

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:
The birth of Lord Krishna (Krishna Janmashtami)
Version 1

Length: 422 words = 2345 characters

e: ashutosh.vardhana@rochdalewriters.org.uk

© 2002 Ashutosh Vardhana

Date: 31 August 2002

Mk2.1

TECHNICAL NOTE

There are three versions of this article:

- Version 1, length 422 words, which explains the story underlying this festival and its theology (divine incarnations).
- Version 2, length 1410 words, which consists of version 1 plus information of festival customs at home and in temples, the significance of Lord Krishna for Hindus, and comparisons with Christian beliefs (childhood of Jesus). Additional illustrations can be found in Version 2.
- Version 3, length 921 words, same as version 1, plus information on customs and rituals, but omitting similarities between Krishna and young Jesus. For greater choice of illustrations see Version 2.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:

On 31 August this year (2002), Hindus celebrate the festival of Krishna Janmashtami, the birth of Lord Krishna. Ashutosh Vardhana explains the significance of this festival.

Ashutosh Vardhana:

The birth of Lord Krishna

(Version 1)

Hindus believe that the one invisible GOD THE ABSOLUTE, manifests in the shape of many personal gods and appears in material form from time to time to reduce evil, to support the good and to renew his teaching for mankind.

One of the most beloved of the Lord's ten incarnations was when he came in the form of Lord Krishna, whose birth we celebrate on the day of Krishna Janmashtami (31 August this year, 2002).



Kámsa about to slay his sister Dévaki, Vasudéva intercedes
© ISKCON

In the city of Mathura, there was an evil king, Kamsa. He was told that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him. He put her and her husband into prison and killed most of her children.

Kamsa is about to slay his sister Devaki. Vasudeva intercedes. Her life is spared but she has to live in prison instead.



Vasudéva carries Baby Krishna across the Yamúna
© ISKCON

When Krishna was born at midnight, the prison warders fell asleep, the gates miraculously opened and Devaki's husband Vasudeva carried the child through the stormy night and across the river Yamuna to the village of Gokula. A many-hooded serpent protected the child like an umbrella against the rain. Vasudeva exchanged baby Krishna for a baby girl (the goddess Durga) that had just been born in Gokula and took her back into his prison.

Vasudeva carries Baby Krishna
across the river Yamuna



Durga warns King Kamsa
© ISKCON

When King Kamsa came and flung the baby Durga against the wall to kill her, she slipped out of his hands, flew up into the air and turned into a fearsome woman: 'Wicked man, you cannot escape your fate. The child that will kill you lives safely in Gokula.' With that she disappeared.

The King was frightened to death. During the next twelve years, while Krishna grew up as a cowherd, King Kamsa sent out one demon after another to find and kill Krishna. They all failed.

Krishna was strong and intelligent beyond his years and gradually revealed to the people around him that he was God in human form. When he was twelve, he killed King Kamsa.

Durga warns King Kamsa

He later became a nobleman and took part in the great battle of Kurukshetra, a battle of good against evil. This battle is symbolic for the battle of life (jihad) which takes place within us and in which we try to overcome our lower desires.

Immediately before this battle, Krishna preached to the soldier Arjuna the wisdom that is contained in our holy book, the Gita. It teaches us how we should combine the duties of everyday life with our spiritual goals.

* * *

Ashutosh Vardhana: The Birth of Lord Krishna (Version 2)

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:
The birth of Lord Krishna (Krishna Janmashtami)
Version 2

Length: 1410 words = 7944 characters

e: ashutosh.vardhana@rochdalewriters.org.uk

© 2002 Ashutosh Vardhana

Date: 31 August 2002

Mk2.1

TECHNICAL NOTE

There are three versions of this article:

- Version 1, length 422 words, which explains the story underlying this festival and its theology (divine incarnations).
- Version 2, length 1410 words, which consists of version 1 plus information of festival customs at home and in temples, the significance of Lord Krishna for Hindus, and comparisons with Christian beliefs (childhood of Jesus). Additional illustrations can be found in Version 2.
- Version 3, length 921 words, same as version 1, plus information on customs and rituals, but omitting similarities between Krishna and young Jesus. For greater choice of illustrations see Version 2.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:

On 31 August this year (2002), Hindus celebrate the festival of Krishna Janmashtami, the birth of Lord Krishna. Ashutosh Vardhana explains the significance of this festival, which has many similarities with Christmas.

Ashutosh Vardhana:
The birth of Lord Krishna
(Version 2)

GOD BORN AS MAN

Hindus believe that the one invisible GOD THE ABSOLUTE, manifests in the shape of many personal gods and appears in material form from time to time to reduce evil, to support the good and to renew his teaching for mankind.

One of the most beloved of the Lord's ten incarnations was when he came in the form of Lord Krishna, whose birth we celebrate on the day of Krishna Janmashtami (31 August this year).



Kámsa about to slay his sister Dévaki, Vasudéva intercedes
© ISKCON

In the city of Mathura, there was an evil king, Kamsa. He was told that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him. He put her and her husband into prison and killed most of her children.

Kamsa is about to slay his sister Devaki. Vasudeva intercedes. Her life is spared but she has to live in prison instead.



Vasudéva carries Baby Krishna across the Yamúna
© ISKCON

When Krishna was born at midnight, the prison warders fell asleep, the gates miraculously opened and Devaki's husband Vasudeva carried the child through the stormy night and across the river Yamuna to the village of Gokula. A many-hooded serpent protected the child like an umbrella against the rain. Vasudeva exchanged baby Krishna for a baby girl (the goddess Durga) that had just been born in Gokula and took her back into his prison.

Vasudeva carries Baby Krishna
across the river Yamuna



Durga warns King Kamsa
© ISKCON

When King Kamsa came and flung the baby Durga against the wall to kill her, she slipped out of his hands, flew up into the air and turned into a fearsome woman: 'Wicked man, you cannot escape your fate. The child that will kill you lives safely in Gokula.' With that she disappeared.

Durga warns King Kamsa

KRISHNA GROWS UP

The King was frightened to death. During the next twelve years, while Krishna grew up as a cowherd, King Kamsa sent out one demon after another to find and kill Krishna. They all failed.

Krishna was strong and intelligent beyond his years and gradually revealed to the people around him that he was God in human form. When he was twelve, he killed King Kamsa.

He later became a nobleman and took part in the great battle of Kurukshetra, a battle of good against evil. This battle is symbolic for the battle of life (jihad) which takes place within us and in which we try to overcome our lower desires.



Immediately before this battle, Krishna preached to the soldier Arjuna the wisdom that is contained in our holy book, the Gita. It teaches us how we should combine the duties of everyday life with our spiritual goals.

Krishna teaches Arjuna the wisdom of how to conduct the battle of life (written down in the Gita).

CUSTOMS

The customs of Janmashtami vary in different parts of India and outside India. Communities outside India have to adapt to different work patterns and the societies in which they live. What people do also varies greatly from one person to another.

There are many **similarities** between the stories of **Janmashtami** and of **Christmas**.

Like Jesus, Krishna was born at midnight. People fast for 24 hours preceding that auspicious moment. While working they fill their mind with the presence of the Lord by doing japa, i.e. they murmur the Sanskrit mantra (prayer) 'Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya' (Praise be to Lord Krishna), similar to the continuous repetition of the 'Jesus prayer' (Lord Jesus Christ,

Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) which is popular in the Russian Orthodox church.

We clean and adorn our homes. We prepare delicacies, especially milk-based sweets (butter and cream were Krishna's favourites). They are taken to temple as an offering to God.

Families mark the passage from their front door to their meditation room with a child's footprints (made of flour and water), symbolising the entry of Baby Krishna.

When the work is done, we bathe and put on fresh clothes, the usual preparation for prayer and meditation. Some people read the entire Gita (18 chapters), the 'New Testament' of the Hindus, in their native language or listen to its being chanted in Sanskrit.

At sunset people assemble in temple where they sit for hours and chant bhajans (devotional songs). The image of Baby Krishna will be hidden behind a curtain. Only the priest has access.

At the stroke of midnight, the curtain will be opened, and the image of Baby Krishna be revealed sitting in a swing which is suspended from a horizontal pole and can be rocked by pulling a string. Devotees will ring bells (the size of ships' bells), blow conch shells, strike gongs and shout their welcome for the new-born saviour (cf 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise' [Psalm 98:4]). The greater the noise the better. This will continue for several minutes.

The image will be bathed in milk and honey and rinsed, a token of love and respect.

As people file out of the temple, they will each pull the cord of the swing a few times and rock the baby, thus expressing their love for the Lord in the form of a child.

They will receive from the priest prasad (food that has been offered to God and thereby been sanctified) and will now break their fast and go home for a joyful and sumptuous family meal at about one or two in the morning.

I remember an occasion about thirty years ago when I was a visitor to New Delhi and stayed in a hotel overlooking a savannah. I did not know where to find a temple. Deep in thought, I went for a walk at about 11 p.m. and heard chanting come across the dark savannah. I walked towards it and found myself outside a tiny, open-air temple, surrounded by a crowd of about 200 worshippers. A model of the town of Mathura (similar to a Christian belen/crib) had been built.

In the crowd was the hotel's manager who recognised and invited me, the lonely visitor, to share the Janmashtami meal with his family. I will never forget that.

KRISHNA AND CHRIST

The town of Mathura is to us what Bethlehem is to Christians. King Kamsa was afraid of being killed by Krishna. Therefore (like King Herod in the Christian tradition) he sent out his minions to kill all newly born children in Gokula. Krishna managed to escape.

Krishna was first worshipped by cowherds (as Jesus was worshipped by shepherds) and he grew up in their company.



Many of his youthful deeds and misdeeds are similar to those told in the gospel of St Luke and in the apocryphal gospels about infant Jesus. He was adored especially by the young women in his village and is often depicted in their company, especially that of his favourite Radha. Their tender relationship symbolises that between the human soul and God.

Krishna with his beloved Radha, image of God and the human soul



Krishna is often seen playing a flute (murli), with which he breathes life, the human soul, which is one with God, into us. His worship is very much based on bhakti, devotional love, rather than rational analysis (theology or philosophy), commandments and laws, and fear of punishment. We believe that everybody will come to him in the end, in this life or another.

Krishna with his flute. He breathes the divine life into us.

Krishna taught us to see God in everything that surrounds us, especially in all living creatures, not only humans, but the earth, plants, all animals, and, of course, all human beings, however lowly, or even 'wicked'.

Respect for all life, as opposed to exploitation of nature, is inculcated into us through our worship of (respect for) the cow, who is symbolically our mother, since we drink her milk. We treat her as sacred so that she can remind us that ***all*** nature is sacred. On paintings Krishna is therefore often seen in the company of cows.

Jesus was twelve years old when he displayed his wisdom in the temple of Jerusalem. Krishna was twelve when he accomplished the first great task for which he had been born, namely when he killed King Kamsa.

The Gita, which contains his teaching to mankind, is to Hindus what the New Testament is to Christians. It teaches us to pursue happiness by doing our duty without hankering after reward, and let God take care of the reward (if any).

* * *

Ashutosh Vardhana: The Birth of Lord Krishna (Version 3)

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:
The birth of Lord Krishna (Krishna Janmashtami)
Version 3

Length: 921 words = 5169 characters

e: ashutosh.vardhana@rochdalewriters.org.uk

© 2002 Ashutosh Vardhana

Date: 31 August 2002

Mk2.1

TECHNICAL NOTE

There are three versions of this article:

- Version 1, length 400 words, which explains the story underlying this festival and its theology (divine incarnations).
- Version 2, length 1410 words, which consists of version 1 plus information of festival customs at home and in temples, the significance of Lord Krishna for Hindus, and comparisons with Christian beliefs (childhood of Jesus). Additional illustrations can be found in Version 2.
- Version 3, length 921 words, same as version 1, plus information on customs and rituals, but omitting similarities between Krishna and young Jesus. For greater choice of illustrations see Version 2.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:

On 31 August this year (2002), Hindus celebrate the festival of Krishna Janmashtami, the birth of Lord Krishna. Ashutosh Vardhana explains the significance of this festival, which has many similarities with Christmas.

Ashutosh Vardhana:
The Birth of Lord Krishna
(Version 3)

GOD BORN AS MAN

Hindus believe that the one invisible GOD THE ABSOLUTE, manifests in the shape of many personal gods and appears in material form from time to time to reduce evil, to support the good and to renew his teaching for mankind.

One of the most beloved of the Lord's ten incarnations was when he came in the form of Lord Krishna, whose birth we celebrate on the day of Krishna Janmashtami (31 August this year, 2002).



Kámsa about to slay his sister Dévaki, Vasudéva intercedes
© ISKCON

In the city of Mathura, there was an evil king, Kamsa. He was told that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him. He put her and her husband into prison and killed most of her children.

Kamsa is about to slay his sister Devaki. Vasudeva intercedes. Her life is spared but she has to live in prison instead.



Vasudéva carries Baby Krishna across the Yamúna
© ISKCON

When Krishna was born at midnight, the prison warders fell asleep, the gates miraculously opened and Devaki's husband Vasudeva carried the child through the stormy night and across the river Yamuna to the village of Gokula. A many-hooded serpent protected the child like an umbrella against the rain. Vasudeva exchanged baby Krishna for a baby girl (the goddess Durga) that had just been born in Gokula and took her back into his prison.

Vasudeva carries Baby Krishna
across the river Yamuna



Durga warns King Kámsa
© ISKCON

When King Kamsa came and flung the baby Durga against the wall to kill her, she slipped out of his hands, flew up into the air and turned into a fearsome woman: 'Wicked man, you cannot escape your fate. The child that will kill you lives safely in Gokula.' With that she disappeared.

Durga warns King Kamsa

KRISHNA GROWS UP

The King was frightened to death. During the next twelve years, while Krishna grew up as a cowherd, King Kamsa sent out one demon after another to find and kill Krishna. They all failed.

Krishna was strong and intelligent beyond his years and gradually revealed to the people around him that he was God in human form. When he was twelve, he killed King Kamsa.

CUSTOMS

The customs of Janmashtami vary in different parts of India and outside India. Communities outside India have to adapt to different work patterns and the societies in which they live. What people do also varies greatly from one person to another.

There are many similarities between the stories of Janmashtami and of Christmas.

Like Jesus, Krishna was born at midnight. People fast for 24 hours preceding that auspicious moment. While working they fill their mind with the presence of the Lord by doing japa, i.e. they murmur the Sanskrit mantra (prayer) 'Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya' (Praise be to Lord Krishna), similar to the continuous repetition of the 'Jesus prayer' (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) which is popular in the Russian Orthodox church.

We clean and adorn our homes. We prepare delicacies, especially milk-based sweets (butter and cream were Krishna's favourites). They are taken to temple as an offering to God.

Families mark the passage from their front door to their meditation room with a child's footprints (made of flour and water), symbolising the entry of Baby Krishna.

When the work is done, we bathe and put on fresh clothes, the usual preparation for prayer and meditation. Some people read the entire Gita (18 chapters), the 'New Testament' of the Hindus in their native language or listen to its being chanted in Sanskrit.

At sunset people assemble in temple where they sit for hours and chant bhajans (devotional songs). The image of Baby Krishna will be hidden behind a curtain. Only the priest has access.

At the stroke of midnight, the curtain will be opened, and the image of Baby Krishna be revealed sitting in a swing which is suspended from a horizontal pole and can be rocked by pulling a string. Devotees will ring bells (the size of ships' bells), blow conch shells, strike gongs and shout their welcome for the new-born saviour (cf 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise' [Psalm 98:4]). The greater the noise the better. This will continue for several minutes.

The image will be bathed in milk and honey and rinsed, a token of love and respect.

As people file out of the temple, they will each pull the cord of the swing a few times and rock the baby, thus expressing their love for the Lord in the form of a child.

They will receive from the priest prasāda (food that has been offered to God and thereby been sanctified) and will now break their fast and go home for a joyful and sumptuous family meal at about one or two in the morning.

I remember an occasion about thirty years ago when I was a visitor to New Delhi and stayed in a hotel overlooking a savannah. I did not know where to find a temple. Deep in thought, I went for a walk at about 11 p.m. and heard chanting come across the dark savannah. I walked towards it and found myself outside a tiny, open-air temple, surrounded by a crowd of about 200

worshippers. A model of the town of Mathura (similar to a Christian belen/crib) had been built.

In the crowd was the hotel's manager who recognised and invited me, the lonely visitor, to share the Janmashtami meal with his family. I will never forget that.

^^^eof