

Akhi Jhyal, or "eye window," is a hallmark of traditional Newar architecture famous for its artistic complexity. The window design combines beauty, ventilation, and privacy, making it an integral part of domestic and religious buildings in the Kathmandu Valley. The most famous motif for this type of window is the peacock window, but other designs often incorporate religious and mythological themes. Akhi Jhyal windows are primarily carved from wood and usually appear as latticework. The intricacy of the carving often depicts various forms of nature, religious symbols, and sometimes scenes from mythology. The design allows the occupants of a house or temple to observe the outside world without being seen themselves, facilitating airflow and light inside the dark rooms of traditional homes. These windows have both functional and spiritual importance, sometimes considered the "eyes" of the house or temple, symbolizing the omnipresence of the divine, especially in temples where gods and goddesses are believed to reside. Several temples and traditional houses in Patan Durbar Square feature Akhi Jhyal windows. They are also found in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, particularly in historically preserved homes and temples. Though more commonly associated with Bhaktapur, the peacock window is one of the most famous designs and can also be found in variations in Patan. 'Aankhi' means 'from the eyes,' and 'Jhyal' means windows. Aankhi Jhyal simply means a window that lets you look out. The horizontally extended upper and lower edge frame of the window and the narrowed section in the middle where the opening gracefully lies almost looks like an eye. Historically, people believed Aankhi Jhyal to be their eye-protector, safeguarding their homes from evil spirits. The tradition of designing and carving Aankhi Jhyal has been carried on by the Newari people for centuries. Newari art is believed to have existed since the Newar people came to be, with some cultural scriptures tracing its roots back as long as two millennia. The earliest formally documented history records date back to the Licchavi Era from the 5th to 9th century. During this period, Nepal was in its golden era of flourishing art and architecture. The rulers utilized the artistic abilities of the Nepalese people to enhance trade strategies, and the works of the artisans were highly valued. The origins of Aankhi Jhyal are tied to stories about the rulers of the time, who commissioned local woodworkers to create aesthetically unique windows for their queens. These windows featured meaningful elements carved into them, providing a blend of privacy, functionality, and spiritual significance. As the trend spread, high-class families also began incorporating these designs into their homes, commissioning craftsmen to create entirely unique patterns, leading to a variety of designs in different regions. The Aankhi Jhyal is distinguished by its intricately carved wooden frame, showcasing a blend of geometric patterns, floral emblems, and figures of deities. These windows often have grids of

different sizes, curves, and patterns, allowing sunlight in and providing proper ventilation. The designs vary by location, reflecting the cultural diversity and artistic uniqueness of each region. Common designs include Sanjhya, Tikijhya, Gājhyā, and Pāsukhā Jhyā, each serving different aesthetic or functional purposes. The Aankhi Jhyal is distinguished by its intricately carved wooden frame, showcasing a blend of geometric patterns, floral emblems, and figures of deities. These windows often have grids of different sizes, curves, and patterns, allowing sunlight to enter while providing proper ventilation. The designs vary by location, reflecting the cultural diversity and artistic uniqueness of each region. Among the most common designs is the Sanjhya, which consists of three parts and is typically placed at the center of the house as a statement piece. These windows are often located on the third floor and can be easily opened, allowing occupants to gaze outside and engage with the surroundings. Another design, the Tikijhya, is the most prevalent form of Aankhi Jhyal. It features a grid-like structure that permits light and air to flow into the house while maintaining the privacy of those inside, usually positioned on the second floor. The Gajhya is primarily used as an ornamental feature or attic window, often placed just under the roof to enhance the visual appeal of the building. Finally, the Pasukha Jhya is a distinctive window design found in places of worship or shrines. It consists of five units symbolizing the Pancha Buddha, or the Five Buddhas, representing its spiritual significance. These variations in design not only highlight the architectural beauty of the Aankhi Jhyal but also demonstrate its adaptability to different functional and cultural contexts, making it a unique feature of Newar architecture. The craft of making Aankhi Jhyal is a traditional occupation of Newari communities, especially the Shilpakars. These artisans are trained by generations of master crafters, using special tools, some of which they make or modify themselves. The windows are created by interlocking carved wood pieces with minimal use of other supports, requiring years of training and patience to achieve precision. Akhi Jhyal, beyond its aesthetic value, holds cultural and spiritual significance. The intricate carvings symbolize protection and beauty, reflecting the artistry of the Newar people. These windows have been a staple in temples, palaces, and traditional homes across the Kathmandu Valley for centuries, representing a fusion of artistic expression and functional architecture passed down through generations of woodworkers. As the modern era advances, efforts are being made to preserve this unique craftsmanship and ensure its survival for future generations.