

The Birth of the Blue God

Adapted from the book, "Hindu Stories" written by Anita Ganeri and published by Evans Brothers.

On the banks of the Yamuna River in India, lay the kingdom of Mathura, which was ruled over by wicked King Kamsa. The king was unjust and unpopular but nobody dared disobey his orders. They were much too afraid of what he would do. The only good thing about King Kamsa was his beautiful sister, Devaki, who was kind and sweet to everyone.

On the day of Devaki's wedding, King Kamsa was driving the chariot of his sister, and her new husband, Vasudeva. Suddenly, a voice boomed out of the sky. "Beware, O king," it announced. "Beware of your sister's children. For her eighth child will one day kill you."

Then the voice was gone. King Kamsa was startled and a little bit frightened. What if the voice was telling the truth? He decided that the best thing to do was to kill his sister to make sure the prophecy could not happen. There and then, he drew out his sword. But Vasudeva begged the wicked king to change his mind.

"Spare her life, I beg you," Vasudeva pleaded, "and take our children instead. We will give them to you when they are born."

King Kamsa agreed. To make sure that Devaki and Vasudeva, and their children, could not escape, he threw them into prison and had them guarded day and night.

And so matters went on for several years. Devaki had seven babies and wicked Kamsa killed them, one by one. From his home in heaven, Lord Vishnu saw what was happening and knew what must be done.

"I shall have myself born as Devaki's eighth child," said Vishnu. "I will be born as the baby Krishna." So this is exactly what happened. One night, in August, Devaki gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. To celebrate this happy time, there was peace and plenty all around. The rivers flowed clear and full; the lakes bloomed with lotuses. The forests were filled with birds and peacocks, singing their sweet songs. Heavenly music rang from the skies and everyone was joyful. For this was no ordinary baby. Devaki cried to think that she must hand him over to the king.

"Give him to me," said Vasudeva, suddenly. "I will make sure he is safe. The king will not kill this child."

With the help of the gods, Vasudeva escaped from prison and crept right past the king's guards. (The gods had sent them to sleep while Vasudeva made his getaway.) When he reached the river, he lifted the baby high above his head and waded across to the other side. All the time, his heart was pounding. What if the guards woke up and warned the king he was gone?

Once he was safely over the river, he went to a house in the village of Vrindavana and knocked on the door. It was the home of a kindly cowherd called Nanda and his wife, Yashoda. Unseen by anyone, he exchanged his son for Yashoda's new-born daughter and hurried back to the prison. Next morning, he handed the baby over to the king. But the baby was really a goddess, and when King Kamsa tried to kill her, she flew right out of his hands and returned to the heavens.

When King Kamsa found out that he had been tricked, he was furious. He had the palace searched from top to bottom, then sent his soldiers into every corner of his kingdom to kill all the baby boys they could find. But they did not find Krishna because the cowherd's village lay outside his lands. And the prophecy? Well, many years later, an informer told King Kamsa that Krishna was still alive and the king sent demon after demon to kill him. Finally, he invited Krishna to a wrestling match with two gigantic wrestlers. But Krishna killed the wrestlers before they could harm him, and then killed the evil king himself, just as the voice from the sky had said he would.