

# Krishna Charitam

Kunjan Nambiar

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An 18th-Century Epic

IN THE MID-1700s, the famed poet of Kerala, Kunjan Nambiar, composed an eloquent work on the heroics of Krishna in the literary style called Mani-Pravalam — a composite of the two languages, Sanskrit and Malayalam.

Titled Krishna Charitam, this epic begins with the birth of Krishna, meanders through his loveable pranks and later, through his amorous interludes with the milkmaids of Vrindavan.

The fast-moving narrative takes readers through many of Krishna's other adventures, such as his fight with the giant serpent Kaliya; his defeat of the evil king Kamsa; his marriage to the beautiful princess Rukmini; his encounter with Jambavan, King of the bears; and his many efforts to establish dharma. Many lesser-known stories are also told, such as the episode where he retrieves ten dead children from the land of Vishnu.

All these narratives are interspersed with abundant humour, delightful descriptions of nature as well as numerous proverbs and pithy urgings.

For many years, this great poem remained locked in the language of Mani-Pravalam, enjoyed only by a regional community. Now, this English translation opens up that enchanting world of Krishna to a wider audience.

Ram Varmha, the translator of this epic, hails from the royal family of Cochin. Varmha has had a lifelong interest in the literary heritage of his country. His previous works include the translation of the famed 16th-century Sanskrit text, Narayaneeyam. Varmha was the first to transcribe this work into English and copies of it have since been accepted into many leading libraries in the US.



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