

## KRSNA

As a manifestation of Visnu, Krsna is the creator of his creatures, while also the loving god to his devotees (Sheth 77). Krsna has been called Brahman, the most supreme, the highest self, and the highest bliss, among others (Sheth 80). He has been referred to as a manifestation, or *avatara* also of Narayana, “Lord of the Universe”. Narayana is another name for Visnu or the original man, *purusa*. Krsna is one of the two more famous avatars of Visnu, Rama being the other. Krsna is probably more popular than Rama, however, as he fulfills almost every human need. As the divine child, he satisfies the maternal instincts of womanhood. As the divine lover, he gives romantic fulfillment and freedom of sexual expression. He can even save the sinner from evil rebirths (Schweig 16). Although considered by some to be an incarnation of Visnu, Krsna stands alone due to his unusual adoration (Bhandarkar 59).

Krsna’s life spanned from around 3228 BCE to 3102 BCE, according to scriptural documentation (Rosen 124). The earliest mention of Krsna is found in the *Chandogya-upanisad* (Majumdar 2). He appeared in Mathura, India and spent his youth as a cowherd or *gopa* in the nearby Northern village of Gokula. He lived with his ‘father’, Nanda, the ruler of the village, along with his ‘mother’ Yasoda and his brother Balarama (Hudson 5). This is where Krsna’s first mischievous yet endearing thieveries took place (Rosen 130). Krsna is also portrayed in texts such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Visnu-purana* and the *Bhagavata-purana*. The *Harivamsa* portrays Krsna as a hero while the *Visnu-purana* and the *Bhagavata-purana* portray him as divine (Sheth 43). Some view Krsna as a deity while others view him as a prince who was deified. Some believe he is a real historical person (Majumdar 279) and others as an Indian form of Christ (Couture 38).

Vaisnavism is said to be the most strictly theistic among traditions within the Hindu complex as it claims devotion, or *bhakti* as both a means and an end. Vaisnavism is the term used for all the devotional traditions dedicated to the worship of Visnu and his avatars (Schweig 15). Vaisnavism was first called Ekantika Dharma, the religion of a single-minded love and devotion to one. It appeared as a religious reform based on theistic principles (Bhandarkar 142). More and more elements have been added to Vaisnavism over time such as the worship of the cowherd boy, Krsna, because of his marvelous deeds and amorous frolicking with the cowherdesses, or *gopis*. He then came to be regarded as a god and another element was added: the worship of Krsna along with his mistress Radha (Bhandarkar 143). Some Vaisnava groups view Krsna as the source of Visnu and not as a manifestation (Rosen 124).

Someone in full Krsna consciousness uses everything for Krsna's service and is always liberated from false egoism (Prabhupada 93). The devotee desires nothing for himself but can seek prosperity for others as this is what the Lord wants. (Hudson 25). Schweig calls the devotion to Krsna "theistic intimacy" as Krsna is a god that presents his closest or innermost relationships of love (14). It is significant that what Krsna devotees desire is not *moksa* (liberation), not freedom from entanglement in *samsara*, the cycle of repeated births, but continuous "entanglement" in Krsna. They want nothing more than to serve him intimately forever, even if such intimate service may depend upon their own continuous rebirth with him rather than upon release (Hudson 9). Even when the *gopis* do not purify themselves through ritual bathing or proper actions before rushing to offer themselves to him, Krsna still receives them because it is their intense longing for him that causes their behavior. Receiving the *gopis* turns all their past and future faults to cotton that will burn up and leave no trace behind (Hudson

26). All devotees seek to emulate the *gopis*' pure and consummate devotion to Krsna (Rosen 122).

Krsna is frequently depicted with his female counterpart, Goddess Radha (Schweig 15). Radha has been called the supreme goddess. She embodies all the *gopis* and all other goddesses. Although Krsna has intimate relationships with all the *gopis*, Radha is a special *gopi*; she is Krsna's supreme *gopi* (Schweig 19). Many devotees of Krsna worship Radha with him. Their relationship is said to be light, playful, and amusing, leaving out work, worry and anger (Kinsley 84).

If there is one god that is more playful than the others, it is Krsna. Krsna is often called a 'playful lover' and he is often engaged in playful actions. Krsna's actions are called play, or *lila*, because he is completely fulfilled. His actions are not purposeful; they come from an overflowing abundance (Kinsley 1). Sheth attempts to give evidence to Krsna's divinity by stating that because his actions are pure, purposeless play, Krsna is unlike a finite being (82). He is commonly worshipped in the form of a baby or child, whose very nature is to play (Kinsley 61). As a child, he is known for his mischief, but his misbehavior is unique in that it purifies and heals all who take part in them rather than evoking concern (Rosen 132). Even when wrestling with enemies, Krsna appears as if he is playing (Sheth 84).

Krsna's *maya*, which can be defined as the power to change form or an illusion, is used as a veil when in human form so that during encounters with people, they will not treat him like a god but as another human. For example, when Krsna's parents realized his divinity, he spread *maya* on them so that they would continue their parental affection for him (Sheth 89). Another power of Krsna's is that he can destroy, or heal simply with his touch. He can kill enemies or turn someone beautiful just by touching them (Sheth 91). In his Visnu form, Krsna carries four

weapons. In two hands, he carries a lotus flower and a conch shell. These are to assure his devotees that they cannot be vanquished. In the other two hands, he carries a club and a disc. These weapons are meant for the non-devotees to bring them to their senses and remind them that there is the Supreme Lord above them (Prabhupada 21). More distinguishing of Krsna, is a bamboo flute held up to his mouth with both arms. He also carries a herding stick and a buffalo horn. Schweig shows the importance of Krsna's flute by quoting from a Sanskrit poetic verse, the *Krishna Karnamrita*, that people would wait to hear Krsna play his flute so that *om* might sound (24).

Krsna is noted to be strikingly beautiful and youthful, and that he is beauty himself. His speech and his odor are equally as beautiful and it is said that one may find Krsna by his irresistible smell (Kinsley 75). In almost every *Vaisnave-Krsna* work, Krsna's physical appearance is revered (Kinsley 77). He usually wears a silk, yellow garment, an ornament with a peacock feather on his head, and a garland made of fresh flowers and leaves. He is a deep blue color, frequently compared to a dark raincloud (Schweig 23). Krsna is so beautiful that even though he wears ornaments, it is his body that enhances the ornaments he wears (Rosen 122). Krsna's charm and beauty are not purposeless however; they are to allure humanity back to the transcendental realm (Rosen 157).

No other figure in the history of Indian culture has given rise to as much controversy as Krsna (Majumdar 1). He is an extremely powerful, playful, and loving god. Krsna is the true friend of all souls because, when he kills, he not only protects his devotees but, he liberates those that he kills (Schweig 23). Krsna gives salvation not only to his devotees, but also to those who hate him (Sheth 77). Krsna is also multi-faceted as seen in texts such as the *Mahabharata*, where he exhibits qualities of a philosopher, warrior, friend, lord, husband, charioteer, and guru (Rosen

122). In essence, loving Krsna is synonymous with loving God. In Hinduism, even though there is a hierarchy of sorts, the absolute nature of a god and his name are one (Rosen 220). Krsna eventually returned to the spiritual realm after ridding the world of its worst demons and establishing *dharma*, or righteousness (Rosen 136). His appearance in this world is claimed to be for the benefit of humankind, to remind us of our real life in the spiritual realm (Rosen 125).

### REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

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*Bhagavata Purana*  
*Chandogya Upanisad*  
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*Harivamsa*  
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Vaisnavism  
Visnu  
*Visnu Purana*

#### **NOTEWORTHY WEBSITED RELATED TO THE TOPIC**

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

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/krishna.html>

[http://www.sanatansociety.org/hindu\\_gods\\_and\\_goddesses/krishna.htm](http://www.sanatansociety.org/hindu_gods_and_goddesses/krishna.htm)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna>

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Article written by: Annie Siegrist (March 2009) who is solely responsible for its content.