



## Bala-Gokulam

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**Rashtra Sevika Samiti**

## Welcome to Bala-Gokulam



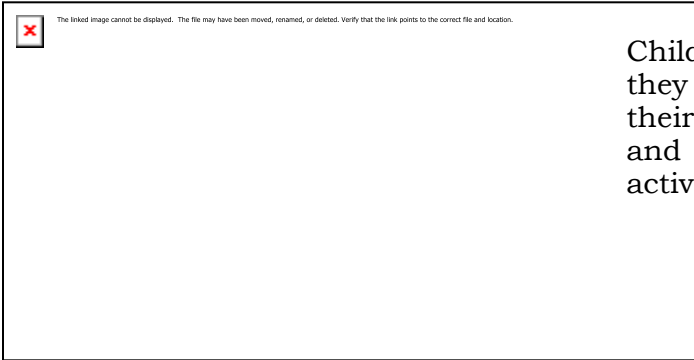
Gokulam is the place where an ordinary cowherd boy blossomed in to a divine incarnation. It is here that Krishna's magical days of childhood was spent and his powers came to be recognized.

Every child has that spark of divinity within. Bala-Gokulam is a forum for children to discover and manifest that divinity. Bala-Gokulam will enable Hindu children in US to appreciate their cultural roots, learn Hindu values in an enjoyable manner and make good friends. They will also develop a sense of Sewa, Service to humankind.

### Our Goal Is ...

- To facilitate children to appreciate, learn and practice Hindu way of life.
- Instill pride and confidence in Hindu children about their identity.
- Raise Hindu awareness in the society around.
- Develop social awareness and leadership skills among children.

### Activities In Bala-Gokulam



Children will have lots of fun while they learn. Activities are planned for their physical, intellectual, social and spiritual development. Weekly activities include:

Games      Yoga

Arts      Crafts      Stories      Bhajans      Shlokas

## Special Events

### Festivals

Hindu Festivals like Ganesh Pooja, Raksha Bandhan and Guru Pooja are celebrated with a special focus on children's participation. Children will perform the pooja themselves and the meaning behind the festivals are explained.

### Hindu Heritage Camp

Vacation can be magical. That's the time to explore, enjoy and make more friends. Hindu Heritage Camp of HSS conducted during vacations or any other weekends has been a favorite event for the children.

### Community Service

Sewa or service is the best way for us to realize the divinity in all and serve the needy. Children from HSS Bala-Gokulam have visited elderly people in convalescent hospital, volunteered at Hindu Mandirs, actively participated in Human Race and have worked with other voluntary groups in serving the community.



### **"I make it a priority" - Seema Shah (16), Houston, TX**

As a Hindu teenager living in America, I make it a priority to participate in cultural or religious activities. The society in this country has a great deal to offer whether it is in education, careers, or recreation. However, it does not give the spiritual and cultural guidance that Hinduism encompasses. Hindu children should realize the importance of their heritage.

The activities offered in Bala-Gokulams are excellent ways for Hindu children to learn about their culture and incorporate the teachings and values in their everyday lives. Furthermore, Bala-Gokulams fosters a productive learning environment that is different from schools.

The breadth of activities from games and exercise to education encourages the children to improve a variety of skills. They also motivate the children to stay committed to the regular Bala-Gokulam classes and partake in the Hindu community events. Thus, Bala-Gokulams are instrumental in providing the necessary cultural and religious education to Hindu children so they may retain and be proud of their Hindu identity.

**Starting a new Bala-Gokulam**

If you have the desire and the inclination to conduct one such Bala-Gokulam in your town, there is a strong team of dedicated and experienced people in HSS, who are always there to provide training, material and any support necessary.

### Steps to start a Bala-Gokulam

The Hindu population in each town is different. Hence, you will have to figure out the best way for your town. Here are some of the standard things that have worked.

- For few days, keep discussing this idea of Bala-Gokulam with your friends and find out who is more interested and committed.
- Make a flier for Bala-Gokulam. A sample flier is attached here. Soft copy is available from [www.balagokulam.org](http://www.balagokulam.org) and you can modify that. Keep these fliers in Indian grocery stores, Hindu mandirs, or any other place where Hindus meet. Make use of special events like Diwali, Janmashtami, etc. to reach out to more people at one time.
- When people call for details, take down their phone numbers, email, etc. and also check out if they are interested in volunteering.
- Once you have a team of 2 or more people, you are ready to start.
- Contact one of our coordinators and schedule a training session for volunteers and meeting with the parents.
- Find a place to start and get going☺

### Duration, Frequency and Time

- Bala-Gokulam duration can be from 75 minutes to 90 minutes.
- To have the expected impact, it should be held at least once in a week.

Majorities of Bala-Gokulams are held on Saturday or Sunday. However, depending on the convenience of children and parents, they can be conducted at any time and any day of the week.

### Time table for 90 minutes

Cheerful, enthusiastic and cordial atmosphere is at the heart of a successful Bala-Gokulam. Physical fitness, knowledge and pride of Hindu Dharma, ability to work together in team and social awareness are being inculcated through various programs. The activities can be broadly classified as 'Sharirik' and 'Baudhik' - the physical and intellectual activities.

The programs depend on the available floor space and number of children. Following is a suggestion for 90 minutes session.

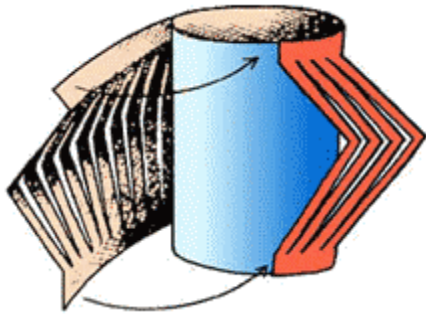
Assembly	5 min
Exercises	5 min
Games	30 min
Surya Namaskar	5 min
Shloka, Bhajans	20 min
Story/Discussion	20 min
Prarthana	5 min

It is better conduct the activities in different groups based on their age.

### Other activities

There can be a variety of activities to bring out the **creative power** within the children and Shikshaks and also to make them good **team players**. Here are some ideas that have been found

successful. Please experiment and come out with new activities and share with us so that other Bala-Gokulams can benefit from your experiments.



### **Sri Krishna's Stories**

There are many stories from the life of Sri Krishna. The childhood stories and those of adventure make a very interesting story telling for children. We can tell these stories for many weeks.

Please refer to this site

<http://hindumythology.com/bhagvata.htm>

for a collection of Sri Krishna's stories from Bala-Bhagavatam.

### **The Story Of Rantideva**

Those were the glorious days in ancient India when men were honest and truthful and kings were ever engaged in striving for the welfare of their people. In such times there once lived a king whose name was Rantideva. He had a large and generous heart and every being came within his embrace of love for he saw Lord Hari in every living creature.

Rantideva was always making gifts to the poor and the needy. He said to himself, "The Lord gives me all these things in plenty. Should I then sit back and enjoy them when so many mouths of Sri Hari are yet to be fed? I shall not be in want, because He has made me His blessings in the world."

And sure enough, he would always have plenty of food and clothing to distribute. The king was famous in the world for his warm hospitality which he extended to rich and poor alike.

Whenever anyone was in trouble, he would go to the king. And whenever Rantideva was of service to anyone, he would feel that it was a service unto Sri Hari. Thus he gave a mother's love to his people. Like a child runs to its mother with its troubles, hurts and pains, so too his subjects would go to him. He would try to remove the cause of their sorrow and if he was unable to do so, it would pain him immensely.

Thus passed many years of prosperity and people basked in the generous love of their king.

But then a time came when the country was hit by famine. The crops failed, the cattle died and men, women and children starved in large numbers. They flocked to the gates of the king's palace. Rantideva would sit and pray, "O Lord, give me the strength to remove their suffering." Then he would go out and distribute to his people what little he had left. And yet the famine continued. In fact it grew worse from day to day. And there was a time when he did not have enough to eat for himself. He could not even feed his family. For none of the members of his household ate unless the masses had been fed. Sometimes there would be food for them, but the king would have to go hungry. Nevertheless, he was happy, because his mind was satisfied when his people were fed. As the conditions grew worse, he did not have anything left to give to the hungry and the starving. No help came to him. And yet his faith in Sri Hari only increased. Day after day, the king and his dependents starved and the famine persisted.

When the king had thus fasted for forty-eight days, someone brought him a bowl of porridge made of flour, milk and ghee. By this time the king was in no position to even move, so weak had he become due to continuous starvation. Overcome by hunger and thirst, Rantideva and his family were indeed glad to see an unexpected meal before them. They were about to eat when there came to the door, a wrinkled old Brahmin, much in need of food. The king received him respectfully and gave him some of the porridge to eat. As they were about to eat again, a beggar came to the door. His face appeared pinched with hunger, so Rantideva gave him too, some of the meal to eat. Then there came a sweeper and he brought with him his dogs. He looked at the king pitifully and said, "Maharaj! My dogs and I have not had any food for many days now. We are starving for want of food. Now we have come to you, for if you will not help us, who will?" So the king gave him the remaining porridge.

Now the king and his family had again no food to eat. There was just a little drink left. Just then, came a Chandala, his throat parched with thirst, his eyes heavy with exhaustion. He begged the King to moisten his dry lips with a little bit of water. Rantideva saw him as yet another form of Sri Hari and held the cup to his cracked lips. He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please, Lord! I do not care for the rewards of this earth. Nor do I care for powers of any kind. My only prayer is - give me the capacity to feel the pain of others and the power to serve them. Let me not ever be indifferent to their sorrows and their sufferings. Make me Thy instrument to give them relief, to make them happy."

The man drank the water. The sparkle of life came back into his eyes. And wonderfully enough, the king felt his own hunger, thirst and fatigue dropping away from him. He felt refreshed and fulfilled, as a hungry man is after a good and satisfying meal. Suddenly there appeared before him Maya and all her attendants. She smiled at him and said, "O King, I am indeed pleased to see your devotion and your extraordinary love for your people. You have suffered much. If you worship me now, I can remove all your wants for all time to come. I can give you the riches and the entire wealth of the world."

Rantideva showed them due respect, but only as the different forms of Hari. He asked Maya for nothing, for his mind was absorbed in Sri Hari. He said to her, "I have no use for all the riches you have to offer me. I have no wish to live any longer than I have to. I do not hanker for the enjoyments of the world, because my mind does not run after them."

And Maya, the queen of the world, the mistress of all beings, the consort of Sri Vishnu, fled from his presence with her whole retinue of attendants. She vanished like a dream does when a person awakes.

Then Rantideva was blessed by the presence of the Lord Himself. He worshipped Him and prayed that he might never be separated from Him. In time, Rantideva became one of the greatest yogis of the land. He merged himself in meditation. By his wonderful service to his people and his love for all living creatures whom he worshipped as Sri Hari, he attained the blissful Being of Lord Narayana.

