

Fall 2020 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
Heroes & Villains in Asian Art and Culture
Sponsored by the *Society for Asian Art*

The Hero Dances: Representing Krishna's "Play"

Forrest McGill, Asian Art Museum
August 28, 2020

In what senses is Krishna a hero?

Questions of dance

When and why does Krishna dance?

- As a mischievous toddler dancing after stealing a treat
- As a brave boy dancing to overcome the serpent Kaliya
- As an alluring young man dancing with the cowherd women

What do these dances *mean*?

When and why does Krishna **not** dance?

- As killer of foes?
- As ruler
- As Arjuna's charioteer and the expounder of the Bhagavad Gita
- As the supreme being? But maybe . . .

Can we tell dancing from others of Krishna's activities in visual representations?

When and why do the people around Krishna dance?

When and why do his worshipers dance? (And what about the "Hare Krishnas"?)

What's the importance of ritual performances of the dance of Krishna and the cowherd women?

Key terms:

lila ("play")

bhakti (Britannica: "mutual intense emotional attachment and love of a devotee toward a personal god and of the god for the devotee")

rasalila the "dance of divine love" of Krishna and the cowherd women (*gopis*)

Characters in the legends

Krishna's parents: Devaki and Vasudeva; foster parents: Yashoda and Nanda

Krishna's brother and sister: Balarama and Subhadra

The villain: Kamsa (brother of Krishna's mother Devaki), ruler of Mathura

An important mystic and ecstatic devotee of Krishna

Chaitanya (1486 – 1533)

Important places in the legends of Krishna:

Mathura, Gokula (Gokul), Vrindavana (Brindaban), Vraja (Braj), Nathadvara (Nathdwara),
Dvaraka (Dwarka)

Goloka

Further Reading

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