

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KRISHNA'S CHILDHOOD PRANKS

Compared to the *Harivaṁśa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* spends unhurried time in a loving and joyful contemplation of the child Krishna¹. Although the *Bhāgavata* comes to the defence of Krishna in several other instances², it hardly attempts to justify his childhood pranks. Its commentators, however, take great pains to exonerate him from blame³. In this Paper we shall consider the justifications offered by Gaṅgāsahāya, Jīva Gosvāmin, Śrīdhara Svāmin, Sudarśanasūrin, Śukadeva, Vallabhācārya, Vijayadhva, Virarāghava and Viśvanātha Cakravartin⁴ in connection

1. See my book, *The Divinity of Krishna*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984, pp. 45-49.

2. *Ibid.*, under 'Justification of Krishna's' in the Index; and my *The Impeccable Krishna*, «Indica» 18:1 (March 1981), pp. 1-6.

3. For their justifications of Krishna in other matters, see my articles: (i) *Kṛṣṇa as a Portion of the Supreme*, «Purāṇa» 24:1 (January 1982), pp. 79-90; (ii) *The Justification of Kṛṣṇa's Affair with the Hunchbacked Woman*, «Purāṇa» 25:2 (July 1983), pp. 225-234; (iii) *Kṛṣṇa's Stealing of the Herdsmaidens' Clothes*, «Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute» 66:1-4 (1986), pp. 172-174; (iv) *Transformation through Denudation*, «Indica» 23:1-2 (March-September 1986), pp. 60-61.

4. (i) Note that Madhva does not comment on this episode in his *Bhāgavatātāparyanirṇaya*.

(ii) The names of the commentators of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* frequently referred to are abbreviated thus: GS = Gaṅgāsahāya, JG = Jīva Gosvāmin (when JG is used, it refers to his commentary called *Vaiṣṇavatoṣiṇī*; when the reference is to his *Kramasandarbhā*, the abbreviation Ks is used), SD = Śukadeva, SS = Śrīdharasvāmin, VB = Vallabha, VC = Viśvanātha Cakravartin, VJ = Vijayadhva, VR = Virarāghava.

(iii) The following editions have been used: (a) *Śrīmadbhāgavatam*, with

with the following episodes of the 10th *Skandha*: destroying the cart because his mother is too busy to suckle him (7.4-17); making himself too heavy for her lap (7.18-19); engaging in unrestrainable play, stealing milk and curds, sharing these with monkeys and then breaking the jar, urinating and defecating in the houses of the herdswomen, and causing their infants to cry (8.21-31); denying that he has eaten mud (8.32-45); smashing the pot for churning curds in anger, stealing butter and giving it to a monkey, and running away when his mother comes after him (9.1-21).

It is not that the commentators do not spend time contemplating Krishna's mischief. VB explicitly exhorts us to meditate on the thousands of forms the Lord assumes as he sits, crawls forward, etc. (on 8.21). JG and especially VC seem to revel most in his pranks (see e.g., VC on 8.29, 31). The commentators also acknowledge with the *Bhāgavata* that, *prima facie* at least, Krishna is at fault (GS, JG, VB, VR on 9.11, 15; SD on 9.11): he does not control himself (GS, JG, SD, VC, VR on 8.34), tells lies (JG on 8.37, VC on 8.36) and steals (GS, SD, SS, VB, VC, VJ, VR on 9.8). His faults cause intense suffering and anxiety to his mother (JG on 8.33). When describing the unrestrained play of Krishna, the narrator Śuka does not enter into specific details for fear of getting involved in profane matters (VB on 8.24), and considering it improper for him to recount the *rājasatāmasī* and *tāmasatāmasī līlā* of Krishna (in 8.28-31), he makes others (i.e., the herdswomen), his mouthpiece (VB on 8.27). VC goes so far as to make Krishna promise not to misbehave again (on 9.12), thereby implicitly making him admit his fault. However, as the same VC puts it, in the case of the Lord falsehood and so forth, far from being faults, are the very crest-jewel of the excellent virtues (on 8.35). We shall first take up the justifications which are common to several episodes and then those which pertain to one or two incidents only.

the commentary of Gaṅgāśahāya called *Anvītarthaprakāśikā ṭīkā* ed. by PĀNḌEYA RĀMTEJ ŚĀSTRĪ, Benares, Paṇḍit Pustakālaya, Samvat 2002 [1946]; (b) *Śrīmadbhāgavatam: Daśamaḥ skandhaḥ*, with several commentaries, 3 vols., ed. by ŚRĪ NĪTYASVARŪPA BRAHMACĀRĪ, Vṛndāvana, Śrī Devakīnandana Press, Samvat 1963-64 [1907-8].

A. COMMON JUSTIFICATIONS

1. *Krishna behaves like a child*

It is evident that in the events under consideration Krishna is a very young child. Some commentators specify his age. Some hold that in the episode where he overturns the cart he is a babe of three months (GS, JG, VC on 7.4)⁵. He makes a nuisance of himself by urinating, etc. and causes the infants to cry (8.21-31) shortly after breaking the cart and before killing Tṛṇāvarta (GS and JG on 8.21), i.e., when he is not yet one year old (Ks on 8.21); VB, however, holds that he is two years of age (on 8.24). When he makes himself too heavy for Yaśodā's lap he is, as 26.6 states, one year old (GS, JG on 7.18; JG, Ks on 8.21). At the time when he escapes from his mother and is eventually caught and bound by her, he is a child of three years (GS on 9.1).

All the commentators except Sudarśanasūrin repeat the declaration of the *Bhāgavata* (9.14), viz., the unmanifest Lord who is beyond the senses presents himself in human form (*martyalinga*). This means that in nature, qualities and activities he manifests himself as a very ordinary mortal (VB on 9.14). When the text (7.3) states that Krishna's childish behaviour imitates the ways of human beings, the same commentators reiterate it. Similarly all except SS and Sudarśanasūrin agree with the text's (8.36) assertion that, although the Lord has unlimited supreme powers, he assumes the form of a human child out of sport. JG also quotes, «As in ordinary life, it is mere sport»⁶ (on 7.6). So Krishna's impish activities can be excused on the grounds that he is imitating a child's behaviour.

In the cart-breaking episode VB points out that Krishna behaves just like a cowherd's child (on 7.6). Unable to get her attention by crying when he wants to suck his mother's breast, he kicks up his feet under the influence of his childhood *līlā* (JG, Ks on 7.6). He raises his feet just as a child does (VB on 7.6), and not

5. According to 26.5 he is *māsyā*, i.e., one month old. But some commentators interpret it to mean 'three months old'.

6. Cf. *Brahma-sūtra* 2.1.33.

otherwise (VB on 7.7). In fact, it is his crying that is the cause (*nimitta*) of the cart being kicked upside down, and so he is not culpable (VB on 7.9). Hence, the breaking of the cart is secondary or incidental (*ānuṣaṅgika*) (VB on 7.6), for the main thing is that he lifts his feet just as a child would.

When about to indulge in their unrestrainable play, Krishna and Balarāma are acting like any other innocent child precisely because they are under the influence of the childhood *līlā* (JG, VC on 8.22). They are wholly given to play (GS, SD, VR on 8.25). Krishna does not inspire their mothers to forbid them from playing with horned animals, fire, animals with sharp teeth, water, thorns and other such hazards because it is not proper for them to be prohibited, for the play (*kṛīḍā*) itself is their highest (*parā*) regulator (*niyāmikā*) (VB on 8.25)⁷. Since he who is the destroyer of the filth of the world and of people is, according to the Purāṇas, free from feces and urine, the nuisance he causes by urinating, etc. in the herdswomen's houses is for the sheer joy of his childhood *līlā* (JG on 8.31). Referring to these boyish pranks (*kaumāracāpalam* — 8.28), VR points out that they are the result of his youthfulness, and VJ goes further asserting that they are proper (*ucita*) of his juvenile state (on 8.28). In fact, the complaining herdswomen are aware that the fault lies not in the Lord but in his tender age (VB on 8.28)⁸. Even though he is telling a lie by denying that he has eaten earth, it is not a misdeed because it is done in a playful spirit that is proper of a child (JG on 8.35). Due to his having a child's nature, he does not tell the truth out of fear of receiving a beating (VC on 8.35-36).

Taking hold of the churning stick, Krishna stops his mother from churning because he wants to be suckled, for he is hungry in a manner befitting his childhood *līlā* (JG on 9.4). In the incident where Yaśodā leaves him to attend to the milk boiling over, he has not yet attained enough understanding (*buddhi*) (VJ on 9.5), and

7. This is how VB explains *kṛīḍāparau* in 8.25.

8. Incidentally, VB specifies that when the text refers to Krishna as *kumāra*, it means to say that he is two years old (on 8.24), i.e., he is not yet toilet-trained, etc., as one would expect from a boy who is at least five — which is normally what is meant by the word *kumāra*.

so he angrily smashes the churning pot. His breaking the pot in anger and eating the butter secretly, etc. constitute the attractive beauty of his juvenile *lilā*, which is filled with affection for his mother. Although from the adult point of view, his tears are false (*mṛṣā* —9.6), he brings tears to his eyes since he has taken on the nature of a child; or, alternatively, although he sometimes deceitfully pretends to cry, here in this incident his tears are not false (*amṛṣā* — supplying the negative prefix *a* from the preceding word *bhitvā* in 9.6), since his mother has left him unsatisfied (JG on 9.6).

2. Krishna attracts others to himself

In a couple of verses the text remarks that, when Krishna and Balarāma launch into their unrestrainable playful activities, their mothers forget their household duties or are unable to do them, and are transported with joy (8.24-25). The commentators, following suit, reiterate that Yaśodā and Rohiṇī are attracted away from their homes or domestic chores. But the one who emphasizes this repeatedly is VB. According to him, in several episodes Krishna brings about *nirodha* ('constraint') in Yaśodā and others: i.e., through his deeds he makes them forget the world (*prapañca*) and develop attachment (*āsakti*) to himself. Krishna first cries in order to attract his mother, then goes further and lifts his feet, as a consequence of which the cart overturns, and thereby he produces *nirodha* in Yaśodā and others (on 7.1, 8, 18). In this cart-overturning event he resorts to a deed, viz., lifting his feet, which is more powerful than speech, i.e., his crying (on 7.6). While in this case he effects a physical (*kāyika*) *nirodha*, he induces a mental (*mānasa*) *nirodha*, when he makes himself too heavy for his mother's lap just before killing the demon Tṛṇāvarta (on 7.18). He gives himself to unbridled playful activities and creates nuisance (8.21-31) because Yaśodā and others are engrossed in their household work (on 8.21). He plays with such cruel and dangerous entities as horned beasts, fire, etc. in order to attract his mother, for the one who loves abandons even nourishment when the beloved is in peril (on 8.25). Since the herdswomen are unrefined (*prākṛta*) by nature, they will not forget the world through the general re-

fined (*sāttvika*) *līlā* of Krishna, so he brings about *nirodha* in them by destroying precisely those things to which they are attached (viz., milk, curds, etc.) (on 8.28). He denies having consumed mud in order to produce *nirodha* (on 8.36). Since his mother is pre-occupied with churning, he effects *nirodha* by stopping her (on 9.4): thereby she gives up attachment to the world and nurses him (on 9.5). He escapes from her because it is when he goes away that the soul becomes attached to him, and it is in this way alone that *nirodha* becomes firm (on 9.1). He leaves the place to help her get rid of her worldly knowledge or to make her realize that she is firmly entrenched in worldly knowledge (on 9.7). In the episode where he liberates Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva from their curse (9.22-23 and 10.24-11.6), he drags the mortar between the two *arjuna* trees instead of remaining still, meekly bearing the 'punishment' of being bound to the mortar⁹. If his mother were to wait there after tying him up, the Lord would not do anything since her *nirodha* would be established. But since she gets involved once again in her household chores, he decides to make her forget the world (*prapañca*) by showing her that he is able to topple the two trees even when roped to the mortar (on 9.22).

3. Krishna brings happiness

Krishna's mischief not only attracts Yaśodā and others to himself: it also brings them joy. Following the text (8.23-24, 27)¹⁰ the commentators repeat that Krishna's playful activities generate ecstatic joy in his mother and the herdswomen. The implication is that, far from causing annoyance, his naughtiness is actually a source of delight to them. JG adds that his irrepressible playfulness creates in Yaśodā the emotion of parental love (*vātsalya*), which is difficult for *bhaktas* to attain (on 8.25; see also Ks, GS, VC on 8.25, and VC on 8.32). The herdswomen complain about him to his mother not to make her angry (GS on 8.31), but so that she and they may experience love and/or happiness (GS, JG, SD, VC on 8.28; SS on 8.29; VC on 8.31). The text refers to the herdswomen's

9. VB is the only commentator to justify this action of Krishna.

10. In v. 24 VB reads *jaṅṅhuḥ* instead of *jaṅṅsuḥ*.

loud complaints to Yaśodā concerning Krishna as something that «is reported» (*kila*) (8.28). This means that the report is false: actually the herdswomen do not yell at Yaśodā. The narrator Śuka describes Krishna's mischief through the herdswomen so that it may be all the more charming (JG on, 8.28). So their criticism is only a pretext for experiencing happiness and love (SD, VC on 8.28). The herdswomen list their grievances against Krishna precisely because they know that, perceiving the tolerant attitude (*śaithilya*) of his mother¹¹, he will play more pranks in their houses (JG on 8.31; see also Ks on 8.31). Their complaining, then, results in their experiencing the mood (*rasa*) of parental love (*vātsalya*) (VC on 8.32). According to VB the herdswomen know that the fault lies in his youthfulness and not in the Lord, and so they come together according to custom to converse with one another in the presence of his mother, and not merely to scold him (on 8.28). But, unlike the other commentators, VB criticizes the herdswomen for blaming Krishna, as we shall see later.

GS, SS, Sudarśanasūrin, VJ and VR repeat the text's (8.31) assertion that, after hearing the complaints, Yaśodā does not desire to scold Krishna. JG and VC, however, bring out its implication by explicitly pointing out that it is due to the joy caused by her son's mischief that she does not want to reproach him (on 8.31). JG however adds that she does question Krishna about his behaviour with the herdswomen, although she does so in an indulgent manner (on 8.31; also GS on 8.31). SD reasons that she does not take him to task because of her parental love (*vātsalya*) for him (on 8.32). On the other hand, VB's explanation for Yaśodā's not wanting to upbraid her son is that there remains no need to do so since the two effects of such scolding, viz., delighting the hearts of the herdswomen and fear being instilled into Krishna, have already been accomplished (on 8.31). Finally, his lying that he has not eaten earth nourishes the mood of parental love (*vātsalyarasa*) which results in intense love (*preman*). Thus, although he is the sovereign master of all virtues like truth, purity, etc., his lying forms an intrinsic part of the devotees' parental love (*vātsalya*). Hence, falsehood, etc. in the case of the Lord are not defects but

11. The text says she does not desire to scold him (8.31).

the very crest-jewel of the great virtues (VC on 8.35).

4. Krishna makes himself dependent and gives grace

Seeing his mother's exhausting efforts to catch him, Krishna has pity on her and permits her to tie him (9.18 and all the commentators except SS). By allowing himself to be bound, he manifests his subjection to the control of his devotees (*bhaktavaśyatā*) even though he is self-dependent and the entire universe is under his control (9.19 and GS, JG, SD, VB, VC, VR on 9.19). So his permitting himself to be tied is not an admission of culpability. In fact, the text asserts that neither Brahmā nor Śiva nor Lakṣmī ever received such grace (*prasāda*) as Yaśodā does through Krishna thus becoming subordinate to her (9.20 and GS, JG, SD, SS, VB, VC, VR on 9.20; see also VB on 9.19, 21). In the cart-overturing episode, Krishna desires to be breast-fed because he wants to submit himself to her parental love (*vātsalya*), for he makes himself subservient to the emotions of his devotees (JG on 7.6). Even though he is Lord, he shows fear in his eyes when scolded by his mother in order to make himself dependent on her (VC on 8.33; see also SD on 8.32). His fear, then, is not due to guilt. He allows himself to be tied mainly because of her parental love (*vātsalya*) for him (JG on 9.18). Among the commentators, JG and VC emphasize Krishna's grace and dependence respectively. Although he is endowed with fullness and power, yet it is in order to bestow grace on the devotee, exults JG, that he becomes hungry, is unsatisfied, loses his temper, steals, is frightened, runs away, takes away by force, sheds tears and is bound (on 9.19). And VC rejoices that Krishna displays his quality of being subject to his devotees through hunger even though he delights in himself, through lack of satisfaction even though his desires are fulfilled, through anger even though his nature (*svarūpa*) consists of pure *sattva*, through theft even though he has sovereignty and wealth, through fear and running away even though he strikes terror in the hearts of Mahākāla and Yama, through forcible taking away even though he is quicker than the mind, through sorrowful crying even though he is full of joy (*ānanda*) and through being bound even though he is all pervasive (on 9.19).

5. The divine Krishna is impeccable

Since Krishna is the Lord (*īśvara*), he does not commit any offence (*aparādha*) (VB on 9.11). As Lord he is capable of doing, undoing, as well as doing otherwise, and in fact he does act otherwise, so one should not look for propriety (*upapatti*) in his actions (VB on 8.43)¹². What may appear as faults in individual souls (*jīva*) can be virtues in the case of the Lord, for he never does a vile (*hīna*) deed. He invents new ways of stealing, which being beyond the range of our speech and thought, are not to be found in the science of thievery. Being Hari — the one who takes away (*harati*) — he can take away simply by the power of his thought (*smarṇa*) (VB on 8.29). It is therefore implied that he is no ordinary, human thief, and should not be judged by human standards. In accusing him of having eaten earth, it is his companions who are speaking falsely, for the scriptural text «Without eating, the other looks on» contradicts them (on 8.35)¹³. When he denies having consumed the mud, he is not lying because from the very beginning everything is within him and so he does not eat anything extrinsic (GS, SD, SS, VR on 8.35; JG on 8.36).

6. Krishna's mischief is directed against demons

JG (on 7.6, Ks on 7.7), GS and VC (on 7.7), referring to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāna* where Krishna is called «the destroyer of the demon in the form of the cart» (*śakāṭāsuraḥhañjana*), as well as

12. Note that VB mentions this specifically to explain away the case of Krishna granting insight (*jñāna*) to Yaśodā and then taking it back; however, as a general principle, it could be applied to Krishna's mischief too.

13. VB adds that other texts which speak of the Lord consuming Brahman, the universe, etc. refer to the *ādhidaivika* form (of the Akṣara Brahman, which is a lower, imperfect form of God) [Note that on 8.29 VB describes Krishna as the consumer in the form of the *adhyātman*], and not to Krishna the Ancient Person (*purāṇapurusa*) (i.e., the Para Brahman, the highest aspect of God). He further adds that, on the other hand, the Lord does eat forest food (leaves, flowers, etc.) in order that the *bhaktas* within him may be satisfied by coming in contact with pure food. Also food offerings please the Lord by the mere fact that they are offered to him. Hence the reference to Krishna's eating a leaf, a flower, etc. (*Gīta* 9.26) is not contradicted (on 8.35).

SD (on 7.7), who quotes a similar appellation, viz., *śakaṭāsuravināśin*, maintain that, in destroying the cart, Krishna is actually killing the demon who had entered it. VR also holds that a devil was the inner spirit of the cart (on 7.7), and thus Krishna slays this fiend in the guise of the cart (on 7.4). The evil spirit gives up the ghost while still remaining concealed within the cart (GS, JG on 7.7). VB mentions the view of some commentators who claim that, in another *kalpa* when Krishna's power of awareness (*jñānaśakti*) was hidden, a certain demon entered into the cart; so Krishna now cries and kicks the cart to prevent the evil one from abducting him. Hence it is that the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* applies the epithet «annihilator of the cart-demon» (*śakaṭāsurakhaṇḍana*) to him. VB however draws our attention to the fact that here the text mentions only the cart. While he rejects the demon theory, he suggests the possibility of demonic qualities having entered the cart, for, since Krishna cannot be accused of eradicating the ordinary properties (the various parts) of the cart (it must be that he destroys the cart in order to extirpate its demonic qualities) (on 7.6).

Although VB does not accept the demon explanation in the case of the destruction of the cart, he uses it in several other instances. On one occasion, Krishna breaks the vessel containing milk or curds because it is possessed by demons and he wants to prevent others from eating what is contaminated by coming in contact with the fiends (on 8.29). When Yaśodā leaves him to attend to the milk spilling over, VB remarks that she is possessed by devils as it were. These *ādhidaiṅvika* evil spirits should be exorcized from her by means of the sound arising from sacrificial weapons, and so he breaks the churning pot with a loud sound by smashing it with a grinding stone (which is a sacrificial weapon) thereby doing a favour to his mother. VB adds that actually a fiend has entered that pot, and it is to kill him that Krishna shatters it. A little later, he secretly eats the butter in the interior of the house where the *ādhidaiṅvika* demons cannot enter (on 9.6). In fact, the text asserts that, when Yaśodā sees the potsherds and realizes that it is her son's doing, she breaks into laughter (9.7): i.e., she does not get angry precisely because the demon has been expelled (on 9.7). Krishna gives the butter which is kept in a swing to a monkey because a fiend had entered into the butter. Due to its (sharp) teeth

the monkey is a cruel animal (on 9.8) and so the demon will be chewed to death. Thus while the other commentators confine the demon explanation to the cart-overturning event, VB applies it in a number of other incidents¹⁴.

7. Krishna's concern for the boys within himself

VB differs from the other commentators also in offering unique justifications which are not brought forward by the others at all. When Krishna sucks at his mother's breast, eats, etc., it is out of concern for the welfare of the little boys he had swallowed into himself when sucking out the poisonous milk from the demoness Pūtanā's¹⁵ breasts. The text makes no mention either of Pūtanā's having kept little boys confined within her or of Krishna's sucking them into himself. But analysing *akhilajīvamarmaṇi* in 6.11, VB concludes that, since *akhila* means 'all' and *marmaṇi* is in the singular number, *akhila* qualifies *jīva* which, he says, refers to all the boys Pūtanā had kept imprisoned in her vital parts (on 6.11).

When Yaśodā leaves him asleep under the cart in order to attend to her guests, Krishna wants the pure milk of his mother for the little boys within him in order to make them similar to himself, in order that they may be freed of their faults so as to be worthy of seeing his herdsmaidens, in order to establish them in the herdsmaidens¹⁶, and in order to instruct them in knowledge (*jñāna*). Besides, many of them are tormented (by pangs of hunger). That is why the text says he desires the breast (*stanārthin*) [for their sake], and not the sucking of the breast [for himself] (on 7.6). Due to his crawling about, the boys (within him) are hungry, and so he drinks deeply from his mother's breast (on 8.23). He steals food in order to feed these boys who are his very own (*svakīya*) (on 8.29). His mother scolds him for eating earth because

14. VB, by the way, says that even Krishna's crawling on his knees is for the purpose of crushing the demons (on 8.21).

15. The story of Pūtanā is in Ch. 6.

16. The boys are the *ādhidaivika puruṣa*-forms of the herdsmaidens: see VB on 22.8.

she is not aware of the boys inside him. It is for their sake that he eats earth secretly to keep it concealed from the gods (on 8.34). So through his denying having eaten mud, he signifies that actually it is these boys who have consumed it (on 8.35; see also on 6.11). Rebuked by Yaśodā, his eyes assume a bewildered look of fear; this is because he fears that, if his mother beats him, the boys within him will be hurt (on 8.33), and not because he is at fault or fears punishment. When the text declares that Yaśodā hastens to attend to the milk overflowing on the oven and, in the process, leaving Krishna unsatisfied (*atrpta*) (9.5), what is meant is that she leaves him in whom (*yasmin*) [the boys] are unsatisfied (*atrptāḥ*) (on 9.5). This makes him infuriated because as their guardian he will be held responsible for going against the path of *bhakti* (i.e., against these *bhaktas*), since, if they are left unsatisfied, it would mean that he does not care for them. He eats (*jaghāsa*) the butter clandestinely or takes (*jahāra* — v.l. according to VB) the butter to a secret place for the sake of these boys (on 9.6). He runs away from Yaśodā as if in fear lest her blemish pass on to these boys within himself (on 9.9).

8. *Others, not Krishna, are at fault*

While all the commentators try in varying degrees to show that Krishna has not really committed any fault or is to be excused, VB is the only one who goes further, pointing out that it is Yaśodā and the others who are really to blame. Attack, they say, is the best defence.

a. *Faults of Yaśodā*

Most of the commentators repeat what the text (7.6) says, viz., Yaśodā does not hear Krishna crying because she is enthusiastic about the festive celebration of her son's turning in bed (*authānika*) and is busy receiving the guests, but the commentators do not seem to blame her. GS, it is true, remarks that she is attached to her activity, but he also adds that she is magnanimous (on 7.6). On the other hand, time and again VB explicitly finds fault with her. Her attachment to the world, viz., her preoccupation in celebrating Krishna's turning in bed in a grand manner, results in the

current of worldliness (*pravāha*) becoming overpowering, and so the Lord becomes secondary (*gauṇa*) for her. Thus, being inwardly and outwardly extrovert, she takes pride in attending to the mundane, viz., to guests who are not worthy of such an honourable status; if they belong to the Lord completely, she will not be to blame for attending to them, but they have an excess of the *tāmasa* element since they are residents of the cowherd station (*vrajaukas* — 7.6), for the station is *tāmasika*. And so even though the Lord tries to draw her attention, she does not hear his crying precisely because she is extrovert with all her heart and soul (on 7.6).

Referring to the text's (9.3) portrayal of Yaśodā's person while she is churning the milk, JG concludes that she is worthy of being Krishna's mother through her excellent beauty and love (on 9.3), and VC reflects that, by suggesting that Yaśodā alone deserves to be his mother through her maternal love, beauty and other qualities, the verse provides an indispensable contemplation on his mother for those who wish to meditate on parental love (*vātsalya-rasa*) (on 9.3). VB, on the contrary, interprets the whole description to symbolize her faults. When engrossed in her churning activity, she does not care (i) for the *adhībhautika* aspect by neglecting her bodily decorum, i.e., by her clothes slipping from her waist; (ii) for the *ādhyātmika* element by not paying attention to the milk oozing from her breasts due to her natural maternal love (i.e., instead of breast-feeding her son, she busies herself with churning); (iii) for the *ādhidāivika* facet because her deity (i.e., her breast-cloth), alarmed by the wastage of her love (in the form of the oozing milk), causes her breasts to tremble. In addition, she does not heed the promptings of the inner controller. Her two banged arms, tired through pulling the churning rope to and fro, symbolically do harm to the *bhakti* and *karma mārgas* as well as to the deities and regulations of these paths. Sāṅkhya and Yoga, symbolized by her oscillating earrings, are also impaired. The implied shaking of her head disturbs the liberated souls (*mukta*). Her perspiring face indicates that the essence of *bhakti* has drained out from her. The fact that the jasmine flowers (*mālatī*) are falling loose from the braids of her hair, which is the place of *siddhas*, shows that she loses the knowledge of Brahman (*brahmavidyā*), for *mālatī* means 'knowledge of Brahman': 'that which transcends

(*ati + i*) the world, viz., that in which Lakṣmī (*mā=Lakṣmī*) is sufficient (*alam*) (on 9.3)¹⁷.

JG points out that even though Yaśodā abandons Krishna in order to stop the milk on the oven from overflowing, her activity is full of love for him, for she wants to preserve the cowherd clan's wealth, viz., the milk, which, she feels, the child Krishna at present does not know how to conserve (on 9.5). GS is more specific: it is not that she cares for the milk more than for Krishna; on the contrary, her action shows her intense love for him, for through the spilling of the milk his food will be delayed (on 9.5). VB, on the other hand, finds fault with her. Unlike in the case when she interrupts her churning in order to please the Lord (by giving him suck) (9.4-5ab), here she does not put down the milk from the oven to please him; rather she displeases him (on 9.5) and robs him (of his breast-milk) (on 9.8). On the one hand, JG reasons that she approaches him from behind so that he may not catch sight of her (on 9.8; also VC on 9.8), and GS and VC add that she follows him furtively so that he may not hear her footfall (on 9.8). On the other hand, according to VB, she has a sinful outlook because she approaches from behind, and she comes just somewhat near¹⁸ to him, for it is not proper for a person with a guilty viewpoint to move quickly (on 9.8). In fact, Krishna runs away because he perceives that she is not worthy of touching him; nay, examining her inner and outer dispositions, he realizes that she does not deserve even to come near himself; in addition, he does not want the boys within him to be polluted by her blemish (on 9.9). He also cries because he sees her blameworthy disposition. Therefore she is not really his mother (*ajanani*)¹⁹, for no mother would behave in such a way towards her son (on 9.10), i.e., run after him to beat him. Contrary to this, JG avers that she catches hold of him out of love precisely because she is his mother (*janani*) (on 9.10). Similarly, VC explains that, both in not scolding — in the case of stealing curds (8.31) and in scolding — with regard to eating earth, love

17. So *mālatī* consists of *mā + alam + ati + i*.

18. *Śanaiḥ* in 9.8 is glossed as 'just a little' (*iṣanmātram*).

19. VB prefers to read *ajanani*, taking the negative prefix *a* from the preceding word *anvañcamānā* in 9.10.

alone is the motive (on 8.32). In reproaching (threatening to), beat, etc., love is nourished; there is no fault here, for such is the way in which a mother behaves (on 8.33).

VC seems to justify Yaśodā when he explains that she desires to bind Krishna so that he does not venture into the forest out of anger (on 9.12) and thereby undergo suffering in the woods. JG explicitly says that she ties him up so that he may not suffer lest he go away in fear (on 9.14). Besides, adds JG, since he has committed a fault and is her own son (9.15), it is fitting to bind him, for when it comes to punishment, it would not be proper to ignore him as one may do in the case of someone else's child (on 9.15). VB, on the contrary, points an accusing finger at Yaśodā. Like a wicked person, she threatens to beat Krishna, thereby proving herself to be a liar (on 9.11), for in the end she does not thrash him. Although she gives up the wicked intention of striking him, she still wants to bind him with a rope: this indicates defects in her inner organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*), body and judgement (*parikara*)²⁰. Her desire to beat Krishna is so bad that the narrator Śuka recoils from mentioning it, and so to avoid committing a fault himself, he merely says «it is reported» (*kila* — 9.12), suggesting thereby that he himself has neither witnessed nor imagined such a (despicable) act (on 9.12).

VB further says that Yaśodā, being a herdsman (*gopī*, *gopikā*), does not have discernment (on 7.19, 9.9), is extremely ordinary (*prākṛta*) and therefore ignorant (on 9.14), and is in a state of delusion (on 9.15). We have already seen that, according to VB, she is attached to the world. She is wicked (on 9.18) and does harm to Krishna (on 9.19). No wonder, then, that VB, giving an alternative etymology of 'Yaśodā', speaks disparagingly of her as 'who cuts (*dyati*) (her own) fame (*yaśas*)» (on 9.17)²¹.

20. Therefore, when VB states (on 9.8) that Yaśodā's idea in tying Krishna up is to prevent him from wandering away, he does not mean to express her concern for Krishna's safety — as do JG and VC above — but rather her desire to punish him.

21. On some occasions VB does excuse Yaśodā. For instance, she scolds Krishna for eating earth because it would harm his body, for she wants him to keep well since, as the text (8.33) remarks, she desires his welfare (on 8.33); besides, she accuses him of eating mud because she is not aware that it is the boys within him who have consumed it (on 8.34). VB mentions her lack of pride, her freedom from

b. Faults of others

Although the cowherds, the herdswomen and Brahmin priests are said to have no faults of nature (*svabhāva*) at the beginning of the cart-overturning incident (on 7.9), they all become inclined to the profane (on 7.11). The herdswomen who criticize Krishna are ordinary (*prākṛta*), putting their faith in worldly speech; it is because they cannot bear Krishna's destruction of their attachment to the world that they take to complaining. They blame Krishna because after all they are herdswomen (*gopī*) (on 8.28). Imagining that they can encompass Krishna in their arms they become very proud (on 9.16)²².

The cowherds are extrovert, i.e., they lack transcendental knowledge (on 7.10). Their intelligence (*buddhi*) is like that of their cattle. Therefore, their children too are prone to defects by their very nature and so, being extrovert, these companions of Krishna mistakenly imagine that he is eating earth in the same way as curds, etc. — when in fact he is feeding the mud to the boys inside himself. The Lord does not bring about constraint (*nirodha*) in them because they are in contact with women²³. Balarāma also makes all the women happy, hence he too sees a fault in Krishna (on 8.32). Even though his testimony that Krishna had consumed earth is accepted by Yaśodā since he is the elder brother (on 8.34), he is mistaken as the Lord is not present in those who, acting independently of him, have other (adverse) qualities (on 8.35).

c. Predestined behaviour of Yaśodā and others

It is noteworthy that ultimately, according to VB's deterministic system, the behaviour of Yaśodā and the others is preordained. Before overturning the cart, Krishna pretends to be

defects, her virtue and her following the path of the liberated (*mukta*) (on 9.10); but, commenting on this same verse (9.10), he also refers to her defective disposition.

22. This is an alternative explanation VB gives of *susmayantīnām* occurring in 9.17.

23. It should be noted, however, that when they bear witness to Krishna's kicking the cart upside down, VB makes them say that there is nothing improper in telling what one has seen even if it is contradicted, for one must think about a thing as one perceives it (on 7.9).

tired so that Yaśodā, thinking that he is sleepy, puts him to bed. He makes his eyes drowsy to restrict the brahmins' power of knowledge (*jñāna-śakti*): otherwise they will not utter blessings on him (on 7.5) but rather, being aware of his divinity, will sing his praises. By closing his eyes, i.e., by his covering up his *jñāna-śakti*, everyone becomes extrovert and the worldly attitude becomes predominant (on 7.6). In order to establish ignorance (*ajñāna*) in them, he carries on crying even after the cart is broken (on 7.11) so that they may continue to consider him as a mere child. Yaśodā has to churn the curds herself because all the maid-servants are assigned other tasks by the wish of the Lord. He stops Yaśodā from getting involved in *saṁsāra* [by interrupting her churning and making her nurse him (9.4)], but deludes her and joins her to *saṁsāra* again: he drinks the essence of her *bhakti* (in the form of milk); hence, being devoid of it, her knowledge shrinks to its former state, and so she attends to something else [i.e., leaving Krishna she attends to the milk boiling over (9.5)] (on 9.1). Krishna rubs his eyes and puts on a frightened look in order to make the delusion firm, i.e., to strengthen the impression that he is a child (on 9.11). We have seen that he does not confer constraint (*nirodha*) on his companions because of their contact with women. On the other hand, he himself has brought them along precisely for the pleasure of the women [cf. 8.27] (on 8.32)²⁴.

B. JUSTIFICATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL EPISODES

In this section, except for an occasional mention, we shall not repeat the justifications common to several episodes.

1. *The destruction of the cart (7.4-17)*

Krishna cries in order to make known that even his own people are extrovert (VB on 7.6). He carries on crying in order to

24. Note that Krishna does not only cause delusion and predestine wrong behaviour; he also removes faults (on 9.9), dispels excessive delusion (on 9.10), makes the *rajas guṇa* subside (on 9.11), and bestows grace (on 9.20-21).

establish their ignorance with regard to him (VB on 7.11). The cart is piled with leather²⁵ bags containing various *rasas* (liquid delicacies): this is not acceptable to the Lord (since leather is taboo). In spite of the Lord who is the treasure-house of all things being present, they store these *rasas* in containers meant for daily use. Hence all these things are toppled down, for no *rasa* should be accorded a position superior to the Lord²⁶. The cart too, which thus contains *rasas* different from the Lord and is placed above him, is destroyed in its very core (*svarūpataḥ*) (VB on 7.7). VB also sees a deeper, symbolic meaning in the episode. The two wheels of the cart are *saṁsāra*'s two wheels in the form of time, and the axle that keeps the wheels together is the *ahañkāra* (on 7.7). Thus the destruction of the cart is not what it appears to be, but it is rather the stopping of *saṁsāra*.

2. Krishna becomes too heavy for his mother's lap (7.18-19)

While VJ does not attempt to defend Krishna's action and Sudarśanaśurin simply states that the heaviness is a means to enable Krishna to accomplish his future exploit [viz., of killing the demon Ṛṣṇāvarta (7.20-32)] (on 7.18), the others explicate further. Krishna increases his weight in order to protect his mother from the fiend Ṛṣṇāvarta (SD on 7.18), i.e., so that leaving Krishna alone on the ground she may withdraw (to a safe place) (VB on 7.8) in this way, she will not be treated with scant respect (*parābhava*) (JG on 7.19) or be harmed (*Kleśa*) (VC on 7.18) or be carried away (GS on 7.18) or be killed (SS on 7.19; VR on 7.18) by Ṛṣṇāvarta, who is about to attack Krishna. VB adds that Yaśodā loves Krishna in the ordinary way (i.e., as her son); it is to remove this mundane attitude [and make her realize that he is the transcendent Great Person (see 7.19)] that he becomes heavy. Besides, he increases his weight gradually so that she may not be crushed under him (on 7.18).

25. VB is the only one who interprets *kupya* in 7.7 to mean 'leather'.

26. Krishna, indeed, is capable of granting all *rasas*: see VB on 29.47.

3. Krishna makes a nuisance of himself (8.28-31)

The herdswomen complain against Krishna to show that they cannot bear his destruction of the things (milk, curds, etc.) to which they are attached. Their minds are not inclined of their own accord to undergo this type of constraint (*nirodha*), and so to remove this fault of theirs they inform Yaśodā of his mischief (VB on 8.28). The Lord plays this *līlā* to get rid of their shortcomings, and they are freed from their faults through attachment to him (VB on 8.29). The six defects enumerated in 8.29 are actually virtues in the case of the Lord. (i) He untethers the calves at the wrong time (i.e., before the milking time of the cows) and at a spot where they cannot be tied before first having their fill from the cows' udders. The creator of inexhaustible treasures, he acts in this way in order that the calves, who have remained hungry the whole day, may not continue to starve even after their mothers have returned from grazing. (ii) When the herdswomen shout at him, he breaks into laughter because he is aware of their ignorance (*durbuddhi*). Through his laughter his *māyā* grows more delusive, and thus he removes their affliction, for an illusion which causes all one's mental activities to concentrate on the Lord is a good illusion. He does not laugh in derision (*amānin*), for he treats others with respect. (iii) He steals food to feed the boys within himself, as we have already seen. (iv) He distributes the delicacies to the monkeys because they were formerly the *bhaktas* of the Rāma *avatāra*. (v) As pointed out earlier, he breaks the jar containing milk or curds so that others may not eat what is contaminated by the demons. (vi) When the food-stuffs are not available, he gets angry with the householders and causes the infants to cry. He is infuriated with the householders because by not stocking provisions in the house they are not doing the proper thing: a householder exists for the sake of *dharma*, for without *dharma* family life is in vain, and *dharma* results from materials. While this is an extraordinary wrath on the part of the Lord, his indignation in the case of the infants is an ordinary one: he makes them cry because it is not proper that the boys within him go hungry while their servants (viz., the infants) remain satisfied. Thus these six which constitute

faults in souls (*jīva*) are actually virtues in the case of the Lord (VB on 8.29).

The various techniques (such as piling up wooden seats and mortars, striking holes in the pots suspended in slings, using his bejewelled person to illuminate the dark store-room, etc.) employed by Krishna to obtain the inaccessible food (8.30) afford one an insight into his knowledge. So although from the worldly point of view his knowledge causes trouble to others, it is actually a favour, for by coming to know the various aspects (*aṁśa*) of his knowledge (demonstrated through the different techniques), one comes to know the Lord himself (VB on 8.30). Unlike in the case when he is rebuked for eating earth, the Lord bears up with the criticism of the herdswomen without defending himself or manifesting (his divinity), for he does not speak or reveal himself until one becomes engrossed due to a certain amount of attachment (*nātyantāsakti*). He puts up with the reproof also because of Yaśodā's deep-seated wrong understanding of himself; this superimposition of hers will be removed in the episode where he apparently consumes mud (VB on 8.32). Therefore, his silence in the face of accusation does not mean that he is guilty.

4. *Krishna denies having eaten mud* (8.32-45)

JG declares that, even though prohibited from doing so, Krishna eats mud (*mṛd*) because it is soft and delicate (*komala*). In fact the text (8.32) explicitly employs the word 'Kṛṣṇa' precisely because Krishna derives (*ākaraṣakatva*) [from the root *kṛṣ*] joy (*mud*) from the earth. His companions inform his mother so that he may not eat too much mud (*atiśayanivāraṇa*) (on 8.32). So JG seems to imply that eating of earth in moderate quantities is permissible: only consuming too much of it would be bad for health²⁷.

27. In their study, *Earth-eating and the Earth-eating Habit in India*, «Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal» 1:12 (May 1906): 249-70, DAVID HOOPER and HAROLD H. MANN show that the habit of eating earth is found all over India. Earth is consumed not only in times of scarcity and famine, but also at other times because it is believed to have medicinal properties. While pointing to the ill effects of earth on health, the authors admit that some earths — e.g., from white ants' nests — have no adverse effect, even when taken in large quantities. They attribute

The information given by Krishna's companions concerning his eating mud eventually leads to Yaśodā's experiencing the *rasa* of wonder (*vismaya*) (VC on 8.32; see also on 8.36) through her vision of the divine Krishna (8.37-39), and this amazement nourishes her maternal love (JG on 8.36 and 42). His eyes assume a dazed look due to the apprehension (8.33) that, by harming the boys within himself through spanking him, Yaśodā may forfeit the imminent vision (*jñāna*) of himself as Lord (VB on 8.33). His fear, therefore, does not imply that he is guilty.

The text (8.35) says that Krishna asks his mother to examine his mouth to show that it is his companions who are lying. VB remarks that Krishna proves to her that not even the particles of food or its odour are in his mouth, nor does he have any purpose in consuming food (on 8.35). On the other hand, we have seen that JG and VC admit that Krishna has eaten earth and is lying: they excuse him on the grounds that he is imitating a child's behaviour. Therefore, when JG maintains that Krishna does not eat because everything is within him (on 8.36), he is speaking of him on the divine plane; on the human level, he does eat mud. JG asserts that there is no trace of earth left in his mouth precisely because he has consumed all of it. Even though it is a lie, it is a virtue (*guṇatva*) since the narrator Śuka, by relating it, as well as other good people, by listening to it, experience happiness (on 8.35). Finally, Yaśodā who begins by upbraiding him ends up taking refuge in him (VB on 8.43), thus implying that he is not blameworthy.

5. The events leading up to Krishna's being tied (9.1-21)

In stopping Yaśodā from churning by catching hold of the churning stick, Krishna is removing her fatigue, for as Hari he is the remover (*hartr*) of all suffering (VB on 9.4), and he knows that his mother will accept his interrupting her (VC on 9.4). If one who is constrained (*niruddha*) falls into error (as is the case of Yaśodā), then Hari becomes angry (VB on 9.1). And he does become en-

the widespread habit «primarily to the purely mechanical effect it seems to have in comforting gastric or intestinal irritation» (p. 270).

raged; however, lest his wrath destroy Yaśodā, he bites his quivering lips in order to put an end to her greed (*lobha*), on account of which she had abandoned him to attend to the milk spilling over (VB on 9.6). He sheds tears in order to make known to the world that Rudra²⁸ has arrived, whereby the deity [i.e., demon] of the churning pot will be annihilated. The effects of tears are silver, etc.²⁹ and are dependent on some cause: since both these are absent here, his tears are false (*mṛṣāśru* — 9.6). Or one may say that, since Krishna is the protector, there is no fear of Yaśodā being destroyed, and therefore the tears are false (VB on 9.6). According to JG the tears are false from the adult point of view, but not from the perspective of his being a child. Alternatively, reading *amṛṣāśruḥ* by obtaining the negative *a* from the preceding word *bhitvā* in 9.6, JG points out that, although at other times Krishna may deceitfully shed false tears, at this time his tears are real (on 9.6).

Krishna eats the butter secretly not only for the sake of the boys inside himself, but also in order that Yaśodā's efforts in making it may not be in vain (VB on 9.6). He gives the butter (*haiyaṅgava*) to the monkey (because) its wholesomeness is vitiated (*pūrṇalakṣaṇopahata*) (Sudarśanasūrin on 9.8), and also (because) it is useless, for, being previously (*hyaḥ* = *pūrvakāla*) related to cows (*gava* = *goḥsambandhi*), it is rancid³⁰. Besides, the butter is superfluous (*atirikta*), and he gives it to the exceedingly (*atirikta*) (cruel monkey) in order to pacify (*śānti*) it (VB on 9.8). At the time of giving the butter to the monkey, he is described as *cauaryaviśaṅkitekṣaṇa* (9.8). This can be understood in three ways: (i) His eyes (*iḥṣaṇe*) are frightened (*viśaṅkite*) since he has committed robbery

28. That is, Krishna's wrath. See Goswamy Vallabha's commentary, called *Lekha*, on VB's *Subodhinī* on 10.9.6, in *Subodhinīvivarānatrayam*, ed. by MANGALDAS and MOHANLAL [Jariwala], under the direction of DHAIRYALAL VRAJADAS SANKALIYA (Surat: Dhairyalal Vrajadas Sankaliya, Samvat 1939 [1937], pp. 64-65.

29. According to the Śruti text *yadaśvasīyata tad rajatam hiraṇyamabhavat* quoted by Puruṣottama in his *Prakāśa*, which is a commentary on VB's *Subodhinī* and Viṭṭhaleśvara's *Ṭippanī*. See *Śrīmadbhāgavatāsubodhinyām... Ṭippanīyam ca Daśamaskandhadvaitīyikatāmasaparakaraṇāvāntarapramāṇaprameyaparakaraṇadvayaprakāśaḥ*, ed. by M.G. SHASTRI, Vallabhācārya-granthamālā, Nos. 16 and 18 (Bombay: Vadilal N. Shah, Samvat 1988 [1932]), on VB's *Subodhinī* on 10.9.6, p. 46.

30. VB here analyzes *haiyaṅgavam* as *pūrvakālgōḥsambandhi*.

(*caurya*). Although he is the Lord of all, he becomes a thief in order to take away Yaśodā's fault of robbing (him of his breast-milk by leaving him to attend to the milk boiling over). His taking of the butter is called stealing according to the custom of the world (but from the divine point of view he is not a thief). (ii) He has an apprehensive (*viśaṅkita*) look (*īkṣaṇa*) because her knowledge will in due course be destroyed due to her imputing the fault (of robbery) to him. (iii) His eye (*īkṣaṇa*) is on Yaśodā who is suspected (*viśaṅkita*) of robbery (VB on 9.8). So in the first interpretation, Krishna is at fault for stealing only in the ordinary, worldly sense; actually, however, he robs precisely to get rid of Yaśodā's misdeed. In the other two explanations there is no admission of guilt even on the worldly level.

Krishna runs away from his mother not because he catches sight of her coming after him but because, having an insight into her inner and outer dispositions, he realizes that she is not worthy of touching him or even approaching him; it is to wipe out her blemish that he hastily runs away, keeping his face away from her (VB on 9.9)³¹. He runs away to make her do penance (*tapas*) by making an effort to catch him (VB on 9.1): her gait is slowed down by her heavy buttocks, and through this (penance) her intellect (*buddhi*) is freed of faults (VB on 9.10). When he is finally caught by her, he cries because he perceives her imperfect disposition. His eyes are apprehensive lest the constraint (*nirodha*) that he is bringing about in her ends up being completely useless. He rubs his *jñāna-śakti* (his eyes) in order to erase her excessive delusion (VB on 9.10). By rubbing his eyes he heals the sty (as it were) and thus (symbolically) tranquilizes Yaśodā's *rajas guṇa*, which is responsible for her inclination to cane him (VB on 9.11). On the one hand, then, by crying, rubbing his eyes, etc. Krishna is not admitting that he is culpable. On the other hand, VB states that he cries because on the worldly plane he is afraid of being beaten. VB, however, quickly adds that this is meant to delude Yaśodā. By rubbing his eyes he also strengthens the impression that he is a child, thereby making her delusion all the more firm. Similarly, he is

31. Eventually, the Lord has pity on her and allows her to touch him (VB on 9.10).

frightened lest the herdswomen surrounding him find fault with him, but this too is for the purpose of delusion. While Yaśodā believes he has transgressed by breaking the churning pot, his 'offence' (9.11) consists in causing delusion³². Actually, however, since he is the Lord, he does not commit any offence. It should be noted also that he deludes not only *asuras* but occasionally also good people. The Lord brings about excessive delusion in Yaśodā so that she may not be a hindrance in the later *līlās*; otherwise, through her attachment, she would prove to be an obstacle (VB on 9.11)³³. And he finally allows himself to be roped to the mortar because it is his support (for he stands on it in 9.8) (VB on 9.14), and not because he considers himself blameworthy.

C. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Thus we see that the commentators come to the defence of Krishna in a wide variety of ways. Some, like Sudarśanasūrin, whose general comments are very brief anyway, offer few justifications; others make greater efforts at vindicating Krishna. JG and VC seem to emphasize Yaśodā's parental love (*vātsalya*) the most. JG is the one who stresses Krishna's bestowal of grace. VC underlines his subjecting himself to Yaśodā and others. JG, VB and VC dwell on his childhood play more than the others and yet, paradoxically, they are the ones who come up with plenty of rationalizations.

In many ways VB is quite unique. He offers the most, the lengthiest and the greatest variety of justifications. He gives more emphasis than the others to Krishna's making Yaśodā and others forget their chores and become attracted to him. While he does not appeal to the demon explanation in the cart-overturning episode, as do GS, JG, VC and VR, he applies it to several other cases.

32. Besides mentioning it in his comment on 9.11, VB alludes to Krishna's offence of destroying her discernment when commenting on 9.10 too.

33. The *Bhāgavata* also presents such cases where Krishna puts his *māyā* to a positive, rather than negative, use. See my *Divinity of Krishna* (see n. 1), under 'Māyā: positive use of' in the Index.

He is the only one to justify certain puckish pranks of Krishna, such as releasing the calves at the wrong time, causing the infants to cry, using special methods to obtain inaccessible food, and drawing the mortar instead of sitting still when tied to it. The commentators refrain from criticizing Yaśodā, and some, like GS, JG and VC, even justify and praise her. VB, however, launches a scathing attack on her. Similarly, he finds faults with the herdswomen, the cowherds, etc. He also comes up with some unique explanations, such as Krishna's concern for the little boys within him. Then again, he is the only one to offer justifications based on symbolic interpretations, such as the destruction of the cart signifying the termination of *samsāra*, the description of Yaśodā's person symbolizing some of her faults, and Krishna's healing the sty by rubbing his eyes and thus neutralizing Yaśodā's *rajas guṇa*.

These episodes in the life of the child Krishna are not peculiar to him alone. Such motifs are found elsewhere too. In connection with the cart-overturning event, Walter Ruben reminds us of the Jātaka story of the sixteen year old prince who lifts a wagon aloft like a toy only in order to get to know his strength³⁴. In reference to Krishna's mischief, Ruben cites examples of young heroes in tales from Greece, Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia, Kirghiz, China, the Caucasus, the Balkans, etc. who are disobedient or rude or insolent or play practical jokes or are unruly and difficult to manage when playing with other children or disturb other children or are malevolent towards them or beat them or cut off or tear off the arms of their playmates or kill people and cattle. In India the wild behaviour of Skanda, Bhīma and Bharata is praised even when criticized. Krishna's love for fresh butter is a mild form of the voracious appetites of hero-children exemplified in stories found in France, North America, Turkey, Germany, etc.³⁵. Our commentators show no signs of being aware of these themes as folk-motifs common to several different cultures, but even if they were, they would still feel the need of justifying Krishna, not only

34. WALTER RUBEN, *Krishna: Konkordanz und Kommentar der Motive seines Heldenlebens*, Istanbul Schriften, nr. 17, Istanbul, 1944, p. 76.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

because of their more sophisticated background, but also because for them Krishna is not a mere folk-hero but a divine personality.

One of the ways of interpreting a myth is to give it a symbolic meaning. Perhaps the most obvious symbolism of these events in the life of the child Krishna is brought out by the concept of play (*lilā*)³⁶. Symbolizing the unconditioned, transcendent nature of the divine, play (*lilā*) is a characteristically divine activity in Hinduism³⁷. In his pioneering and penetrating study of how the play element characterizes culture, Huizinga points out that play cannot be exactly defined and, in particular, the play of children and of animals can be subjected to very little analysis. According to him, play is essentially indulged in for the fun of it: it is satisfying in itself and has no ulterior reason. It brings joy and expresses freedom. It steps out of 'ordinary life'. It is supra-logical and transcends wisdom and foolishness, truth and falsehood, good and evil³⁸. These characteristics³⁹ apply very well to the Hindu understanding of play (*lilā*) in the realm of the divine, and particularly to

36. In his original contribution to the study of the myth of the child Krishna, Jean Herbert gives a more complex, and at times far-fetched, symbolic interpretation: (i) The practitioner of the spiritual life (*sādhaka*) has to overcome: (a) obstacles, viz., the dangers which result from the infant's becoming aware of his body and its relation with the exterior world (cart-overturning episode), and the fetters which are placed by parents, teachers and the environment, as a consequence of which, one sees multiplicity instead of unity (the incident in which Trṇāvarta is killed); (b) temptations pertaining to his spiritual search, viz., the rush of desires and the lack of discernment in the use of things, which lead to restlessness and fickleness (the events leading up to Krishna's being tied), and the appropriation of all resources to obtain material gratification (Krishna's dragging the mortar to liberate Nalakūbara and Maṇigrīva from their curse). (ii) Through his unrestrainable play, nuisance, denying having eaten mud and the vision he grants Yaśodā, Krishna reveals his divine nature. JEAN HERBERT, *Le yoga de l'amour: la geste de Krishna*, Spiritualités vivantes, Serie Hindouisme, Paris, Albin Michel, 1973, pp. 77-111.

37. DAVID R. KINSLEY, *The Divine Player, A Study of Kṛṣṇa Līlā*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, pp. 1-55.

38. JOHAN HUIZINGA, *Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, Beacon Paperback, 1955, pp. 3-9.

39. Some other qualities such as orderliness in play within the limits of its space, time and regulations probably apply to what Huizinga calls social play, which is manifested in contests, performances, dance and music, etc. (*Ibid.* p. 7), rather than to play in general.

the case of the child Krishna, for it is the very nature of a child to play.

Kṛṣṇa's pranks express an indifference to rules that typifies the behaviour of children. The child's pranks and general misbehaviour are not yet rebellion, as the child acts with little, if any, premeditation. The child has not yet assimilated social conventions and so is not yet limited by them. He behaves spontaneously, impetuously, without regard to «musts» and «oughts». The child seeks only to be amused and to amuse himself, and if such amusement means breaking parental or social rules, he goes right ahead and breaks them without hesitation. The child is free, that is, to express every impulse, to express his essential nature in every action. The theophany of the child Kṛṣṇa, then, expresses the nature of the divine as unconditioned. God, like the child (in this case, as a child), belongs to an other world that is not bound by social and moral convention, to a world where fulness and bounty make work superfluous. For the divine to become embodied as a child is eminently suitable, for they behave in similar ways. Each belongs to a joyous realm of energetic, aimless, erratic activity that is pointless yet significant: pointless, but at the same time imaginative and rich, and therefore creative. In play the mind can go wild; the imagination is set free to conjure and conquer. With the world of necessity left behind, the imagination takes over, eagerly populating a world that knows no limits whatsoever. So it is with the play of children, and so it is with the activity of the gods. The child Kṛṣṇa is by no means a partial, lesser manifestation of the divine in India. He epitomizes the nature and activity of the divine⁴⁰.

It is this carefree, irrepressible, joyous play of the child Krishna that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* affectionately contemplates. It scarcely attempts to vindicate his mischievous behaviour: after all, he is imitating the activities of a human child out of sport. His playfulness makes his mother and the herdswomen forget their household chores and become attached to him in ecstatic joy. He permits Yaśodā to bind him, bestows grace on her and subjects himself to his devotees. He proves that he has not eaten mud. Yaśodā is too busily engrossed in receiving the guests to hear his crying, and so he kicks the cart upside down. This is practically all that the *Bhāgavata* suggests to exonerate Krishna. It cannot be said that it hardly offers any rationalization because it treats these episodes of the child Krishna as mere expressions of folk culture, for it does justify him in many other incidents⁴¹. Far from being embarrassed to relate the unrestricted, natural play of the child

40. KINSLEY, *Divine Player*, pp. 67-68.

41. See n. 2 above.

Krishna, the *Bhāgavata*, in fact, narrates it with relish, for it symbolizes the free, spontaneous, unconditioned nature of his divinity. We have seen that the commentators too do spend time contemplating Krishna's unfettered behaviour, and they do assert that his impish behaviour is not unnatural since he is a child. But they find it difficult to reconcile his pranks with their conception of his divinity and therefore, unlike the *Bhāgavata*, they go out of their way — some to great lengths indeed — to remove any blemish that they feel may tarnish his divine portrait.