

Janmastami the Festival

Janmastami comes 8 days after the full moon of the Shravan month and it celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna. Many devotees begin fasting from 'Sataam' till the midnight of Krishna's birth, where it is broken by tasting the 'Prashad' that was offered to him. There are two types of fasts; *Nirjal* fast is where they do not even have a drop of water on this day. They feel it will take them closer to God. The other fast is *Phalahar Vrat*, where only milk and fruits is eaten on this day. Salt and Cereals is also avoided on this day. People feel that it is the only thing that they can offer to God. Fasting is accompanied by singing bhajans throughout the day. Traditional sweets, made out of milk and butter are also eaten on this day, being one of Krishna's favorite dishes.

"Jhanki" means peeping into ones life. In this case, the moments of Krishna's life is relived. People or Dolls are dressed up as Krishna, Devki and Vasudev. There are five scenes that are usually reconstructed. These are the birth of Krishna, Vasudev carrying Krishna safely across River Yamuna, His return to jail, the killing of Yashoda's daughter and Little Krishna in his cradle in Gokul. The people that dress up are not seen as humans at this moment, but a representation of the Lord.

The festival of Janmastami can go on for a number of days, as per family tradition. So, on the second day, the ladies usually wake up early to make a paste out of rice flour, and imprint footsteps coming towards their door. This symbolises Krishna's footsteps into his foster home.

The 'Dahi Handi' ceremony also takes place later on this day. It consists of a clay pot being filled with milk, dry fruits and ghee, hung up on a rope above the ground. Many form a human pyramid to break the pot, and the people around throw water on them, trying to stop them. Many believe that a broken piece from this pot will keep away negative powers.

