

# The Enigma of Nidhivana: An Interactive Assessment

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**Abstract:** Lord Krishna is worshipped as an eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He is referred as the deity of benevolence, love, compassion and tenderness. The deity is also associated with several mysteries and Nidhivana is one such unsolved mystery associated with the life of Lord Krishna. Nidhivana is a temple complex enclosed with dense bushy forest in Vrindavan. The structure is able to entice and allure people from all over the world. According to some famous legends it is presumed that Lord Krishna performs Raas-Leela with his consort Radha and other Gopies during the night hours and that is why the temple is locked after the completion of evening benediction.

**Keywords:** Nidhivana, Lord Krishna, Radha, Gopies, Mystery etc.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The earliest inhabitants of India i.e. the people of Indus Valley Civilization worshipped mother goddess and a horned fertility deity. They usually worshipped the nature gods like Indra, Varuna, Agni etc. however, the earliest imprints of religion can be traced back to the Vedic culture. It was a phase where Hinduism came to its apex and reached out to the masses. It is considered to be the oldest and major religion that got culminated into the Northern India. In Hindu religion, Vaishnavism is a form of monotheism. According to one of the famous preachers of Vaishnavism, Madhava, Vaishnavites believe in only one God i.e. Hari. Vishnu is derived from a Sanskrit term Vish, which means the one who pervades. Vaishnavites believe in the presence of a Supreme Being. This Supreme Being, according to the Law book of Manu, is identified as Narayana. Lord Narayana is described as a deity living in Vaikuntha with his consort Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and beauty. The Puaranas describes Vishnu as a deity with four arms and holding different symbols in them. These symbols are discussed as follows:

- Chakra (*sudarshana*)
- Shankha (*panchjanya*)
- Gada (*kaumodaki*)
- Lotus (*padma*)

The chakra or the sudarshana represented the killing of demons. The Shankha or the *panchjanya* was used as a medium of communication to call the soldiers during any god and demon wars. Gada was used to kill the demon-foes.

Moreover, Lord Vishnu is reckoned as a deity with many incarnations. His widely accepted 10 incarnations are described as the following:

- Fish
- Kurma
- Varah
- Nara-simha
- Vamana
- Parsurama
- Rama
- Krishna
- Buddha
- Kalki (yet to be revealed)

During the Vedic era, Vishnu was regarded as a solar deity. However, with the passage of time, he was recognized with the Krishna-Vasudeva cult of Mahabharata. With the evolution and progression of Panchtantra, its deity Narayana was also identified with Krishna-Vishnu. The identification of these three Gods took place in a mysterious process of religious syncretism. Lord Krishna became an important and acclaimed divinity in Hindu religion pantheon. He is considered as the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Krishna is vested with many miracles and is considered as a god who loves his devotees, in other words, the lord of people. Moreover, Lord Krishna is contemplated as deity of benevolence, love, compassion and tenderness. Many literary sources such as *Mahabharata*, *Bhagawat Gita* and *Bhagawat Purana* identify Krishna as their predominant person with superhuman qualities. The anecdotes and narratives of Krishna's life are famously known as *Krishna Leela*.

## Background

### Physical Features

Mathura is considered to be the epicenter of the Krishna pantheon. Mathura lies on the western bank of river Yamuna. Mathura also renowned as the Braj Bhoomi is vicinal with many renowned places such as Vrindavan, Govardhan, Kusum Sarovar, Barsana and Nandgaon. Its eastern boundary is adjacent with places like Gokul, Mahavan and Baldeo. Along with its association with Lord Krishna, Mathura is also famous for its pious Ghats and river Yamuna (sister of God Yama and daughter of Surya). The river is worshipped at Vishram Ghat (a place where lord Krishna took rest after killing the demon Kansa) every evening. The whole aroma gets sanctified with the fragrance of incense and the pious Sanskrit chants. As a daily ritual, the devotees perform their respective sacrifices and release oil lamps into the waters of the river. There are a number of narrow lanes present in the vicinity of the Vishram Ghat.

Vrindavan, 15 kms away from Mathura, is vested with some of the famous legends. According to these legends, Lord Krishna used to play with Radha and her friends here (in the woods of Vrindavan). However, today rapid industrialization and urbanization along with various other climatic factors had contributed into the complete swipe out of these forests. The only remains left of these sacred jungle, is the walled Nidhi Vana. Its entrance consists of scrawny, stunted trees and the lineage of rhesus monkeys.

Important places having Archaeological, Historical and Religious significance:

Mathura is famous as a religious city that was successful in grabbing the attention of various devotees across the world. Many famous temples such as temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman and Narasingha, Murli Manohar, Neelkantheshwara, Radha Damodar and the Mukut Temple are present in the vicinity of Mathura. Some of the important places having Archaeological, Historical and Religious significance are:

➤ **Shri Krishna Janambhoomi**

The most famous and oldest temple in Mathura is known as Shri Krishna Janambhoomi. It is the prison cell in which Lord Krishna was born. The prison consists of a bare platform, a place that has been identified with the birth of Krishna. Various other deities such as Shiva (Lord of destruction and his followers), Vishnu (the preserver), and Brahma (the creator) are depicted in a standing posture behind the platform. Stairways adjacent to this temple lead the devotees towards new temple that contains the idols of Radha-Krishna. There is also a presence of Shiva-Linga. According to the devotees the linga is carved out of 11.25Kgs of Mercury. It is also believed that a secret process has been used to solidify the metal.

➤ **Banke Bihari Temple**

The temple is located in the vicinity of Vrindavan where Sri Krishna is known by the name of Banke Bihari or the '*Supreme Enjoyer*.' The term Banke means 'Bent in three places,' whereas Bihari means 'Enjoyer'. The hands of the idol of Lord Krishna are folded to hold a flute with a leg slightly folded and overlapping the other, in a standing posture. Banke Bihari Mandir is one of the seven temples associated with the temples of Thakur ji of Vrindavan, and is situated near Shri RadhaVallabh Temple. The main entrance of the temple is adorned with a dark yellow-brown colour with intricate traditional design and is the main attraction in Vrindavan. Inside the premises of temple a jet black idol of Lord Krishna known as Thakur Ji is placed. The whole ambience of the temple is filled with the spirit of love, affection and devotion.

➤ **Prem Mandir**

The temple is situated on the outskirts of Vrindavan. The spiritual complex is dedicated to Sri Krishna and lord Ram and his consort Sita. The deities are beautifully carved with the usage of white marbles exhibiting the astonishing architectural creation. It also narrates the history of Sanatana Dharma. The main temple comprise of figures of Sri Krishna and his followers. Inside the temple, one witnesses many portraits of Krishna Leela, Govardhan Parwat Leela, and Krishna Kaliya Naag Leela. The temple exhibits tranquility and bliss to the devotees.

➤ **Shri Krishna Balaram Mandir**

The temple is considered to be one of India's largest ISKCON temples. The structure is constructed with white marbles and comprises an archway and winding pavement stairs on both sides. Sri Krishna's transcendental stages are highlighted by the temple. There are three altars, the Sri Sri Gaura Nitai idol is found on the first altar, the Nityananda Prabhu incarnation and Sri Caitania Mahaprabhu; Sri Krishna and Balaram, the divine siblings are the deities that are found on the second or central altar. The Sri Sri Radha Shyamasundara idols and the gopies, Vishakha and Lalita are found at the third altar.

### Historical Context of Nidhivana

Swami Haridas was born on the day of Radha Ashtami. He was born in Haridaspur, a tiny town in Uttar Pradesh near Aligarh. Shri Gargacharya was the priest of Yadav's and was secretly visiting Brij, at Vasudev's request, for conducting the Namkaran Samskar (name ceremony) of Krishna and Balaram. Some of his family members moved to Multan, but after a long time some of them came back. Sri Ashudhir was one of those migrants who got settled in the outskirts of Brij near Aligarh after returning from Multan. Swami Haridas

was Lalita's or popularly known as the 'sakhi' 'reincarnation (female friend) of Lord Krishna's inner consortium. This can probably explain the fact that he was in meditation and scriptures even during his adolescence while other kids of his era were interested in playing games. He was married to Harimati at the optimal age. Haridas remained away from worldly places and focused on meditation even after their marriage. Harimati was a religious soul. When she realized the inclination of her husband, she prayed deeply and was carried to the celestial abode of the Lord, by entering the flame of small lamp in Haridas' presence. There have been no physical remains. Soon after that Haridas left his village for Vrindavan that comprised of a thick forest then and chose a secluded location, now known as Nidhivan, for his music and eternal meditation pleasures. He constantly and continuously meditated on Nitya Ras and Nitya Bihar of Lord. While living in a mortal state on earth, he facilitated his frequent unimpeded entry into Nitya Bihar, always enjoying his delight in the Lord's proximity. He chose a seclude, densely forested region, Kunj, as his door to Nirvana in Nidhivan, and was mainly there to sing, meditate, and surf in the ocean of eternal and immortal happiness. His followers were inquisitive about this locality and they all joined the Kunj one day with Swamiji's consent. However, they all lost their eyesight due to the presence of dazzling and intense light. On apprehending the difficulty of his followers, Swami ji decided to visit the place himself. On the request of Swami ji, Lord Krishna along with his consort appeared in a very charming and playful mood there. All those who witnessed this, were spell bounded by the beauty of the Lord and his consort, and as a result they were not even able to blink their eyes, it seemed that all of them had turned into stone statues.

Nidhivana is the land that is imbued with inscrutability. According to the locals, the devotees and the priests of Nidhivana temple, Lord Krishna visits this place daily with his consort Radha. The testimony of Ras Leela is also been provided here. In accordance to the onlookers, the temple is vacated soon after the evening benediction ceremony at 19:00 hours. Neither the devotees nor the priests are allowed to reside inside the temple premises posterior the benediction ceremony. It is also believed that even the animals and birds that are found inside and near the Nidhivana, also abandon the temple premises soon after the evening Aarti is enchanted.

Nidhivana consists of a palace inside its premises, known as *Rang Mahal*. Here, the temple priests prepare bed for Lord Krishna, which is made up of sandalwood on a daily basis. Adjacent to this bed, a jar filled with water, Neem Datun (to brush teeth) and betel leaf with areca nut is being placed for the consumption. It is interesting to know that, when the temple gates (which were closed and locked last night) are opened, the water in the jar appears to be consumed and so is the case with the Neem datun and betel leaves. On interviewing, *Shri K.P. Singh*, an elderly person and devotee of 93 years, another incident that grabbed my attention was that there were several cases witnessed where people deliberately camouflaged themselves into the temple premises; post evening Aarti in lieu of may be quenching their thirst of solving the mystery hours of Nidhivana. Lamentably, those who tried to do so either ended up losing their eye sight or speech or mental soundness or even worse, sometimes they are also found dead. To this, another devotee and a local resident of Mathura, *Sneha Pathak* added that, her grandmother use to narrate her stories and legends of Lord Krishna. She further remarked that according to one such famous legend, when an individual witness such divine mystery, it is believed that they had attained Niravana and they no longer held any desire to live in this world. In other words, they attain salvation.

While observing the trees found in Nidhivana, one usually witnesses the unusual shape and size of the trees. Most of the trees found here are of short height and enmeshed trunks. Another striking fact was that even the plants of tulsi were found in pairs and no plant was present as a single entity. According to *Shri Raman Kumar Jha*, a devotee being interviewed in the premises of the temple, these trees disguise themselves into Gopis and participate in the mysterious Ras Leela and as soon as the dawn breaks, the Gopis again get themselves disguised into enmeshed or entangled trees. Moreover, he also added that according to some famous tales prominent in Vrindavana, these trees move from their original place during the night hours. This further envisaged my desire to enquire and perceive more about this mystery. On further investigating and interviewing other people another astounding fact announced by emerged in front of myself that no individual was fortunate enough to carry the parts of these Basil plants (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) into the premises of their residence. All those who dared and solicited, faced severe and very harsh repercussions. *Mr. Madan Singh*, another devotee being interviewed in the temple premises, narrated the famous legend of Nidhi Vana that a famous Saint Swami Haridas use to amuse his lord Shri Banke Bihari Ji (Lord Krishna) by pouring his melodious euphoria. One night his Lord Bihari Ji appeared in his dream and showed his happiness and appeasement from his gratitude and love. Thus, Lord blessed him by appearing in the ground of Nidhi Vana and there is also a temple inside Nidhivana known as *Prakatya Sthala* (place of appearance of Bihari Ji).

*The Bansri Chor temple* is also located within the complex of Nidhivana. According to a famous legend narrated by *Srimati Kiran Purwar* (devotee), Radha got really anguished on Lord Krishna, as he use to spend most of his time blowing his flute. Thus, in order to grab his attention his consort Radha stole his flute and hid it in this temple. Along with the idols of Krishna and Radha, the Bansri Chor temple also comprised of an idol of *Lalita*, Lord Krishna's Sakhi (friend).

The temple also comprised of *Vishakha Kunda*. The famous folk lore associated with this temple was reported by *Parmendra Tomar*, according to which it was believed that once a Gopi named Vishakha, revealed Lord Krishna about her thirst. In order to fulfill her desire, Lord Krishna took out his bow and arrow bashed the ground and water appeared from that place. This Kunda still contains some amount of water.

Even though the temple is surrounded by houses from both directions yet no one even tried to make a sneak peek into Nidhivana during the mystery hours. After observing the houses in the nearby premises, another mysterious fact popped out that people have sealed their windows with bricks and those who haven't sealed them yet does not dare to sneak out from their windows post evening Aarti. On enquiring and questioning about this amongst the youths, *Ankit Purwar* revealed that people have sealed their windows because of the belief that if they sneaked out in the gardens of Nidhivana, even by mistake, they will have to face severe consequences. He even highlighted certain events where people attempted to sneak at the gardens post evening Aarti and as a result they either lost their sight or mental balance. Thus, people shut down their windows post the benediction ceremony.

#### **Interesting stories associated with the temple premises**

- One of the most popular anecdote and folk tale associated with Nidhivana is that Lord Krishna along with his consort Radha and gopies visit this place daily during the night hours and perform his ethereal and mystical activities popularly known as Krishna Leela or the Ras-Leela.
- The temple priest of Rang Mahal prepares the bed for Lord Krishna along with Neem datum, betel leaves and arica nuts soon after the benediction ceremony. These commodities appeared to be consumed when the temple gates are unlocked in the morning. Some people claimed that they had witnessed the sound of Musical anklets (ghungroos) during the night hours as well.
- Another mystery associated with Nidhivana is the unusual shape and size of the trees found in the temple premises. The trees found here are of short height and enmeshed trunks. It is presumed that the gopies are in the disguise of the trees and their intertwined shape suggests the aroma of fondness, endearment and affection between them. The trees are entirely lacking or free from the eyrie of birds or insects.
- Nobody is allowed to remain in the temple after the completion of the benediction ceremony. Even monkeys vacate the temple during the mystery hours. Those who tried to remain inside the temple either ended up losing their eye sight or speech or mental soundness or even worse, sometimes they are also found dead.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Thus, in a nut shell we can conclude by stating that India is a country where belief plays an important role. Due to great regional and linguistic diversity in India, one encounters various beliefs and practices being preached in India. With various beliefs, come various unfolded mysteries. However, these mysteries cannot be solved easily as it might hurt the sentiments of a particular section. Surely, Nidhivana is one of the mysterious places that grab the attention of various researchers, travellers from all around the world. Though, it seems impossible to cognize more about this place, nevertheless, it is one such destination that required more exploration.

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