

## The Lord Krsna

Krsna is possibly one of the most recognizable gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is the playful child, divine lover, and the wise friend, the ever-present beauty in the world. In most common images of him he is depicted with blue skin as a reference to his divine nature and his association with Visnu. Poets and devotees have sung praises of Krsna's otherworldly grace and beauty. There is nothing that is unworthy of praise as his beauty is all encompassing; it is even said that he was accompanied with a scent so fragrant it was to be irresistible, and that his companions could locate him by it (Kinsley 1975: 24-25). Such is the beauty of Krsna that the goal of devotees is to see him in a vision, or gain a place in his heavenly realm of Vrndavana in their afterlife (Kinsley 1975: 25).

Vrndavana, became the highest heavenly realm of Krsna, but was first his childhood home where the *Bhagavata-purana* tells how he spent his days in blissful mischief, such as his notorious butter thievery (Kinsley 1975: 14). The shenanigans of Krsna's childhood reveal the concept of *lila*. As a child Krsna is compelled to pursue pleasure for pleasure's sake; it is the innocent pursuit of play for the sake of amusement in itself. He is unrestrained by the perceptions and social boundaries that permeate adulthood, and is therefore able to revel in every desire and impulse to which he feels inclined (Kinsley 1975: 15). Krsna is accepted as a prince, although he was forced into exile for his own security, for fear of his uncle Kamsa (Majumdar 1969: 2). Kamsa was the king of the city of Mathura, and his sister's name was Devaki. When Devaki was married to a man named Vasudeva, it brought to Kamsa's mind an old prophecy which spoke of the destruction of his lineage by the eighth child of Devaki. Kamsa became resolved to kill any children born of Devaki, and he had her and her husband locked away. It was then that the fetus of Devaki's seventh son, was transferred by Visnu into the womb of

Vasudeva's other wife, and it was this son who grew to be Krsna's brother Balarama. Devaki's eighth son was smuggled to safety and switched with the daughter of Yasoda and Nanda, two humble cowherds. When Kamsa came to see Devaki's child, the daughter of Yasoda and Nanda revealed herself as the Goddess, or Devi, and told Kamsa that the eighth child, Krsna, was indeed beyond his reach and would eventually be his undoing (Rodrigues, 313).

Kamsa sent many demons to destroy Krsna, however many of them became nothing more than new sources of amusement for the young god. In the *Bhagavata-purana* there is the story of the demoness Putana who comes to Krsna in the guise of a beautiful young woman. She begs the favor of Krsna's mother Yasoda, in allowing her to suckle the young baby Krsna, which Yasoda grants her. Krsna, however, sees through the façade, and when the demoness takes him to her poison covered breasts, he is untouched by the poison and instead drains out her life (Kinsley 1975, 20). The *Bhagavata-purana* was written circa 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E., and discusses the first eleven years of Krsna's life at Vraja, which he spent living amongst the cowherds (*Krsna in History and Legend*, 56).

An extremely popular myth cycle concerns the compelling relationships between Krsna and the cowherd woman, the *gopis*. As an overwhelmingly attractive young man, Krsna seems to enjoy a large part of his youth as a rampant womanizer; however, his fondness for these women and the dynamics of his relations with the *gopis*, are of a greater substance than that. The *gopis* exist as representations of those who would aspire to intimacy with the divine; they are that which all devotees of Krsna should aspire to be (Kinsley 1979: 77). The *gopis* mentioned in the earlier Vaisnava Puranas are not the more polished entertainers they become in such later texts, such as the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana* and the *Govinda-lilamrta*. First depicted as more pastoral, they eventually become the inspiring adornments of his heavenly realm of Vrndavana. It is the

relationship between Krsna and one particular *gopi*, Radha, that has gained more modern notoriety. David Kinsley states that Krsna's lovemaking should be examined in its relations to the *gopis* as a group, or to a particular *gopi* such as Radha (Kinsley 1979: 78). This is because these relations with the *gopis* are symbolic to the personal relationships between the divine and its devotees.

The *Bhagavadgita* reveals Krsna as the teacher and as the divine. In it Krsna is a charioteer for his friend Arjuna, and counsels him before a coming battle. He reveals himself as the 8<sup>th</sup> avatar of Visnu and teaches Arjuna the path of *bhakti-yoga* (Kinsley 1975: 57). *Bhakti* means devotion, and is offered by Krsna as the ultimate means of salvation. It becomes a central concept to those who follow Krsna, as calling on his divinity will bring that individual salvation (Kinsley 1975: 57). Krsna could be viewed as the embodiment of Hindu devotionism, and the history of his worship displays many periods in which the concept of *bhakti* has been expressed in differing ways. In the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries in southern India, *bhakti* was seen as ardent love, which gave way to *bhakti* cults (Kinsley 1975: 59-60). Krsna is capable of inspiring such passion because of his relatable nature, and his differing aspects; he can be approached as a son, a teacher, a friend, a lover, a confidant, and a god. As Krsna changed, so too did the concept of *bhakti*. The *gopis* become the true symbol of what it means to be a devotee of Krsna, for even in the strict social confines of Hindu society they ignore these social boundaries in order to bring themselves closer to the pure state of being that is Krsna (Kinsley 1975: 65). Ever enigmatic, Krsna allows one to explore his nature and through the sheer delight of discovering him, uncover one's own true self.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

Kinsley, David R. *The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krsna, Dark visions of the Terrible and Sublime in Hindu Mythology*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975.

Kinsley, David R. *The Divine Player (A study of Krsna Līlā)*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

Majumdar, Bimanbehari. *Krsna in History and Legend*. Centre of Advanced Study in Ancient Indian History and Culture: University of Calcutta, Lectures and Seminars No. III-A. India: University of Calcutta Press, 1969.

Rodrigues, Hillary. *Hinduism – The Ebook*. Journal of Buddhist Ethics Online Books, Ltd, 2006.

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### Noteworthy Websites about Krsna

[www.krishna.com](http://www.krishna.com)

[www.vedabase.net/sb/](http://www.vedabase.net/sb/)

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**Article written by: Stephanie McNiven (March 2008) who is solely responsible for its content.**