as souvenirs. The handicrafts play a crucial part in the culture of Nepal as it defines the arts and crafts scene of the nation.

Handicrafts of Nepal:

These encompass a wide range of products including metal ware, pottery, textiles, wood and stone crafts, paper products, goods made out of beads, bones, horns, leather, bamboo and so on. The list seems endless, implying that you will never fall short of products to buy when in Nepal! While some of these things like metal statues of Gods and Goddesses, religious items such as bells and vajra, wood carvings, lokta paper and silver ornaments are being made since the first civilizations began in the country, the rest are relatively newer items. Among textiles, Pashmina and garments made of yak wool are noteworthy. Nepali artisans and craftsmen have earned respect and admiration for their work from people all over the world.

Architecture of Nepal



The **Pashupatinath Temple** in Kathmandu which attracts a multitude of tourists is one of the oldest examples of pagoda style architectures in the world, being built in the 1st century AD. It is even believed that a Nepali architect named Araniko was the first to introduce the pagoda style architecture in China. Other examples of this style include the Basantpur Palace and Changu Narayan Temple. Fine examples of stupa-style architecture are the famous Boudhanath and Swayambhunath stupas. Some stupas can also be spotted in Patan, built by emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC. The **Shikhara style** is another prominent style of architecture in the country - it includes a tall mountain peak-shaped tower containing stone or wood carvings. The Krishna Temple in Patan is an example of this style. In addition to these, the Newa style

that originated from the Newaris and the Mughal style can also be observed occasionally.

Cuisine of Nepal

Dal-bhaat is the staple food of all Nepalese irrespective of ethnicity. While bhaat refers to simple boiled rice, dal is lentil-based gravy. This is often accompanied by a vegetable curry termed tarkari. Other than this, there are some variations in the food consumed by different ethnic groups and also depending upon the region. Like for instance, people residing in the mountainous regions may substitute rice for other grains like wheat, maize, millets, cornmeal or barley.

Traditional Attire



The traditional apparel worn by the Nepali people are the **Daura-Suruwal** for men and **Gunyo-Cholo** for women and constitute a major portion in the culture of Nepal. The Daura is a type of double-breasted kurta worn on the upper body and fastened with eight strings, while the Suruwal is the trouser. It is worn with

a type of cap called Dhaka Topi and sometimes with a jacket or waistcoat too. Gunyo-Cholo consists of a cotton saree which is draped like a skirt on the lower body and worn with a blouse or Cholo and lots of traditional jewellery. When a Nepali girl turns seven, there is a tradition of gifting her dress to mark her coming of age. This dress is reserved for marriages, festivals and other special occasions.

Religion in Nepal



After officially being a Hindu kingdom for a long time, Nepal at present is a secular country giving equal importance to all religions and giving its citizens the freedom to practice the religion of their choice. Demographic data shows that the vast majority of Nepal's population is **dominated by Hindus** - a whopping 81.3% of the people follow the religion, followed by Buddhists who cover 9%, Muslims 4.4%, Kiratis (religion of some of the native Himalayan tribes) 3%, Christians 1.4% and the remaining 0.9% is composed of Jains,

Sikhs, Baha'is, Jews and also some people who do not follow any religion. Places of worship for all the religions exist in the country, and all the religions celebrate their own festivals. Great harmony and bonding are said to exist between the Hindu and Buddhist communities in Nepal to the extent that they share places of worship and celebrate festivals together. Lumbini in Nepal is, in fact, the birthplace of Lord Buddha and hence a very holy place for both the Hindus and the Buddhists

Language and Literature



Although **Nepali** is the national and official language of Nepal, it is actually a multi-lingual nation with each ethnic group conversing in its own distinct tongue. As many as 123 languages are spoken in Nepal - the most spoken ones being Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu and Tamang. Nepali language is written in the Devanagari script and has actually evolved from the ancient Sanskrit language.

Literature began to develop only since the 19th century with some notable Nepalis like Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Bhanubhakta Acharya, Bal Krishna Sam, Motiram Bhatta, Parijat and many others making a remarkable contribution to Nepali literature. Lyrical poetry, tragic dramas and short stories are some common forms of Nepali literature, and they deal with themes like social issues faced by the people, patriotism and love stories.

Primary Occupation of the Nepali Natives



Nepal is an agro-based economy implying that a majority of its population (around 70%) is engaged in **agriculture** and related work. Most of the farming takes place in the southern Terai plains and also in some of the lower hilly

areas. Fruits and vegetables, cereals like rice, wheat and maize, and tea are the main crops cultivated. The remaining 30% of the people are employed in the service sector and industries. You can already predict that tourism is an important industry in the country, being a pilgrimage site for Buddhists and Hindus, and not to forget the trekkers and mountaineers. Apart from these, people are also employed in financial institutions, transport sector, construction sector, and software sector in urban areas and engage in animal husbandry and fishery in rural areas.

That was all about the culture of Nepal. Despite having over a hundred different ethnic groups, there is a unity in diversity in the nation, thus truly making it a land of '*Never Ending Peace and Love*'.