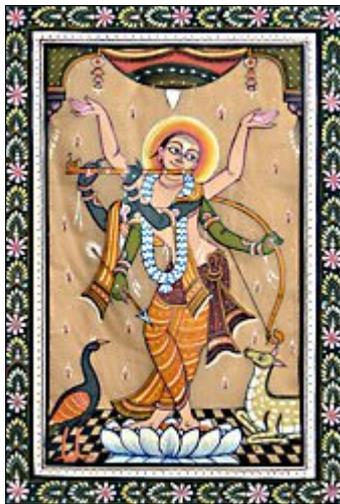




Destroyer of Evil and Epitome of Love
Tales From the Life of Young Krishna

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Krishnaism and Vaishnavism - how did they develop?



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**SRI CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU - THE
VAISHNAVA - UNITED WITH KRISHNA**

Though a universally loved deity, the worship of Krishna mainly forms part of Vaishnavism. Vaishnavites are followers of Vishnu, who regards Him as the Supreme One and worship His aspects, along with His consorts and related gurus and saints. Krishna enjoys a special place in the hearts of Vaishnavites, as He is venerated as the Poorna Avatar or the complete manifestation of Sri Maha Vishnu in all His glory.

But Krishna is also considered to be a supreme entity even all by Himself, without necessarily associating with Vishnu. This gave birth to the concept of Krishnaism, which describes sects of Krishna devotees who consider him to be a transcended being. Such sects include Vallabha Sampradaya, Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Nimbarka Sampradaya, Swaminarayan Sampradaya and such others. They regard Krishna as the Svayam Bhagawan, who is the original form of the Supreme Lord himself.

Meaning of the word, "Krishna"

The word "Krishna", in Sanskrit, means "dark" or "dark-blue" or "black" and is used to describe one who is dark-skinned. Most paintings depict Krishna in blue, while idols depict him in black.

Some other Hindu schools of thoughts interpret the name Krishna in another way. According to them, Krishna comes from the roots "krs" and "na", where "krs" is taken from the verbal root, "to plough" or "to drag" and "na" denotes "nirvriti" or "bliss".

The Brahasambandha Mantra of the Vallabha Sampradaya describes the name Krishna as being capable of destroying sin related to the self, material and even divine causes. Krishna also denotes the "all-attractive one".

The name Krishna is incidentally one of the names listed in the Vishnu Sahasranama. Adi Sankara interprets this as meaning, the "existence of bliss". There are very many other names of Krishna too, such as Govinda, Gopala, Giridhar and so on.



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THE DARK SKINNED LORD KRISHNA

Depictions of Krishna



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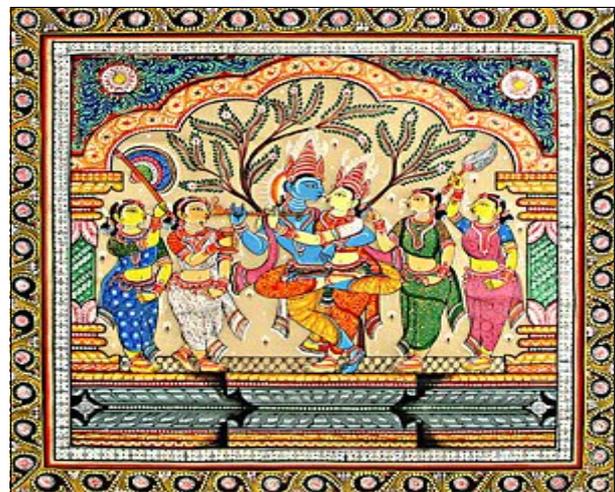
BABY KRISHNA

In the Bhagavata Purana, Krishna is often portrayed to be a sweet, chubby little infant; as a young boy playing the flute or as a prince giving guidance to the warrior prince, Arjuna, as in the Bhagavad Gita. He is usually shown wearing a yellow dhoti and wearing peacock feather headgear. While he stands placing one crossed foot crossed in front of the other as Gopala, Krishna is shown as the typical Hindu deity with several hands, in his Vishwarupa (gigantic form) manifestation during the Kurukshetra war, where he plays divine advisor to Arjuna.

Different Hindu theological traditions portray Krishna in various ways - a divine child; a mischievous prankster with butter smeared all over his little mouth; a gentle lover and the Supreme Godhead. These traditions worship different manifestations of Krishna, such as Bala Krishna, Vasudeva and Gopala. While Krishna was worshipped as a deity as early as 4th Century BC, the Krishna-bhakti Movement started spreading down South during the 9th Century AD. It had spread as far as the North by the 11th Century AD.

Krishna then started being depicted through art channels too, such as music, dance and paintings. Different forms of Krishna too developed at around this time, giving rise to Srinathji in Rajasthan, Jagannatha in Orissa and Vithoba in Maharashtra. With the establishment of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), the Krishna-bhakti movement spread to several parts of the Western world as well.

Krishna is often depicted in temples as a divine being standing upright, either alone or along with his brother Balarama and sister Subhadra; with his consorts, Rukmini and Satyabhama or with his childhood friend and eternal lover, the beautiful Radha Rani. Manipuri Vaishnavas worship Krishna not alone, but as Radha Krishna. Gaudiyas, Nimbarka Sampradaya and Swaminarayan Sampradaya too worship the Radha-Krishna union.



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THE UNION OF RADHA AND KRISHNA

Birth of Krishna

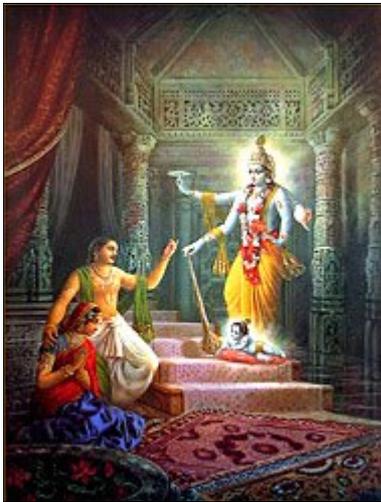
Based on astrological calculations, scriptures detail Krishna's birth as either 18 or 21 July, 3228 BC. Krishna was part of the royal family of Mathura, as the eighth son born to princess Devaki and her husband, Vasudeva. Mathura was the capital of the Surasenas or Yadavas. Devaki's brother, King Kansa, had imprisoned his own father, Ugrasena, and had usurped the throne.

Kansa had been very fond of his sister, Devaki and arranged her wedding to Vasudeva with a great deal of enthusiasm. But just as Kansa ascended the chariot to take his sister to her new marital home, there emanated an Akashvani (celestial voice) which warned Kansa that his death would occur at the hands of Devaki's eighth son.

Fearing the prophecy, Kansa immediately took Devaki and Vasudeva by force and locked them into a prison cell. Kansa intended to kill Devaki, but at the request of Vasudeva, decided to keep her alive, in exchange for killing all their children. Kansa kills the first six children, foolishly fearing that any one of these children could well result in his destruction. Then Devaki apparently has a miscarriage of the seventh child, which is actually transferred to Rohini (Vasudeva's first wife) as Balarama.

Devaki and Vasudeva finally have their eighth child, Krishna. Since the child's life is in danger, Vasudeva decides to take the baby out of the prison cell and place him in the care of his foster parents, Nanda and Yashoda in Gokul. The Bhagavata Purana states that Krishna was born not by a sexual union, but by a kind of "spiritual transmission" from Vasudeva, into the womb of Devaki. According to Hinduism, this kind of a conception can be carried out only by highly evolved souls.

Miracle of Krishna's birth



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THE BIRTH OF KRISHNA

Krishna's birth was filled with many mystical, strange experiences. There was heavy rain, thunder and lightning the night he was born. But as soon as the baby came out of his mother's womb, there emanated a brilliant light, which lit the whole dungeon. Devaki and Vasudeva felt very glad and proud to see their radiant little one giving them a beautiful smile. Much to their surprise, little Krishna spoke and said, "Mother and Father, do not worry anymore. I have come to rescue you and the whole world. I have come to destroy the wicked. King Kansa shall die in the schemes he made himself. Once again, peace shall reign supreme."

Krishna then asked Vasudeva to take him to the house of their very good friend, Nanda, in a village called Gokul, situated just across the Yamuna river. Nanda's wife had just given birth to a daughter. Krishna asked Vasudeva to exchange the children and take the little girl to the prison instead. Though a witness to a huge line of miracles so far, Vasudeva was still doubtful as to how he was going to transport the child to Gokul. Krishna spoke up yet again and declared, "Your way will be cleared. Just proceed fearlessly."



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THE BIRTH OF KRISHNA - VASUDEVA AND DEVAKI ESCAPING FROM PRISON



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**VASUDEVA CARRIES NEW BORN KRISHNA
TO GOKUL**

Sure enough, the guards mysteriously fell asleep and the gates of the prison opened on their own. Vasudeva placed the divine infant in a wicker basket and, holding it over his head, proceeded to leave for Gokul. The night was stormy and scary and the Yamuna was rising every second. Miraculously, again, the river gave way and created a neat pathway for Vasudeva to cross over to the other side. Little Krishna, in the meantime, remained dry, as Adishesha or the Divine Serpent, protected the infant by covering the entire basket with his hood.

Vasudeva reaches Gokul

Vasudeva finally reaches the abode of Nanda, where he sees Yashoda and Nanda fast asleep beside their newborn infant. Vasudeva takes this opportunity to quickly exchange the children and takes their daughter back with him. Once he enters the prison cell, the doors close by themselves and the guards return to their state of wakefulness, never remembering anything else ever happening to them.

Kansa comes into the prison cell to look at the eighth infant and kill it too. When he grasps the baby's tiny feet in order to dash her against the wall, Devaki and Vasudeva reveal to him that it is a girl and not a boy, and so, she couldn't possibly cause him any harm. He decides to kill the baby anyway, but the infant, Maya, is no ordinary child. She surprises Kansa by deftly leaving his grasp and flies away, disappearing into nothingness. She laughs aloud and warns him, "You fool, did you really think you can win against the divine will? Your destroyer is already born and is safe in Gokul."



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MAYA APPEARS BEFORE KANSA

Kaumara - From birth to age six

Krishna settles down in Gokul

Nanda and Yashoda rejoice at the birth of their newborn son. The whole of Gokul goes into raptures and everyone celebrates the good tidings. Little do they know who the little Krishna really is. Krishna soon comes to be known for his mischievous pranks - an imp of a child who annoys the gopis (cowherd women) all the time. Though they temporarily lose their temper and complain several times to Yashoda, they still forget everything once the beautiful one looks at them and smiles innocently.

Once he completely settles down in Gokul, he starts performing many miracles, acting like a little prankster at one time, then protecting the people of Vraj and then, finally, charming the gopis out of their wits by indulging in dalliances with them.

Krishna kills Putana



KRISHNA KILLS PUTANA
Courtesy: Exotic India

Putana is a Rakshasi (demoness) who is killed and hence given Moksha (liberation) by Krishna. Putana or Poothani, as she was also called, was considered the "killer of infants". She was sent by the evil Kansa to kill the little Krishna. Putana assumed the form of a beautiful young woman and came to Vraj (Gokul). So beautiful was she that the residents of Gokul thought she was Goddess Sri Mahalakshmi in disguise! Taken in by Putana's good looks and refined attitude, Yashoda let her take Krishna in her arms and suckle him.

Putana had already spread an intoxicant, mandana, on her breasts. But the omniscient Krishna, who already knew what she was coming for, squeezed her breasts and sucked not only the milk, but also her very prana (life-force) from her. Putana screamed in great pain and pleaded with Krishna to release her. But the infant turned

a deaf ear to her entreaties and refused to let her go. Taking her original demonic form, she ran out of the town with Krishna still clinging to her bosom, till she ultimately fell dead.

The residents of Vraj cut up her body, buried her bones and burnt her flesh. A wonderful fragrance rose from the flames of the pyre, cleansing all of Putana's sins, granting her instant entry to the pearly gates of heaven. Thus, Putana earned the unique distinction of being known as Krishna's foster mother, just like Yashoda.

Some versions of this story claim that Putana's breast milk was poisoned, while some others relate that she stole Krishna at night, when no one was around. Though lore portrays Putana as wicked and evil, there is a story that narrates how, in spite of her evil intentions, her maternal instincts rise when she lays her eyes on infant Krishna. She forgets all about her actual mission and suckles him with a totally pure heart. This is how she gets liberated from this entire world.

Putana is now included in the group of malevolent Hindu Mother Goddesses, called the Matrikas. She is also part of the Yoginis and the Grahinis. Some ancient Indian medical texts also suggest her worship in order to protect children from several illnesses.

"Putana" is a combination of "Put" (virtue) and "na" (no), which implies, "the one without virtue". "Putna" also means "purifying", so the name could also mean, "one who purifies". Yet another meaning of "Put" is a kind of hell in Hindu mythology, associated with not having male offspring. Thus the demoness is related in this sense to motherhood.

Putana in her previous birth

In her previous birth, Putana was Ratnamala, the daughter of King Bali. When she saw Vamana (one of the earlier avatars of Vishnu), she had a desire to have him as a son and suckle him. But when Vamana acquired Bali's possessions, she was enraged and wanted to kill him. Legend has it that Krishna fulfilled both her desires in her next life - to suckle him and attempt to kill him!

Little Krishna's pranks

Krishna always troubled the gopis with his various pranks, each one different from the other. He would then feign complete innocence in front of his mother and deny every accusation the gopis brought home about him. If he saw any gopi walking along with a pot full of water on her head, he would throw a stone at it, so that it would break into pieces and the water would drench the gopi to the skin! He

would then play with the gopis' saris and keep pulling at the pallav (the loose end) till she tired of it.

Krishna as the Makhan Chor (butter thief)

Krishna is tremendously fond of butter and constantly tries to find more pots of butter to feast on. He, along with his friends, would raid the gopis' homes in their absence and drink the buttermilk and eat the butter available there. He would even steal the butter from his own home, whenever his foster mother, Yashoda, was not watching him.

One fine day, Krishna waits along with his friends for a gopi to leave her house in order to complete the day's work. They silently enter the house and look around for butter, as always. To their utter dismay, though, they find that the butter pot hanging from the ceiling is far too high for them to reach. They try hard to jump and get it, but they are not successful in their mission. Krishna suddenly comes up with a brilliant idea. He asks his friends to form a human pyramid and then climbs on top, thus gaining easy access to the pot. Bringing it down carefully, the children enjoy all the delicious homemade butter.

Krishna offers his friends just one little ball of butter each and happily gobbles up the rest. When his friends start complaining, he retorts saying that since it was his idea to get hold of the butter pot, it was also his right to enjoy the lion's share of the same.



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KRISHNA AS MAKHAN CHOR

Interestingly, the above incident is celebrated even today, in the form of the Govinda ritual in Maharashtra. Teams of people form human pyramids and try to reach a pot of money and other goodies hung high over their heads.

Garga Muni's visit to the Nanda household

Nanda requests Garga Muni, a great Brahmin Sadhu, to visit his household, purify his sons and cast their horoscopes. Nanda had not known that Krishna was Vasudeva's child, not his. So Garga Muni delicately explained how, according to astrology, Devaki could never have had a daughter as her eighth child. He also stated that Krishna was actually Vasudeva's son and that he had incarnated to destroy his maternal uncle, the evil Kansa. Garga Muni also revealed to him the true divine nature of Krishna, as one of the avatars of the Supreme Godhead, Sri Maha Vishnu.

Yashoda and her neighbours and friends took immense pleasure in enjoying all of Krishna's and Balarama's pranks. The children continued to steal butter from each house. On being chided, they would wonder why they should be punished, as there was no paucity of butter and milk anywhere. They would let loose the calves early in the morning, so the calves would drink all of the cows' milk. The cowherd women would not be able to milk the cows after that. But if Yashoda asked them to punish the boys, no one had the heart to touch the sweet innocent-looking little pranksters!

While Yashoda and Nanda discovered the Supreme in their hearts through Krishna's presence, the gopis and gopas were always in bliss being blessed by that power. The gopis especially developed a deep love for him.

Yashoda sees the world in little Krishna's mouth



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YASHODA SEES THE WORLD IN KRISHNA'S MOUTH

Fed up with all the complaints received from the Gopis, Yashoda decides to teach Krishna a lesson. She catches him red-handed, stealing the butter from a Gopi's house. She grabs hold of Krishna's hands and drags him to their home, where she securely ties him to a pillar. When Krishna still keeps denying he stole butter, saying, "Brother Balarama and all my friends are lying about me. I never stole any butter, I promise."

She commands him to open his mouth and show her. When the child innocently opens his mouth, Yashoda is absolutely amazed at what she sees therein. Yashoda beholds the entire universe, filled with many suns, moons and galaxies, orbiting in space, in the little child's mouth!

Krishna, though, sees to it that Yashoda does not recall anything of the experience thereafter. He commands Maya (a mystical power) to influence Yashoda and shroud her memory. Once Yashoda recovers, she has no recollection of the incident whatsoever.

Krishna as Damodara

Yashoda ties Krishna several times as punishment for his pranks. As a result of this, Krishna has also been referred to as Damodara. This name features as the 367th name in the Vishnu Sahasranama (1000 names of Vishnu) and has several connotations. The first meaning is a literal translation. The word "Damodara" comes from the words, "Dama" (cord) and "Udara" (stomach), which means, the one who is tied around the stomach (or waist region) with a cord.

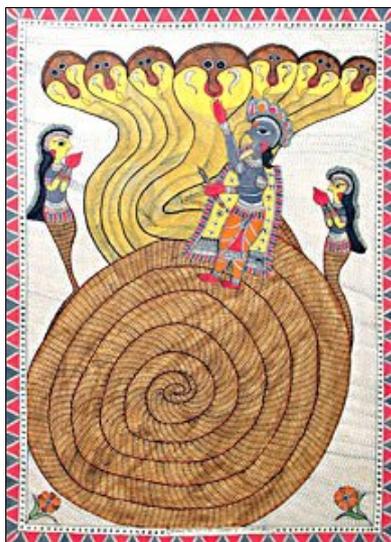
The second meaning of the name "Damodara" is the "One who is known through a mind which is purified (Udara) by means of self-control (dama)". Yet another meaning for the name is "One in whose bosom rests the entire universe."



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YASHODA TIES KRISHNA

Krishna tames Kaliya



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KRISHNA TAMES KALIYA

In the Yamuna river lived a monstrous, most venomous snake named Kaliya. One fine day, while the cowherds took the calves to graze, they happened to feel thirsty and proceeded to drink the sweet water from the lake. They did not know that Kaliya's poison had infested the water and they died instantaneously. On coming to know what happened, Krishna immediately reached the spot and brought them back to life.

Thereafter, Krishna entered the lake and joyfully pranced about in the water. This enraged Kaliya and he came out from the depths of the lake with the intention of attacking the boy. Kaliya, the thousand-hooded serpent, along with his brood, wound himself round Krishna and tried to kill him thus. Krishna seemed to faint under the pressure and went under. But just as soon as the Vraj cowherds started lamenting his loss, he showed up, effortlessly climbed onto Kaliya's hoods and started dancing on them. He kept dancing and striking various poses on his hoods.

The pressure of Krishna's feet subdued the monster serpent and tamed his ego. Soon, Kaliya started vomiting blood and lowered his hoods. But the Kaliya Nartan (dance of Krishna) went on till the serpent's wives come out of the lake with folded hands, pleading Krishna to stop his destructive dance and spare their husband's life. Krishna took pity on Kaliya and got off his hoods. Kaliya promised to stop harassing the people and decided to get back to the island of Ramanaka, his original abode. The water of the lake was now completely pure and sweet and shorn of all traces of Kaliya's poison.

The spiritual aspect of Kaliya Nartan

There is a deep spiritual connotation to the Kaliya incident. Kaliya embodies evil and this story relates that, no matter how evil tries to entrap the pure and the good, it can never succeed, as Krishna is there forever to protect those who are genuinely pure and totally devoted to him.

Once Kaliya repented his acts and decided to retreat, Krishna immediately forgave him and assured him that his vahana (vehicle), Garuda, would never ever consider Kaliya as his enemy. This also shows that those who reform their evil ways and come back to good, stand to get lifelong protection from Krishna.

Krishna lifts the Govardhan

Govardhan is a hill, which is situated near Vrindavan and is considered very sacred in Hindu culture. This is because both Krishna and Balarama had performed immense lilas in the vicinity of this hill. Literally, "Go" stands for "cows" and "vardhana" means "to nourish" or "increase". It is said that the Govardhan has the power to increase the bhakti (devotion) in the minds of the follower. Vaishnavas perform the Govardhan Puja on the day after Diwali.

There is a story which relates how Krishna lifted Govardhan in order to defeat Indra, the King of the Devas (gods). Krishna saw several of the residents preparing for a great annual offering to Lord Indra and asks Nanda about it. He then goes to the farmers and debates that they should be doing their duty and concentrate on their farming and their cattle. He said that performing one's 'Karma' or duty was truly the way towards liberation. He also stated that Indra was not one of the main gods, and so, he did not need to be worshipped with such fervor. The farmers thought a while and finally decided to follow Krishna's advice. This immensely angered Indra.

Indra let torrents of rain, thunder and lightning lash the little hamlet. The village got completely flooded in just a little while. Krishna merely smiled and lifted the Govardhan Giri with the little finger of his left hand. He held it up there as a protection for all the residents, cattle and other animals. Everyone safely huddled underneath the hill. Indra eventually accepted defeat and acknowledged that Krishna was indeed the supreme.

The true relevance of the Govardhan lifting episode

Though one of the many interesting tales of Krishna's childhood, this story is also the basis for the Lord's "Karma Yoga" theory in the Bhagavad Gita. This tale also marks a new beginning for Hindu philosophy, as worship shifted from being a mere set of sacrificial rights, to a more spiritual approach. Krishna was thus also seen as a great reformer in his time.



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KRISHNA LIFTS GOVARDHAN MOUNTAIN

Salvation of Trnavarta

One day, Yashoda was patting infant Krishna on her lap. Then, she placed him on the grounds, as he was too heavy to carry. She was then engaged in her usual chores. At this time, one of Kansa's servants, Trnavarta, as instructed by Kansa, took the shape of a whirlwind, picked Krishna up on his shoulders and raised a great dust storm all over Vrindavan. Vrindavan became so dark that no one could see anything around. Yasoda not seeing her baby anywhere, began to cry. The cowherd women immediately began to look for him, but could not find Him.

The baby on Trnavarta's shoulder assumed such a weight that he had to stop his activities. Baby Krsna began to weigh down on the demon. Krishna then caught hold of his neck. Trnavarta tried to get out of his clutches in vain. Trnavarta's eyes popped out from their sockets. Roaring fiercely, he fell down to the ground and died. When the gopis saw the demon killed and child Krsna playing on his body, they immediately picked Krsna up and took him to a much relieved Yashoda.

Giving deliverance to Nalakuvara and Manigriva



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KUBERA - GOD OF WEALTH

Krishna gives deliverance to Nalakuvara and Manigriva, two great demigods and sons of the divine treasurer, Kubera, who was also a great devotee of Lord Shiva. The two mahatmas (great souls) had been cursed and Krishna released them of that curse. Being very rich, the two sons of Kubera had fallen prey to bad ways and were addicted to wine and women. One day, the two brothers decided to make merry in Shiva's province of Kailasa, on the banks of the Mandakini Ganges. They drank to their content and enjoyed the singing of lovely women, sitting in a garden laden with flowers. They entered the Ganges filled with lotus flowers, dragged their women in there and generally enjoyed in the water.

Narada, the celestial sage, passed by them at that time. He knew they were too inebriated to even so much as notice him. But the young girls did and felt highly embarrassed and ashamed at being naked in front of sage Narada. They immediately covered themselves. But Nalakuvara and Manigriva still could not understand the situation and so, did not bother about covering themselves up. Sage Narada,

wishing their welfare, decided to reform them by placing a curse on them. He wanted them to rise about the material world and experience spirituality and attain Godhead. Material wealth, prosperity and their ego was the thing that got them down, so Narada realized it would be his duty to destroy that ego first.

Narada cursed them that they would become immovable living beings, or trees. Narada also saw to it that the brothers would realize why they were being cursed and that they would also remember the reason for it for the entire tenure of the curse. Narada cursed the two demigods that they would remain as trees for a period of one hundred years, after which, they would come face to face with the Supreme Godhead and be granted liberation by Him. As soon as Narada proceeded to return to his abode, Nayanagrama, the two brothers turned into twin arjuna trees. They grew in Narada's courtyard and so they had a good chance of being in Krishna's presence.

Yashoda had now bound little Krishna again to a wooden mortar in order to punish him for his mischief and also to restrain him from further mischief. But Krishna knew his mission well and proceeded towards the growing arjuna trees in order to fulfil Narada's prophecy. He was already who the twin arjuna trees really were and proceeded towards the passage between the two trees. He passed the passage, but the mortar trailing behind him, got stuck horizontally in it and refused to budge. Krishna took advantage of this and began to pull on the rope tying him to the mortar. He pulled with great strength and lo! Both the trees were felled and came down with a deafening roar.

Out from the broken trees emerged the two demigods who were trapped inside for a whole century. They were radiant personalities, casting a blinding light everywhere with their presence. They were instantly purified by Krishna's presence and humbly bowed down before him. They completely

surrendered their all to Him. Krishna smiled a brilliant smile and blessed them, granting them complete mukti from this material world. Having been thoroughly cleansed of their sins, Nalakuvara and Manigriva did pradakshina (circumambulated) of Krishna and proceeded to return to their father's abode.

The fortunate fruit vendor

One day, a fruit vendor came by and asked whether Krishna wanted any fruit. Krishna readily offered some food grains in exchange for the fruit. But being a child, he could not hold much grain in his palm. Besides, much of the grain fell off his palm too. But the fruit vendor was so taken in by the child's beauty that he readily agreed to the barter deal. When the vendor returned home, though, he saw that the whole basket of fruit had been filled with various jewels.

Killing Vatsasura and Bakasura

Krishna and Balarama were playing by the banks of the Yamuna one day, when the demon Vatsasura came to attack them, assuming the form of a calf. He thought he would go unnoticed among all the other cows and calves grazing there. But Krishna noticed him and told Balarama about it. The brothers approached the demon calf and holding it by its two hind legs and tail, forcibly whipped him around and threw him up into a tree. The demon fell to the ground and died, taking his original form.



KRISHNA KILLS BAKASURA
Courtesy: [Exotic India](#)

Yet another day, the cowherd boys saw a huge duck-like entity in the Yamuna. It was actually the demon Bakasura, a friend of Kansa. He attacked Krishna with his beak and swallowed him up in one gulp. But soon, Bakasura started feeling a burning sensation in his throat - a result of Krishna's effulgence. Quickly throwing up Krishna, Bakasura tried to kill him by pinching him with his beak. Krishna suddenly moved and caught hold of the beak and effortlessly bifurcated the mouth. Balarama and the other cowherd boys were stunned by this act and praised Krishna for his bravery.

Killing Aghasura

The demon Aghasura, who happened to be Putana's and Bakasura's younger brother, had sworn to kill Krishna. He had also promised Kansa that he would kill him. He expanded himself into the shape of an eight-mile long serpent and opened his mouth to look like a cave, so that he could swallow all the boys and their cattle at one go. When the boys saw the huge thing there, they first thought it was a statue. Then they realized it was a big serpent widening its mouth. They also knew Krishna would save them out of any trouble, so they bravely went into his mouth. Aghasura was waiting for Krishna to enter inside too.

Knowing that all his friends and the cattle were inside Aghasura, Krishna thought about a way to kill him. He too entered the demon's mouth. Krishna then began to expand his own form inside. The serpent now started getting choked by his expanding form and, without having a chance to breathe, died right there. Krishna helped all the boys come back to consciousness and led them out of the mouth of the serpent. Aghasura's effulgent soul was awaiting Krishna outside. Once Krishna stepped out of the mouth, the soul merged in the Lord. Krishna was under five years of age at that time.

Brahma steals the calves

One day, Krishna and his cowherd friends decided to eat their lunch by the banks of the Yamuna, while they let their cattle graze in the lush meadows just there. Unknown to them, though, the calves entered a deep forest nearby, enchanted by the new grasses. When the boys could not find the calves, they asked Krishna for help. Krishna told them not to interrupt their lunch and that he would go out in search for them. He too searched high and low and could not find them. When he returned disappointed, he could not see his friends there either. Krishna thought for a while and immediately

understood that Brahma had taken away the calves and the boys, just to test Krishna's powers. The divine child knew he could never go home without taking his friends along, as their parents too would get really worried.

Krishna immediately expanded himself and took the forms of the calves and the boys. No one could have guessed that the boys were all actually manifestations of Krishna himself. He entered the village and not a soul suspected a thing. Their mothers took them inside and, with all their love, fed the boys the milk flowing from their own breasts. No mother knew that she was actually fortunate enough to feed the Supreme Lord. This charade went on for a whole year.

Krishna then confided in Balarama about Brahma taking away the children and the calves and casting a spell of sleep on them. Brahma, who knew the children and cattle were under his care, had himself been wondering how the same children came back with Krishna. Now Brahma, the son of Vishnu, was confused with his own mystic power. He could not comprehend Krishna's ways. Krishna smiled at Brahma and, in order to convince him that they were not the original children and cattle, showed Brahma that each child was an aspect of himself. Each child then appeared blue-skinned, dressed in yellow garments, with an effulgent aura surrounding each of them. Their chests had the unmistakable mark of Srivatsa. All the boys were looking extraordinarily beautiful too.

Brahma then knew how Vishnu was present in every being, animate and inanimate. He realized that everything in this world was filled with Vishnu's Chaitanya (spiritual power). Brahma had already known how great Vishnu was, but he had just wanted to test if Krishna's aspect held that power too. He was totally overwhelmed by Krishna's unlimited power and realized how truly limited his own power was, as compared to Krishna.

Krishna lifted the veil of yogamaya off Brahma's mind and made him see how truly temporary the world really was. Brahma realized how Krishna was the Supreme Being that merely took the form of a cowherd boy on herd and that too, only for a brief period of time. Brahma immediately got off his swan chariot and fell at the Lord's feet, his ananda baashpa (tears of joy) washing Krishna's feet.

Pauganda - from age six to age ten

Killing Dhenukasura



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KRISHNA AND BALARAMA AS COWHERDS

Now Krishna had crossed his Kaumara and entered the Pauganda phase, which goes on from age six up to age ten. Krishna and Balarama started taking care of cows in the pasturing ground. Krishna would play his flute while on these trips around Vrindavan. The flora and the fauna in the region always felt at peace in the presence of Krishna. Flowers would bloom, birds would start chirping endlessly and animals used to prance around in joy. Krishna would in turn acknowledge their happiness and smile and bless them in return.

It was at that time that Krishna again exhibited his extraordinary powers. Krishna's closest friends, Sridama, Subala and Stoka Krsna informed him that near the place

their cattle were grazing, was a huge forest called Talavana. It was supposedly very beautiful, with all kinds of animal life and vegetation, except for one disturbing aspect. There was supposedly a vicious demon by the name of Dhenukasura, living in the forest, who made life miserable for the inhabitants of the forest. Dhenukasura had the form of a donkey and he was surrounded by assistant demons who took the same shape. Krishna's friends desired to explore that wooded area and enjoy themselves but were unable to do so due to the presence of these evil powers infesting the forest.

Krishna and Balarama immediately proceeded toward the forest, surrounded by their friends. Once inside Talavana, Balarama started to yank the fruit-laden trees, causing the luscious, ripe fruit to fall to the ground. On hearing the sound, Dhenukasura came storming on the scene. The demon came up to him and kicked him with his hind legs. When Balarama did not react, he repeated this act again. This time, Balarama caught hold of the legs and wheeled him around till he died. Balarama threw the body

at a palm tree and so heavy was the body, that the palm tree fell in a heap over other trees and a whole lot of them were felled, appearing like a hurricane had hit the region!

As if from nowhere, Dhenukasura's aides came rushing at Krishna and Balarama to attack them. But the lads caught hold of each donkey in the same fashion and dealt with each one just as they had done with the asura. The demigods witnessing the scene from the heavens, showered flowers on Krishna and Balarama and started beating drums and offering their obeisance to them. Animals, birds and people from outside eventually started visiting Talavana in order to collect the sweet fruit and fresh flowers it had to offer them.

When the boys came back to Vrindavan, they were praised by the villagers for their brave deeds. Villagers placed the tilak on their forehead and some decorated Krishna's head with a peacock feather headgear. The gopis were overjoyed on seeing their beloved Krishna again. The boys' mothers bathed them, dressed them beautifully and served their favourite dishes for their meals. Indeed, the whole of Vrindavan was proud to have such brave and extraordinary boys living there.

Killing Pralambasura

Krishna and Balarama had by now become extremely popular and had a great deal of friends. They would play around in the beautiful locales of Vrindavan. One day, when they were all at play, the demon Pralambasura entered their company, with the aim to kidnap Krishna and Balarama. The asura had assumed the form of a cowherd boy himself. Krishna understood why Pralambasura was there, but showed nothing on his face and welcomed him into the fold. Then he told his friends that their next game would be played in pairs. He said that they would challenge one another in pairs. Some of the friends went to Krishna's side, while the others took Balarama's side. They then started a duel. The rule was that the ones defeated would carry the victors on their backs.

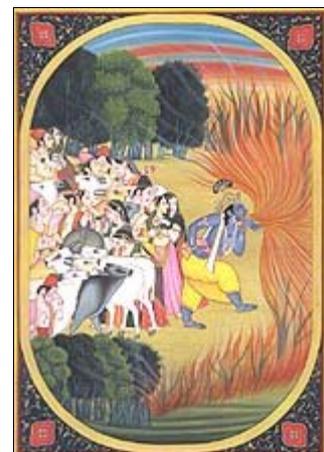
The boys entered the Bhandiravana forest. Balarama was accompanied by Sridama and Vrsabha and they were ultimately the victors. Krishna and his party had to carry them on their backs, right through the Bhandiravana forest. Krishna carried Sridama and Bhadrasena carried Vrsabha. Pralambasura carried Balarama on his back. Knowing how truly powerful Krishna was, Pralambasura carried Balarama far away from the crowd. He assumed his real form in front of Balarama. Balarama was amazed at the sheer gigantic size of the demon - his body extended all the way up to the clouds, his eyes flashing fire, the teeth gnashing.

Balarama immediately struck the asura in the head. Balarama was very strong himself, so one blow rendered the asura dead, his head smashed and blood pouring from his mouth. When his friends heard the crashing sound and rushed to the spot, they praised Balarama for slaying the terrible demon so easily. Krishna and Balarama looked at each other and exchanged secret smiles.

Krishna swallows up the forest fire

Once, when the boys were at play in the pasture, the cows, being unobserved, entered the forest and wandered off on their own, going deeper and deeper into the forest. They were searching for some more fresh grass. They then entered the forest of Isikatavi, a forest filled with fresh, green grass. But when the animals entered this region, they saw a huge forest fire there and began to weep in fright. The boys on the other side, could not find their cattle and proceeded in search of them. Tracing the animals' footprints, they just prayed that they could find their lost cattle. Very soon, they heard the animals crying.

Krishna had given each of the animals a name and he started calling out to them. The animals heard his voice and a joy arose in their hearts. But alas, the forest fire had surrounded them, so they were trapped in there. The flames went higher and higher and seemed to be capable of destroying everything in its wake. The boys were frightened out of their wits and requested Krishna and Balarama to help them out of the situation.



KRISHNA SWALLOWS THE FOREST FIRE
Courtesy: [Exotic India](#)

In the blink of an eye, Krishna swallowed up the huge tongues of fire and he persisted till all the fire

had died down. This way, he saved all the boys and their cattle. The boys, in the meantime, had become unconscious due to the fear. When they regained consciousness, they were surprised to see how peaceful it looked all around and wondered how it had happened. Indeed, Maya had tricked them yet again, making them blind to Krishna's Supreme powers.

Dalliances with the gopis



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A KRISHNA EACH FOR EACH GOPINI

Krishna continued with his dalliances with the gopis. Though it seems that he was flirting with each gopi, in reality, he shared a deep, pure bond of love with each gopi. It is said that the gopis were great Mahatamas in their previous birth, and that is how they had the good fortune to be with Krishna in their present birth. The gopis would be engrossed in their household chores. But when Krishna started playing his flute, they would forget everything else to rush to his side. So engrossed were they that they would forget they had a family and children to take care of, back home.

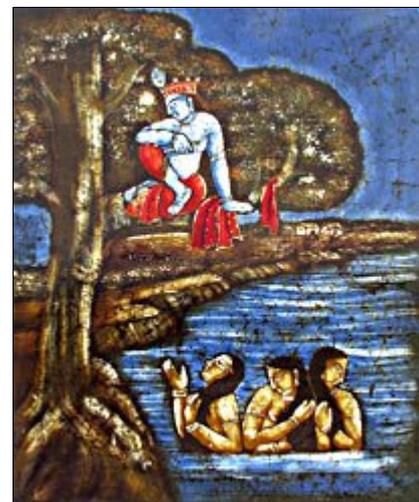
But the surprising thing here was that there was no home where the work was left undone. It would all automatically be taken care of by Krishna, even as the gopis were sitting by his side. None of the gopis' husbands ever missed seeing them around either. While a particular gopi was still mesmerized by Krishna's flute, there would be a 'duplicate' gopi sitting at home and finishing her chores and tending to the children, as always! Such was Krishna's affection for the gopis and the grace he showered on them.

Stealing the gopis' clothes

One day, when the gopis were bathing in the river, Krishna crept up quietly on the banks of the river and stole their clothes. He then climbed a nearby tree and placed the heap of clothes in a high branch. Settling himself down on a high branch, he watched the gopis frolicking in the water. The gopis had been too busy to notice Krishna there, so they had not suspected a thing.

When they prepared to come out, though, they were appalled to see their clothes missing. It was only when they heard Krishna laughing that they realized what actually happened. They could not come out of the water in their present state and so, they beseeched him to give them their clothes. But their request fell on deaf ears. Then Krishna made a pact with them that he would return their clothes if they came out of the water and requested him to return the clothes to them.

When the gopis saw that there was no other way to get back their clothes, they came out of the water and tried to cover their naked bodies with their hands. Krishna was yet unwilling to part with their clothes. He asked them fold their hands and raise them above their heads in total surrender and said that they would only then get their apparel back. Though very reluctant and highly embarrassed, the gopis finally agreed and did as they were told. They immediately got their apparel back.



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VASTRAHARAN BY KRISHNA

In actuality, Krishna was stripping the gopis of their ego and taught them to surrender themselves in front of the Supreme. This reminds one of the Draupadi Vastraharana (disrobing of Draupadi) incident, which takes place much later. Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, is ordered to be disrobed in public, in full view of several dignitaries present there. She is pulled by the hair to the sabha (congregation), is

verbally shamed and then tried to be disrobed. Her husbands and all the others present in the sabha are forced to stand by and watch the drama unfold.

Without seeing anyone else to help her out, she prays to Krishna to protect her modesty. Her brother-in-law, Dussasana, starts disrobing her. Draupadi initially tries to protect her sari with her hands. But when she sees the situation spiralling out of control, she completely surrenders herself to Krishna, raises her folded hands above her head, closes her eyes and goes deep into prayer. That is when Krishna steps in and miraculously covers her with reams and reams of fabric. The more Dussasana pulls at the fabric, the more the fabric is generated. Defeated, he ultimately falls exhausted to the ground. Draupadi is thus saved of the utmost humiliation.

Krishna's childhood sweetheart, Radha



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ETERNAL LOVE OF RADHA KRISHNA

Krishna had a childhood sweetheart, by the name of Radha. The lovely gopi, also referred to as Radharani or Radhika, is considered one of the incarnations of Goddess Lakshmi. Krishna and Radha spent much of their time together in their youth. They had a deep love for each other, a love that went beyond human perception. Radha is considered the prime devotee of Krishna and the other gopis, her assistants.

Radha's relationship with Krishna is on two levels, the svakiya-rasa (marital relationship) and parakiya-rasa (a relationship with eternal mental love). Radha's love for Krishna was far beyond the mundane and worldly. She had such a close bond with him that they would share thoughts even in periods of physical separation. Radha is

Krishna's constant companion, even advisor, and stays with him for over 10 years, till he leaves for Mathura.

Though Radha was never married to Krishna, according to major Hindu texts, the Radha-Krishna bond is much celebrated even today. ISKCON temples all over the world celebrate the Radha-Krishna union. So do many other sects. Though Krishna went on to marry Rukmini and Satyabhama, they never received the kind of adulation Radha did. This might be because of the true nature of love Radha and Krishna had for each other.

The Raas Lila

Krishna, Radha and the gopis would regularly perform the Raas Lila, a joyous dance to lively music. The gopis would form a huge circle and perform Dandiya Raas (keeping rhythm holding small wooden sticks in the hand, while dancing), Radha and Krishna would stand at the centre and dance away with gay abandon. None of the gopis ever felt jealous or envious of Radha, as each gopi had one Krishna all to herself! Such was the love of Krishna for the gopis that he would manifest taking several of his own forms, so that no gopi would ever feel forlorn. The brilliant Raas Lila has been romanticised in several works of the poet Jayadev, the author of the Gita Govind. Several other poems and songs too describe the beauty and the sheer joy of the Raas Lila.



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RAAS LILA OF KRISHNA

Krishna leaves Vrindavan and returns to Mathura



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THE TEARFUL DEPARTURE OF KRISHNA AND BALARAMA FROM VRINDAVAN FOR MATHURA

At the age of 10 years and 7 months, Krishna decides that it is now time to leave Vrindavan and head to Mathura, his birth place, to fulfil his mission of killing his wicked uncle, Kansa. The gopis are very depressed to see Krishna leaving and Radha is devastated. But he assures her that he will definitely come back and take her with him in the future. Krishna and Balarama leave for Mathura.

When the news about the boys' arrival reaches the residents of Mathura, they are all overjoyed and wait to catch a glimpse of the lads. Ladies get atop roofs of buildings and shower flowers on Krishna and Balarama as they walk down the streets of Mathura. Even the Brahmins go to greet them in keeping with the tradition of welcoming great souls into the land of Mathura.

A florist, Sudama, had two exquisite garlands ready for the boys to wear. Krishna promised him that all the good fortune in the world would be his for the asking. Kubja, the hunchback woman, who was carrying a bowl of sandalwood paste for the king, smeared it on them instead, saying this suited them better than it did the king. Krishna, in all his mercy, gave the woman a sharp jerk and completely cured her of her hunchback. Now she could walk absolutely erect.

Krishna then entered the Dhanur-yagna (sacrificial ritual) venue and proceeded toward the big bow that Kansa had placed there to designate this particular ritual. Krishna lifted the bow, strung it and, drawing it, broke it in the middle into two pieces. When the caretaker of the bow ordered his men to kill Krishna, the boys picked up the two pieces of the bow and killed all their attackers.

Krishna's mission was to defeat and kill Kansa in a wrestling match, to be held the next morning. But first, he had to deal with the elephant, Kuvalayapida.

Slaying Kuvalayapida

In the morning, Krishna and Balarama got ready and proceeded to go to the wrestling camp. At the gate, they saw a huge elephant, by the name of Kuvalayapida, being taken care of its mahout, riding on its head. The mahout was deliberately blocking the boys' entrance. He provoked the animal to attack the boys and it came rushing towards them, with every intention to crush them under its feet. When Kuvalayapida tried to grab Krishna with its trunk, the boy deftly moved aside. Running behind the elephant, he caught hold of its tail and pulled it hard. He then went in front of the creature and gave it a strong slap. Then he ran again behind the elephant. Then Krishna quickly came back and placed himself in front of the animal's two legs, thereby causing it to trip and fall.

The elephant was already very irritated and again came rushing at Krishna. This time, Krishna caught hold of its trunk and pulled the creature down. When it fell along with its caretaker, Krishna jumped up on its back, breaking its tusks in the process. After killing the caretaker and the elephant, Krishna took one tusk on his shoulder and proceeded towards the wrestling camp.

Krishna and Balarama kill Chanura and Mushtika

Kansa got nervous after hearing about Kuvalayapida's death. Kansa knew these boys were not just ordinary human beings. He sent his wrestlers, Mushtika and Chanura, to enter a duel with the boys. The wrestlers were very strong and had a formidable reputation all over the country.

Balarama decided to tackle Mushtika and Krishna took on Chanura. There was a huge struggle in the wrestling ring. Krishna struck Chanura thrice with his fist, but the wrestler came back to attack him. He struck Krishna on the chest, but the latter caught hold of his hands and wheeled him around in the air. Then he threw him down to the ground and that was the end of Chanura. Mushtika stuck Balarama as well, but Balarama returned the blow with even greater force, killing that wrestler too. Other wrestlers emerged, such as Kuta, Sala and Tosala. But the brothers vanquished and killed them all. The entire crowd gathered around, stood by and cheered wildly as the boys smiling proceeded towards Kansa.

Killing Kansa

Krishna jumped over the high guards of Kansa and proceeded to tackle him. Kansa was well prepared for this moment and he immediately unsheathed his sword and shield. Krishna nonchalantly caught hold of Kansa's hands - it was a grip Kansa could not free himself from. Krishna then knocked Kansa's crown down and grabbed his long hair. Dragging Kansa to the wrestling dais, Krishna threw him down and straddled his chest. Striking Kansa over and over again, Krishna stayed there till he made sure Kansa was dead.



KRISHNA SLAYS KANSA
Courtesy: [Exotic India](#)

Krishna meets Devaki and Vasudeva

After killing Kansa, Krishna goes to the dungeon to free Ugrasena and then meet his real parents, Devaki and Vasudeva. The boys fell at their parents' feet. Though Devaki and Vasudeva were in ecstasy at meeting with their children at last, they also realized the true, supreme nature of Krishna and hence, stayed on in that joy of being with the Supreme Being. Ugrasena finally ascends the throne and rules over Mathura for a long time.

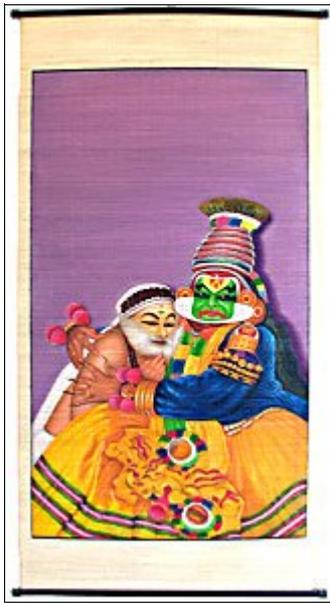
Krishna's life in the Ashram

Krishna is sent to the Ashram of sage Sandipani, soon after Ugrasena's coronation. There, Krishna imbibed all the virtues of a perfect youth. He was known to be the ideal student and was a favourite of both the Acharya (preceptor) and his wife. Before bidding goodbye to the ashram, Krishna asked his guru what he would like as gurudakshina (fees for the teacher). But the Guru desired nothing material.

Sandipani's wife, however, told him about their son having disappeared. He was playing at the beach one day, after which he mysteriously disappeared and never came back again. She asked Krishna to find him if he could. Krishna went to the ocean and asked the god of the ocean to hand over the boy to him. But the ocean did not possess any control over him, as he had been kidnapped by the demon Panchajanya. Krishna then went in search of Panchajanya. One he found the demon, he pleaded with him to return Sandipani's son Dutta, but the demon refused to let go of the boy. Finally, Krishna killed Panchajanya and rescued Dutta. Panchajanya's bones were ground to a powder, out of which Krishna's famous conch, the Panchajanya, was born.

Krishna returned with Dutta to the ashrama. His Guru and Gurupatni (guru's wife) were speechless when they saw their son returning to them. They had already known about Krishna's divinity and were filled with gratitude at the Supreme's grace flowing through their lives.

Krishna's bond with Sudama



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**KRISHNA WITH SUDAMA - A
KATHAKALI DANCE POSE**

Krishna never made a distinction between the rich and the poor. He was a friend to all and always maintained relations. Sudama, Krishna's classmate, was a poor Brahmin boy. The two boys soon became great friends. Though Sudama was poor, he had a pure heart, filled with love for Krishna. Once, when the boys felt hungry, Sudama had shared his little packet of puffed rice (poha) with him. Once they moved out of the ashram, though, the boys went their own ways and lost touch with each other.

Much later, when Sudama was in dire need of some money, his wife coaxed him to go to Krishna, then the ruler of Dwarka. Krishna welcomed him warmly and treated Sudama with all courtesy befitting a Brahmin. Having nothing else to offer as a gift, Sudama had brought him the usual packet of puffed rice. Krishna ate up two mouthfuls, enjoying the taste. When Sudama got back home, he was amazed to see a huge villa standing in the place of his little hut. His wife and children were bedecked in the finest clothing and jewellery. Krishna, in his kindness, had bestowed all wealth on him. Sudama lived happily ever after, ever in praise of the Lord.

Krishna returns to Mathura

After completing his tenure at Sage Sandipani's ashram, Krishna comes back to Mathura, to his parents, grandfather and all the residents waiting to greet him. He worked to instil faith in the people, telling them how they should fearlessly fight evil and never let it get them down. He conducted several public meetings and gave inspiring speeches as to how everyone was born to achieve a certain mission. Hearing all this, the masses were truly inspired to rise above mere existence to trying and achieving all their dreams.

Some time went by and then Krishna got to meet the Pandavas (sons of Pandu), also his cousins and befriended them. He got especially close to Arjuna. Krishna was, in fact, the central character, much later, during the course of the Kurukshetra War.

After staying in Mathura for a while, Krishna took his Yadava subjects to the city of Dwaraka in Gujarat, where he established his very own kingdom.

Did Radha and Krishna ever meet again?

While many Hindu works such as the Bhagavata Purana claim that Radha never met Krishna again, the Sri Krishna Janma Khanda of the Brahmavaivarta Purana brings out a different version of the story. Radha had once been cursed by Sudama in retaliation for a curse she had placed on him. Due to this curse, she was to be separated from Krishna for a period of 100 years. Goddess Parvati appeared before Radha and told her to go forthwith to Prabhasa, a province near Dwaraka, where Krishna was residing.

Radha, who had gone under severe depression at being separated from her beloved, had always worn a forlorn, dishevelled look. Now, she adorned herself again and looked her best for Krishna. The instant their eyes met, all the 100 years of suffering vanished and there was only joy left in both Radha and Krishna. Krishna took her in his chariot and they left for Vrindavan, where Krishna also met Nanda, Yashoda and the Gopis. He spent 14 blissful years there in the locale he had spent all his childhood.

The Krishna avatar lasted for 125 years, at the end of which Krishna, Radha and everyone else in Vrindavan mounted the celestial chariot and headed toward Goloka.

This article was written by **Saipriya Viswanathan**. Saipriya is a teacher/performer of Bharata Natyam, Carnatic vocal music and Carnatic Veena. She is a recipient of several awards for both dance and music, including the Sur Mani and Singar Mani titles. She is a recipient Govt. of India Merit Scholarship for dance and is a diploma holder in Carnatic vocal music.

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