

Khatags

Origin, Significance and Proper Use



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Khatags are often seen in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia and places where there are presence of Vajrayana tradition. They are often seen during the exchange of greetings and in ceremonies such as festivals, weddings and birthdays. Little is known of the origins of khatags, the significance and how to properly use them.



Origin

Many aeons ago, it was said that the divine realm is linked to the human realm via a special string or thread. This acts like a 'freeway' for the divine beings to commute to the human realm if you like. One day, the divine king was murdered by one of his ministers and this thread was thus lost. Since then, the humans started to weave threads out of wool as an offering to symbolise the giving of all auspiciousness from the divine realm.

In time, the woollen thread was updated with silk to become a white fabric or scarf which we now recognise as khatags. Slowly, colours were added to signify certain meanings.

Khatags and its Significance

The original colour of khatags is white. The white colour symbolises that the one who is giving is offering it with a genuine heart without stains of selfishness or any bad intention.

The long length of the khatag symbolises the bond between the giver and the receiver. The mutual respect and pure affection is as long as the river and is as constant and continuous as the river flow.

The tassels of both ends of the khatags symbolise the multiplication of prosperity and strength.

Hence, the three important elements of a khatag are

1. Clean and stainless
2. Lengthy
3. Long tassels

Who can we offer Khatags to?

Khatags are offered to the Triple Gem, to temples during pilgrimages, personal deities, high lamas, leaders, as a form of greeting to one another, as an expression of joy, as a form of reward, in receiving and sending off guests, in weddings, birthdays, confession, in festive activities such as singing and dancing and even as an offering of auspiciousness to the deceased (Please do not offer khatags to the family members of the deceased).



How to use a Khatag properly?

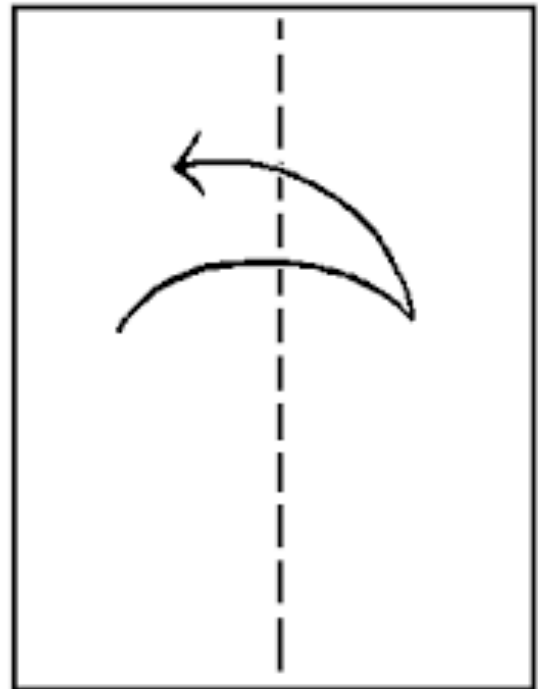
Fold a clean khatag lengthwise. Each half then symbolises the cause and condition. Together, they refer to the inter-dependency of nature as taught by the Buddha.

The folded part acts like a pocket where every goodness is held and is being offered to the recipient. Hence, the giver with two hands, hold the folded khatag lengthwise with the open ends facing the recipient. This represents the giver is giving all the goodness to the receiver.

When you are offering a khatag with both hands above your head, palms turn face up, you bend your body a little and bow your head lower than the receiver. This is a form of respect.

To seniors such as a high lama, ones own teacher, parents or persons to be respected, we bow our heads with the khatag on both hands above our heads. We offer the khatag to their hands and not over their heads.

When offering khatags to someone of similar age, equal or slightly better status, you do not need to bow your head and simply offer the khatag to their hands. The receiver receives the khatag with both hands (not overly outstretched) and immediately places it upon his neck.



As a teacher giving khatag to your students, you place it onto their necks.

You are expected to keep wearing the scarf until after you leave.

Symbolic colours of khatags

Colourful khatags were developed by the Mongols. White khatag is still the most commonly used colour and is safe to give and receive in most occasions. There are five colours that symbolises the five elements and here are the significance starting from the highest rank:

Blue - represents the skies

White - represents the clouds

Red - represents fire or wind

Yellow - represents earth

Green - represents water

Five-colored khatag is very valued gift which can be given to the Buddha statues or intimate relatives. According to the Buddhism teachings, five-colored khatag represents the clothes of the Buddha. Therefore, five-colored khatag can only be presented in some special occasions.



The white colour khatag is still revered as it symbolises purity, auspiciousness, sincerity, kindness, justice and prosperity. White khatags white symbolise the pure heart of the giver.

So now that you know these interesting facts of khatags, the next time you give or receive a khatag, recall these and make the exchange a meaningful one.