

Cross-cultural Significance and Impact of the Gaura Festival: A Comparative Study between Sudurpashchim Province (Nepal) and Uttarakhand (India)

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Abstract

The Gaura festival, deeply rooted in the Himalayan region, particularly in Nepal and Uttarakhand, India, is explored in this article for its religious, cultural, and social significance. Celebrated in Sudurpaschim and Karnali Provinces of Nepal and Uttarakhand province in India, the festival is integral to the Manas Pradesh region, where Vedic beliefs intricately merge with the festivities. Honoring the inseparable bond of Lord Shiva and Parvati, Gaura festival's boundaries are defined by the Mahakali or Sharda River, shaping its observance. The article underscores the festival's role in promoting religious tourism while preserving Vedic traditions amid modern challenges. The research delves into the festival's connection with Vedic values, providing a crucial link to the region's glorious past, often overlooked by the youth. Utilizing qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and historical study, the paper emphasizes Gaura festival's unique position in maintaining Vedic purity amidst distortions in other celebrations. Serving as a cultural bridge, Gaura Parva holds a special place in the hearts of Himalayan inhabitants, embodying a harmonious blend of their heritage, religious convictions, and the lush natural environment.

Keywords: *Gaura-Maheshwor, Manas Pradesh, Shiva-Parvati, Sudurpashchim, Uttarakhand*

Introduction

Gaura means bright, white, pure, clean, beautiful, auspicious, and the source of good fortune. As a symbol of Gauri – Maheswor(Shiv-Parvati) marriage, Gaura or Gamara festival is celebrated across the Kali/ Mahakali/ Sharada River which stands as the

boundary river between Nepal and India in the Hindu month of Bhadra generally in the Shukla Paksha. The origin of this river is sacred Kailash Mansarovar in the high Himalayas. This festival falls in the Hindu month of Bhadra. Gaura worshipping is mentioned in Bhavishya Puran as "*BhadreshuklpadeBhadresaptyamsalilasaye/ Snattvashivammandalkelekhityivasahambikam// (Pant,2072, p.73).*

The festival represents purity, simplicity, family unity, mutual love, and a source of inspiration for a happy married life. It is a shared grand celebration in Nepal and India. Today, it is essential to emphasize the social and cultural significance of the Gaura festival celebrated in Western Nepal and Uttarakhand, India, rooted in the Vedas. This festival is now celebrated with great enthusiasm in both regions, supported by their respective provincial and federal governments. Sudurpashchim and Karnali provinces of Western Nepal are rich in religious and cultural traditions, boasting stunning natural landscapes. Similarly, Uttarakhand shares a similar natural beauty and culture. People on both sides of the Mahakali River share religious, economic, social, and cultural connections. They worship Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati as Maheshwor and Gaura. In Uttarakhand, this festival is known as *Gaura/Sataun -Aathaun or Gamara*. The festival is as a symbol of social and cultural unity, promoting religious, social, economic, cultural, and ecotourism ties between Nepal and India. This can help to preserve culture and improve the economic well-being of the people on both sides.

The Gaura festival has Vedic roots. During this festival, the process of making idol from the paddy field involves *bratalu*(fasted) women collecting a special grass called *sau* from paddy fields. They create three idols: *Loli*, *Ganga*, and *Sanjya Gaura*. One Gaura is placed in the well and worshipped, and then *Sanjya Gaura* is brought in, and both idols of Gauras are mixed with *Loli Gaura*. The Puja is performed only for *Loli Gaura* (representing Parvati) and *Maheshwor* (Shiv). Thus, *Loli Gaura* is considered as *Gaura* (G. S. Acharya, personal communication, January 5, 2023). Maina is considered the mother, and *Parvat* or the *Himalay* is considered the father of Gaura. But in *Gaura jag / songs* Maharaj Roop Narayan is mentioned as father of Gaura. The folklore of *Gaura-Maheshwor* marriage explores the dynamics of introducing a second wife into the household, offering sociological insights. The nurturing of Ganesh born from *Gaura's* story is also intriguing from a sociological perspective (Joshi, 2062, p.45). Every child needs nurturing from his/ her parents and relatives. Lacking proper caring of the child, it causes severe psychological and social problems in the life so in the above context Gaura as a mother teaches her son Ganesh the ways of social behavior when he will grow up.

Not only Gaura festival but all other feasts and festivals have scope of developing tourism and these events need to be connected with remedy of development of the concerned regions. In Sudur Paschim people usually do not use the term Gaura Festival or Parv but instead it is just called “Gaura” as “I am going home for Gaura”. It shows its impact on the people that in almost families people sew new clothes at this occasion and most of the persons who have gone out of country, come back on this occasion of Gaura to celebrate it with their family members. The transaction of people in this time, certainly increases the circulation of money in the society which is beneficiary for the national economy. If decision makers pay more attention towards religious tourism, it will give a boost to the earning of the concerned people too.

Despite its natural beauty and cultural heritage, the Sudurpaschim province faces developmental challenges, including limited infrastructure, access to education, and healthcare services. Efforts are underway to improve the livelihoods of the local communities and promote sustainable tourism in the area. Gaura Festival may be very fruitful to promote Nepali and foreign tourists (D.C. Bhatt, personal communication, January 2, 2023).

The potential for eco and religious tourism in Sudurpashchim Province and Uttarakhand, due to cultural and geographical similarities, is vast. Preserving traditional cultures and environments is crucial for the economy and cultural heritage of this region. However, academia has overlooked this aspect. This paper sheds light on the joint festival of Gaura and emphasizes the cultural connectivity between Nepal and India. By promoting pilgrimage visits from both sides, the economy can prosper and cultural preservation can be enhanced. Thus, the study has not only significance of connectivity of Gaura with Vedic Traditions, it has economic values too.

Main Objectives of this research paper are to highlight the religious, cultural, and social significance of the shared Gaura festival between Sudurpashchim Nepal and Uttarakhand, especially the Kumaon Region, India and emphasize the role of Gaura Festival in promoting religious, cultural and ecotourism and validating the Vedic tradition in the modern context.

Methods and Design

This study employs qualitative research method to comprehensively investigate the cultural and religious significance of the Gaura Festival. Fifteen persons in Khatima, Uttarakhand and thirty persons in Mahendranagar, Kanchanpur were interviewed about

Gaura festival and its celebration area, those respondents provided a comprehensive insight into personal experiences, historical context, and rituals. Visual and audio data collection enhanced insights. Historical documents, scholarly literature, and ancient texts were reviewed to trace the festival's roots and evolution over time. Collected data underwent rigorous organization and analysis, identifying themes and patterns through qualitative techniques. A comparative research approach highlighted differences and shared traditions between Nepal and India, enriching the understanding of the festival's cultural diversity. Ethnographic methods fostered an insider's perspective by immersing in local culture and engaging in participant observation. The study assessed the festival's role in strengthening cultural ties, promoting intercultural exchange, tourism, and regional development. Library was used to collect the data related with Vedas, Puranas and articles related with Gaura festival and rituals.

Results and Discussion

There has been great influence of Hinduism in every feast and festival of Sudurpashchim and Uttarakhand. All rituals and *sanskar* are related with ancient Sanskrit Literature and Vedas (Kalauni, B.S. 2063, p.28). Sudurpaschim Nepal and Uttarakhand (Manas Khand) are known for their rich cultural heritage; celebrate a variety of festivals throughout the year. The main festivals of this region are as; *Makar Sankranti, Shivaratri, Holi, Dasai / Navratri, Tihar / Diwali, Magh Mela / Maghe Sankranti, Baisakhi / Vishuvatsankranti and Gaura / Gamaraetc.*

It is important to note that festivals of Sudurpaschim and Uttarakhand are often deeply rooted in their culture, mythology and natural surroundings. While the above list includes some of the major festivals celebrated in the states, there are numerous local and regional festivals that vary from one community to another (observed). Gaura Parv may be compared with *Teej Parv* of Hindu women but like *Teej* not only women celebrate Gaura, children and men also actively participate in it but mostly women's role is prominent in this festival as said;

Gaura Parva is a female-dominated festival celebrated by fasted women, although men also participate in it. In this festival the married women keep vrat / fast for good fortune, children and their husbands' good health, life and good wishes (Pant, 2062, p. 73)

Gaura; Great Culture and Civilization of Great Himalayas

Gaura Parvais mainly celebrated by worshipping Shiva - Parvati, gives a glimpse of the *Dashain* festival of eastern Nepal, its importance is also the same as the *Dashain* festival of the east (Joshi, B.S. 2062, p.71). The tradition of beating the *biruda* of Gaura as well as *Tika Thape* of *Dashai* is its own specialty of this festival. Especially for the women, after fasting and worshipping Gaura Devi, *biruda* is given as an offering to all the members of the family after worshipping them. During the months of *Shravan* and *Bhadra*, its rejoicing takes place in the village. During the night, they enjoy singing songs and playing *dyuda*. In this festival, songs of different languages, rhythms, *dhuska*, *fag*, *dhamari*, *deudaetc* are celebrated by singing and dancing in different tunes and rhythms (Joshi, 2072, p.1). It represents the rich culture and civilization of the Himalayas. Its history dates back as far as the Himalayas themselves. The central figure of the Gaura festival is Goddess Parvati, known as Gaura or Gamara in the Manas Khand region, which combines the cultural heritage of Western Nepal and Uttarakhand, Bharat(India). The people of Manas Khand are considered the descendants of the land of Gods and Goddesses, making it a place renowned as the land of Shiv-Parvati or Shiv Shakti, / Gaura-Maheswor. The culture of a place reflects the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Discussing the importance of *Vedic/Sanatan* culture, Balkrishna says,

The real power of making man human is in eternal culture. This culture teaches us that man should love man, not fight and quarrel with each other. To have good will for all in the heart, to lead a life with moderate honesty, to strive for the welfare of others, to use speech only for good purposes, to live by just earnings, to remember God, to stick to the path of duty, to follow these rules even in favorable and unfavorable circumstances. By doing, life becomes sacrificial. Making human life successful is true intelligence and foresight. Our civilization and culture is our identity (Balkrishna, 2016, p.101).

Manas Khand worships Shiv Shakti in various forms, and many sacred places are associated with it. The Gaura festival in SudurpaschimNepal and Uttarakhand's Kumaon region celebrate the marriage of Lord Shiv and Goddess Parvati, also known as Shiv Shakti. The celebration of the divine marriage highlights the inseparable union of Shiv and Parvati (Gaura Maheswor) and symbolizes the sacred and eternal bond of marriage in Vedic culture. Hindu magazine '*Kalyan*' writes on Hindu marriage:

Among the Aryan caste, the marriage ceremony is the biggest classical ritual, which is considered to be related not only to this world, but to every world after world. Among other civilized castes of the earth and followers of different religions, marriage is not a permanent ritual, nor is its relationship accepted even after death. Nothing has been considered in them except the fulfillment of sensual pleasures and the attainment of temporary pleasures in this life. Divorce is a common thing among them; But marriage in Aryan culture –There can be no separation (Samvat, 2064, p. 45).

Areas of Celebration Gaura/Gamara

In Nepal and Uttarakhand, the festival celebrating God Shiv and Goddess Parvati is known as *Gaura Parvin* Nepal and mostly *Gamara* in Uttarakhand. It is celebrated in all nine districts of Sudur Paschim. For last some years, people of Sudurpaschim have started celebrating *Gaurain* Kathmandu also. In Karnali, Gaura celebration is mainly limited to *deuda* playing. In Uttarakhand, it is observed in districts like Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Champawat, Udham Singh Nagar, Almora, and Nainital. Gaura/Gamara is closely associated with the River Mahakali or Sharada, and its impact varies with proximity to the river, resulting in unique local traditions.

The entire region, culturally known as *Manas Pradeshor Manas Khand*, considers Gaura a significant festival. *Manas Khand* is described in Sakand Puran as;

*Nandaparvatmarabhyayavatkakagirisamou
TavadvaiManaskhandaKhyaiteNripasattam(Manas Puran).*

In Sudurpaschim Province, Gaura has been mostly celebrating as Purn Prakash "Yatri" says,

Durvastami is the biggest religious festival of this region. Some people call this festival Gaura Utsav, some call it Bhuva Utsav. In this festival, girls are called Maita. On the day of Ashtami, relatives and friends gather together and perform Durva Puja in every house, everyone wears new clothes and eats sweets and treats. On the occasion of this festival, they experience joy by singing deuda, dhola, and playing vertical games for several days. Cheli Beti Maiti and other relatives get together and celebrate this festival which is considered to be the famous festival of the year. Mythologists call this fast Gaurivrat. However, there is not much difference between Gaurivrat and Durva fast. Upasana and Pooja Katha seem almost the same (Yatri, 2033, p. 89).

In quoted citation, *Yatri* writes that some people call it *Bhuwa Utsav*. But *Bhuwa* is quite different than Gaura festival. *Bhuwa* or *Bhuvo* festival is mainly associated with Mahabharat and it is celebrated in the Hindu month of Paush. While Gaura is celebrated in Bhadra.

Gaura Parv (Festival) is closely associated with the rigorous penance of Parvati, who took on the form of Gaura in her quest to make Maheshwor her husband. She spared no effort to win his love and affection. Maheshwor, however, initially tried to dissuade Parvati from pursuing this idea. In the end, Shiva revealed his true form, and both Parvati and Shiva were overjoyed to unite in marriage. While there are numerous stories connected to this festival, this particular narrative is well-recognized in the *Puranas* and *Lok Dharm*.

At the beginning of the ninth century, it seems that *Adi Shankaracharya* visited this area along with his disciple congregation after establishing the *Badrikashram* *Peetha* during *Digvijaya* to reduce the growing influence of *Buddhism* in this region and for the propagation of *Vedic Dharm*. *Dewals* have been built in different places as evidence. They are in Telihat, Champawat, Lohaghat, Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand and correspondingly, there are five *Dewals* in Baitadi, Devalhat, three in Dadeldhura, Pilkot, three in Doti, Dehimandau, five in Kaphalle Kheema, four in Achham, Kuchi Vinayak. There are five temples in Darna Kot as well as Dailekh and Jumla. It is proven that *Shankaracharya* propagated the *Vedic Dharm* in this area and initiated the rulers and scholars here and there in the *Vedic Dharm*. Therefore, the scholars of Doti, Kumaon and Garhwal regions have adapted their ancient culture to the Vedic system. During this festival, women wear *Kantha Sutra* (*Sharma, 2062, p. 33*).

Gaura vrat is not only a fast for Parvati, but it is a fast for all the three forms of Mahalakshmi born from the body of Gauradevi, i.e. Gaura of well (Naula) named *Ganga*, *Sanjagaura* (Evening time *Gaura*) named as *Mahasaraswati*, *Loli Gaura* named as *Mahakali*, *Jamuna* (*Ganga*, interview). The source of *Gaura* literature is the mythological religious stories and Vedic literature. Especially, the idol of *Gaura* to be worshiped is made of green grass and worshiped with *PanchViruda* (five sprouted grains).

According to historian *Devi Prasad Ojha*;

It is based on a story from the Bhavishya Purana. It describes how Daksha's daughter Kali jumped into the fire leaving the black color on the green grass

and later she became Gauri and did penance to Mahadev and got Mahadev as her husband. After leaving the black colour, and becoming as Katyayani on green grass, Deities were very happy and they gave boon that those who will worship to her from the sprouts of seven grains, they will be full of prosperity, happiness and long age. This first story tradition of Sanskrit literature is only the cornerstone of the method of celebrating the Gaura in the Sudurpaschim. Amuktabharana Saptami also has a provision to worship Shankar and Gauri, so there is no doubt that the five-day religious festival of Gaura Parva is completed according to scriptures in a religious manner, Amuktabharana Saptami is considered an integral part of Gora Parva (Ojha, 2062, p. 37).

Festivals have special importance in human life. Gaura Parv is one of the most important festivals celebrated in the Sudurpaschimand Kumaon region of Uttarakhand.

The story of Shrimad Devi Bhagwat Mahapurana is particularly noteworthy in terms of when this festival started. According to the chronicles of the 16th and 17th chapter of the said Purana, King Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna, who was born in the Haihaya vamsa in ancient times, was a devotee of Devi and also very generous. Gauri Pujan is related with him too as;

Haihaya NirdhnaJata Kalen Mahata Nrip (Shridhar, 2062, p.73)

"Gauri" is mentioned in Shreemad Devi Bhagawat as;

Bhrigupanyo yada rajanhimwantamgirimgata.....Gauritratrasusnthpya....
(Shreemad Devi Bhagawat, 6/17/5-6, Shreedhar,2062, p.73).

When observing the first fast for Gaura, women seek permission from Goddess Gauri, asking her for blessings during the fast;

"Ail ko gauravaratmuilolilailino

MahesworGusaihamaravinati suni diy

Khojidiypanchbirudigusai

Silai DiyKapada..... "(Kalauni, 2017, p.7)

The *Aathu* festival preparations begin on Biruda Panchami, with women bathing, singing auspicious songs, and consecrating and soaking pulses in a copper vessel. Idol of Gamara-Maheshworis decorated with special grass on the third day and paraded

while singing. These idols are worshipped on different days, with fasting on Saptami and Ashtami. A strict Vatra fast on Ashtami involves not eating cooked food. The fast is broken with SaptadhanyaBiruda. Men and women sing traditional folk songs, and Maheshworidol are immersed in the temple. Some places organize Hiljatra, featuring mask dances. The Aathun festival is a joyous time with new clothes, visits to maternal homes, and sacred rituals (Joshi, 2062, p.76).

According to Tikaram Bhatt;

In the mythological period, there are instances when Janaknandini Sita, Draupadi and other princesses worshiped Gaura before marriage to get a suitable groom and get good luck, but the basic characteristic of a married woman is to observe the Gaura fast (Vrat) for life and follow Kanthasutra for years. The tradition of wearing (dubdhago) is found only here (Bhatt, 2062, p.27).

Before *Durbashtami*, on *Saptami Tithi*, women tie *Saptamya* (thread with seven knots) around their necks. *Saptamya* represents *Lakshmi*. There is an opinion that Lakshmi originated from seven *Rishis*. Development of feeling that Lakshmi should dwell in the neck (Dharanidhar, 2062, p.42). The basic philosophy behind this festival and worshipping Shiv and Parvati as Gaura Maheswor is to establish balance between Shiv (Welfare) and Gaura (Power). Both elements are equally important for the human race (Kalauni, 2062, p.60).

Significance of Gaura for All

This women-centric festival emphasizes purity and unity, with people of all ages coming together to celebrate with new attire, feasts and joy. This festival is very inclusive which includes all genders, rich and poor people, all types of classes and casts.

Harish Prasad Joshi says about Gaura parv;

There is no caste discrimination in Gaura festival. Gaura's offerings are eagerly accepted by people of all castes. Birudas are distributed to many neighboring villagers believing that it will be good. When throwing the fruits (throwing offerings of fruits and vegetables towards the sky on a stool or sheet) men and women of all castes, children leave their hands, hats, clothes and take as prasadi' to home. In Deuda, Gidara and Khelkari are playing without

any discrimination, mixing language and essence. Damau, dholak, bhokkar, bekul, mizra etc. instruments are played together. The jhakri (dhami) can be of any caste and the dhami distributes prasad to everyone. Gaura festival is celebrated as a festival of social harmony, brotherhood and unity without caste discrimination. Animal sacrifice is not made during the festival (Joshi, 2062, p. 79),

Celebration of Gaura

The Gaura festival spans from the fifth day of the bright half (Shukla Paksha) of the Bhadra month to the eighth day. Various events are organized during the festival. On the first day, married women observing the Gaura festival fast and sing traditional songs, immersing five types of grains, namely Gurus, Gahat, Kalou, Mas (Urad), and wheat in water. These grains are collectively known as biruda and they are ritualistically soaked in water while songs are sung in a rhythmic prayer. The act of soaking biruda, called fag, a long rhythm based on socio-cultural song is carried out to purify these grains. An example of fag is like this;

“अइल को नौलो वरत मुइ लोली लै लिनौ,

महेश्वर गुसाई हमरा विनती सुणी दिय खोजी दिय पंच बिरुडी गुसाई, सिलाई दिय कपडा

(-observed).

On another day, during the Gaura festival, all the fasting women who have observed the Gaura Mantra immerse the soaked biruda into a sacred and pure place in a river or pond with great respect. on that day, people decorate the Gaura shrine with offerings, raise divine songs, and play musical instruments like the madal or dhol to celebrate the joyous occasion. Gaura worship takes place in homes or temples.

Critic writer Tikaram Bhatt says about Gaura Parv;

Gaura or Gamara, known by various names, is renowned for celebrating the divine entities like Laxmi Narayan, Radha Krishna, and Uma Maheshwor, as the role models for our lives, emphasizing enduring marital bliss, prosperity, and other virtues. In the age of truth, Gaura festival symbolizes the hope of attaining unbroken and eternal happiness. It is celebrated with great devotion to achieve a happy and blessed life, just like Lord Shiva and Parvati, who obtained their divine union on these days (Bhatt, 2062, p. 27).

In the making dance of Gaura idol, fasted women use to sing faglike following:

“नाच नाच लोली गौरा तमेइ बटिय नाच
तमारा नाचन ध्येकी तब हमे नाचु
नाच नाच लौली गौरा नंचलैन नांचु“ (–observed).

When this song or fag is sung, people twist their waists and move their heads back and forth five times in a row, deeply engrossed in the rhythm.

In a similar manner, on the fifth day, after soaking five grains, the soaked Biruda from the previous day, women observe fasts, wear clean clothes, adorn themselves completely, and join with their maternal relatives, friends, and families to the nearby stream or well to immerse the biruda. This action is performed while singing auspicious songs. After soaking the biruda, they return home and place the dried *birudaon* the banana leaves in the room where the worship takes place on the seventh day. The tasks of the *Gaura Puja* on the seventh day are completed during the nighttime. On the next day, namely Durvashtami, all women visit the Gaura temple or Gaura house and start singing *Aathwali (Aaithau)* with the Gaura idol placed in the courtyard. *Aathwali* holds as much importance as *Vedic* hymns. This song narrates the religious story sung in eight parts, starting from the life of *Maharaj Rup Narayan* and *Queen Mainawati* to the marriage of their daughter Gaura with Lord Mahadev and the birth of their son Ganesh.

According to the story, when Ganesh is born and raised, Gaura expects from her mother-in-law that she will look after to Ganesh and Gaura is tension free, as in Doteli language bratalu (fast keepers) sing this *Aathwali* as follows:

हल्लोरी री बाला हल्लोरी, हल्लोरी बाला हल्लोरी
यो मेरो बालो (बच्चा) लिसिनो लोटलो ज्युले
लिसिनो लोटलो सासुज्युले हेरी दिथ्यो बालो
हेरी दिथ्यो नंदुज्युले हेरी दिथ्यो बालो
हेरी दिथ्यो बालो हल्लोरी बाला हल्लोरी ।
सासुज्यु काँ गए बाला नंदुज्यु काँ गए ॥ (–observed).

Nurturing babies and concerns about their childish activities are top priorities for mothers. In this context, Gaura is deeply anxious about her son Ganesh, so she

decides to keep him in the care of her mother-in-law. In response to this situation, Nara Joshi pens down her thoughts;

In a joint family, everyone, including the mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and others, come together to care for and consider the child. This reflects our Vedic or Sanatani philosophy that emphasizes that living together as a family is not just about a single family but is the wealth of society and the nation. This system demonstrates that just as in the family of Lord Shiva and Parvati, differences in roles exist, but everyone cooperates and lives together. In a nuclear family with an only child, children's minds remain underdeveloped. How can a child's holistic development be achieved? This is what mothers should understand and learn from others. Gaura, on her motherly pages, teaches that she should learn what role each family member played during his childhood. Gaura, tells her son Ganesh that when he grows up, he should go to his grandmother's and auntie's house..... (Joshi, 2062, p.46).

But there are some contradictions in Hallori Bala Hallori song. Gaura asks her son Ganesh that when he grows up, it is his duty to visit his grandmother and auntie. I think this is a local story, and the idea that Ganesh should visit his grandmother is not suitable because Shiv or Maheshwor was not born, so there is no question of him meeting his mother, as Gaura suggests to Ganesh.

Ashtavali or Eight Sections of Gaura Festival

During the evening, women who have observed the *Gaura vrat* perform the Gauri Puja with the soaked *biruda*. The special day of Gaura festival is *Athwali* or "*Aathau*" when Gaura festival celebrations start early in the morning. On this day, women wear new clothes, adorn themselves according to their ability, and prepare for the Gauri Puja, a festival symbolizing the joy of the divine union of Shiva and Parvati. They place the idols of Gaura Devi and Maheshwor in separate areas and dance around them, sometimes in a slow and graceful manner. After this, Gaura Devi is worshiped, and the accumulated *biruda*, along with other offerings, is tied in a bundle and placed on the heads of devotees who carry it overhead. This process is repeated five times and is known as *Fal Fatkaune* (Lekhak, 2062, p.5). At the concluded day of this festival and worshipping, the idol of Gaura is placed in a holy place as under the *peepal* tree etc. This festival represents its essence in the form of the *Aathwali* or *Aathau* song. From *Biruda Panchami* to the full moon, this festival continues for ten days, and women

create and collect these songs. These songs are based on the foundation of the *Shruti* tradition, the wisdom of *Smriti*, and the stories of *Puranas*, history, and the *Vedas*. In brief, *Athevali(Nari Ved)* is presented as follows (Gaura Maheswor, 2062).

First Aavali

In the first Aavali, people remember various deities, including their own *IshtaDevata* (personal deity). This section involves the recollection of various gods and symbols of truth, knowledge, and celestial bodies like the Sun, Moon, and rivers such as Ganga and Yamuna, Saraswati.

Second Aavali

The second Aavali mentions the wedding of Rup Narayan (Himalaya) and Maina. Maina is described as she becoming pregnant. As a daughter of Rup Narayan and Maina, Gaura is born. The coincident of marriage of Maheshwor and Gaura happens.

Third Aavali

In the third Aavali, the birth of a daughter and naming her Gaura as per the horoscope, indicating that she would be very fortunate and attain the status of the wife of God.

Fourth Aavali

The fourth Aavali describes the *annaprasana* ceremony when the daughter turns six months old. After the girl becomes eligible for marriage at the age of eight, Gaura expresses her desire to perform penance in front of her father, while she undertakes severe meditation at the banks of the Ganga.

Fifth Aavali

In this section, Maheshwor tests Parvati at the riverbanks, while Gaura waits, playing her *veena*. After a series of disguises, Maheshwor reveals his true identity and Gaura tells him that Maina is her mother, Rup Narayan is her father and Damodar is her brother. Knowing all those things Shankar becomes happy and he puts marriage proposal ahead Gaura. Gaura's mother and father reach there and secret marriage accomplishes. Later for the formal marriage, Maheshwor decides to go and request to Gaura's father at her home.

Sixth Aavali

Shankar, in the form of a Badubhat, asks Gaura the road that leads to her house. She initially creates excuses, but Shankar reveals his true form. He returns to ask her parents for her hand in marriage, and after receiving their consent, the formal marriage is decided on Bhadra Saptami.

Seventh Aavali

Gaura's wedding day is the most important part of the seventh Aavali. On Bhadra Saptami, on Tuesday, the news is confirmed. All the deities are invited, and they arrive with their own vehicles, wearing all their ornaments. So, this day is called *amuktabharansaptami*. On this day as the blessings or Prasad of Gaura, saptamiya and dubdhago are worn by the bratalu women. Like the sacred thread; *janeu*, *dubdhago* and *saptmya* have the same importance. Thus, in this awali, the preparation of Gaura Maheswor wedding is mentioned.

Eighth Aavali

In the last section, Gaura and Maheshwor (Shiva) have a post-wedding meal. The groom offers various jewels to the bride, and then the wedding ceremony of Gaura and Maheshwor concludes. After the marriage, they go to Kailash, live with pleasure, and later they have a son called Ganesh.

Gaura or Gamara is a grand festival with multiple dimensions, and it is a time for jubilation and celebration for people of all ages. It symbolizes the bright, hopeful, and prosperous aspects of life, just as Lord Shiva and Parvati found happiness and blessings in their union. The idols of Gaura Devi and Maheshwor are placed in different rooms, and women dance around them, even performing slow and graceful dances. After this, the celebration of Gaura Devi worshipped and the carrying of offerings over devotees' heads take place, symbolizing the transfer of blessings and good fortune. This process is repeated five times and is known as *falfatkaune*, which means offering the fruits.

Significance of Deuda Khel in Gaura

In western Nepal and Uttarakhand, the main attraction of the Gaura festival is *deudakhel* and Gaura songs. Gaura festival is a unique festival known for its folk music and dance. Deuda players, who are celebrated poets and songwriters, make an essential contribution to the preservation of folk literature and culture. People of

all ages are enthusiastic about Deuda, a sport that brings out various facets of life and the world. It's a subtle art, and deuda players, as well as poets and writers, play a significant role in the preservation of folk literature and culture. They bring to light many hidden aspects of life.

Many people confuse between Gaura Festival and deuda game. Actually, deuda may be played in any happy environment but Gaura cannot be celebrated everywhere and every time. Deuda is a small part of Gaura but Gaura is not a part of Deuda. Views of Jayraj Pant on deuda;

After taking one step back and forths, take another step in between and sung a song while dancing is called Deuda. Even if it is sung without dancing in the dance style, the songs of a certain style of composition are called Deuda. Although some critics argue that it is called Deuda because it is sung in a question and answer style, starting with Deu, that is, the praise of the deity, it is actually named after the style of dance, and it is province and has become famous in the national and international world. Doti is generally understood by Nepali people to mean the place where the song is sung. Although the songs and sagas like Sagun, Phag, Chait, Dhamari, Chachari, Bharat are very rich in historical, cultural, social and linguistic terms, they have many types of rhythms, love and more singing time and freedom of singing style. Deuda are traditionally and spontaneously sung songs by gidardaras / poets(Pant,2069-70). Dhumarigames arealso played especially in some hilly districts (Bajhang, Baitadi) for enjoyment during Gamara festival (Joshi, 2058,p.42).

Significance of Biruda in Gaura Festival

In Vedic culture *panch* has been used in many ways as five gods; *panchadev* etc and likewise panchor five grains have great importance in this festival and worshipping too. Without five following important grains, Gaura worshipping is not imagined.

PanchBiruda

Botanical table of these five grains is given below:

S.N.	Name	Botanical Name	Family
1.	Mas	Phaseolus Mungo	Leguminosal
2.	Gurans	Phareolus sp.	Leguminosal

3.	Gahat	Delochus biflorus	Leguminosal
4.	Kerau/Kalau	Pisum sativum	Leguminosal
5.	Gahu (Wheat)	Truticum aestivum	Graminate

(Source: Joshi, 2062, p.42).

PanchBiruda (five grains) are used in the worship of Maheshwor and Gaura. This religious festival has religious and spiritual significance on the one hand, while on the other hand, it has specific scientific significance also. *Kalau* (Kerau) is tasty, mas / gram is nutritious and rich, dense Ayurvedic) and tasteless *Guruns* (Gurauns) are also Ayurvedic and *Thantari* (Khallo) pulses, corn and wheat are accepted as confirmatory grains. *Panchakarmandriya*, *PanchaGnanendriya*, *Panchamrit*, *Pancha Pallava*, *Pancha Ratna*, *Pancha Gavya*, *Pancha Mitra*, *Pancha Meva*, *PanchaPakwan*, *Pancha Phal* etc are necessary in the worship of the true power of Gaura, i.e. the bright light of glory.

The Religious Concept of Biruda

The *biruda* used in the Gaura festival is expressed in the following form in the religious perspective. As the human body is made up of five elements, there is a mythological belief that five grains are mixed together to worship these five elements. Gaura shows the adjustment of immaterial and material objects. Germinated *birudas* are worshiped from the feet to the head of the family members, society and friends. It is clear from this that it grows like a seed and develops the concept of long life, prosperity and all-round development. For social reasons, social harmony is achieved by worshipping *biruda*. After the Gaura Pujan is over, the five grains used by women, is still used as a fruit bowl. Fruits in *Gaura* are *biruda*. These grains used in almost families are easily available in every household. The concept of giving recognition to *biruda*, is found to be held by religious scholars. As grains are the lifeblood of human life, the five grains are used in the worship material, according to religious practitioners (Joshi, 2062, p.42).

Worshipping Heads

At the conclusion of the Gaura celebration, the senior women of the family perform a revered ritual known as *biruda*, wherein they offer their blessings to the heads of the family. This ritual holds immense significance as it serves as a unifying force, bringing together family members who may have traveled from afar, sometimes even from foreign lands. During this poignant moment, the elderly women of the family, known

as *bratalu*, bestow their blessings upon each individual, symbolically starting from their feet and moving up to their heads, wishing them long, healthy, and prosperous lives (observation). The blessing of that time is like following;

दुबी चौड बसी रानी सूरज पुजन्नी ।

पुज्याका सूरिज गुसाई क्यारे बर दिना ।

पुज्याका सूरिज गुसाई धारतापु ।

घामुरे तमौन्ना गुसाई सबै बर दिन्ना ।

चौकी माई बसी लोली पुरुख पुजन्नी ।

पुज्याका पुरुख गुसाई क्यारे बर दिन्ना ।

पुज्याका पुरुख गुसाइ जरम्यो जीउन्ना ।

Making Play to Gaura (गौराको पुतला खेलाउदै)

नाच हो खेल हो लोली गमरा देवी धेइ तेरो कसो नाच

हल्लोरी बाला हल्लोरी

नाईकु नाच्यानु पर्ईक नाच्यानु त मेरीलोली नाचू नाई आउनु - हल्लोरी.....(Joshi, 2072, p=49).

Vedic Message Emphasizing Gender Equality and Echo Balance

The Gaura conveys a profound Vedic message emphasizing gender equality and the balance of masculine and feminine energies. It underscores the importance of nature worship and environmental preservation in the face of growing ecological concerns. This festival is recognized when there is greenery everywhere in the environment and the idols made of it saw grass which is found only in the rainy season, so, this festival is equally important environmentally as it is important on the basis of religiously and socially. Gaura fosters community unity, promoting communal harmony and inclusivity, vital in today's fragmented society. The festival's rituals symbolize deep devotion and spiritual mindfulness, offering solace in our fast-paced modern lives. Gaura is a significant cultural event, preserving traditional music, dance, attire, and art forms, highlighting the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage. Gaura festival incorporates nature centric themes and rituals that promote environmental awareness and sustainability. For example, festival includes the worship of nature elements such as fire, water, and earth and grass. Additionally, practices like tree worshipping during festival contribute to environmental conservation. The festival emphasizes the importance of coexistence and harmony with nature. For instance, it is celebrated in the

rainy season when farmers are in rest, when there is greenery everywhere highlighting the connection between humans and the environment. This festival promotes gratitude and respect for the Earth, fostering a sense of responsibility towards the environment.

In Sudurpaschim, there is great potential for ecotourism with attractions like Shukla Fata Wild Reserve area, *Vedkot Tal*, suspension bridge of Dhodhara Chandani, *GhodhaGhodiTal*, *Api Himal* and numerous other tourist destinations. These and likewise other such places are not yet highlighted in the reference of Gaura festival and other festivals. This research paper is expected to connect Nepal- India religious destinations through common rituals and festivals. It will also be helpful to add income sources of the people as well as respecting and celebrating festivals. On this context critic writer Devraj Bhatt Sharma writes;

Himavat culture is a part of the ancient Khasa civilization, it is understood that the Khasa race originated from the mixture of Yakshas and Kirats, the descendants of Prajapati Kashyap. As written in Atharvaveda:

Kairatika Kumarika KhasaKhanatiBhaishajam

Hiranmayovirbhribhi: GirinamupSanushu: (Sharma, 2062,33).

The act of giving during Gaura encourages generosity, empathy, and compassion toward others in society. Its association with ancient temples and historical sites underscores the significance of understanding and preserving our historical roots. Gaura's rituals, passed down through generations, reflect the enduring nature of cultural traditions and the need to pass them on. Sharma further writes;

The Yakshas and Kirats who are considered to be members of Gauri Maheshwor were the ultimate worshipers of Gauri Maheshwor. Therefore, they used to gather together and worship Gaura Maheshwor. Till today there are places of Gaura Maheshwor under different names on the peak of the mountain. That is why the poet Kalidasa has written –

Astuttarsyamdishidevatatma, Himalayonamnagadhiraj (Sharma, 2062,p.512333).

Conclusion

The Gaura festival is a multifaceted event that holds great significance in Sudoor Paschim, Nepal and Uttarakhand, India. It combines spirituality, culture, and religion,

offering a break from materialism and promoting inner peace and mindfulness. The festival's connection to nature and *Vedas* emphasizes the importance of environmental conservation and promotes ecotourism. Gaura also champions gender equality and empowers women in both traditional and contemporary contexts. It fosters communal harmony, unity among diverse groups, and the endurance of cultural traditions. By focusing on devotion, generosity, and compassion, *Gaura Parv* promotes community and interconnectedness. Additionally, the festival underscores the importance of maintaining a connection to our historical roots. In today's world, Gaura's messages of spirituality, environmental awareness, cultural preservation, and community cohesion remain relevant and can contribute to a more harmonious and environmentally conscious existence.

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