

Tihar: Tihar, also known as Deepawali or the festival of lights, spans five days and celebrates various aspects of life. It includes worship of crows, dogs, cows, and the bond between brothers and sisters. The final day, Bhai Tika, honors sibling relationships with prayers and rituals.

Tihar is one of the most important festivals for Hindus in Nepal. Nepal is a small country between India and China. It has a population of about 23 million, most of whom are Hindu. The festival of Tihar takes place in late autumn and lasts for five days. This festival is also called the festival of lights. It is a time when all the houses light oil lamps, and the city is full of lights and decorations. This festival is about worshipping different animals such as the crow,<sup>1</sup> the dog, and the cow. During Tihar, the people also worship their brothers and sisters and the goddess of wealth, Laxmi. On the first day of the festival, people worship crows. Every family cooks a delicious meal in the morning. Before they eat, each member of the family puts some food on a plate of leaves and places it outside for the crows to eat. People believe crows are the messenger of the Lord of Death. They worship crows to keep sadness away. The second day, people worship dogs. They decorate dogs with garlands of flowers around their necks. They give dogs delicious food and put a red tika (a special powder) on their foreheads. They even do this to stray dogs. It is a day to respect all dogs. They pray for the dogs to guard their homes. Dogs with garlands of flowers can be seen everywhere. The third day is the most important day of the festival. Early in the morning, people start to worship the cow. The cow is the symbol of wealth and is the most holy animal for Hindus. They put tika on the cows' foreheads and a garland of flowers around their necks. They give the cows nice things to eat. People place the cows' manure in different parts of their houses. Later, in the evening, they worship the goddess Laxmi.

If people please the goddess, she will give them wealth. People clean and decorate their houses. They put oil lamps in every door and window. A female member of the family performs a special ceremony or puja. She then puts a red mud footprint on the floor entering the home and makes a trail to the room where the family worships the goddess. In this room, there are pictures and an icon of the goddess. There is also a money box where each year the family puts money away for the goddess. In the evening, girls go from door to door of their neighbors' homes and sing songs of the goddess. They receive gifts in return. The fourth day is a little different. The things people worship on this day depend on their cultural background. Most people worship the ox. They put tika on the oxen and a garland around their necks. They also give them delicious food. Other people make a small hill out of cow manure, put some grass on it, and perform a special ceremony, or puja, on it. Yet other people worship themselves.

The fifth day is the day of brothers and sisters. Sisters wish their brothers long life and prosperity. If you do not have a brother or sister, you can make one of your relatives or friends a brother or a sister. On this day, sisters will perform a puja and apply a special tika on their brothers. Then they put garlands around their brothers and give them special gifts of food. Brothers in return honor their sisters; they put garlands around their necks and give them gifts of clothes and money. This festival finally ends after five days of cooking, decorating, eating, singing, dancing, shopping, relaxing, gift giving, and worshipping. There is no doubt that Tihar is the most popular festival in Nepal.