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### Speak Up

## ŚRĪKṚṢṆA IN THE JAIN TRADITION

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Across India, Śrīkṛṣṇa is revered and deeply loved by people of all walks of life. Whether within the Vedic or Śramaṇic traditions, his name evokes deep love and spiritual admiration. Though his portrayal varies across religious texts, his popularity remains timeless and universal. Interestingly, Jain literature offers unique insights into Śrīkṛṣṇa's life, presenting him not as an incarnation of Viṣṇu (as in the Vedic tradition), but as one of the 63 *śalākāpuruṣas*, or illustrious personalities. Although there are some differences in his depiction in the two traditions, there are some striking similarities, too.

According to both Jaina and Vedic texts, Śrīkṛṣṇa was born to Vasudeva and Devakī. Jain scriptures also state that Śrīkṛṣṇa was the cousin of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Jain *tīrthaṃkara* – Bhagavāna Neminātha. Neminātha's father, Samudravijaya, and Śrīkṛṣṇa's father, Vasudeva, were brothers. This familial connection underscores Śrīkṛṣṇa's historical and spiritual significance within the Jain tradition. Also, the triad of Baladeva, Śrīkṛṣṇa, and Jarāsandha, Śrīkṛṣṇa is often mentioned in Jain texts.

The Jain canonical text *Antakṛddasāṅga Sūtra*, along with many other Jain scriptures, discusses Śrīkṛṣṇa's life in detail. His devotion to Tīrthaṃkara Neminātha is evident in the episode where Śrīkṛṣṇa personally arranges for his brother Gajasukumāla's initiation under Tīrthaṃkara Neminātha. He even announces that anyone wishing to be initiated by Bhagavāna Neminātha will have their arrangements made by Śrīkṛṣṇa himself. Remarkably, all eight of Śrīkṛṣṇa's principal queens are also said to have been initiated by Bhagavāna Neminātha.

There is even an account where Śrīkṛṣṇa himself expresses a desire to renounce the world and be initiated by Bhagavāna Neminātha. However, Bhagavāna Nemināth explains that the role of a Vāsudeva (a great worldly leader) is to establish righteousness within society, and thus, renunciation is not his path. This episode reflects Śrīkṛṣṇa's deep reverence for Bhagavāna Neminātha and his faith in Jain values. Responding to Bhagavāna Neminātha's preaching, Śrīkṛṣṇa initiates a prohibition on alcohol, meat, and gambling in the city of Dwarka.



Jain literature portrays Śrīkṛṣṇa as a skilled strategist and wise political advisor. He is depicted as judicious, detached, a promoter of dharma, as well as brave, humble, and diligent. Though a Vāsudeva, Śrīkṛṣṇa remained steadfast on the path of self-realization. As a result, in his further birth, he is destined to be reborn as the 12<sup>th</sup> *tīrthaṃkara* named Amamasvāmī as per Śvetāmbara tradition (or 16<sup>th</sup> *tīrthaṃkara* named Nirmala as per Digambara tradition) and continue to illuminate the path of dharma.

In the Jain tradition, the life of a *śrāvaka* (householder) is distinctly framed as a sincere and meaningful spiritual path, separate from the ascetic life of a *śramaṇa* (ascetic). The *śrāvaka* is not merely a passive believer but an active participant in the ethical and spiritual vision of Jainism, particularly as articulated through the values attributed to Ṛṣabhadeva, the first *tīrthaṃkara* Bhagavāna Ṛṣabhadeva's teachings advocate a way of life that harmonizes education, entrepreneurship, and prosperity with a foundation of ethical and spiritual integrity

In this light, Śrīkṛṣṇa's life can be seen as a luminous example of the householders' ideal—living ethically, intelligently, and compassionately within the world, without forsaking spiritual depth. It complements the ascetic path by showing that liberation and ethical excellence are not confined to renunciation alone, but can also be pursued through responsible, dharmic engagement.

Śrīkṛṣṇa's philosophy of life is reflected across nearly all Indian languages, attesting to his broad-hearted acceptance and universal appeal.

Let us, on this auspicious occasion of Śrīkṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭami, offer our reverence to his virtues and walk the path he illuminated, paving the way for our own spiritual upliftment.

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