

## WHO ARE GOPIS?



**Gopi is a word of Sanskrit (गोपी) origin meaning 'cow-herd girl'. In Hinduism specifically the name gopi (sometimes gopika) is used more commonly to refer to the group of cow herding girls famous within Vaishnava Theology for their unconditional devotion (Bhakti) to Krishna as described in the stories of Bhagavata Purana and other Puranic literatures. Of this group, one gopi known as Radha (or Radhika) holds a place of particularly high reverence and importance in a number of religious traditions, especially within Gaudiya Vaishnavism.**

**The gopis of Vrindavan total one hundred and eight in number, they are generally divided into three groups: Gopi friends of the same age as Krishna; maidservants; and gopi messengers. The first group are the most exalted, Krishna's contemporary gopi friends, the second group are the maidservants and are the next most exalted, and the gopi messengers come after them. The primary eight gopis are considered the foremost of Krishna's devotees after Srimati Radharani. Their names are as follows :**

**Lalita (gopi) Sakhi  
Vishakha Sakhi  
Campakalata Sakhi  
Citra Sakhi  
Tungavidya Sakhi**

**Indulekha Sakhi  
Rangadevi Sakhi  
Sudevi Sakhi**

**According to Hindu Vaishnava theology the stories concerning the gopis are said to exemplify Suddha-bhakti which is described as 'the highest form of unconditional love for God' (Krishna). Their spontaneous and unwavering devotion is described in depth in the later chapters of the Bhagavata Purana, within Krishna's Vrindavan pastimes and also in the stories of the sage Uddhava.**

**The gopis may be divided into three groups: 1. Gopi friends of the same age as Krsna, 2. maidservants and 3. gopi messengers.**

**Learned scholars have also divided Lord Krsna's associates into the following nine categories : 1. yutha, 2. kula, 3. mandala, 4. varga, 5. gana, 6. samavaya, 7. sancaya, 8. samaja, 9. and samanvaya.**

**Of the three kinds of gopi associates of the Lord of the three kinds of gopi associates of the Lord, the first group, Krishna's contemporary gopi friends, are the most exalted, the second group, the maidservants are the next most exalted, and the gopi messengers come after them. These three groups correspond to the groups mentioned as samaja, mandala and gana respectively. The first group, Krishna's contemporary gopi friends, may be further divided into varistha (the most exalted ) and vara (exalted).**

**The varistha gopis are more famous than all the others. They are eternally the intimate friends of Sri Sri Radha-Krishna. No one can equal or exceed the love they bear for the divine couple.**

**Of all Krishna's friends, the varistha gopis are the most worshipable. They are decorated with incomparable transcendental qualities, bodily beauty and all other charming opulences.**

**Krishna's contemporary gopi friends decorate their own dear friend Srimati Radharani. They cheat their husbands parents and other guardians (by going to meet Radha and Krishna) and they take Srimati Radharani's side when she has a lover's quarrel with Lord Hari.**

**These gopis assist Radha and Krishna in Their secret rendezvous. These gopis serve palatable meals to the divine couple and afterward relish tasting the remnants left by Them. These gopis carefully guard the secret of Radha's and Krishna's confidential pastimes together.**

**Their minds are pure and they are very expert and intelligent. They serve Radha and Krishna very appropriately. They glorify their own group and criticize the followers of Candravali, Radharani's rival.**

**They please Radha and Krishna by expertly singing, dancing and playing instrumental music. At the appropriate time they beg to be engaged in various appropriate services.**

**For the most part the learned devotees know about these activities of Krishna's gopi friends. All the gopis are aware of these and all the other similar services and they actively serve Radha and Krishna by performing these activities.**

**The gopis who are close associates of the divine couple are directly engaged in these services, whereas other gopis are not.**

**Some gopis serve the divine couple in the garden known as Madanonmadini among the flowering creepers, betel creepers and betel trees. Some gopis are expert at playing various magic tricks, some are expert at composing riddles and some are appointed to provide betel nuts for the divine couple. All these gopis are the servants of Srimati Radharani.**

**Other gopis are specifically the friends of Lord Baladeva. Lalita-devi is the leader and controller of all these exalted and worshipable young gopis.**

**Srimati Radharani's rival is Candravali. Among Candravali's friends are Padma, Syama, Saibya, Bhadra, Vicitra, Gopali, Palika, Candrasalika, Mangala, Vimala, Lila, Taralaksi, Manorama, Kandarpa-manjari, Manjubhasini, Khanjaneksana, Kumuda, Kairavi, Sari, Saradaksi, Visarada, Sankari, Kunkuma, Krsna, Sarangi, Indravali, Siva, Taravali, Gunavati, Sumukhi, Keli-manjari, Haravali, Cakoraksi, Bharati and Kamala.**

**The beautiful gopis may be considered in hundreds of groups, each group containing hundreds of thousands of gopis.**

**Among all these gopis the most important are Srimati Radharani, Candravali, Bhadra, Syama and Palika. These gopis are full of all transcendental good qualities.**

**Of these gopis Srimati Radharani and Candravali are the best. Each of them has millions of doe-eyed gopi followers.**

**Because She possesses all charm and sweetness, Srimati Radharani is the better of the two. She is supremely famous. In the Sruti-sastra She is known by the name Gandharva-devi.**

**Lalita-devi and the other eight principal gopis, the other gopis and the manjari have forms that are for the most part like the transcendental form of Srimati Radharani, the queen of Vrndavana.**



**Rangavali-devi and other gopis are expert at drawing various designs in tilaka, artistically stringing flower garlands, composing clever verses and acrostics such as sarvatobhadra, conjuring magical illusions by chanting mantras, worshipable the sun god with various paraphernalia, singing in various foreign languages and composing different kinds of poetry.**

**Madhavai, Malati, and Candrarekha are the leaders of the gopi servants who dress and decorate Srimati Radharani.**

**There are also eight gopi maidservants expert at cooking various preparations from the milk products at Vraja village. Kurangaksi-devi is the leader of these gopi cooks.**

**Pindaka-devi, Nirvitandika-devi, Pundarika-devi, Sitakhandi-devi, Carucandi-devi, Sudantika-devi, Akunthita-devi, Kalakanthi-devi, Ramaci-devi and Mecika-devi are among the gopis who are very strong and stubborn when there is an argument or conflict. Among them Pindaka-devi is the leader. She dresses in red garments. She is very beautiful. When Lord Krsna comes she embarrasses Him by attacking Him with many ferocious witty puns.**

**Haridrabha-devi, Hariccela-devi and Harimitra-devi speak many illogical and frivolous objections as they lead Lord Krsna to the place where Srimati Radharani waits for Him.**

**Pundarika-devi's garments and complexion are both the color of a white lotus flower. She ferociously mocks lotus-eyed Lord Krsna.**

**Gauri-devi always wears white garments. Her complexion is the color of a peacock. Because her sweet and charming words are often laced with acid sarcasms, Lord Krsna jokingly calls her Sitakhandi (always sweet).**

**Gauri-devi's sister is known as Carucandi because her words are sometimes mild and pleasant (caru) and sometimes harsh and violent (candi). Carucandi's complexion is the color of a black bee and her garments are the color of lightning.**

**Sudantika-devi wears garments the color of a kurunthaka flower. Her complexion is the color of a sirisa flower. She is expert at inflaming the amorous sentiments of ujjvala-rasa.**

**Akunthita-devi's complexion is the color of a lotus stem. She wears white garments the color of the fibers within a lotus stem. She likes to insult Krsna for the amusement of her gopi friends.**

**Kalakanthi-devi's complexion is the color of a kuli flower and her garments are the color of milk. She speaks to Lord Krsna, describing Radharani's jealous anger and advising Him to beg forgiveness from Her.**

**Ramaci-devi's is the daughter of Lalita-devi's nurse. Ramaci's complexion is golden and her garments are the color of a parrot. She takes pleasure in jokingly insulting Krsna and laughing at Him.**

**Ramaci-devi always wears white garments. Her complexion is the color of a pinda flower. She is expert at insulting Lord Krsna.**

**Petari-devi, Varuda-devi, Cari-devi, Kotari-devi, Kalatippani-devi, Marunda-devi, Morata-devi, Cuda-devi, Cundari-devi and Gondika-devi are the leaders of those gopi messengers who are past the prime of youth. These older gopis can argue with great stubbornness and they can also nicely sing as the divine couple take their meal. These gopis are always engaged in making arrangements for the forest pastimes of the divine couple.**

**Petari-devi is an elderly Gujarati lady whose hair is the color of fibers within a lotus stem. Varudi-devi is a native of Garuda-desa and her braided hair is like the current of a river.**

**Cari-devi, who is Kucari-devi's siste, is also known by the name Tapahkatyayani, because she performed severe austerities (tapah) and took shelter of goddess Katyayani (Durga). Kotari-devi was born in the abhira caste. Her hair is a mixture of black and white resembling rice mixed with toasted sesame seeds.**

**Kalatippani-devi is an elderly washerwoman with white hair. Marunda-devi has white eyebrows and a shaved head.**



**Agile Morata-devi has hair the color of a kasa flower. Cuda-devi has a wrinkled face and a forehead decorated with many grey hairs.**

**The brahmani Cundari-devi is not as old as the others. Lotus-eyed Lord Krsna glorifies her and treats her with great respect. Gondika-devi shaves the splendid white hairs on her head. Her cheeks are wrinkled with age.**

**Sivada-devi, Saumyadarsana-devi, Suprasada-devi, Sadasanta-devi, Santida-devi and Kantida-devi are the leaders of the gopi messengers who expertly arrange the meeting of Radha and Krsna. These gopis consider Lalita-devi to be their dearest life and soul. They are counted among the intimate associates of Lord Krsna. At a certain time Srimati Radharani quarrels with Lord Krsna and refuses to see Him. Understanding the hints of Lalita-devi, these gopis then approach Lord Krsna. These gopis appease Lord Krsna and please Him in different ways. With great effort they convince Him that His actual desire is to meet Radha again. When These gopis bring to Her the gift that Lord Krsna gave them as a peace offering, Srimati Radharani becomes very pleased with them and grants them Her mercy.**

**Sivada-devi was born in the Ragyhu dynasty, Saumyadarsana-devi in the dynasty of the moon-god, Suprasada-devi in the Puru dynasty, Sadasanta-devi in a family of ascetics and Santida and Kantida in brahmana families. By the mercy of Narada Muni they were all able to reside in Vraja.**

**Aside from the eight varistha-gopas and the eight vara-gopis, sixty four gopis are considered most important. Their names are : 1. Ratnaprabha, 2. Ratikala, 3. Subhadra, 4. Ratika, 5. Sumukhi, 6. Dhanistha, 7. Kalahamsi, 8. Kalapini, 9. Madhavi, 10. Malati, 11. Candrarekha, 12. Kunjari, 13. Harini, 14. Capala, 15. Damni, 16. Surabhi, 17. Subhanana, 18. Kurangaksi, 19. Sucarita, 20. Mandali, 21. Manikundala, 22. Candrika, 23. Candralatika, 24. Pankajaksi, 25. Sumandira, 26. Rasalika, 27. Tilakini, 28. Sauraseni, 29. Sugandhika, 30. Ramani, 31. Kamanagari, 32. Nagari, 33. Nagavenika, 34. Manjumedha, 35. Sumadhura, 36. Sumadhya, 37. Madhureksana, 38. Tanumadhya, 39. Madhuspanda, 40. Gunacuda, 41. Varangada, 42. Tungabhadra, 43. Rasottunga, 44. Rangavati, 45. Susangata, 46. Citrarekha, 47. Vicitrangi, 48. Modini, 49. Madanalasa, 50. Kalakanthi, 51. Sasikala, 52. Kamala, 53. Madhurendira, 54. Kandarpa-sundari, 55. Kamalatika, 56. Premananjari, 57. Kaveri, 58. Carukavara, 59. Sukesi, 60. Manjukesi, 61. Harahira, 62. Mahahira, 63. Harakanthi, 64. Manohara.**

**Vrnda-devi, Kundalat-devi and their followaers assist the divine couple in Their pastimes in the various forests of Vrndavana. Dhanistha-devi, Gunamala-devi and their followers remain in the home of Nanda Maharaja, the cowherd king and assist the Lord's pastimes from there.**

**Kamada-devi is the daughter of Srimati Radharani's nurse. Kamada is an especially close friend of Radharani. Ragalekha-devi, Kalakeli-devi and Manjula-devi are some of Radharani's maidservants.**

**Nandimukhi-devi and Bindumati-devi are the leaders of those gopis who arrange the rendezvous of Radha and Krsna. Syamala-devi and Mangala-devi are the leaders of those gopis who act as well-wishers of Srimati Radharani.**

**Candravali-devi is the leader of those gopis who are Srimati Radharani's rivals.**

**The talented musicians Rasollasa-devi, Gunatunga-devi, Kalakanthi-devi, Sukhanti-devi, and Pikakanti-devi delight Lord Hari by singing Visakha's musical compositions.**

**Maniki-devi, Narmada-devi, and Kusumapesala-devi serve the divine couple by playing drums, cymbals, string instruments like the vina, and wind instruments like the flute.**

**Ragalekha-devi, Kalakeli-devi and Bhurida-devi are the leaders of those gopis who are Srimati Radharani's maidservants. Among these maidservants are Sugandha-devi and Nalini-devi (the two daughters of Divakirti-devi) and Manjistha-devi and Rangaraga-devi (the two daughters of Nanda Maharaja's laundry washers).**

**Palindri-devi serves Srimati Radharani by dressing and decorating Her. Citrini decorates Radharani with various cosmetics. Mantriki-devi and Tantriki-devi are astrologers who reveal the future to Srimati Radharani.**

**Katyayani-devi is the leader of those gopi messengers who are older than Srimati Radharani. Bhagyavati-devi and Punyapunja-devi, the two daughters of Maharaja Nanda's sweeper, are also the maidservants of Srimati Radharani.**

**Also included among Srimati Radharani's servants are Gargi-devi and other very respectable brahmana girls, Bhrngarika-devi and other girls from the ceti community, Vijaya-devi, Rasala-devi, Payoda-devi and other girls from the vita community, as well as the boys Subala, Ujjvala, Gandharva, Madhumangala and Raktaka.**

**Tunga-devi, Pisangi-devi and Kalakandala-devi always remain near Srimati Radharani to serve Her. Manjual-devi, Bindula-devi, Sandha-devi, Mrdula-devi and others, although very young still engage in Radharani's service.**





Collected by Raman