

## **GOKULASHTAMI**

Gokulashtami falls on Sravana suddha ashtami. This marks the birth of Lord Sri Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

**Pooja procedure :** It is a night festival. In the homes of south Indian Maharashtrians, the pooja procedure differs slightly. Young children busy themselves in preparing a clay model of “Gokula” in which a compound wall is made, inside which clay models of Vatapatra sayee Krishna (infant form of Krishna as lying on a fig leaf), Balarama in cradle, a Panchangi for Panchanga patana, a woman with a basket full of fruits, a donkey and a crow on a tree are well laid, to create a semblance of the events at the birth of the Lord and this model is worshipped in the midnight. In Maharashtra, youth dance on the streets to the accompaniment of drums chanting, “Govinda ala re” meaning Govinda has come. Devotees throng the temples of Lord Krishna and sing bhajans in praise of the Lord. It is common sight to see the youth smearing themselves with red gulal and take part in the “Dahi Handi ceremony”. The Handis contain prize money ranging from a few thousands to some lakhs. They form human pyramids to reach the pot, break it and win the prize money.

Murukku and Seedai are some of the important snacks prepared for this festival in south Indian families.

### **Story of Gokulashtami**

Sage Narada, the great benefactor of the world, went to Satyaloka to see his Pitamaha, Brahma who was seated on the white lotus. He prostrated before the Lord.

Brahma on seeing Narada enquired, “O, Narada, what brought you here to satyaloka? You are an eternal wanderer. Have you any latest news? Please tell me”. Narada replied, “Pitamaha, my pranams. I am eager to know about Gokulashtami and its significance. Please unfold the Mahatmya of this vrata”.

Brahma continued, “O, my child Narada, I will tell you in detail about this vrata. It is undoubtedly capable of destroying all sins of our past deeds and confers all prosperity. It is the day on which Maha Vishnu took Avatar as Lord Krishna. It is therefore the birthday of Lord Krishna. He was born at midnight to Vasudeva and Devaki in a prison and immediately was transferred to Yasodha’s house. This vrata is therefore observed at night.

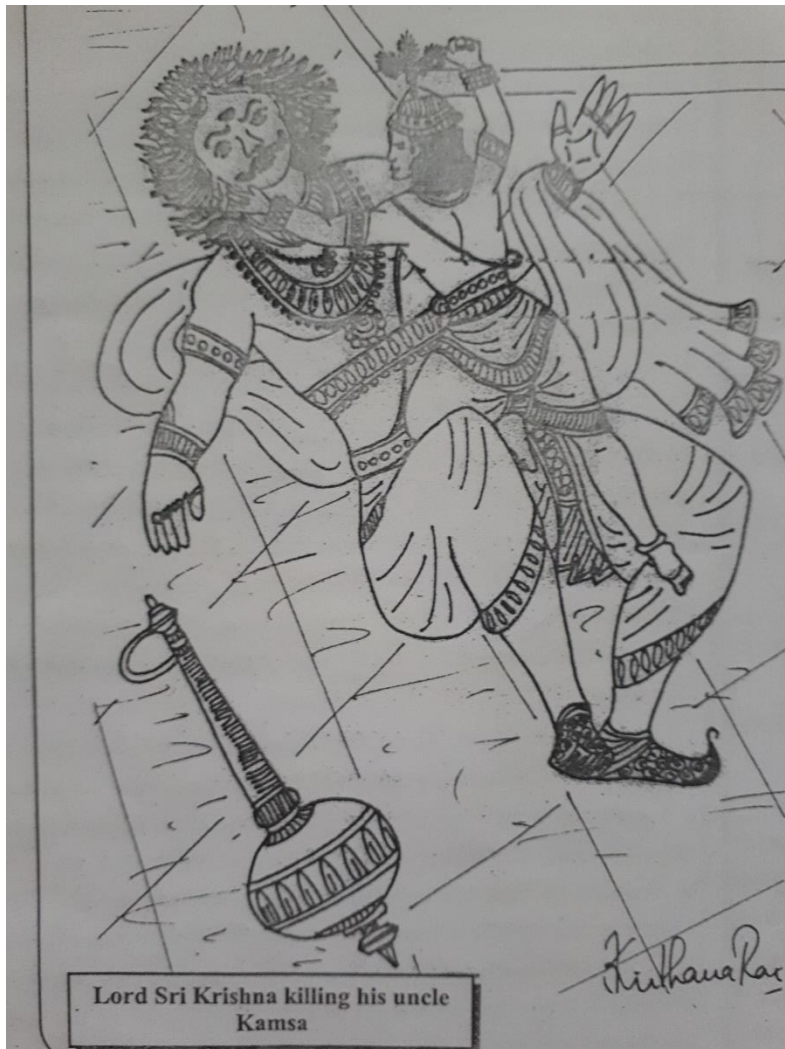
The very mention of Gokulashtami rids us of all our sins. What doubt is there, if I say, that we will get all benefits and grace of the Lord by worshipping Him on this day. The benefits are manifold equivalent to conducting Ashwamedha Yaga, taking holy dips in all our sacred rivers. In addition, if we observe fast on this day, additional benefits are gained such as giving 100 cows, 10 crores of pearls, 10000 horses, 1000 elephants not to speak of gifting 1000 gold sovereigns at Kurushetra and above all of having performed 1000 kanyadans.

Observing this Vrata, once in a year, is equivalent to sacrificing one's life for the sake of Guru, and Brahmins, teertha tana (visiting holy places), giving oblations to our forefathers and so on.

After observing fast on this day, to follow it up with breaking the fast next day and partaking food gives a status equal to Ambarisha and finally attain Vaikunta like Vasishta, Valmiki, Valakhilya, Gautama, Gargya and Jamadagni. You will be able to see Lord Purushothama. On the other hand, those who do not observe this Vrata sincerely, eat a full meal on that day commit sins like Surapana (alcoholic drinks), Gohatya (cow slaughter), streeshatya (women slaughter) finally end up in hell”.

Narada said, “O, Pitamaha, I have been intently listening to what all you said about this Vrata and its good and bad effects. Now I would like to know more about how this Vrata should be observed.”

Brahma continued, ‘Listen Narada, follow this simple procedure. At noon



on Gokulashtami day, take your bath, sprinkle Tulsi water on your head, clean the floor set for the pooja with water mixed with cowdung, get a metal kumbha, place ghatam over this with mango leaves, and decorate it. Put Balakrishna bimba, preferably of silver, perform sodasopachara Pooja in the usual manner. Offer pure butter made from cow's milk (Krishna is fond of butter) give gifts in plenty, do not be miserly. Finally offer Argya with milk and grapes. The pooja should be performed at midnight (the time Lord's birth took place), keep awake that night, perform pooja next day and break the fast. Offer plenty of Tulsi flowers and garlands. Do pradakshina namaskarams”.

The main object of Lord Krishna's birth was to destroy the cruel King Kamsa of Mathura. His sister Devaki was married to Vasudev, A voice from heaven announced that the eighth child of Devaki would

kill him. He imprisoned Devaki and Vasudev. Six children born to them were killed by Kamsa. When Devaki conceived for the seventh time, gods transformed the embryo to Rohini's (Vasudev's second wife) womb, and a son by name Balaram was born (incarnation of Adishesha). When the eighth child was born to Devaki, the child changed into Vishnu's form and commanded Vasudev to carry him to Nandgaon, place him besides Yasodha (wife of Nandagopa) and bring back the female child of Yasodha. Kamsa, enraged smashed her on a rock, but she escaped and flew away to heaven, warning Kamsa that his killer is alive.

Krishna grew up in Nandagopa's house among cowherds, played flute, played raslila with Gopis and was fond of butter, which he stole from Gopis' houses. Gokulashtami is also celebrated as "Gopal Kala" or "Dahi Kala".