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Texas
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THE
WILDEST
DAY OF 1966



GURU

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*The making
of a
Krishna
devotee,*

58 from

R: DALLAS

Photos by
Sam

"People stare at me because I have this ring in my nose. They think I'm suffering. But I feel very blissful. I don't wear my hair loose because it will attract men's minds. And I wear saris so the men won't get attracted to my body. We have to think of Krishna all the time." That's 10-year-old Christina Kennedy talking.

KULA:

(spiritual master)

*cradle
to grave*

Pierson

Houston Chronicle Staff

When Krishna's children grow up, they want to serve him. Many want to become purjaris, like the girl on stage. Purjaris pamper marble deities. They bath them in rosewater, offer them food and clothe them. At right, the girl attends to Krishna and his consort, Sri-mati Radhikani.



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HOUSTON CHRONICLE



□ The old church is now a boarding school, and it stands like a gray tomb in a low-rent district in east Dallas. The smell of yams leaks from the kitchen into the morning; inside, the air at Gurukula is sticky with incense. There are crayon drawings on bulletin boards, pictures of a boy eating a forest fire, lifting a mountain and slaying a thousand-headed monster. Cardboard shrines with pictures of a pale man sitting cross-legged guard blank classrooms. He is His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupda, leader of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

These are Krishna's children.

The school has no shiny teaching aids or library. No Texas history. Only Hare Krishna bumper stickers on doors, yak tails for show and tell, and the echoes of children with shaved heads and rings in their noses as they chant "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna . . ."

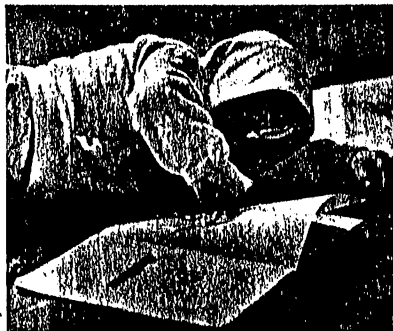
Billy, 8, has been a student at Gurukula two years: "When I first came I had fits because I couldn't control my senses. I had a bad temper. Now I'm better. When I'm really happy, I'm chanting Hare Krishna."

Krishna is their God. They say He appeared on earth 5000 years ago and displayed super-human powers. One child says, "He is the cause of all causes," and another says, "He can do anything." Students ignore their own birthdays, but celebrate those of Krishna and their spiritual master Prabhupda.

They are told to think of Krishna at all times; some even dream about the deity in the school auditorium. A child says her favorite bedtime story is about a woman who looks into Krishna's mouth and sees the universe. They rise at 4 a.m. to chant His name and offer Him food six times a day.

If their minds wander from Krishna, this is what could happen:

"It's really serious that we have to become Krishna conscious in this lifetime," says Christina Kennedy, 10. "Most people think that when they die, it's all over. But there is much danger. If you have sinned, Krishna will send Yamaraja, the king of death, to rip out your soul."



Krishnas' littlest devotees are creative in terms of what they can do for Him.

By Connie Lunnen

Houston Chronicle Staff

From the mouths of babes:

"Most people think that when they die, it's all over. But there is much danger. If you have sinned, Krishna will send Yamaraja, the king of death, to rip out your soul."

"Sometimes, when we're really bad, we crack a joke."

"I came here because I wanted to learn about Krishna. I'm the one who threw my toys away."

"The tuft (of hair) is for Krishna, so He can pull me up to Him when I die."

Sinners are those who like material objects, have illicit sex, gamble, drink intoxicants, eat meat and don't think of Krishna.

Before Christina came to Gurukula two years ago, she wanted to be a mother. Now her future is clear: She will serve Krishna. It's as if her thoughts are no longer her own. She could be a teacher, or a clerk in the movement's million-dollar corporation, Spiritual Sky, or a purjari, who takes care of the deities.

"We're teaching children that Krishna is the loveable object. They are creative in what they can do for Him," says Jnana-ganya, a kindergarten teacher with an art degree from Florida State University.

A child says, "Sometimes, when we're really bad, we crack a joke."

There are 80 children at Gurukula. They range in age from 5 to 15. Half are kindergartners. Most come from California and New York, a few from Texas. One student is from London, one from Puerto Rico.

Many came two years ago when the school opened. They say they wanted to come, that no one forced them.

Kelly, 8, came a month ago. Her home was in New York. "I came here because I wanted to learn about Krishna. I'm the one who threw my toys away."

Eric, 9, says parents don't send their children to Gurukula to get rid of them. "Actually I wanted to come. I made my own arrangements practically to come here, I wanted it so bad. I asked what flight it was and how much it cost. See, our spiritual master is very pleased by this school."

Nirheadeva, a 14-year-old boy from London: "I was living in a London temple before coming here. This is the only school in the world I can be happy in. I joined the movement two years ago. I just started chanting on the street with some of London's devotees. My parents don't belong to the movement, but they don't object to it. You see the system is flawless, nothing wrong with it. A pure and simple life."

There are few comforts at Gurukula. Children take cold showers twice a day to keep clean. They eat with their fingers.

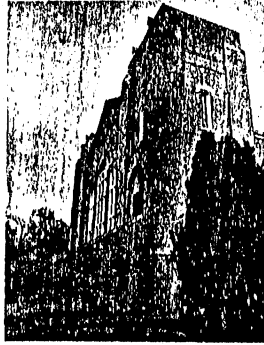
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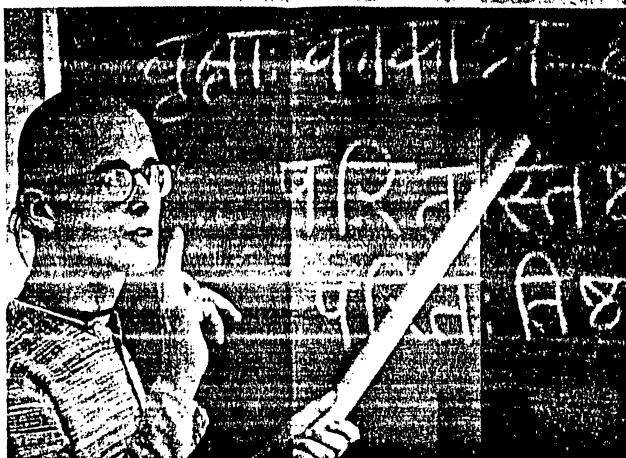
Text continued on page 11

"All they
(public
schools)
do is
make
you pray
to a flag
It's a
waste
of time."

Top: The old church in east Dallas is a boarding school for children of the Hare Krishna movement. There are no toys here, no fun. Children take cold showers and sleep on mats. "When a child gets to be 6 years old, austerity is fun," says Gurukula's headmaster.

Right: To the children at Gurukula, the deities are flesh and blood. Twice daily, a ritual in the auditorium erupts into a frenzy of dancing and chanting. Exhausted children fall at Krishna's feet.





A teacher at Gurukula stands at the blackboard, pointing a club to Sanskrit words. The school has nine teachers. Four are certified. Before joining the movement, some taught in public schools. "Public schools educate children to be no more than dogs and cats," a teacher says.

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There are no plates, only napkins on hardwood floors. They sleep on mats. Most don't have school desks, although there is office furniture.

It doesn't seem to bother them that Krishna had 16,108 wives and each had a palace.

"When a child gets to be 6 years old, austerity is fun. It's a way of life," says Dayananda Das, the school's acting headmaster, a Marine Corps veteran. On his desk is a package from his mother-in-law. It's a stuffed dog, a gift for his two daughters at Gurukula. The headmaster throws the toy away.

There is no fun at Gurukula, the children say, but that doesn't disturb them. Saraswati, 5, says, "Fun is nonsense activity." Her Sanskrit name means "goddess of learning." Lisa Kennedy, 11, says, "Footballs, dolls, kites. That's sense gratification. We don't do those things here."

Classes are held daily except Sunday. "Sunday we just do work the whole day. It's like a day off," says Darwin, 11. He became a Krishna devotee when he was 3.

When the children turn 15, they can leave the movement if they want to. "I really won't want to leave because

"The butter is in the pot Krishna likes butter."

it would be like giving a precious jewel away," says Lisa Kennedy.

The wife of a Gurukula teacher says: "Children who grow up in this environment aren't going to grow up with material attachments and illusions. They won't experience the kind of pain that everyone else goes through."

There's a Wall Street Journal in the headmaster's "incoming mail" basket. His office is lined with pictures of Krishna. One shelf has an assortment of incense sticks, incense burners and bottles of strawberry perfume, all manufactured by Spiritual Sky in Los Angeles. He has a "hotline" to the Dallas office a few blocks away.

All money goes to Krishna; some schools spend more on deities than children, the headmaster says.

The children at Gurukula look forward to daily rituals that erupt into a frenzy of dancing and chanting at the feet of deities in the auditorium. Krishna and Srimati Radharani, his consort, are like store window mannequins adorned with fake jewels, fresh carnations, velvets and taffetas. The children bow to them, as if they are flesh and blood.

The "maha prize," a plate of food offered to Krishna, goes to the best performer. "It's really a great prize," a boy says.

In one classroom, a teacher stands at the blackboard, pointing a club to Sanskrit words. "You know this work, so why should you act like such a fool?" he tells a student. The teacher's head is shaved. He wears a white robe and is barefoot; the bottoms of his feet are dirty.

Everyone is barefoot out of respect for Krishna.

The main discipline at Gurukula is routine; children follow a strict schedule. One thing they must do is chant the Hare Krishna mantra 1728 times a day.

The school is not accredited; the headmaster says he doesn't care to teach things like Texas history. Sanskrit is more practical, he says. He sits at his desk, opening mail and eating from a platter of cereal, bananas and milk. "Our emphasis here is on Sanskrit and English grammar and having the children understand our philosophy so they can

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Even coloring books are about Krishna. Here, a child colors as he learns the alphabet.



The children at Gurukula are vegetarians, eating vegetables and fruits. They eat with their fingers off the floor.

The wife of a Gurukula teacher says:
"Children who grow up in this environment aren't going to grow up with material attachments and illusions. They won't experience the kind of..."



Above: His mind never wanders from Krishna; it's as if his thoughts are no longer his own.

Top: Gurukula's headmaster says the school isn't accredited because he doesn't want to teach things like Texas history. He prefers teaching more practical subjects, like Sanskrit, he says. The Marine Corps veteran's two children attend Gurukula.

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introduce our way of life to everyone," says Dayananda Das, 27.

World history, geography and math are also taught. Teachers make most of the textbooks and base them on a Hindi spiritual text, Bhagavad-gita. "That book is our Bible," the headmaster says.

In one class, where children are learning to read, there is a picture of Krishna with the caption: "The butter is in the pot. Krishna likes butter."

Four of the nine teachers at Gurukula have certificates; most have taught in public schools. "Public schools educate children to be no more than dogs and cats," a teacher says. Another, who taught two years, says, "A teacher is supposed to impart wisdom and I felt I couldn't do that. Here at Gurukula I give my students the highest kind of knowledge — the nature of the self."

Some children remember public school, what it was like. They share Christina Kennedy's feeling: "They don't teach you about Krishna. They don't even care about if you learn something or not. All they do is make you pray to a flag. It's just a waste of time."

Tuition at Gurukula is \$100 a month. A few families can't pay, the headmaster says.

The only time some children leave the building is to sell Krishna coloring books on street corners. Eric, 9, puts on a wig before going out. "Some people get freaked out when they see me because they're thinking on a bodily level. I wear a wig so they'll treat me better."

Eric's head is shaved, except for a tuft in back: "The tuft is for Krishna, so He can pull me up to Him when I die." He cried when his head was shaved the first time; he was embarrassed.

Two white streaks on their foreheads identify the children as devotees. The boys wear baggy orange pants called dhotis; many don't wear shirts. The girls have rings through their noses. The holes were made with sewing machine needles. "It hurt a little bit, but if you chant Hare Krishna it doesn't hurt because you're thinking of Krishna," says Christina. "People stare at me. They think I'm suffering. But I feel very blissful."

Christina says she isn't allowed to speak to boys, that she has no classes with them. "I don't wear my hair loose because it will attract men's minds. And I wear saris so the men won't get attracted to my body." Gurukula's older students, 10 to 15, are segregated to keep them from thinking about sex. The headmaster says, "The children are just beginning to mature, to notice each other. That isn't good. We're teaching self control, strength."

A teacher tells students that sex can hinder their development, damage brain cells.

One student says, "We're training to be bramacharis, trying to be celibate, you know. If you're celibate, you will be very strong and serve Krishna your whole life."

Around every corner are pictures of Srimati Radharani, Krishna's concubine, created for his sexual pleasure.

Men can marry when they're 25, but marriages are arranged. "It is understood that women are of lesser intelligence," says Jnanaganya, the kindergarten teacher. Couples have children for one reason: "To raise them in Krishna consciousness."

A few students have parents who live at the school or in rent houses a few blocks away, but they don't sleep with them. Others see their parents twice a year, no more. "When children are too attached to their parents, they are torn between here and home," says the headmaster. "Actually, the child becomes more satisfied here."

His daughter, Ahandranukhi, 5, says, "I'm not so attached to my parents. If I think of them, I can't think of Krishna."

The headmaster wouldn't permit interviews with kind-

ergarten children because "they can't give intelligent responses."

Older children say they don't miss their parents. Kelly, 8, says, "The first week at Gurukula was hard because I wanted my mother a little bit. It's not good because you'll be more attached to your mother than Krishna."

The boy from London says he misses the temple there, not his parents.

One woman, whose husband teaches at Gurukula, has a 5-month-old son.

She says, "These children are happy, very peaceful. My son will have a choice about his lifestyle. But if he has any intelligence at all, this is what he'll do."

"The first week at Gurukula was hard because I wanted my mother a little bit. It's not good because you'll be more attached to your mother than to Krishna."