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The Damage of Separation: Krishna's Loves and Kali's Child

[John Stratton Hawley](#)

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Abstract

The publication of *Kali's Child* by Jeffrey Kripal in 1995 ignited a furious debate that persists unresolved today. Two questions are paramount. First,

is it right to think of the religious and erotic realms as overlapping, particularly when a homosexual dimension is involved? Second, if Hindus and Hinduism are the subject, should non-Hindus refrain from speaking? In this article I revisit the *Kali's Child* debate by highlighting one of its central terms—*vyakulata*, the desperate agitation felt by lovers separated from the objects of their desire. What light is cast on Ramakrishna's same-sex longing by turning to a broader context: the agitation that male poets feel for Krishna when they speak through the female personae of his *gopis*? Conversely, what light might Ramakrishna's apparently homoerotic impulses cast on the cross-gendered moods of Krishna's male devotees? And what is one to make of the delight these men feel as they depict the sufferings of Krishna's women? Is this the dark side of Krishna's famously sunny world, and is it also the homosexual shadow of his dominant, flamboyant heterosexuality?

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