

Socio-Cultural Impact of Celebrating Krishna Janmashtami in Suga Village of Mahotari, Nepal

Manoj Kumar Lal Karn

mkkarn64ins@gmail.com

Former CEO, Himalayan Life Insurance Limited, Nepal

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/pragya.v14i2.90766>

Abstract

This paper explores the Hindu festival of Krishna Janmashtami in Nepal, examining its religious significance, ritual practices, regional variations, and socio-economic impacts. This paper has employed an exploratory design. Drawing on a variety of published sources and festival-reports, the paper illustrates how this celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna manifests differently across Mahotari district, how such rituals contribute to community identity in Suga Village, and how the festival influences local economies and commercial activity. The findings suggest that while the core religious narrative remains consistent, diverse regional cultural forms and growing commercialization are shaping how Krishna Janmashtami is experienced in Suga Village. Implications for cultural preservation and festival-economy balance are discussed. Besides, the huge participation of people from all walks of life in making the festival a grand success reflects the community engagement and devotion of the practicing Hindus in the rural Nepal as exemplified by Suga Village. The continuity of tradition enhances the flavor of the past and beauty of communal gathering and bonding is intensified. The communal reinforcement for participation and contribution makes the community unity exemplary as experienced by the participants in Krishna Janmashtami Festival in Suga Village. The researcher has used the qualitative research design and has analyzed the contents drawn from different secondary sources and has integrated the secondary data with the primary knowledge based on personal observation and participation in the festival.

Keywords: Krishna Janmashtami, Hindu festival, India, regional variation, festival economy

Introduction

The festival of Krishna Janmashtami, also known as Janmashtami or Gokulashtami, commemorates the birth of Lord Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu in Hindu theology (Srimad Bhagavatam tradition). According to Hindu lunisolar calendars, the festival falls on the eighth day (Ashtami) of the dark (Krishna) fortnight in the month of Bhadrapada (or Shrawana, depending on regional calendars). In Nepal, Krishna Janmashtami is celebrated with vigils, fasting, devotional singing, dramatic enactments of Krishna's life (Raslila), and in some regions, the lively "DahiHandi" human pyramid tradition (especially in the districts of Terai region). This paper considers three interlinked areas of inquiry: (a) the religious and ritual practices associated with the festival; (b) how

celebrations vary regionally across Nepal; and (c) the socio-economic consequences of large-scale celebrations in the modern era. By doing so, the study contributes to a better understanding of how a traditional religious festival evolves in a contemporary socio-cultural and economic context. The paper delves into the intensity and engagement in the festival by the devotees and even those who love social harmony and peace regardless of cultural differences in the village. Although Suga Village is dominated by the practicing Hindus, the Muslims do support the organizers in multiple ways. Some of the liberal Muslims even participate in the festivals as if they were also from the Hindu community.

People's participation and curiosity are highly remarkable because they experience the entire process happily and enthusiastically. The festival lasts for three consecutive days and the devotees do not feel restless pertaining to managing resources and accomplishing the procedure of the Krishna Janamsthami. Since Suga is a big village, the organizers do not find difficult to manage resources for accomplishing the festival.

Literature Review

Pradhan and Dongol (2025) have highlighted issues such as the erosion of conventional systems, lack of adequate infrastructure, and the decline of cultural traditions caused by urban migration and the challenges of modernization. By identifying critical areas of concern, the paper aims to create a framework for sustainable revitalization strategies that align cultural preservation with modern development. The findings serve as a tool for policymakers, urban planners, and architects looking to create a future where Dapcha's historical essence blends effortlessly with contemporary growth (p.154).

Shri Krishna Janmashtami Jatra is celebrated on Krishna Janmashtami, the 8th day after the full moon in August. Women in Dapcha observe a day-long fast and pray to Krishna at midnight, wishing for husbands like Lord Krishna or for the longevity of their existing spouses. On Navami (the ninth day following August's full moon), people celebrate Krishna's birth by conducting a 'Khata'. Consequently, it is likewise known as Shri Krishna Janmashtami RathaYatra. Three Krishna Ratha are present, situated in Tallo Hatiya, Kotkali, and Dapcha Bazar. The people of TalloHatiya carry out the Khata in the morning, whereas the people of MasloHatiya (Kotkali) perform the Khata during the day (Pradhan &Dongol, p. 157).

Dahal (2020) has stated that most residents in the Kathmandu valley will partake in yearly festivals individually whenever they can, although at times, groups, organizations, and institutions also join the celebrations as representatives of those entities. The Bhoto DekhauniJatra for Rato Machhendranath occurs annually in Patan, recognized on both local and national scales, and is currently taking place. During this festival, a detailed cart with unique architectural styles is built to transport the deity, while a crowd of people pushes and pulls the cart through the historic streets of Patan. The celebration facilitates the transmission of cultural values and essential cultural elements tied to it, which can be effortlessly passed on to the younger generation through lively and joyful

participation. The grandeur of the event (which some might consider excessive) lies in its status as one of the lengthiest festivities globally. It persists during the event, spanning two to three months, particularly during RathJatra, which involves the strenuous task of dragging a 52-foot-high chariot through the city using ropes and considerable effort, in reverence to Machhendranath, the rain goddess, to guarantee plentiful rains in the upcoming monsoon.

This form of public sphere is essential for participation and interaction in both social and cultural settings throughout all societies and countries. It suggests that the social and cultural values of public life are reflected in a culturally vibrant nation like Nepal, where public spaces and such simplicity have not been preserved for various reasons; the primary reason is to promote cultural interactions among diverse groups during celebrations. In Western cultures, social gatherings typically take place in private and particular locations such as restaurants, clubs, pubs, and theaters. In Nepal, every festival holds great importance for social connections and the cultural transmission of norms, values, traditions, and customs. It has maintained its spiritual aspects in public spaces such as temples, Nasal, Chowk, and Dabali. The festivities then take to the streets, serving as beloved venues for joyful expressions, dancing, and singing that enrich their everyday lives (Dahal, 2020).

Chaudhary (2023) has explored that Kailali has a variety of festivals, and the Tharus observe them distinctively based on their cultural practices and beliefs. Among the celebrations, Krishna Janamashtami is often called Krishna Janashtami or Ashtimki/Ashtami in the Tharu dialect. It happens on the eighth day of Bhadra Krishna Pakshya in the Hindu lunar calendar. Known as Krishna Janma Ashtami, it signifies the second celebration for the Tharu community in Kailali. In Tharu tradition, a notable festival is celebrated with devotional singing at midnight to honor Lord Krishna's birth, accompanied by fasting (upavasa), nighttime vigil (RatriJagaram), and celebrations in the days that follow as part of Janmashtami festivities.

Ashtimkih comprises four ritual practices: Agiyara, Agrashan, Tika, and Parohna. It is believed that Lord Krishna was born on the Ashtami (8th Tithi) of Bhadra's darker half. In the story of Ashtimki, a king called Ugrashen was taken prisoner by his son, Kansha. He was a sovereign of fiends. As a result, Kansha killed seven of his sister Dewaki's offspring. In Ashtimki, there exists a community where Bashudev and Dewaki live. They settle in the village and create the garden featuring a pond and additional elements. They also positioned the Deities' muses on the village's eastern side. On that day Isharu, they serve Chhanki, a type of wine in the Tharu culture. I apologize, but it appears you've mentioned a particular text or numerical citation (Chaudhary, 2023, pp. 3233).

At the stroke of midnight, Dewaki gives birth to a remarkable child. Today is the 8th of Bhadra during the Krishna Paksha. They achieve good performance in line with their customs. The astrologer is known as Krishna Kanaiya. Since that time, it is believed that Kanha/Krishna protects all the villagers from evil after his birth. Since that time, the Tharu people have been honoring Lord Krishna in Ashtimki. They observe Ashtimki to rectify past sinful deeds. Consequently, the festival symbolizes issues related to human behavior as well as physical well-being. They observe fasting to

purify their body and soul from past wrongdoings. It has gained widespread and lasting recognition among the Tharu, acquiring a significance that transcends any particular period. It seems to be an exceptional artwork that has come from the Tharu festival. Ashtimki is believed to be conducted to acknowledge the significance of the cultural and ritual festival of the Tharu community in the extreme western region of Nepal. It's not only for women and girls; males can also engage in large numbers, motivated by their ambitions, beliefs, and dreams for bettering their future. Males rarely take part in this event (Chaudhary, 2023).

There is no gender discrimination present. Regarding Krishna Janmashtami, historians and scholars including Agrawal and Mudgal suggest that Lord Krishna was born in a prison cell during Dwapar Yuga to parents Vasudeva and Devaki. Vasudeva needed to cross the Yamuna River on a stormy night to bring his child to a friend and safeguard the child from Kansa's evil plans. In summary, Maiya Yashoda and Nanda from the Gokul region of Mathura were Lord Krishna's adoptive parents. Janmashtami, often called Krishna Janmashtami, marks the celebration of Lord Krishna's birth, observed in India with great fervor during the rainy season. As per the Hindu calendar, this important day falls on Ashtami, the eighth day of Krishna Paksha, which is the dark half of the month Bhadra. The precise beginnings of this festival are unclear; it might have taken root in our culture approximately a millennium ago (Chaudhary, 2023, pp. 3435).

Dev (2018) has stated that in Hindu mythology, Krishna embodies the ideal divine hero—a character whose existence fuses the remarkable with the mundane, the sacred with the mortal. His divine nature as a manifestation of Lord Vishnu is core to his identity, but his life is filled with very human experiences, ranging from youthful pranks to profound philosophical discussions. The blend of divine and human traits is a prevalent theme in English literature, especially in figures that, similar to Krishna, traverse the dual nature of their being. A significant example of the divine hero in English literature is John Milton's portrayal of Christ in *Paradise Lost*. Milton depicts Christ as the supreme divine hero, whose sacrifice for humanity's salvation mirrors Krishna's function as a guide and protector of dharma (righteousness) in the *Mahabharata*. Similar to how Krishna steps in to bring order and justice to human lives, Milton's Christ is portrayed as the redeemer who takes on the weight of humanity's sins to guarantee their salvation.

Krishna's position as a mentor and thinker, especially in the *Bhagavad Gita*, situates him at the heart of one of the deepest explorations of moral and ethical challenges in global literature. The *Gita* explores the intricacies of duty, ethics, and the essence of the self, providing a guide for comprehending the ethical dilemmas encountered throughout human existence. These themes are also examined in English literature, where characters frequently confront challenging moral decisions and the repercussions of their behaviors. Examining the connections between Krishna Janmashtami and English literature uncovers the universal qualities of these themes, showcasing how Krishna's narratives and lessons keep inspiring and provoking readers globally. Reflecting on Krishna's legacy in both religious and literary realms highlights the lasting strength of literature to

delve into profound questions of human life, providing perspectives on divinity, heroism, and the ethical decisions that shape our existence (Dev, 2018).

Discussion

At the heart of Krishna Janmashtami lies the commemoration of the natal anniversary of Lord Krishna. According to long-established tradition, Krishna's birth occurred within the confines of King Kansa's prison in Mathura, shortly followed by his relocation to Gokul, where he was nurtured within the pastoral community of cowherds (*The Economic Times* 2023). Devotional observances typically commence the preceding day with acts of fasting or vigil, culminating at the stroke of midnight—recognized as the moment of Krishna's birth—when the idol of the infant Krishna is placed in a cradle or bed and venerated. Fundamental ritual elements encompass: Fasting (*upavasa*) by Hindu devotees until the midnight *puja*, alongside Midnight worship, *aarti*, and sessions of song and *bhajan*. The embellishment of homes and temples includes the creation of *rangolis* or *kolams* in Southern India; footprints of baby Krishna leading to the designated prayer area (*The Indian Express*, 2016). *Raslila* performances or devotional dramas illustrating the life of Krishna are presented during the festivities.

In many parts of India and in some parts of Nepal including Mahotari district, the renowned "Dahi Handi" (a ceramic vessel filled with dairy products suspended at a considerable height; groups construct human pyramids to breach it) symbolizes Krishna's mischievous appropriation of dairy. These ritualistic practices encapsulate a plethora of significances: reverence toward the divine figure of Krishna, a collective sense of community identity, the interplay between mythology and performance, and frequently, the endurance of age-old traditions that have evolved over time. Although the fundamental narrative remains unaltered, the methodology of celebrating Krishna Janmashtami exhibits substantial variation across diverse regions of Nepal and the districts of Madhesh Province, mirroring local customs, cultural practices, and communal identities. However, the devotees in Suga village do not celebrate "Dahi Handi".

Process of Organizing and Celebrating Krishna Janmashtami in Suga Village

All Hindu devotees especially youths and middle-aged people form a committee to accomplish Krishna Janmashtami in Suga Village. Ganesh Pandey—one of the landlords of the village—contributed a big chunk of finance in undertaking the organization of the festival. He was a community leader who initiated the contribution collection from the villagers for long time. His share in the contribution was the highest almost every year. He was very generous and friendly with the villagers. He loved the festival and triggers the youths to stay interested in the process of the festival. The organizing committee hires singers from India. They dance and sing in order to entertain the viewers. They also collect the rent from the shopkeepers who put their stalls in the fair. The collected money is spent on diverse items ranging from the female singers to the purchase of the goods for the Krishna Janamsthmi. The youths of the village are proactive and take part in almost every item of the program. The singers come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh of India.

There has been a drastic change in the resource management. The organizing committee receives a handsome amount of money from the office of Jaleswor Municipality. They have direct access to the local politicians. The influence of the organizing committee determines the amount of grant received from the municipality. Devotees observe a fast throughout the day. Mostly, female members of the family strictly observe the fasting. They take some fruits and milk. However, some devotees are so committed that they do not eat and drink anything. The devotees break the fast after midnight just after the completion of Krishna's birth rituals. Villagers make either an idol of baby Krishna or buy one that is decorated. When accomplishing the birth celebration in the midnight, the devotees blow conch shells and bells. They bath the idol of Krishna with milk, ghee, yogurt, honey and sugar. Finally, they bath the idol and dress it with beautiful clothes and ornaments.

Devotees sing songs especially bhajans to dedicate to Lord Krishna. The chanting of *Hare Krishna* resonates in the whole village. Nevertheless, the purohits at temples recite Bhagavad Gita and narrate Krishna Leela. Some youths play the role of characters of Krishna and Kansa and *Kansa Badha* is performed. In other words, Krishna Leela is performed in the village. The play comprises of different items of performance including butter stealing, and Govardhan lifting. On top of all these things, Dahi-Handi—a pot filled with curd, butter, and fruits is hung at a height—is broken by a group of youths. It is the major part of the celebration. All the villagers regardless of the religion, caste, gender, community and class celebrate the festival. At last, the offering of Prasad including makhan, mishri, and fruits is distributed among all age groups of devotees. The implication of the celebration reflects in the community strength and unity. It helps to bring people together and keeps the society intact with the tradition and norms and values of Suga Village.

Overview of Krishna Janmashtami in Nepal

Rituals and Customs

The festival commemorates Krishna's birth and takes place on the eighth day (Ashtami) of Krishna-paksha (waning moon) during the month of Bhadra in the Nepali calendar. Numerous followers observe an all-day fast, stay awake all night (jagrān or vigil), and break their fast after midnight, aligning with the belief that Krishna was born. Temples and homes are decorated with oil lamps, flowers, rangoli and the idol/image of baby Krishna is placed in a cradle or swing. Typical activities consist of devotional singing (*bhajans*), reciting texts (such as the Bhagavad Gita), and telling tales about Krishna's life. Sweets, milk, curds, and other items are distributed and shared as prasāda (blessed food) with relatives, friends, and the community. In the Kathmandu Valley, particularly in the city of Patan (Lalitpur), the historic Krishna Mandir stands as a focal point of celebration. Supporters gather in large numbers for the midnight rituals. In Bhaktapur, a distinctive custom is the “Deep Prajwālan Yātrā” (Oil-Lamp Procession): devotees carry oil lamps atop their heads, hands, or shoulders while strolling through different parts of the city.

In the Tharu community (located in the Terai region of western Nepal), the festival corresponds with their tradition called Ashtimki, where they produce wall paintings (Ashtimki Chitra) and participate

in folk dance as part of the festivities. The festival transcends a simple ritual: it fosters community bonds, bringing together youth, children, and elders through singing, performances, celebrations, and worship. It also illustrates how Nepal's Hindu traditions, temple architecture (such as the Krishna Mandir in Patan), and cultural heritage enhance the celebration with local flavor. Economic and cultural impacts: through decorations, treats, temple visits, and community festivities, the festival stimulates local enterprises and enhances social interactions. Devotees dress respectfully for temple visits since modest attire is appreciated. There are large crowds around major temples. Some temples sometimes remain open late into the night. For a more local experience, small villages and communities participate. The visitors can observe more intimate rituals beyond the big temples.

Effects on Socio-Cultural Aspects

While Krishna Janmashtami is mainly a cultural and religious event, its socio-economic impact is significant in Suga Village. One facet is the festival's financial influence. The sale of flowers, sweets, decorative goods, clothing, and religious items notably rises during Janmashtami. This economic activity supports retailers, artisans (idol makers, decorative items). Besides, large-scale events serve as opportunities for community connection, identity formation, and local civic engagement: festivities become occasions for socializing, religious tourism, and interaction among different communities. However, challenges also exist: handling crowds, guaranteeing safety during human-pyramid events, the risk of commercialization overshadowing ritual importance, and environmental concerns (like idol immersion and plastic consumption). The revival of Janmashtami in the village showcases the social fragility of festival customs.

The study of Krishna Janmashtami in Suga Village reveals a dynamic interplay of belief, culture, regional identity, and trade. The festival's enduring spiritual appeal is strengthened by its capacity to adapt to local customs—be it through theatrical shows, street festivities, or individual acts of devotion. They reveal more profound cultural values: how societies interpret and express the legend of Krishna in ways that align with their social contexts. Simultaneously, the growing commercial side of the festival raises important questions: How do faith-based celebrations preserve their spiritual integrity amid market pressures? How can local crafts (like idol making and decoration) be preserved and encouraged within the modern economy? What is the environmental effect of large festivities, and how can eco-friendly practices be incorporated? Moreover, the sociological importance of the festival requires further exploration: the communal participation, identity formation (especially among young people through DahiHandi), the transmission of ritual traditions between generations, and the connection between pilgrimage sites and festival economies.

Conclusion

Krishna Janmashtami is among the liveliest festivals in Suga Village observed with devotion. Its ritual life world—ranging from fasting and midnight pujas to spirited human pyramids—demonstrates the lasting influence of religious myth in molding daily existence. The varied regional celebrations enhance the cultural fabric of Nepal, while the socio-economic effects highlight the

festival's increasing modern importance. For both scholars and practitioners, the task is to harmonize the spiritual, communal, and commercial elements of the festival in ways that preserve both faith and culture.

Krishna Janmashtami significantly impacts Suga Village's socio-economic landscape, enhancing financial activity through increased sales of flowers, sweets, and religious goods, which benefits local retailers and artisans. The festival fosters community engagement and identity formation, serving as a hub for social interaction and religious tourism. However, it faces challenges such as crowd management, safety issues, commercialization risks, and environmental concerns. The festival's resilience reflects its ability to adapt cultural traditions while raising critical questions about maintaining spiritual integrity amidst commercialization and environmental sustainability. Besides, the event plays a crucial role in communal participation, identity formation, and the transmission of rituals across generations, warranting deeper sociological investigation.

References

- Chaudhary, Surya Bahadur (2023). Ashtimki/Ashtami: The itualestival of Tharu in Kailali. *BMC Research Journal*, 2, 32—41.
- Dahal, Bishnu Prasad (2020). Society, ocialization and ocialrder through the HinduFestivals in Nepal. *Global Journal of Sociology & Culture*, 20(5), 18—30.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>
- Dev, Ashish (2018). Krishna Janmashtami and English Literature: Intersections of Divinity, Heroism, and Moral Conflict. <https://www.scribd.com> Krishna Janmashtami. (n.d).
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna_Janmashtami
- Pradhan, Rushat & Moon Singh Dongol (2025). Reawakening Dapcha: Bridging Past and Present for Better Future. *KEC Journal of Science and Engineering*, 9(1), 154—161.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/kjse.v9i1.78380>
- The Indian Express (2016, August 25). Janmashtami: How the Birth of Krishna Is Celebrated across India. *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/janmashtami-how-the-birth-of-krishna-is-celebrated-across-india/>
- The Indian Express (2023, April). Krishna Janmashtami. *International Journal of Novel Research and Development (IJNRD)*, 8(4).<https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2304134.pdf>
- Krishna Janmashtami – Report on anmashtami elebration (2021). *Gitarattan Institute of Advanced Studies and Training, Rohini*. <https://www.giast.org/research-publication/janmashtami-celebration.pdf>