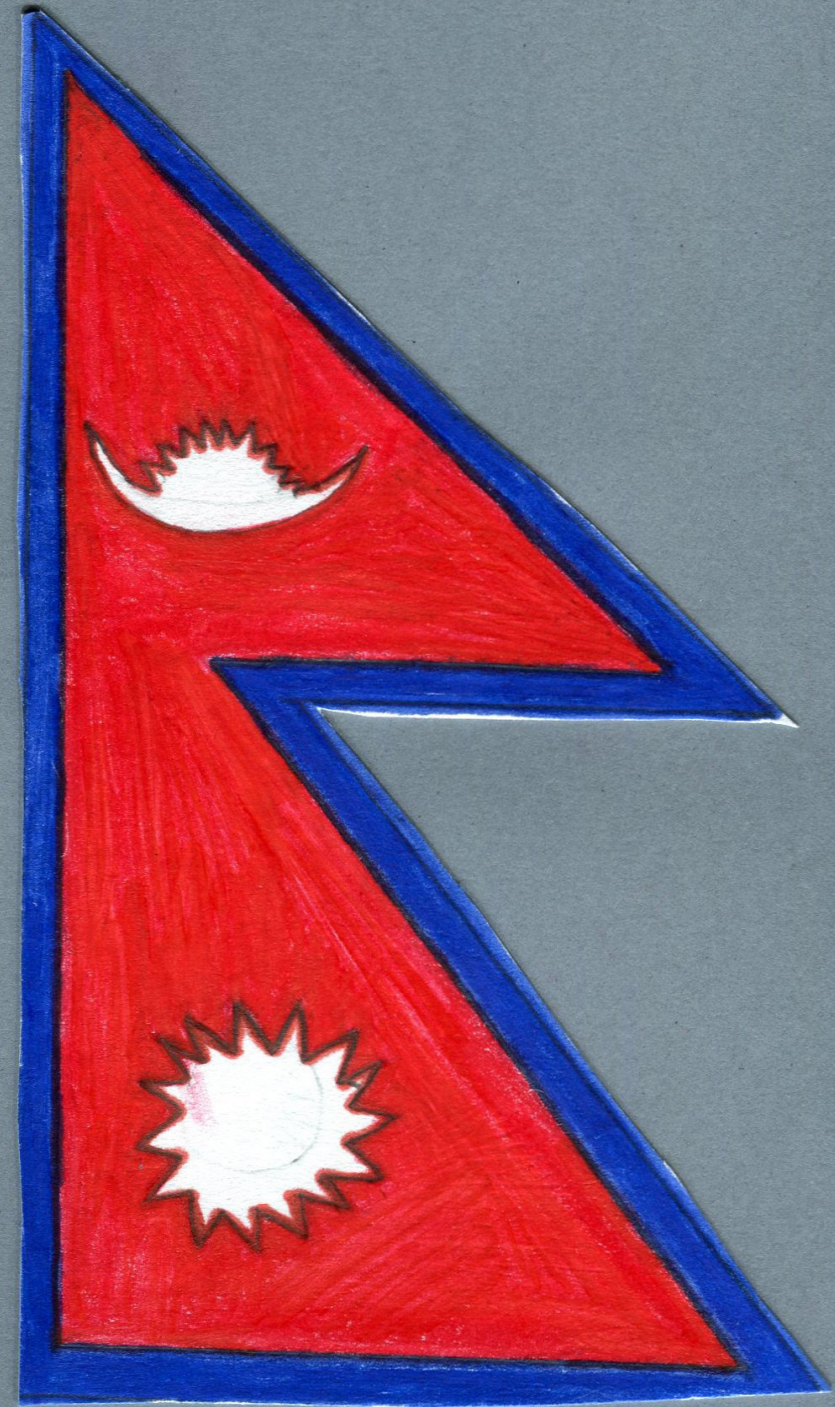




by Neheraika Thapa



My name is Neheraika Thapa. I am currently 14 years old and am a Nepalese-Bhutanese refugee. I live in the USA and it has been a few years now since I have lived here; about 12 years maybe since I came here in 2009.







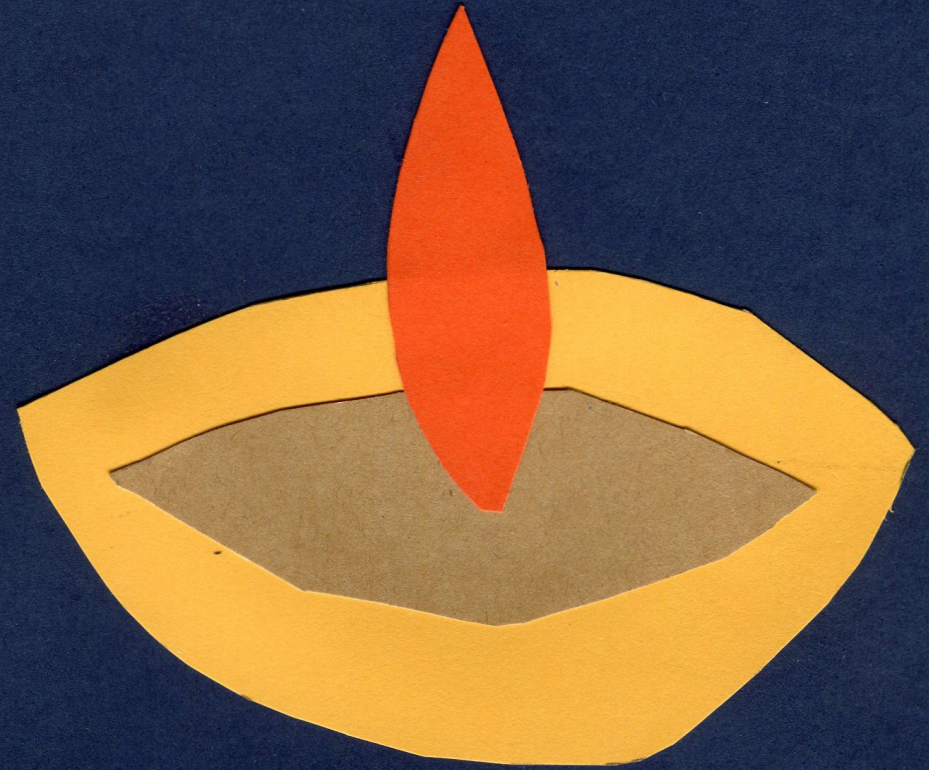
You might expect me to know a lot about my country, have a lot of memories there as well, and to tell you my side of the story of how I came here. Well the truth here is I don't have any memories from my country since I was only 2 when I came to the USA.

I had been very young then and didn't know much about my home country or my cultural traditions.

My family continues to celebrate many of our cultural traditions, including Tihar.



Tihar is a festival also recognized as the festival of lights, which we have once a year for 5 days representing the victory of light over the darkness. Each day represents something different.





Day one we have Kaag Tihar which is the day of crows who are also known as the messenger of the death god Yama. This day is when crows are worshiped by offerings of food such as grains, seeds, sweets, a traditional ring-shaped bread called Cellroti, and other types of food as well. My family also follows the tradition and celebrates Kaag Tihar by taking the offerings and putting them outside as an offering to the crows.





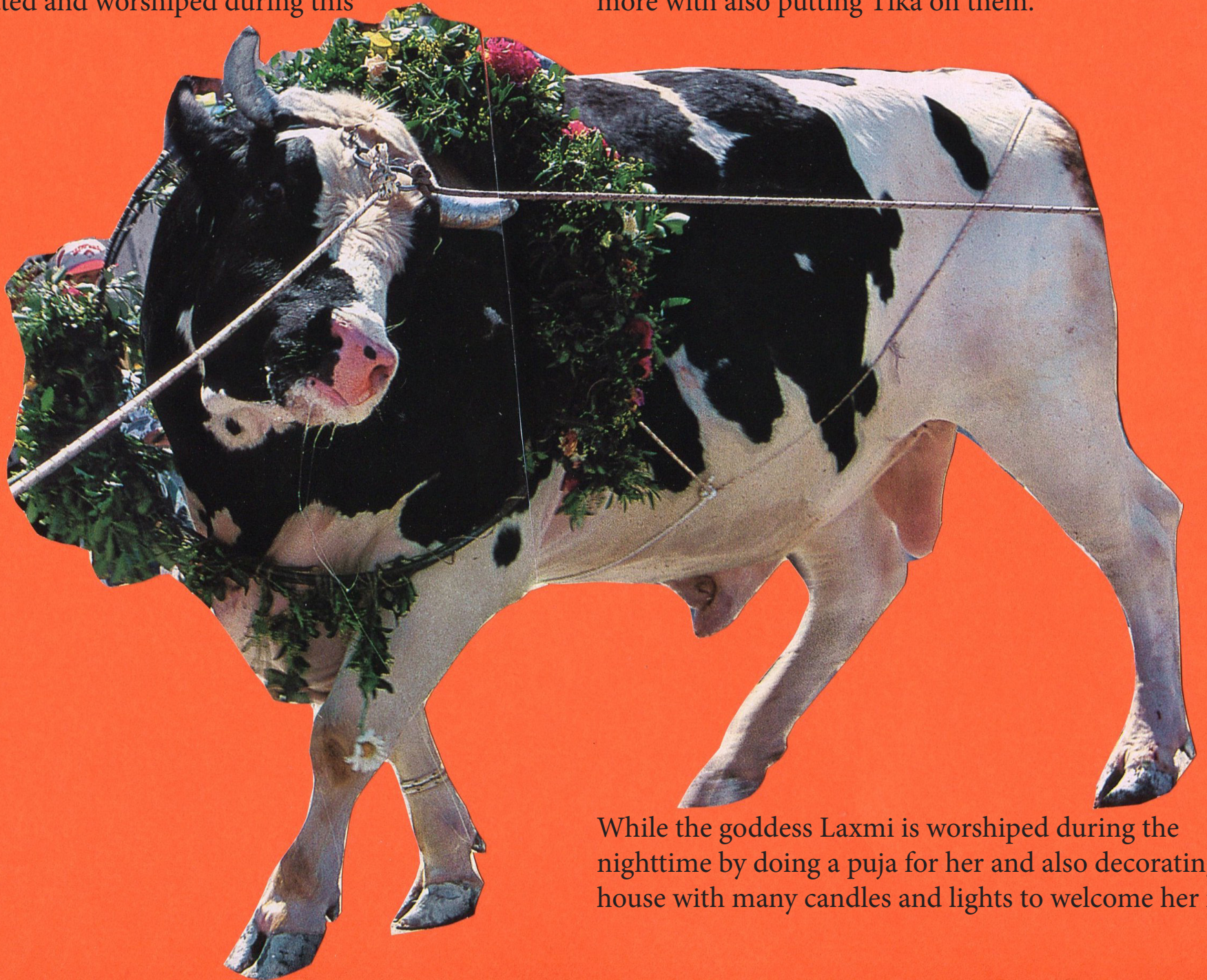
The second day we have Kukur Tihar, which is the day of the dogs. He is also known as the messenger of the death god Yama. This day they are offered treats and also are worshiped with Tika and a necklace made out of a Garland of Marigolds. In Nepal this tradition was always celebrated by my family and many other families as well, which my mom talks and tells me about a lot. Many would have pet dogs while others would find a stray dog and worship them to celebrate Tihar and our traditions. So far my family hasn't always been able to keep up with this tradition ever since we have moved to the USA. But still, they have tried to do it as much as possible to keep this tradition of ours ongoing.





The third day of Tihar is called Ghai and Laxmi Puja. Also known as the day when Cows and the Goddess of wealth Laxmi are worshiped. The reason behind this tradition is that cows are considered sacred in the Hindu culture and are also known as the Vahana of the goddess Laxmi who is celebrated and worshiped during this day of Tihar as well.

It is also believed that during this day if you worship the goddess of wealth, Laxmi, then you will receive great wealth and good fortune as well. To celebrate this day cows are worshiped during the daytime by offering them garlands and other foods such as fruits, malpua, and more with also putting Tika on them.



While the goddess Laxmi is worshiped during the nighttime by doing a puja for her and also decorating the house with many candles and lights to welcome her in.



My family also celebrates this day by doing the Laxmi Puja but since they are not able to do the Ghau Puja they are not able to complete that part of the tradition. But during this festival, our houses are decorated very brightly to invite the goddess Laxmi into our houses as well. But besides all of this, during this day young girls go around the neighborhood in the evening and sing and dance, which is an tradition called bhailo, and are also offered money and food as a reward.







The Fourth day of Tihar is Goru Puja, also known as the day of the Ox, who is believed to be an analog to the cow in Hinduism since they are also used for manual laboring. They are worshiped with the giving of different types of foods.



The fifth day of Tihar is Bhai Tika. Which is a day where the relationship between a brother and sister is celebrated. It is said that if brothers and sisters celebrate this day then the brothers will get a very long and happy life while also representing the promise of protecting their sisters. While they also give them gifts and money as well with the sisters giving them food.





And so this is one of my country's most important festivals, Tihar, filled with a lot of colors, traditions, culture, and lights. As I grew up I understood the meaning of Tihar, my culture, and traditions more and more.





