

## INTRODUCTION

EDWIN F. BRYANT AND MARIA L. EKSTRAND



**T**HE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT, registered as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), was the most visible face of the eastern religions exported to the West during the 1960s and 1970s, and did much to define popular representations of Hinduism during that period. Although less visible nowadays in the West than in their heyday, Krishna devotees with their shaved heads and saffron robes are still seen chanting and dancing in many urban centers all over the world. This volume traces the theology, history, and social legacy of the Krishna Consciousness movement, with attention to its postcharismatic phase in the West—the period since its founder passed away almost a quarter of a century ago—a time of particularly dramatic and consequential turmoil.

The Hare Krishna movement is a branch of what is traditionally known as Gaudiya or Chaitanya Vaishnavism (both terms are used interchangeably throughout this book), a movement inaugurated by the charismatic saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the sixteenth century, in what was formally known as the land of Gauda, East India. Chaitanya established a religious system featuring

the chanting of Krishna's names and dancing in public places that is still practiced by the various branches of the lineage in East India as well as in the Mathura-Vrindavan area near Delhi in the northwest of the subcontinent. Krishna is considered to be God, the absolute supreme Being, by the Gaudiya Vaishnava school, rather than a derivative incarnation of Vishnu, who is held to be the original godhead and ultimate source of all other incarnations by the older Vaishnava schools.<sup>1</sup>

A further distinctive feature of the Chaitanya school is the belief that Chaitanya himself is actually Krishna incarnated again in the present age, partly in order to spread the particular process of *bhakti* yoga, devotion to God, distinctive of this school of Vaishnavism. Since the name of Krishna is considered to be nondifferent from Krishna himself, Chaitanya traveled around India engaging in the ecstatic chanting and propagation of the Krishna mantra: *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare Hare*. This chanting and hearing of the names of Krishna is the primary feature of the yoga practiced by this school, and it is bolstered by immersing the mind in hearing, reciting, and remembering the stories about Krishna from the *Bhagavata Purana*, the principal scriptural text for Krishna-centered theology; worshipping the deity form of Krishna in the temple; visiting the places of pilgrimage associated with Krishna; and other devotional activities.

Chaitanya's disciples, the six Gosvamis, who resided in Vrindavan near Krishna's birthplace, were sophisticated men of letters who wrote numerous volumes formulating and articulating the theology of the sect, which they grafted onto various established branches of thought and theories of literary aesthetics current in their time.<sup>2</sup> Philosophically, Gaudiya Vaishnavism is a monotheistic tradition that has its roots in the theistic schools of Vedanta stemming from the great Vaishnava theologians Madhva in the thirteenth century and Ramanuja in the twelfth,<sup>3</sup> which in turn have their roots in the Upanishads, the earliest philosophical texts of India. The Chaitanya tradition remained centered in East India and the Vrindavan region until the early twentieth century, when a follower of Chaitanya from Bengal, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, established a missionary wing called the Gaudiya Math, which attempted to propagate the teachings of Chaitanya and the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra around India and even sent some missionaries to the West.<sup>4</sup>

Although, for all intents and purposes, the Gaudiya Math disintegrated as a viable unified missionary movement after Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati passed away, his disciple, Bhaktivedanta Swami, arrived in New York City in 1965 as a representative of the Gaudiya lineage. Alone and penniless, he sat in Tompkins Square Park and began to chant the Hare Krishna mantra, and soon became a fixture in the hippie culture of the East Village. Although the first few

months were difficult for the seventy-year-old swami, or Prabhupada, as he was to be called by his disciples, he soon began to attract a small but devoted following, and the Hare Krishna movement was born (see W. Deadwyler's and Sherbow's essays for descriptions of this early period).

Although the movement's strict requirements—no meat, fish, or eggs; no intoxication; no sex except for procreation; and no gambling—contrasted sharply with the bohemian lifestyle of New York's Lower East Side counter-culture, the teachings imparted by Bhaktivedanta gave meaning and purpose to many disaffected youths. A center was established in a storefront, and the newly registered International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) soon spread to other major cities of America, and subsequently sprang up across Europe and on other continents. Young converts, prepared to sacrifice everything for Lord Krishna and his representative, Bhaktivedanta Swami, renounced their families, gave up all their possessions, and moved into the temples that were rapidly being opened in these urban centers. They applied sacred sectarian clay markings to their foreheads and adopted traditional Hindu attire, the males shaving their heads and donning traditional robes and the females wearing their hair in long braids and garbing themselves in *saris*. They rose at 4:00 A.M. and participated in a four- or five-hour regimen of devotional chanting and dancing, mantra meditation, and theological discussions before spending the rest of the day in "service" to Krishna. Such service typically included preaching work, book production and distribution, *sankirtana* (public chanting and dancing), *prasadam* (sanctified food) distribution, and activities in the society's rapidly expanding temples, schools, farms, and restaurants. The almost overnight worldwide propagation of the movement caused devotees to feel they were the first generation of a tradition carrying spiritual truths all but unknown outside of India that they believed would transform the religious and social landscape of the world. The idealism of the time can be sensed in the various hagiographical accounts of Bhaktivedanta Swami and his disciples.<sup>5</sup>

As the essays in this book elaborate upon in detail, the carefree devotional spontaneity of the early days was not to last. Although Bhaktivedanta was heir to a respectable and sophisticated Indian devotional tradition (see the first section of this volume), problems plagued the movement during his lifetime (see Mukunda and Anuttama's essay), due in part to its rapid expansion and the immaturity of the young hippies Bhaktivedanta attracted, who found themselves suddenly managing a rapidly growing international organization. Anxious to avoid the pitfalls that led to the collapse of his own guru's institution (see Brzezinski's essay), Bhaktivedanta Swami established a Governing Body Commission (GBC) comprised of his senior disciples to act as the managerial authority for all affairs of the society. Young men (primarily, although, as Knott

outlines, a few women had some positions of responsibility in the very early days) fresh off the hedonistic streets of San Francisco and New York, despite their previous anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian orientations, found themselves running an institution organized very much on corporate lines (see W. Deadwyler). The GBC was bolstered by a hierarchy of regional secretaries, temple presidents and vice presidents, and temple commanders who directed an ever-expanding army of new recruits inspired to propagate Bhaktivedanta Swami's mission in exchange for the barest minimal necessities of life.

Institutionalization brought its price: preaching gave way to revenue production (see Burke), gender equality to celibate male hierarchy (see Knott), devotional camaraderie to bureaucratic stratification (see Herzig and Valpey), and, inevitably, scandals and corruption flourished along with the institutional growth of the society (see Mukunda and Anuttama). Questionable fundraising tactics, confrontational attitudes to mainstream authorities, and an isolationist mentality, coupled with the excesses of neophyte proselytizing zeal, brought public disapproval and, by the late 1960s and '70s, the movement was a prime target of the anticult crusades of the period. Internally, the early inspiration, vision, and hope that Bhaktivedanta succeeded in imparting to his disciples gave way to large-scale disillusionment and disaffection among rank-and-file ISKCON members, particularly in the postcharismatic period (see Gelberg and Rochford).

Nonetheless, by the time Bhaktivedanta Swami passed away in 1977, he had achieved an impressive array of accomplishments: ISKCON had well over a hundred temples, and dozens of farm communities, restaurants, and *gurukula* (boarding) schools for the society's children. In India, in particular, the opulence and lavish worship services of ISKCON temples all over the subcontinent have caused them to be highly frequented. Bhaktivedanta Swami was also a prolific author, and translated and published most of the multivolume *Bhagavata Purana*, describing the life and activities of Krishna and other incarnations of Vishnu; the entire multivolume *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, depicting the life of Chaitanya; and dozens of other books on the practice of Krishna devotion, which he pressed his disciples to translate into all the major languages of the world and to distribute profusely.<sup>6</sup> Exact figures are impossible to come by, but, by now, certainly hundreds of millions of Bhaktivedanta Swami's books and booklets have been distributed worldwide.<sup>7</sup>

The postcharismatic phase of the Krishna Consciousness movement in the West has been a period of particularly dramatic turmoil and has presented the movement with new sets of problems. Bhaktivedanta Swami did not clearly specify how the lineage was to continue after his demise in terms of the initiation of new members, and when he passed away, eleven of his most senior disciples monopolized the function of guru for the sect. The world was divided

into eleven preaching "zones," and each guru had the exclusive right to initiate new recruits to the movement within his respective zone. This led to the first major schism within the movement, and a significant number of Bhaktivedanta Swami's other disciples defected to another branch of ISKCON's parent organization, the Gaudiya Math (see Swami B.B. Vishnu).

In time, most of these eleven gurus became embroiled in various dramatic scandals and the system came under increasing attack from other members of the movement headed by William Deadwyler, whose essay in this volume outlines the entire history of this crisis. Even after what came to be known as the "zonal *acharya* (guru)" system had been dismantled and the authority of initiation extended to any of Bhaktivedanta's disciples in good standing, scandals connected to the new gurus continued to erupt regularly, most involving deviations from the vows of celibacy. Frustration with this state of affairs developed into an ongoing (but now excommunicated) reform position known as "*ritvik*." According to this view, represented here by one of its most outspoken proponents, Adridharan Das and his associates, all incoming second-generation members of ISKCON should be considered Bhaktivedanta's direct disciples even after the founder's death, rather than disciples of his disciples.

As a result of such crises of leadership, the movement has splintered into a variety of independent expressions and is undergoing further schisms centered on issues of transmission of authority. A majority of its members have disaffiliated themselves from the institution, and there has been a widespread exodus of large numbers to other representatives of the Chaitanya lineage in India, the most recent and divisive being Narayana Maharaja, whose confrontation with ISKCON is discussed by Collins in this volume. The splintering has spawned various debates over dogma, particularly in instances where Bhaktivedanta's teachings conflicted with previous authorities in the lineage, resulting in the formation of an orthodoxy and the excommunication of heretics—Conrad Joseph is perhaps the most outspoken such "heretic," who presents here his firsthand version of events. The society is experiencing the stirrings of a suffragette movement reacting against the historical disempowerment and denigration of women, who have long been denied access to prominent roles as a result of the *sannyasi* (male, lifelong renunciant) culture and ethos that developed in ISKCON in the 1970s (see Knott and Muster). This resulted in the (fiercely contested but historic) appointment of one woman to ISKCON's Governing Board Commission (GBC) in 1998. Most seriously, at the time of writing, ISKCON is settling a multimillion-dollar child abuse case sponsored by more than a hundred alumni of its *gurukulas*, private religious boarding schools (which have for all intents and purposes since become defunct in the West; see Wolf). Such problems have shaken even the

movement's most loyal followers and threaten the very survival of the institutional aspect of the tradition.

The movement must also face other serious issues that will determine its relevance in the religious landscape of the modern world. Its scriptural literalism and subscription to *varnashram*, the social system of ancient and medieval India, bring it into conflict with the dominant intellectual and social currents of our times. But, as Mukunda and Anuttama argue, some individuals within ISKCON have matured and made efforts to redress the excesses of the past. They have opened themselves to dialogue with, and influence from, the academic, social, legal, and other mainstream institutions of the greater society. As with any more-established religious tradition, there is an inevitable tension between a fundamentalist, literalist element and a more liberal, progressive one. Ultimately, the very fact that there is now a wide spectrum of participatory possibilities outside the jurisdiction of ISKCON suggests that the tradition of Gaudiya Vaishnavism may be taking some broader roots in the West.

All in all, the postcharismatic phase of the Hare Krishna movement provides a rare glimpse of the formative stages of a religious tradition. This volume attempts to capture and record some of these ongoing developments. It also serves as a resource for scholars interested in researching the transplantation of this tradition—the bibliographies and references provide a compilation of much of the published scholarship, as well as of unpublished in-house material, much of it now available on the Internet. Represented herein are the voices of some of the most senior and prominent devotees loyal to ISKCON, who critically scrutinize their involvement with the Hare Krishna movement, portraying insider vantage points on essential issues; academic scholars who have studied the movement over the decades from various disciplinary approaches (to the extent that scholars with such research interests exist) and offer outsider perspectives on key aspects; and former ISKCON members, who have been the most vocal critics of the institutional aspect of the Krishna tradition and/or have established reformist or alternative expressions of Chaitanya Vaishnavism. This multidisciplinary collection thus contributes to the insider vs. outsider dialectic in the study of religion and navigates between such boundaries and polarities as apologetic or confessional vs. academic or critical by presenting a wide range of voices and perspectives on ISKCON and its offshoots from different participatory contexts and analytical disciplines.

We have attempted to include a spectrum of the subjects and issues most relevant to the postcharismatic history of the Krishna tradition in the West, all of which are indispensable to a comprehensive anthology on this topic, and the contributors are authorities on the particular areas assigned to them. At least two sets of essays (14 and 15, and 22 and 23) represent opposing views on two important issues, and those in part 3 are different developments ensuing

from the same, and what proved to be the most seminal, crisis faced by the movement—the perpetuation of the function of guru after Bhaktivedanta Swami's demise. Since this volume is aimed at the academic community, our initial intention was to include only contributions from insiders who had graduate-level academic training. However, due to lack of alternatives, we found ourselves soliciting essays on schismatic developments that were of immense import to the trajectory of the Krishna movement from authors who, although without such backgrounds, were catalysts or players in each of these developments. It soon became evident to us that this very interplay, between detached analysis and passionate advocacy, is what brings the volume to life and constitutes its strength. These essays capture the individual reactions of the various parties and make the book authentic in a way that a collection of exclusively academic discussions could not (see the contributors list for an introduction to the authors).

In addition to these, we have included four autobiographical essays that we have subtitled "Personal Story" I, II, III, and IV. What these may lack in terms of critical distance, they make up for by providing firsthand, and in places quite poignant, narratives of different experiences in and reactions to the Hare Krishna movement by both present and former members. The volume thus attempts to capture some of the sense of hope, disillusionment, commitment, rejection, determination, and bitterness that motivated the participants in these events. This real-life history is often lacking in academic treatments. The collection, as a result, is a very privileged look at some of the people and issues shaping ISKCON's recent and ongoing development, which has significant general relevance for the study of emerging religious traditions, including early Christianity.

The book has been divided into six sections, according to subject. Part 1 situates important aspects of the theology and praxis of Krishna Consciousness in the historical context of Hindu thought and practice. The first essay, by Schweig, introduces Krishna himself, and the particular way in which he is understood by the Gaudiya or Chaitanya Vaishnava school. The second, by Delmonico, is a short comment on the history of Hindu monotheism prior to its manifestation in Chaitanya's theology, and on the challenges the historical study of a tradition poses for modern followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. In the third essay, Beck situates the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra within the context of the history of sacred sound in Indic traditions. In the fourth, Valpey traces ISKCON's deity worship of Krishna from within the larger historical context of related practices in India.

Part 2 of the volume examines important aspects of the lineage of the Hare Krishna movement as a branch of the Chaitanya or Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. Steven Rosen presents a synopsis of the hagiography of Chaitanya,

the inaugurator of the Krishna movement in the sixteenth century. Brzezinski examines the developments following the passing away of two previous charismatics in the Chaitanya lineage: Chaitanya himself, and Bhaktivedanta's own guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, the founder of the Gaudiya Math in the early twentieth century. Shukavak Das then introduces another prominent figure in ISKCON's lineage, namely the father of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, Bhaktivinoda Thakur, in the nineteenth century, and considers whether he provides a role model for present-day Krishna devotees struggling to reconcile a traditional faith system with modern rational thought. Lorenz considers the extent to which certain of Bhaktivedanta Swami's particularly conspicuous and polemical views are representative of previous authorities in the lineage. In the final essay, Sherbow examines some of the philosophical aspects of Bhaktivedanta Swami's doctrines in the light of those of his predecessors.

Part 3 examines controversies over lineage and initiation, presenting differing views on what constitutes authority in, and legitimate expressions of, post-Bhaktivedanta Chaitanya Vaishnavism. The first essay, by William Deadwyler, documents perhaps the most devastating postcharismatic crisis undergone by ISKCON as a result of the implementation of the zonal guru system mentioned earlier; this sets the backdrop for the rest of the section. Swami B.B. Vishnu traces how this system led to the first major schism within ISKCON after the passing away of its founder, as a result of a major exodus of its members to the organization of Bhaktivedanta Swami's godbrother, Shridhara Swami. Adridharan, Madhu Pandit, and Krishnakant's essay then offers a very different response to the zonal guru system and an account of the causes of ISKCON's travails, presenting the merits of the schismatic *ritvik* reform position noted earlier. The last paper in this section, by Collins, describes the historical development of events leading to yet another challenge posed by charismatic figures of the Chaitanya lineage outside of ISKCON, in the person of Narayana Maharaja, who is presently traveling around the world recruiting and reinitiating many disgruntled and disenfranchised ISKCON members.

Part 4 examines the emergence of the categories of orthodoxy and heresy in the Krishna movement. These two essays focus on a major theological point of contention concerning the origin of the *jiva*, or soul. Conrad Joseph's paper analyzes the mechanics behind the reaction to his methods of resolving this issue, deemed heretical by ISKCON's orthodoxy, and the implications this has for critical thinking and rational inquiry. Resnick responds on behalf of ISKCON and its reaction to this controversy.

The main focus of part 5 is the sociocultural issues related to interactions between ISKCON and the greater society, as well as individual and interperson-

al dynamics within the institution. The first essay, by Rochford, addresses the fund-raising techniques that were developed by the movement in its early days and their consequences for both external relations between ISKCON and the greater society and internal interactions among its own membership. Knott then gives a historical overview of the status of women in ISKCON from the early days under Bhaktivedanta Swami's tutelage to the jurisdiction of a male renunciant ethos in the postcharismatic period. This is followed by Nori Muster's poignant account of a woman's personal ordeal as a new devotee in the ISKCON Los Angeles temple. The next essay, by Wolf, outlines the history of child abuse in the ISKCON system of boarding school education (*gurukulas*), from the heyday of these schools in the 1970s to their almost complete demise in the 1990s. Gabriel Deadwyler provides a personal perspective on *gurukula* life. In the concluding essay, Lorenz seeks insights into the devastating social problems that have plagued ISKCON, by compiling Bhaktivedanta Swami's own views on *varnashram*, the social system of ancient and medieval India, which he encouraged his disciples to re-create in the fledgling organization he founded.

The final part, 6, deals with issues pertaining to reform, revision, and reevaluation. The first two essays are simple confessional pieces, counterpoised to each other. Gelberg, an ex-devotee, presents his reasons for leaving ISKCON, thus providing a wide-ranging critique of the society's social, moral, and spiritual failings. Mukunda and Anuttama present two insiders' view of what might motivate followers to remain within an institution that has been subject to so much scandal and controversy. Finally, Herzig and Valpey's essay offers a blueprint for ISKCON's reform by mining the tradition itself for resources that might redress the errors of the past as well as address the modern context of Chaitanya Vaishnavism.

We must note, in conclusion, that there are by now multiple Chaitanya Vaishnavisms, and any one anthology such as this can do no more than offer a glimpse of some of them. This volume has documented institutional developments of the tradition in the West, but has left unexplored the rapid expansion of Chaitanya Vaishnavism in the former Soviet Union over the last decade (following a period of state persecution); the constraints and conditions of pursuing and propagating Krishna Consciousness in other environments hostile to religious plurality and the freedom to proselytize in regions such as China and the Middle East; the changing dynamic between western temples and the Hindu diaspora; and the very well-connected and highly visible face of the movement across India, where massive, multimillion-dollar marble ISKCON temples continue to spring up in major urban centers and holy places. There are by now many facets of the Hare Krishna movement and its offshoots, and this volume can only attempt to reflect a few. Nonetheless,

whatever may be the ultimate destiny of Chaitanya Vaishnavism in the West, we hope that this book offers sociologists and historians of religion a view of the germinating stages of a distinctive religious tradition attempting to put down roots in foreign soil, and of some of the major issues it has had to confront in the process of transplantation.

## NOTES

1. "Vaishnavism" refers to a complex of religious traditions, the older schools of which hold Vishnu to be the supreme Godhead who incarnates into the world in times of strife by assuming various forms, such as that of Krishna. Gaudiya Vaishnavism reverses this relationship, considering Vishnu to be a derivative manifestation of Krishna.
2. For the history of Gaudiya aesthetics see David Haberman, *Acting as a Way to Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); for the early history of the sect see S. K. De, *The Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961); for an exposition of Gaudiya philosophy and theology see O. B. L. Kapoor, *The Philosophy and Religion of Sri Chaitanya* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977).
3. The Vedanta is the most influential of the six schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy (for comparative glances between Gaudiya philosophy and theology and that of other Vaishnava schools see Kapoor, previous citation).
4. See, for example, Tridandi Swami B. H. Bon, *My First Year in England* (London: n.p., 1934).
5. See, for example, Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, *Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta*, vols. 1-7 (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980); Hari Sauri Dasa, *A Transcendental Diary*, vols. 1-4 (San Diego: HS Books, 1992); Howard Wheeler, *Vrindavan Days* (n.p.: Palace, 1990); Mahanidhi Swami, *Prabhupada at Radha Damodara* (n.p.: n.p., 1990). For an anthropologist's perception of the period see Francine Jeanne Daner, *The American Children of Krsna* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, Case Studies in Anthropology, 1992). The most important study of this period is J. Stillson Judah, *Hare Krishna and the Counterculture* (New York: Wiley, 1974).
6. These books are published by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, which has headquarters in Los Angeles and branches in various regions of the world.
7. According to a former devotee who worked in the Northern European BBT (there are a number of BBTs around the world), at least 50 million books of various sizes were distributed in Northern Europe and the former Soviet bloc alone between 1988 and 1998. In 1994, the best year, 10 million books were distributed in this area.

# PART I

## Krishna Consciousness in the Context of Hindu Theology

