

KRISHNA AND CHRIST: HINDU AND CHRISTIAN SAVIORS

By Nick Gier, Professor Emeritus, University of Idaho (nickger@adelphia.net)



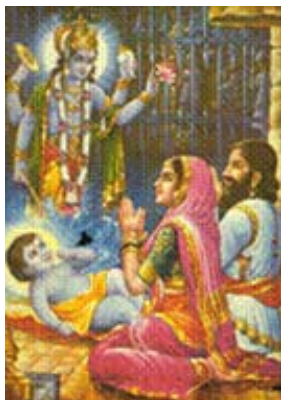
Mother and Child: Devaki and Krishna



On August 28 millions of Indians celebrated the birthday of Lord Krishna, who, if one scholar's calculations are correct, was born about 3,000 years ago. The main celebration begins at midnight and activities included singing, praying, and fasting. (The image at the left shows Hindus gathering for Krishna's birthday at a temple in Kathmandu, Nepal.)

Anti-Christian polemicists have been carried away in their attempts to argue that early Christians somehow borrowed Krishna's stories and attributes and applied them to Jesus. The claim that "Christ" comes from Krishna is completely baseless, because Christ is Greek for "anointed one" and Krishna is an unrelated personal name.

Christian apologists, on the other hand, have rejected Krishna as an imposter and a perversion of the savior ideal. Some writers have made much of the fact that many of the Krishna stories were not written down until hundreds of years after Christ. Christians had immigrated to southwest India by AD 300, so Hindu writers could have known about the birth and life of Jesus.



We now know that basic legends surrounding Krishna are pre-Christian, and that the man Krishna, son of Devaki (his mother and father Vasudeva on left), is mentioned in a text dated 750 BC. Depiction of the Hindu equivalent of the slaughter of the

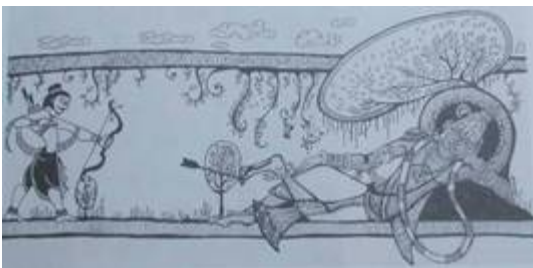
infants--Prince Kansa's attempt to kill Krishna--is found in a bas relief from the 3rd Century BC. Krishna's heavenly father Vishnu is shown in the upper left of the image.

Krishna and Christ Compared



There are many striking and instructive similarities between Krishna and Christ. Both were miraculously conceived; both had royal genealogies; both were threatened with death by a wicked ruler. Krishna and Christ were human incarnations of a triune God; both were tempted by demons; both worked miracles; both transfigured themselves (see image at left); and both predicted their own deaths. For more see the Savior

Archetype at www.class.uidaho.edu/ngier/archetype.htm.



Krishna and Christ rose from death and ascended into heaven. Christ died a gruesome death on a cross, while Krishna died, Achilles-like, by an arrow to his heel (left). The main difference is that Christ's death is redemptive, while Krishna's entire

life is what redeems the world. Both Christianity and the religion of Krishna are theologies of grace. Krishna's favor, however, appears to go further than Christ's. In his battle with demons, Krishna dispatches them to heaven after killing them. The hunter who accidentally kills Krishna is also forgiven all of his karmic debt.

Krishna is the eighth incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu, who, according to Hindu belief, has come in every cosmic age to save humankind from its sin and folly. Perhaps in an attempt to gain favor with India's Buddhists, Hindus decided

that Vishnu's ninth incarnation was Lord Buddha, whom the Hindu Gandhi called the greatest ever teacher of non-violence.

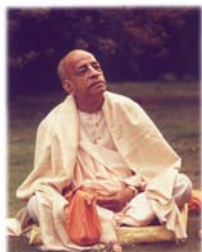
In stark contrast, Vishnu's tenth and final incarnation has striking similarities with Christ's second coming. Hindus believe, and appear to have substantial evidence for it, that our age is particularly violent and sinful, and this means that a great warrior savior Kalki will come astride a white horse slaying all unbelievers with his mighty sword.

Controversy Surrounding the Hare Krishnas in America

Just as some Christian sects have gone over the edge, so has the religious movement called the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) done as well. Along with thousands of others, I first encountered the Hare Krishnas in the LA airport, and I still have the copy of the *Bhagavad-gita*, sometimes called the Hindu New Testament, they gave me.

In the *Gita* Lord Krishna is disguised as Arjuna's charioteer, and after a long discussion about religious duty and Krishna's transfiguration that scares the wits out of Arjuna, Krishna insists that it is Arjuna's sacred duty to fight a war with his cousins that, according to the text, causes a million casualties. Gandhi tried his best to interpret this war as an internal conflict within each person's soul, but some scholars maintain that he failed in this task.

Just as is the case with some Christian missionaries, the Hare Krishnas were known for their aggressive proselytizing. Parents accused them of brainwashing their children, and then former members came forward with claims of sexual abuse. In June of 2005 ISKON agreed to a \$9.5 million settlement that will offer compensation to 535 former members in the U.S. and the India.



When I contacted ISKON in the late 1970s, the person who responded to my inquiries was loathe to speak about the death of Krishna. I was informed that because Krishna was divine he could

not die. Like all great yogis, including ISKON's founder Bhaktivedanta (left), Krishna simply decided to leave his body. Krishna saves directly out of his divine power; blood sacrifice plays no role in human redemption. Among the major world religion, Christianity is unique in holding this doctrine.

Rama, Vishnu's Seventh Incarnation, and the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya

It is Rama, the seventh Vishnu incarnation, who has been at the center of recent conflict in India. Hindu fundamentalists have always been disturbed by the fact that Muslim armies destroyed a temple at Rama's birthplace in Ayodhya and erected the Babri Mosque in its place. On December 8, 1992, about 3,000 Hindu fanatics dismantled the three domes of this huge monument with pick axes and sledge hammers. They declared that the Taj Mahal was next. This action unleashed a wave of violence between Hindus and Muslims that resulted in over 2,000 dead. For more on this incident, see www.class.uidaho.edu/ngier/ayodhya.htm.

During the attack on the Babri Mosque, I was on a field trip with a group of students from Panjab University. For one afternoon each week their task was to teach English or Hindi to poor Muslim students in a village outside of Chandigarh. A curry kitchen at the Hindu temple fed all those who were hungry, and four Hindu and two Sikh students sat down with their Muslim children for their language lessons. As I was experiencing Gandhi's India, where six major religions usually live in harmony and celebrate each other's holidays, the evening news all over the world was focused on the violent exception rather than the peaceful rule.

My hope is that on Krishna's birthday we take to heart the teachings of non-violence in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity and put aside all ideas of vengeance and retribution. Gandhi once said that "an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind," and Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us that "hate cannot drive out hatred, only love can do that."

