

## **Rites and Rituals of Newaras of Kathmandy Valley**

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**Abstract:** The Newars are the indigenous people and the creators of the historical civilization of Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. The Valley and surrounding territory have been known from ancient times as Nepal Mandala. Newars have lived in Nepal Mandala since very early times, and immigrants that arrived at different periods in its history eventually merged with the local population by adopting their language and customs. Newars are a linguistic and cultural community of mostly Tibeto-Burman and some Indo-Aryan ethnicities. Scholars have also described the Newars as being a nation. Scholars in this field have consensus that prehistoric Newars were originally interconnected to the ancient Kirat people (Kiratis). Stone Age, prehistoric Kirat tools found by Anatoly YakoblaveShetenko (Leningrad Institute of Archaeology) date back to 30,000 years ago, matching prehistoric tools unearthed in China's Gobi Desert and Yunnan. According to Nepal's 2001 census, the 1,245,232 Newars in the country are the nation's sixth largest group, representing 5.48% of the population. Newars practice Hinduism as well as Buddhism. They have their own culture, followed their own festivals that are unique in the world. Newar culture is very rich in pageantry and rituals throughout the year. Many festivals are tied to Hindu holidays, Buddha's birth and the harvest cycle. The important Newar festivals are "Mha Puja", celebrated in the occasion of the New Year as per local calendar (Nepal Sambat), "BisketJatra" celebrated on the first of Baisakh and many more. Another important festival celebrated by Newar people is "GunhuPunhi". During this nine-day festival, Newar men and women drink a bowl of sprouted mixed cereals and offer food to frogs in the farmers' fields. On the second day, Sa Paru (GaiJatra), people who have lost a family member in the past year dress up as cows or anything comical and parade through town, a ritual carried by a king to show his queen that not only his son died but other people die too. The last day of GunhuPunhi is Krishnastami, birthday of lord Krishna, an incarnation of lord Vishnu. Many rituals are related to the stages of life stages from birth, first rice-feeding, childhood, puberty, marriage, seniority and death. The complexity and all-encompassing nature of these rituals cannot be exaggerated. For instance, Newar girls undergo a "Bahra" ceremony when they reach menarche. As menstruation is considered to be ritually impure, girls undergo ritual confinement for 12 days. Girls are separated from all males and from sunlight for 12 days while they are doted upon by female relatives. On 12th day the girl must pay homage to the sun. Should a Newar man or women live long enough, there are five rituals, known as "janku" (this can be confusing, as the first rice feeding ceremony of a child is referred to as "janku" as well) performed between the age of 77 and 106. These are held at the age 77 years, 7 months, 7 days; 83 years, 4 months, 4 days (after one has seen 1000 full moons in one's life); 88 years, 8 months, 8 days; 99 years, 9 months, 9 days; and, finally, at 105 years, 8 months, 8 days. After these rituals are performed, the person will be regarded as a god. Husband and wife will perform their rituals together, as the events occur for the husband.