



Ow Hindus Across India

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Conforming to the Hindu lunar calendar, Janmashtami is observed on the eighth day (Ashtami) of Krishna Paksha, or the waning moon, which usually falls in August or September. It is celebrated across the country, but the festivities in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh (especially Mathura and Vrindavan) are particularly grand.

Celebrations include dance-drama enactments of the life of Lord Krishna, prayers, night vigils and fasting. The gaiety of the festival is accompanied by cultural events and competitions, the most interesting being Dahi Handi (breaking a pot filled with yoghurt).

The legend surrounding Janmashtami

Like every other festival in India, the origin of Janmashtami is associated with a famous legend. According to myth, there was a time when Hindu deity Bhumi Devi (the goddess of earth) prayed to Lord Vishnu to help rid her of evil rulers. One of them was Kansa (in Mathura). Vishnu promised Bhumi Devi that he would reincarnate himself in human form to destroy those inflicting pain upon her and others.

Kansa had a sister named Devaki, who was married to Vasudeva. The day they got married, a heavenly voice predicted that the eighth son of Devaki would kill Kansa. Frightened by this ominous prophecy, Kansa imprisoned the couple and killed six of their children. The seventh child (named Balrama), however, was saved due to divine intervention.

And when the eighth child – Krishna – was born, he was believed to be an avatar of Lord Vishnu (the preserver and protector of the universe). The doors to the prison opened and Vasudeva's chains fell off magically. In order to protect his son, he gave him to Nanda, his friend who lived in Gokul. From that point onward, Krishna was raised by his foster parents, Yashoda and Nanda. Years later, Lord Krishna killed Kansa and the other evil kings. Janmashtami is a celebration of this legend and marks the victory of good and the destruction of all things bad.