

Nepal Dashain festival

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After the rituals of **Dashain** are over, then begin the merrymaking aspects of the festivals. From the 10th day onwards, people of Nepal visit their elders to receive tika and jamara in blessings and goodwill. It is also the festival of sumptuous feasting, especially of meat and beaten rice. It is the time of going home, reunion, meeting loved ones and strengthening ties with relatives and elders.

The eighth, ninth and the 10th days of Dashain are known as Maha, Astami, Maha Nawami and Dashami respectively. From ritualistic aspects, these three days are important, especially the eighth day.

On the eighth day, Goddess Kalaratri is worshipped. She is considered the fiercest embodiment of the Shakti goddesses. She is pictured as having a red face and blazing, bloodshot eyes. She carries Shiva's bow in one hand, and in the other she carries a skull. She drinks blood and chews on raw meat. The ferocious goddess who terrifies the whole universe holds death in her left hand and time in the right hand.

To please this goddess, special sacrifice or bali is offered to her at midnight. Similarly, puja and fire-offering ritual (yagya) are also performed in her honor. The goddess, though fierce in her demeanor, is believed to bestow peace, longevity and perpetual happiness to her worshippers.

On this day, official military sacrifices are performed at the Kot courtyard of the **Hanumandhoka Palace**. Fifty-four water buffaloes and another 54 goats are sacrificed to honor Shakti, the goddess of victory and military might. Military bands playing martial tunes accompany this ceremony. Gunfire also takes place to mark the ceremony.

Common people also offer sacrifice to their vehicles and machines on this day to ask Goddess Shakti to protect their vehicles and the riders against accidents and mishaps of all kinds. Those who do not offer animal sacrifice, dedicate their vehicles and machinery, duck eggs or coconuts instead.

On the ninth day or Maha Nawami, Goddess Shakti is revered as Maha Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and fortune. On this day, the temple of Taleju Bhawani, the Malla era temple at Hanumandhoka, is opened to the general public. The temple remains closed to public for the rest of the year. In the Hanumandhoka Palace, elephants and horses are also consecrated on this day.

The 10th day is called Dashami or Vijaya Dashami, the day commemorating Goddess Shakti killing the demon Mahisasur. Dashain rituals are concluded on this day and the Goddess is bid farewell and requested to bless the worshippers from her heavenly abode. Worshippers take the consecrated water from the holy ghata, the vessels installed on the first day that is Ghatathapana, and sprinkles it over himself as well as all the family members gathered to receive the goddess blessings by chanting special stotra.