

About 300 A.D. a mutation occurred in the mythology of Krishna that was radical in the extreme. The central section of the Harivaṃśa, which was composed at about that time*, narrated in chapters 47-78 the story of the infancy and youth of Krishna, which had never been told in Hindu literature before. The implicit theology of these tales was as new as the narratives themselves. The age of adoration of Krishna as a sportive being--as a doer of līlās--had begun.

Perhaps because the abruptness of this development has not been fully appreciated, efforts to explain it have been superficial. Scholars have not failed to notice that the Krishna of the Harivaṃśa is a new kind of Krishna. They have looked, rather casually, for possible earlier sources of a cowherd divinity. But the contrasts in theology have not startled anyone sufficiently to set off a full-scale investigation into a dramatic phenomenon of religious change.

*Scholars have proposed the whole of the first four centuries AD as possible dating for the Harivaṃśa. It cannot be placed in mature Gupta times, however, because the Kālayavana episode reflects a time when the power of Hellenistic states still carried a sting. Professor Ingalls' analysis that it stands in poetic style between the Rāmāyana and Kālidāsa warns us away from the extremes of this range of centuries. The work itself protests about a time when petty kings with standing armies waste the country. (). For these reasons the date 300 A.D. offered by P.L. Vaidya, editor of the critical edition (Intro., p. xxxix), seems a fairly accurate approximation.

That the Harivaṃśa's revolution in Krishna-
~~worship~~ worship should attract no special notice was precisely
the intention of its author. In his introduction,
(Adhyaya 1:5-15), he looks back upon ^{the} & recently-
completed Mahābhārata with polite gratitude toward
its narrators, and says that he wishes only to add
a congenial addendum to remedy the epic's silence
on the history of the family of Krishna. Hindu
revisionist technique has always introduced innova-
tions as quietly and seamlessly as possible.* Their
obfuscation of difference has sometimes fogged the
perception of scholars as well as of the orthodox.

A deeper reason for lack of study of the
rise of the Gopāla cult, however, is history's
extreme poverty of information about India in the
third century A.D., the time in which the outlook
of the Harivaṃśa was formed. Joanna van Lohuizen
de-Leeuw in her The Scythic Age (p. _____) calls it
"the dark age of Indian history," its darkness illumi-
nated by no inscriptions, by very little art, and by
scarcely any literary documents~~and~~ surely ascrib^{le}able
to the age. With the advantage of insights into
the issues of that century derived from an earlier
study of the Kālayavana¹ theme,** however, I am going
to venture into that "void" in search of insight into
the overturn in Krishnaism.

* See my "Hindu Formulas for the Facilitation
of Change" in Traditions in Contact and Change, Selected
Proceedings of the XIVth Congress of the International
Association for the History of Religions (Waterloo
Ontario, Wolfred Laurier University Press, 1983) ed.
Peter Slater & Donald Wiebe, pp. 39-52.

**Forthcoming in Doris Srinivasan, ed., volume
on the cultural history of ancient Mathurā.

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It may be that even my present hearers need some sharpening of their perception of the difference between the ~~perception~~ pictures of Krishna that were dominant before and after our dividing line of the third century A.D.

Up until that time, from the fifth century B.C. when our first glimmering of knowledge of Krishna-worship begins, the worship of this god is fairly intelligible in Durckheim's terms: Krishnaism is a social and civic religion, moral in its interests, and a rallying--point for responsible social groups devoted to the survival of main-line Hindu culture. The cult's crusade is against all those movements Hindu or non-Hindu that erode the society and break down its institutions. As Krishnaism in these centuries draws wider and wider segments of the population into this enterprise of consolidation, the names of the religion become more diverse. First it is the sāttvata dharma, the distinctive faith of the Sāttvata tribe; then the Bhāgavata faith, the faith of those who worship Krishna as Bhagavān of the Lord; and then, most inclusively, the Vaishnava faith, when the sect had attained the status of a Vedic religion devoted to a form of the orthodox god Vishṇu. Throughout, there was a continuity in the function of the religion and in its conception of deity.

Of the most remote period, we know only that the worship of Krishna Vāsudevā was known as the tribal faith of the Sāttvata or Vṛishṇi people, centered upon their god who was at the same time tribal chief, tribal teacher and tribal deity. Whatever else the ^{Sāttvata} religion was, it was a group religion, having a function in supporting the identity and unity of a people who were very successful in rising in status and influence.

A second period can be perceived, identifiable with the first several centuries of the formation of the great epic called the Mahābhārata, in which the Sāttvatas have not only risen from low status to the rank of Kshatriyas, but they have also spread acceptance of their faith so successfully that there are very few in their North Indian courtly circles who does not recognize the divinity of Krishna Vāsudeva, their god, at some level of other of honor.

A third period in the development of early Krishnaism began when the sect began to attract not only the military elite, but brahmans, bringing the more adaptive members of the old Vedic priesthood into the service of Krishnaism in its thinking and writing. The first fruit of this coalition was the Bhagavadgītā--in effect, a great sermon, asking sensitivity to the needs of society in a time when world-weariness is drawing the gifted young into lifelong monastic retreat --Vedantic, Buddhist and other. Krishna's teaching in the Bhagavadgītā

is directed to Arjuna, representative warrior, who is about to drop his duties in disgust and leave for the forest as a wandering beggar (2:5b). Holding up the idea of lokasamgraha (3:20, 25)--holding the world together--Krishna urges Arjuna to remain steadfast in his duties, because the sacred renunciation that is necessary for salvation is not the renunciation of work, but the renunciation of self-interest. He himself as God works desirelessly in the world, not only as creator of the earth and its statuses and its duties, but as periodic redeemer who descends again and again to purge the earth of evil-doers and to re-establish righteousness (4:1-15).

After the time of the Bhagavadgītā the Bhāgavata movement drew into itself many groups of kindred social outlook. Brahmans who honored the Vedic Vishṇu entered the movement, reinforcing the Bhagavadgītā's picture of a serious world-concerned deity ^{with} the lore of the most compassionate of the Vedic ^{gods,} ~~deities~~ who had descended ~~to earth~~ as a dwarf to recover the earth from the ^{and} demons ¹ to provide safe abode for humanity. Before the third century A.D. these descents for the assistance ^{of dwellers in a} ~~of~~ the world had become many. A sect called the Pāñcarātrins were absorbed, a group honoring brah mans and the Vedas, who ^{followed} ~~were~~ earnestly ~~devoted~~ to a special code of social ethics that stressed non-violence toward all living creatures. As centuries went on the critical threat to the central Hindu social tradition

changed. Indigenous religious heresies waned in power. The worldly outlooks of ~~conquering houses~~ ^{foreigners} who ruled much of North India from 184 B.C. to ~~about 200 A.D.~~ ^{the third century A.D.} became the social enemy. Throughout, the place and function of what we shall now call the Vaishnava faith remained the same. Led by brahmans, it rallied all lovers of the Hindu virtues to resist all disintegrating forces, holding before their eyes the Krishna of the Bhagavadgītā, steadfast in his cosmic work and offering salvation ~~through disinterested faith-~~ ^{to} ~~fulness of~~ believers who ~~should~~ ^{would} let the dharmaśāstras be their guide (Bhagavadgita 16:23f). This is the ~~civic-minded~~ Krishna ^{honored by} ~~on which~~ some of the latest writers ^{the} of epic, ~~materials look back--~~ the authors of the Narāyaṇiya (Mbh. 12.336.49) and the Anugītā (Mbh. 14.16.5), ~~who~~ mention the Bhagavadgita by name at a time not far from the second century A.D. There is no notice in Sanskrit literature, anywhere, ^{then,} [^] that a different view of Krishna is in formation.

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Now we move forward to the other side of our chronological line. The gap in time is not great. ~~The gap in time is not great.~~ ^{of the Harivamśa} The author looks back upon the Mahābhārata ~~now~~ ^{as a work now finished, but only recently finished} as a finished work, but ~~as~~ ^{as} ~~a work only recently completed.~~ He views himself as in the immediate succession of its composers. We would not need to take ^{his} ~~that~~ claim seriously, but all our other information backs it. His Harivaṃśa has always been accepted as a postscript by ~~all~~

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all circles specializing in the transmission of the epic. His Vaishnava faith is continuous in ~~its~~ almost all of its distinguishing marks with the sect of our prior information. The Vaishnava concordat with brahmanism is conspicuous in his teaching. He enjoins the honoring and supporting of brahmans, the performing of Vedic sacrifices, and the humble performance of one's caste work. He is concerned that all persons--and kings in particular--should be faithful in their duties and defend the sacred law of the dharmaśāstras. He stresses Krishna's identity with Vishnu. He continues to enlarge the list of Vishnu's avatars. (HV _____) He speaks for an ongoing Vaishnava community whose ~~special~~ features, ~~if any~~, do not ~~involve~~ suggest *social separateness* any ~~radical separation~~ from the Vaishnavas of earlier times.

These continuities only highlight the *magnitude* ~~newness~~ of the Harivaṃśa's ~~radical~~ innovations in mythology and theology. Chapters 47 through 78 of the Harivaṃśa--the very heart of the work--narrate in detail material *new to literature* ~~that has never appeared in literature before~~--the story of the birth and youthful exploits of Krishna. The new narratives are accompanied by *a dramatically new* ~~an even more dramatic change~~ in conception of the typical interests and attitudes of the deity. In these tales the theology of līlā or the divine sportiveness has its mythological beginnings.

Harmonious

The saga begins with Krishna's birth in the prison of a jealous king who wants to kill him. He is whisked away to a cowherd settlement and is raised by foster parents, Nanda and Yaśodā. The child's reckless energy and astounding powers keeps these parents at their wits' end. Laid under the family wagon for a nap, the infant kicked the cart to bits and ^{was} found laughing under its debris. When he became able to creep, his mother tied him to a heavy wooden mortar to stop his crawling into filthy places--and the child dragged the mortar into a grove and uprooted two great Arjuna trees. A demoness tried to kill him by nursing him with a poisoned dipple and he ended her life with one bite. Acts of jaunty heroism became habitual with him as he grew older. He jumped coolly into the ~~noxious~~ pool ^{where lurked} of a dangerous water-serpent and danced on its seven heads until it promised to go away and leave the riverbanks safe and pure again. He and his brother Balarāma, running about like two frisky young bulls, encountered and killed the demon Pralamba who, in the shape of a donkey, had prevented the cowherds from eating the fruit of a garden of date-palms. Keśi, a horse-demon, is killed. These horrible demons always loom over the divine infant, monstrous in size and dreadful in their malice, yet he ~~always~~ disposes of them effortlessly by exercise of his marvellous hidden powers. His parents fret; his playmates always tell them how lucky they are to have such a remarkable son. Krishna pulls off

amusing swindles--as when he convinces the cowherds that they should make their annual food-offering to Mount Govardhana rather than to Indra--and then, entering into the mountain, he eats all the food himself. When the angered rain-god all but drowns the cowherds with days of unbroken rain, Krishna takes his people under the shelter of an "umbrella" created by picking up the mountain and holding it aloft for seven days until the rain-god could rain no more. Sometimes Krishna's pranks were not innocent--as when he sent forth from his body packs of wolves to plague the cowherds until they were ready to move their settlement from an old range that had become uninteresting to him. Once on a moonlight night of autumn his ramblings in the forest included a tryst with the amorous cowherd girls with much singing and dancing and uninhibited love-making--but the episode is terse as told in the Harivaṁśa. Finally, as a half-grown boy, Krishna returns to his birthplace and kills the tyrant king who had often tried to kill him. But Krishna refuses to take the throne himself, saying that he prefers the freedom of wandering ^{as he likes} at will in the woodland among the cows.

Amid the cows is where most Vaishnavas there-
^{have} after preferred to find Krishna in their thoughts,
 from the time of the Harivaṁśa until the present
 day. The myths ^{ology of} of Krishna-Gopāla, the cowherd Krishna,
 has been the growing edge of the Krishnaite ^{literature} mythology,

and his childhood līlās or sports have been the determinative material in shaping new theological conceptions of the nature and activity of the god.

The childhood tales are retold a little later--we almost dare say, a little later in the 4th century A.D.--in the Vishnu Purana, whose author expands them ^{the Harivamśa narayana a little, and} ~~a little~~, frames them in strong Vaishnava ^{catechetical} ~~doctrinal~~ teaching; and ^{he} brings to the level of conscious doctrine the view that Krishna's acts are sports. The Harivamśa had described particularly acts as sportive, ^{The Vishnu Purana makes} ~~now~~ Krishna himself ~~is~~ a sportive god, ^{and} his doings as an infant are his manuṣyalīlā, his human sports ^{and we understand that his acts,} which, all of a kind, are sportive.* ^{More stress is placed on Krishna's} ~~It is clearer that his acts~~ ^{naughtiness in the new purana} can be perverse: he pulls the cows tails (Wilson, p. 407), he turns them loose when ^{to disrupt the evening milking} ~~they can make trouble~~, he deliberately disobeys the commands of his mother (p. 497). Krishna's ^{amours} ~~flirtations~~ with the cowherd girls are retold ~~in the twelfth chapter of the Vishnu Purāna~~ in much greater detail and with plainer indications ^{reference} ~~to their erotic nature.~~ of an irregular and erotic affair.

→ An antinomian strain in the conception of Krishna becomes clearer and clearer ~~and clearer~~ as we learn more and more about Krishna's ^{misbehavior} ~~naughtiness~~. In later ^{Krishnaite} literature--the Tamil songs of the Ālvars whose composition begins in the fifth or sixth centuries A.D., and in the Sanskrit Bhāgavata Purāna, of about the ninth. In ~~the same~~ references in the hymns of the Alvars we ^{learn} ~~perceive~~ for the first time that Krishna ^{is} ~~has become~~ a thief--a household butter

thief. An incorrigible child, he inevitably locates the pots ^{where his mother stores} containing his mother's curds and butter and feeds himself and friends, leaving messes and destruction. He does not behave better when away from home. ^{we} Completing this theme from later literature, ~~we can report that~~ he raids empty houses without compunction, making specious alibis when caught. When dragged home by neighbor women and accused before his mother, he makes ingenious false defenses that get him off scot-free. When a little older, Krishna resorts to a kind of highway robbery to fill his belly with his favorite edibles: he poses on the road as a ^{toll-}~~tax-~~collector, and lightens the cowherd women of a portion of their head-burdens as they carry their milk and butter to market in Mathurā. The ~~complete~~ register of these crimes need not be told because Jack Hawley has told it all in his Krishna the Butter Thief, published this year. (Princeton U. Press, 1983).

But the worst about Krishna's lawlessness has hardly been suggested. I refer to his escapades with the cowherd women. The story of his night with the Gopīs continued to grow, even though promiscuous sex is and has been a greater scandal in India than in the West. The Ālvārs knew the tale, and they treasured it. A new climax came in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, ^{where he tells} in which ~~a merely preliminary narration~~ ~~told~~ of how he stole the clothes of the gopis when he came upon them bathing in the river, and of how he took their garments into a treetop and did not

return them to their owners until the girls came before him in stark nudity and made obeissance.

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A little later in the book, five entire chapters (10:29-33) are devoted to Krishna's calling the cowherd women from their homes with his flute, and to the details of his rāsa dance ~~with them and of their erotic sports.~~ *and of the erotic sports that followed*

Krishna's amorous acts with the gopis have become his principal līlā, a myth revelatory of the deepest secrets of Krishnaite devotion, a focus ~~ever after~~ for devout meditation.

In the twelfth century, in the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva, the principal object of Krishna's affection ~~has become~~ *became* a favorite among the cowherd girls whose name is Rādhā. Her importance grew with the centuries. She became a goddess, then a polar feminine principle within the godhead of Krishna himself. The love-making between the two became cosmic. The highest spiritual aspiration of many modern Krishnaites has become the attainment, by the grace of the deity and through meditations in ~~which the role is adopted of~~ a servant-attendant on the divine pair, of discrete glimpses of the nightly meetings of Krishna and Rādhā in the bowers. Spiritual guides teach aspirants ~~how to adopt the person of~~ *how to become* a particular attending gopī, ~~and in imagination,~~ *in imagination* through her eyes, ~~contemplate~~ *he is then to* every detail of the divine flirtation and congress through every watch of the day and night.* And the Bengal school, which has ~~made~~ *formed* the arousal and sublimation of erotic feeling into a high science, ~~ixs~~ insists

~~that~~ S.K.De, Early History of the Vaishnava Faith & Movement in Bengal (Calcutta, General Printing & Publishers. 1942).***

that the relation between Rādhā and Krishna must not be understood to be the love-making of husband and wife, but an adulterous relationship!

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By ~~this time~~ ^{the} Krishna of the Bhagavadgītā, looking down from the Highest Step of Vishnu upon these goings-on among his later devotees, ~~must~~ may ~~very~~ well have overturned his celestial flower-chariot in ^{his} astonishment at what he ~~sees~~ ^{now}. I have not been scandalizing, but sketching the earlier and the later Krishnas to point out ^{a very sharp change} ~~the difference~~. The cult of the child-Krishna shares a name with the earlier religion, but an astounding turnaround has occurred in the nature of a religious faith. (Whether the rise of Christianity within Judaism, or the rise of Islam against its Jewish-Christian background, involved a more radical transformation, is a reasonable question.) ^{It was not a question of the influx into Krishna of a new nation or a new people} ~~All indications point to a continuity of religious community.~~ It was the religion that had changed.

Why?

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Scholars have not been entirely oblivious of this change in conception of Krishna, and they have made a few attempts at explanation ~~[in terms of 19th-century notions of the evolution and diffusion of religions]~~.

The earliest explanation known to me is that offered by J. Kennedy ^{Several articles in} in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, beginning in 1907. The child Krishna, "The Child Krishna, Christianity, and the Gujars," pp 951-991; & "The Child Krishna and His Critics," idem., 1913. 501-521

he explained, was a borrowing from Christianity, ~~which~~
~~Xnty~~ is the original source in the human scene of the idea
 of the divinity of childhood. The name "Krishna" is
 an Indian transformation of the word "Christ;" in
 India ~~Harod's~~ massacre of the innocents became the
 murder of the children of Devakī by Kāṁsa; John the
 Baptist became Krishna's brother Balarāma; the
 herds~~men~~ are common to both birth stories. Fifty
 years earlier Albrecht Weber had collated these
 correspondences carefully in his Berlin Academy paper
Über die Krishnajanmāṣṭamī (Krishna's Geburtsfest)
 and had ventured ~~a view~~ ^{an opinion} that the Mediterranean
 Christmas festival had migrated eastward. Kennedy
 transformed Weber's hunch into a historical theory
 by naming the instruments of this migration: the
 carriers, he claimed, were a migratory group of herds~~e~~
 people called the Gujars, who came into India (he said)
 with the Huns ~~who~~ in the fifth century, ~~came into~~
~~India from~~ ^{In their} former home in Central Asia where
 Christian~~x~~ churches were known to have been flourishing.
 Kennedy's proposition was helped by his dating of the
 Harivaṁśa and Vishnu Puranas--and the beginnings of
 the Gopāla cult--as late as the sixth century A.D.
^{In 1913} Sir R. G. Bhandarkar ~~in 1913~~ welcomed ~~Kennedy~~ ^{the idea of}
 Christian ~~assumption of~~ responsibility for the Gopāla
 cult. (in his Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious
Systems.) He strengthened the theory by proposing
 as bearers of the lore of the Christ-child a people
 known earlier ^{than the Gujars} in Indian records: ^{the carriers were} the Abhīras, ~~who~~
^{a people already} ~~are~~ mentioned in the Mahābhārata, and thus possible

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contributors of material to ~~a more soberly dated~~
the Harivaṃśa, correctly dated.

Arthur Berriedale Keith really destroyed the theory of borrowing from Christianity in an article in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1908 ("The Child Krishna," pp. 169-75), ~~in which~~ he pointed out that the story of the killing of Kāṃsa--a part of the childhood cycle--was already current in India in the second century B.C., as evidenced in several references to it in the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali. Keith might have added that the notion of transmission of Christian lore by either Gujars or Ābhīras was a daydream. There is no evidence that either tribe ever lived outside of India, no record of the entry of either into India, nor of their having been in ancient days the cowherds of the Mathurā countryside, nor of their having ever been Christians or worshippers of Krishna Gopāla either, for that matter. [All references to Ābhiras in Hindu literature hold them in abhorrence, and some record hostility between them and the family of Krishna. See Bhagwansingh Suryavamshi, The Abhiras, Their History and Culture (Baroda, U. of Baroda, 1962).]

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The theory of a Christian origin of Gopāla did not prosper. Nor has any other.

A theory had to be proposed by someone that the cult of Krishna the cowherd had the Vedas as its source. The propounder was Professor Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, who published in 1920 his Materials

for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect (U. of Calcutta, 1920). The Vedic literature, he pointed out, already calls Vishna a Gopā or Herdsman (RV 1.22.18) who has in his abode many-horned and swiftly-moving cows. Vishnu is also called (1.155.6) a youth who is no longer a child. The Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra calls Krishna Govinda, and Dāmodara (25.24)--terms that are prominent in the later Gopāla literature.* This pastoral god of the Vedas was preserved and developed, say Raychaudhuri, by some tribe like the Ābhīras.

Posterity seems to have judged that a theory that assumes the Vedic scholarship of herdsmen--and that leaps back over a millenium of silence to find the inspiration of the Gopāla cult--does not explain much.

After fifty years, Charlotte Vaudeville of the Sorbonne has had the courage to pick up, again, the problem of the origin of the cowherd god.** In those parts of her sophisticated investigations in which she struggles with this problem, she sorts out several cycles of childhood stories with separate origins--cycles having to do with Krishna's birth, his lifting of Govardhana and subduing of Kāliya, stories involving his brother Balarāma, the erotic tales, and those on the slaying of Kamsa. All were originally rooted, she thinks, in prehistoric cults

*Raychaudhuri, Materials..., pp. 33, 45, 85-92).

**Charlotte Vaudeville, "Aspects du Mythe de Kṛṣṇa-Gopāla dans l'Inde ancienne," Melanges d'Indianisme à la mémoire d'Louis Renou (Paris, E. Du Boccard, 1968), pp. 737-761; "Braj Lost & Found," IJ 18 (1979) 195-213; "The Govardhan Myth in Northern India," IJ 22 (1980) 1-15

of the Mathurā countryside, associated with pre-Aryan godlings and divinities.

There is probably a good deal of truth in Professor Haudevill's connections between Gopāla and little-known ancient yakshas, divine serpents, hill spirits and tree-spirits--but little proof. Even if her demonstrations were conclusive, however, at the end we would know only where the creators of the Gopāla cult gathered up their materials. We would know how the cult of Gopāla was created, but not why, and we would have attained no inkling of an understanding of its vitality and power. Only a 19th-century historian of religion could believe that by tracing a historical religion back to a ^{historical} ~~supposed~~ starting-point one ^{has} ~~can~~ capture the essential nature of the religion and the key to all subsequent developments in its history. ^{Even} If one ^{has} ~~traces~~ the new-born Krishna and his mother back to the Madonna Lactans of Byzantine murals, really, what has one learned? If one is trying to understand the rise of Gopāla-worship in America, what has one accomplished in learning that it "sprang from" Bengal Vaishnavism as introduced by Swami A. C. Bhaktivedānta in 1965? One has learned when, and whence, but not WHY.

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In making my own attempt to answer that question I shall forego the matter of remote origins and be content to show that, before the author of the Harivaṃśa

retold these stories in Sanskrit, they had already been told in a less dignified circle on the margins of the awareness of the composers of the Mahābhārata. for several centuries at least. The best evidence is found in the scene of Śiśupāla's verbal attack upon Krishna in Mahābhārata 2:38.4-9. ^{In the passage} There the "mācho" Śiśupāla pours his contempt upon Krishna's ~~childhood~~ exploits, mentioning them by name. In editing this book of the Epic for the critical edition Franklin Edgerton has found the lines to be early and authentic. In them, Śiśupāla rails at the ~~"warrior-deeds"~~ ^{heroism in the past} that are Krishna's ~~claim to fame:~~ that he killed a bird named Putanā, that he upset a cart, and ate a lot of food, and lifted an anthill of a mountain, and slew a ~~horse~~ (aśva) and a bull (Vṛishabha.) (The last two references are to the killing of the demons Keśi and Arishta.) ^{long before the Harivaṃśa.} KRISHNA'S CHILDHOOD FEATS WERE KNOWN. The evidence of this passage is supported by occasional namedropping elsewhere in authentic passages in the Epic in which the honorifics applied to Krishna recognize feats that belong to his childhood: Keśiniṣūdana in Bhagavadgītā 18.1, Kesihantr in Mahābhārata 2:36.2, Keśisūdana in 2:30.11. Also, two sculptural representations of infancy stories have been found, and dated to a time before the Harivaṃśa. The Mathurā Museum has a relief of the Killing of Keśi on a weight-stone that is assigned to the Kusāna period.* And another Mathurā Museum piece

* No. 58.4476. See John Stratton Hawley, Krishna the Butter Thief (Princeton U. Press, 1983), p. 339; & Joanna Williams, ed., Kalādarshana: American Studies in the Art of India (Delhi 1981), Doris Srinivasan, "Early Krishna Icons: the Case of Mathura," p. 747.

is No. 17:1344--a relief in which a man walks beside a river carrying a baby on his head in a shallow basket. Even Charlotte Vaudeville, who has her own unique understanding of this relief, agrees with previous interpreters in seeing here a representation of the child Krishna being carried to his refuge in the village of the cowherds.*

Another demonstration that there was an early and widespread lore regarding the childhood of Krishna may be seen in the Ghata Jātaka of the Pali canon of the Buddhists.** The Jātaka tells its own strange version of the birth of Krishna and the death of Kāṁsa, yet in a version that has many clear ties with the narrative told in the Harivaṁśa. Though the date of this Jātaka cannot be determined, it is likely to be early; and at any rate it shows how varied, and therefore of what old growth, the Gopāla legend was, at a fairly antique time. The fact that this version is in a vernacular language, and in the literary form of a tale, appears to point to the oral folk tale as the transmitter of the Gopāla stories before the author of the Harivaṁśa brought them together in Sanskrit. Professor Ingalls supports this view in his

* Vaudeville, "Kṛṣṇa" "Aspects du Mythe de Kṛṣṇa-Gopāla...", op.cit., p. 746; Hawley, op.cit., p. 338 bibl.; Srinivasan, op. cit. p. 127. Srinivasan's objections to the prevailing identification of the scene have been met by Hawley and Vaudeville.

** V. Fausvöll, ed., The Jātaka, vol. 4 (London, TRübner & Co., 1887), pp. 79-89.

omit if late

observation that the Harivaṃśa narrative includes no quotations, no references to earlier authorities, and that it has the seamless texture of material that is being reduced to writing from oral sources for the first time.*

The stories existed, somewhere in folklore.
Apparently there were Sanskrit-speakers, who, like Śiśupala, were contemptuous of these stories; others, like the composers of the Mahābhārata, merely stood aloof from them--knowing them, but not willing to be their transmitters.

A time came when that aloofness changed--when Sanskrit-speakers heard those stories gladly, and the Harivaṃśa was written. And after that, the stories of Gopāla were told and told again, and became the stories that Krishna-workshippers really wanted to hear.

WHY?

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My own effort to answer this question involves a general theory of religion that I have found helpful in explaining the dynamics of religious change: the understanding that religious cults focus always upon areas of anxieties in the life of a people where factors almost beyond control are endangering what are felt to be vital necessities. Where disaster ~~is an imminent possibility~~, there religion comes into play, invoking extra-human power or the support of a superhuman order. Professor Ralph Linton, who

*Daniel H. R. Ingalls, "The Harivaṃśa as a Mahākāvya," in Melanges d'Indianisme à la Mémoire de ~~xixixxRampi~~ Epuis R'nou, p. 394.

once graced Columbia's Department of Anthropology 21
made this point in lectures in my course in Primitive
Religions: the Malagasy tribe that is utterly dependent
upon rice has no rice-god: their rice-crop had
never been known to fail. Elsewhere there were ~~are~~
rice-gods and rice-rites--and natural dangers
that made the rice harvest ever unsure. In the
Trobriand Islands in some places the hurricane deity
received constant cultic attention--while on the
lee side of the same island, worship of the wind-
god ~~was~~ ^{is} perfunctory of non-existent. Religion
focuses upon sore spots where human beings worry,
scarcely able to cope, ~~with distress regarding critical~~
~~matters~~. Their worshippers look to the superhuman
for support.

Advanced religions are not different: their
rites and their lore focus on areas where they ~~can~~
~~scarcely cope--where~~ there is weakness, want, hurt,
distress and anxiety.

This was true of the older Krishnaism: *the threat of*
Disorder--~~the threat~~ of having to live in a fallen,
disintegrated and brutalized world or in a world
organized on distasteful principles--that was the
bugaboo of the writer of the Bhagavadgītā, which
he worked against by invoking the world-concerned
God who was ~~the civic head of the universe so to~~
~~speak~~, working for the welfare of all creatures
himself, and calling for faithfulness to duty ~~and~~
~~the needs of society~~. He will *not deny of salvation*
~~support and save~~
~~those~~

those who stand by their posts and ~~promote lokasangraha.~~

I need not repeat my sketch of ^{the} social concern ^{that provided} in the earlier Krishnaism. ^{I must point out, however, how} ~~How faithful a later~~

faithful

Krishnaism was to that ideal, ~~after the Bhagavadgītā~~ in the centuries of the later epic, ~~is something that~~ ~~I must point out, however, because~~ it was the very social effectiveness of Vaishnava religion that ~~in time~~ necessitated a transformation in the faith.

What one sees in the materials of the later epic is a continuous drive, under Vaishnava religious auspices, to construct and weld and cement an unshakable neo-Vedic world—~~or, if not really Vedic, then at least a world approved by the Vedic priesthood that was not Buddhist or Hellenistic or materialist but Hindu.~~ Making common cause with a rejuvenated and chastened brahman class, the worshippers of Kṛiṣṇa led a ~~swelling~~ counter-reformation against all the deprecators of the Vedic tradition and against all the rejectors of the neo-vedic social life that was being formulated in the dharmaśāstras. Increasingly, the enemy was the king or emperor of foreign extraction—usually Buddhist or renegade Śaiva in religion—who cared little for brahmans or for ^{their} dharmaśāstras. They neither performed Vedic rituals nor compelled compliance with the growing corpus of Hindu sacred law.

Late in the second century A.D. the issue ^{who should} ~~of~~ cultural dominance ^{in India became a real question} ~~became a real one.~~ The great

hold

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Kuṣāṇa empire ^{had} began to fall apart, leaving a flotsam of petty states ruled generally by kings of foreign family and worldly outlook, and a population made poor and miserable by the burden of many standing armies. Under the circumstances, voices became shrill. The issue of the third century in Sanskrit literature became a typically Krishnaite drive for order-- now, a drive for brahmanical order, ~~and for acceptance of brahman~~ tutelage in the universal observance of social codes formulated by the brahmins.

Beginning even in the Maurya times, an aspect of the Hindu reaction to pressure had been the codification of the Hindu social ~~tradition~~ ^{norms}. The Laws of Manu had appeared before the end of the Kuṣāṇa time. Now, amidst the struggles of a dark age, a crescendo was reached in the writing of the law book of Yājñavalkya and the Vishnusmṛiti and the Nāradaśmṛiti. The lands in which these codes were honored became the lands that were considered to constitute the Indian nation, rather than any area set by natural boundaries: the conception is visible in a geographical pronouncement found in Vishnu Purana 2:38:

"On the east of Bharata dwell the Kirātas,
On the west, the Yavanas;
In the center reside Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and
Sudras,
occupied in their respective duties of sacrifice,
arms, trade, and service."

(Tr. H.H.Wilson; cf Garudāraṇa 55:5,
Varanasi, Chowkhamba, 1964; Markandeya
Purana tr. Pargiter, 47:8.)

The peoples that do not conform to the duties of caste are no part of Bharata, but foreigners.

Several epic references to political situations reflect the bitterness of this struggle of the indigenous against the foreign or barbaric. Mahābhārata 3.186.29 polemicizes ^{against} rulers who are Yavanas, Śakas, Andhras and others ^{they are} --wicked overlords who punish wrongly, lie deliberately, and allow even the brahmans kshatriyas and vaiśyas ^{of their realms} to ignore their own proper caste occupations. What makes these outsiders degraded and unfit to rule, says Mahābhārata 13.33.10, is their disregard of the advice of brahmans. The author of Mahābhārata 12.65.13ff addresses kings ^{these} who now have such people among their subjects. Hindu kings, he says, should compell such mlecchas to perform Vedic sacrifices and to give fees and gifts to brahmans, and should ~~make~~ make them show respect for Aryan kings, parents, gurus, ācāryas and other authority figures. Residents of India who are of foreign origin or culture are not only being toppled from rule, but they are being absorbed, under pressure, into ^{the} ranks of ~~the~~ caste order provided by the dharmaśāstras. A passage of the Harivaṃśa speaks of this reform in kingship as now often an accomplished fact: good kings, says 41:1-11, always heed the Vedas, sacrificed to gods and ancestors, appease INdra to insure rain, and know the dharmaśāstras. And they never go to war, says 15:49f., without worshipping fire and brahmans and getting a brahman blessing for their enterprise.

In 320 A.D. this pressure for a Hindu reunification came to fruition in the rise of the very Hindu empire

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of the Guptas. Each succeeding Gupta ruler added conquests until the Gupta lands stretched from sea to sea. Krishna was generally the personal deity of these emperors: four of the seven great rulers of the line are described in their inscriptions as paramabhāgavata, Supreme Bhāgavata.* With the establishment of the Vaishnava faith came the victory of the causes long associated with Vishnuism. Emperors began their reigns with the legitimization provided by performance of the royal coronation sacrifices. Sanskrit became the language of state as well as of religion--the language of records, inscriptions and coins. Royal endowments in the form of the land of rent-producing villages (agrahāras) were settled upon groups of brahmins for their support in lives dedicated to the promotion of Hindu learning.** Minority ethnic groups submitted to brahmins, underwent purifications, and were given livelihoods in the hierarchy of the Hindu castes. The composition and study and application of dharmaśāstras went on with even greater seriousness because their norms that were ~~once~~ stated as preachments were being re-stated ~~as statutes~~ with juridical precision. A new attention to courtroom procedure in the dharmaśāstras of the Gupta Age shows that the courts of the state were enforcing the brahmanical rules. The judges were always brahmins.

Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, ed. J.F. Fleet, Vol. III, p. ~~28, 38, 52, 116~~ 28, 38, 52, 116. Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1970).

**A.S. Altekar, "Agrahāra Villages as Centres of Learning" in R.C. Majumdar & A.S. Altekar, eds., The Vākātaka-Gupta Age (Delhi, Motilal Banarasi Dass, 1967), pp 397ff.

The brahmanical society that emerged in the Gupta age was clear in its demands and firm in its discipline. Its pattern was that of a ~~carefully-~~ ~~ranked~~ hierarchy of varnas and occupational sub-castes. The guardians of the system were the brahman class, whose authority and superiority are inculcated constantly in the dharma literature. The work proper to the various castes is stated clearly, *in those works,* and the penalties for non-performance--usually exclusion from society. The children of inter-caste marriages no longer retain the rank of either parent, but fall into the ranks of the unclean. Untouchability in its mature historic form makes its appearance. Rules for the subordination of women ~~receive~~ *have* full and enduring expression. The age for the marriage of girls is set at a time prior to puberty. The first mention of sati appears in dharma writings. The joint family makes its appearance, with its many restraints upon individual freedom. In later times the bolts of this structure will be tightened and some further restrictions will be added to limitations on occupation, marriage, and social contacts. But the brahman resurgence had expunged *already in the* the laxities encouraged by foreigners and heretics, and the classical social system of India had reached maturity. The essential quality of life would not change for many centuries.

This is the India that put the Bhagavadgītā on the back shelf, to stay there until the 19th century. This is the India that welcomed the stories of the mischievous Gopāla, and gave them respectability, and listened to them ever after with delight. How could a civilized people turn their backs upon the vision of the moral world-supporting God, avyayah śāśvatadharmagoptā, "immortal guardian of the eternal dharma." I asked this question earlier, half in seriousness. Now, in the light of historical circumstances, the answer seems obvious. (If I have done ~~my~~ work properly, perhaps I can quit now and say no more.) ?

I have said that a religion focuses upon a people's desperations. The God of the Bhagavadgītā had done his work, then, and taken his leave. Lokasaṃgraha, the integrity of the world, was no longer an acute problem. *a desperate matter. Far from it* Order has a high theoretical value, but enough is enough. There are situations in the development of human culture when disorder is far from the principal cause of anxiety and misery. ~~And~~ in the Gupta age and thereafter the most dreadful problem in Hindu living was something else. It was the triumph of order itself. Human beings love order absolutely only in its absolute absence. Order attained, always restricts. And the Hindu caste order restricted with a thoroughness that few systems have known before or since. What the people

of this society groaned of was something that they called "bondage;" and what they ardently longed for was something that they called "freedom": mukti or or moksha--"liberation"--was their name for salvation itself. Bound by their estate in life, bound by innumerable conventions, ^{they submitted and endured} because they saw they saw these bondages as rooted at a deeper level in the bonds of their own karma that were of their own making, ^{only their personal evolution could bring} ~~justice required them to endure and await~~ ^{freedom.} ~~the deserved liberation of an eschatological enlighten-~~ ~~ment.~~

In the meantime, contemplation of the work-god of the Bhagavadgītā had little to offer that could raise the ~~the~~ spirits of those entrapped in the dull routines of caste duty. But the little Krishna who was free as the wind and a reckless smasher of pots was another matter. ^{TP} For those whose matings were hedged in with considerations of varna, jāti and gotra, in a system that would break down in fact if lines of heredity were not rigidly channelled, the epic Krishna on his chariot had nothing to say that could charm. Another matter was the contemplation of divine lover-boy who, devil-may-care, made love just as he pleased. Sanctioned as holy meditations, contemplations of the erotic sports of Krishna soothed a deep unhappiness ^{in people who were immersed in} of this tense social system. ^{And} ~~Such~~ devotions to this sportive god could, by divine grace, lead even ~~to lead~~ to eternal liberation in Krishna's supernal Cow-world, there to participate one's self, forever, in those same eternal romantic

where
sports, every aspect of the former collared life ^{would} ~~vanish~~ in a life of pure spontaneity.

The Hindu fascination with Krishna's loves as adulterous acts ^{is in part a} ~~finds part of its explanation~~ as balm for severe repression. Our Victorian ancestors saw the Hindu tales as scandalous proof of indifference to morality in Hindu religion and society. The truth about their meaning is quite the opposite. East of Suez is simply not the place "where there ain't no Ten Commandments." Remember the shock of the late Hippies who betook themselves to India expecting to be welcomed into the original home of sexual naturalism. The Hindu commandments are not ten, but legion.

Even the Bengal Vaishnavas, whose teachers fill their own minds and those of their pupils with systematic meditations on the sexual dalliances of Krishna, are Puritans in practice. S. K. De, after long and not uncritical analysis of Gaudīyā schemes of meditation on the ^{copulations} of Rādhā and Krishna, notes with some surprise that the teachers he ~~has~~ known ^{in his} studies appear to lead blameless lives. (_____)

The exuberant eroticism of the Krishnaite lore is quite another thing from ~~Indian~~ divinization of sex. It is an application of the resources of religion to ~~difficult~~ tensions created by cultural restraints ~~xxxx~~ of exceptional severity, ^{it is} a system for exploding and expending sexual energy in ways that are harmless to the values of Hindu society.

Born as a counterpart of sexual puritanism, I doubt that the erotic aspects of the religion of Krishna Gopāla can survive in any other frame. The evidence: where such Krishnaism spreads, if it does not find a puritanism, it creates ~~one~~ ^{it}. Moving into the hippie scene here in New York City in 1965, Swami A.C.Bhaktivedanta drew in youths who wanted above all to express their alienation by embracing a new cultural religion, but who believed also that whatever was natural was blessed. The Swami changed ~~all~~ that. His disciples accept the four-caste system and the supremacy of brahmins, and they give over to their guru their wealth, their work, the freedom of their minds, and the freedom to marry as they please. When married with the consent of their teacher, their freedom extends to intercourse once a month on the day of highest probability of conception. When permitted childbearing ends, sex life ends also.** A better scheme for generating insufferable tension could hardly be devised. It is the base, however, on which the erotic Krishna myths can survive in life, and thrive.

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* New York Times, Oct 10, 1966; Sept. 6, 1972; Feb. 27, 1973.

may stop.

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There appears to be time for a final note on the special relevance to Hindu need of the cult of Krishna as truly a child and not as lover....of worship in the vātsalya rather than the mādhurya rasa. The adoration of Krishna as toddler and small boy is a major theme of Hindu sentiment. In the sixteenth century Sūr Dās, foremost poet in Hindī, responded to Krishna primarily in this infant form, and left to posterity in his Sūr Sāgar the most extensive and sensitive celebration of Holy childhood, perhaps, that has ever been written in any language. These poems of Sūr Dās are basic liturgical literature for North Indian Krishna-worship today.

Western students have not been able to empathize well with the feeling of this cult. Despite the formal similarity with the adoration of the Christ-child, mentioned earlier in this paper, the comparison is not illuminating nor explanatory. The adoration of the Christ-child is a transient matter, a momentary pose, without any hold upon Christians that can be compared to the depth of meaning that Hindus see in the child Krishna. So I shall point out a special connection between the worship of this child and that special Hindu distress, the hurt of "bondage."

The plight of the Hindu adult, enwrapped in total religious prescription, has been discussed sufficiently. Even in areas where tradition allows

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some freedom of choice, the freedom is often a freedom for collective choice, or for decision by authoritative figures; and men can live to hoary-headedness under the domination of their aged fathers. This experience of total control is the more depressing ^{to} the Hindu male ^{because he} remembers a time when his life was not so.

Sociologists today remark constantly upon the exceptional liberty, the exceptional permissiveness and affection that surround the Hindu boy, in particular until he reaches ~~what is considered to be~~ the ^{age} of responsibility. He is doted upon by his mother. (He is her great claim to distinction.) Females wait upon him. Few rules apply to him. He is disciplined gently, or not at all. Then, suddenly, the boom is lowered on him--ideally after the performance of the Upanayanam initiation into adulthood. Suddenly he is in his father's world. He can not act according to his whim. The word "must" enters into almost all his acts; and thus his life is spent. The status and prospects of most ^{Hindu} men offer little hope that release from bondage will come later in ^{their lives} ~~this life~~. Their Paradise ^{therefore} lies in the past. The contemplation of ^{their} childhood is a happy contemplation that blesses and heals. Hindus find this liberation not only in the contemplation of their own remembered childhood, but in other ideal childhoods that are open to their imaginative participation. Identifying with their own children,

they ~~defend~~^{continue} the tradition of childhood liberty in
~~their~~^{them} raising, and participate vicariously in their
 freedom^{as things} that is now so scarce in their ^{own} adult lives.

The worship of the child Krishna has the same healing power. The projection of the worshipper's self into the god is not direct, but the rehearsal of the baby Krishna's untrammelled sports stirs up half-conscious recollection of a happier time, as drawing the bow over the top strings of a sārangī evokes the resonation of the unstruck strings below.

We know something, ourselves, about the benign power of memories of a happy childhood:

"Turn backward, turn backward, O Time in thy flight;
 Make me a boy again, just for tonight."

For occidentals, the charm that remembered childhood casts over us is predominantly the enjoyment again in fantasy of the protection, security, and affection that once were ours--qualities that ~~we~~ are conspicuously lacking in our competitive adult world. For the Hindu, the blessing repossessed is above all freedom, spontaneity, the sportive possibility in living--the quality that is so hurtfully suppressed in the straightjacket in which he lives. ~~that~~ the longing for ^{freedom} ~~it~~ has become a religious matter, and ~~that~~ the personification of ^{freedom} ~~it~~ has become a god.