

Introduction

It is the end of July 1991 on the Westside of Los Angeles. The park is teeming with visitors. Besides the usual number of families picnicking and kids throwing frisbees and riding bikes, a large gathering of perhaps 150 young men and women are enjoying the summer day as well as one another's company. As a group, they appear very much like other young Californians with their colorful shirts and shorts, long hair, and youthful manner. Many are sitting in groups of five or six socializing while others, mostly the young men, are throwing footballs, shooting baskets on the nearby court, wrestling, and generally having a good time. In the distance I can see several barbecues with smoke billowing from them. One would have to get up close to realize that there are no hamburgers or hot dogs on the grill, only veggie burgers and other vegetarian food. From my perch on the hillside looking down, I am struck by the fact that the reunion festivities before me appear so ordinary. I look hard without success to find any markers that might reveal the collective identity of this group of young people enjoying the summer afternoon.

As I sit observing, two young men from the group walk toward me and sit down. At first I think they might recognize me, but I soon realized that they are merely looking for a safe place to smoke marijuana. One of the young men refers to me as "Jerry" as he sits down a few feet away, presumably because my long hair, bushy gray beard, and large frame remind him of Jerry Garcia. I am surprised by their choice to sit so near, given their intentions, but then I am reminded that this is California after all. At one point the young man who calls me "Jerry" reaches over to offer me a "taste" of his neatly rolled joint. When I decline, he responds, "What's the matter Jerry, too early in the day for you?"

I have returned to Los Angeles after a ten-year absence to research these young people in the park. In the late 1970s, when the majority of their generation were five, six, and seven years old, I was living down

the street and conducting research for my dissertation on Los Angeles's Hare Krishna community. With me now are a few of the young people I had chaperoned to this very park, or to the beach just five miles away. As I sit here observing these second-generation Krishna devotees, I am reminded of how, in different ways, we grew up in Krishna Consciousness together, me as a graduate student clumsily trying to understand their religious world and they as children growing up in a controversial new religion. I am reminded, too, of the many things I learned from the devotee children I met during the movement's formative years. Being a novice in every sense of that word, I had much to learn, and the young children I met took special delight in teaching the person they called "Bhakta Burke."¹

In 1989, I began recalling fond memories of the boys I had come to know years earlier. I couldn't help but think about what had happened to them over the previous decade. I wondered whether they had managed to escape using drugs and alcohol, something most teenagers find reason to experiment with and occasionally abuse. I considered as well where their lives might have gone. Were they still devotees of Krishna and members of the movement? Were their girlfriends or spouses devotees or *karmies* (nondevotees)? Where were they living and working? In short, I thought about the nature of their lives, given their experiences growing up in the Hare Krishna movement. Many of my questions, of course, formed research topics even while expressing personal interest in and concern about the boys. Being a student of new religions, I realized that those born into Hare Krishna and the other new religions of the 1960s were important, given their collective inability to capture the imagination of a new generation of converts. I wondered and even worried about how the changing fortunes of the Krishna movement had shaped the lives of the children and parents I had come to know during the 1970s. My observations of the young people who had come together for a reunion in Los Angeles suggested that much had changed over a decade, and I was drawn to studying what had happened and why.

Studying the Hare Krishna

The Hare Krishna movement, formally known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or ISKCON, is a religious group founded in New York City in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

It is based on the Hindu Vedic scriptures and represents a Western expansion of the Bengali *bhakti* (devotional) tradition, or Krishna Consciousness, which emerged in the sixteenth century. Members practice an ascetic lifestyle that includes vegetarianism and a life devoted to the Hindu god Krishna. Essential to achieving spiritual enlightenment is the practice of chanting the Hare Krishna mantra. ISKCON spread to other cities in North America and to Europe, Australia, Latin America, India, and, in more recent years, eastern Europe. Since the death of its founder Prabhupada in 1977, the role of authority, heresy, and dissent in ISKCON has been debated, especially women's rights and leadership in the wake of highly publicized scandals. What is most striking is the transition from a communal structure that actively discouraged marriage and the nuclear family, denigrated women, and viewed the raising of children as a distraction from the devotees' spiritual responsibilities to a movement that now embraces the nuclear family and is becoming more accepting of both women and children, steps taken out of necessity to sustain itself as a religious movement into the next generation.

Focusing on the second generation of Hare Krishnas, this book is the first systematic attempt to understand how marriage, gender politics, and family life have influenced the development of this group and its prospects for the future. I also consider the implications for the movement of its recent outreach into the India-born American Hindu community. I have been studying the Hare Krishnas for thirty years and have visited and conducted research in virtually every major ISKCON community in the United States. Significantly, this book studies a new religious movement over the two generations since its founding. I focus on the interplay among individuals, families, and the inherent volatility of new religions as they progress from their radical beginnings to accommodation with the mainstream society.

In order to continue my research of the Hare Krishnas into its second generation, in 1989 I contacted a longtime devotee friend who had risen to a position in the ISKCON leadership in the years since we had last spoken. I told him of my interest in studying the movement's second generation. He gave me a cautious but still largely encouraging response and recommended that I contact two leaders involved in educational issues. Shortly thereafter, I spoke with the devotee who served as ISKCON's minister of education. He, too, seemed cautious but asked me to send him a copy of my book, *Hare Krishna in America*.² He said that he would speak to me again about my project after reading the book. Several

weeks later he called to say that he was willing to talk further about my research plans. Clearly, my book had passed the test, although I remained unsure exactly what that meant. He told me early on in our conversation that the second generation represented a sensitive issue to the movement and one that might well prove difficult to study. At first I interpreted his words as indicating an existing generational divide, not unlike that found in other communities and society more generally. I thought this in part because he suggested that it would be difficult to gain the trust of ISKCON's young people. Therefore, he recommended that I begin my research by interviewing parents about ISKCON's children. Such a strategy would allow me to learn some of the issues relating to the movement's children before I asked them directly for interviews.

In the summer of 1990, I interviewed seventy first-generation parents in four ISKCON communities in the United States (Detroit, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Three Rivers, California). I also interviewed a dozen teachers and other devotees directly involved in educating ISKCON's young people. My initial interviews revealed some startling information. One teacher and mother told me that some of the children had been abused in the movement's *ashram*-based *gurukulas* (boarding schools). Some parents also acknowledged that their children, or those of other parents, had been neglected and abused in the schools. At first I remained cautious in my assessment because I had no way of knowing how extensive the abuse had been. Moreover, the unfortunate fact is that large numbers of children face abuse and neglect in American society. The reports I was hearing did make me realize, however, that this was likely one reason why ISKCON's young people might be hesitant to speak with me about their experiences growing up in the movement. My suspicions were indirectly confirmed when I spoke informally with a young, second-generation woman in Los Angeles who told me in 1990, "You have to understand the kids have a lot of things they are working through. Many of them won't talk with you because they haven't fully understood and processed their own experiences in the *gurukula*." Yet she never mentioned abuse, and at that point, I hesitated to push the issue any further.

My interviews with parents made me realize rather quickly that I needed to broaden my research focus to encompass family life more generally. Many parents, both men and women, told me that ISKCON's leaders had neglected the needs of families. Others mentioned that women had endured particularly troubling lives in the movement and that many continued to do so.

Initially, I did have a difficult time gaining the trust of the second-generation youths I hoped to study and, in the end, probably was able to do so only because *they* began to make public what had happened to them growing up in ISKCON. This happened only after members of the second generation began holding “*gurukuli*” reunions beginning in 1990. These reunions, which I attended in the early 1990s, began as consciousness-raising affairs for the youths involved but in time grew to include their parents’ generation as well. I became one voice among others in the discussions that emerged during this period. One way I became a participant was in my role as a member of ISKCON’s North American Board of Education during the early and mid-1990s. Seeing me as involved in generational issues, a number of young people expressed interest in speaking with me. In the end, I was able to interview forty-seven second-generation youths about their experiences growing up in ISKCON. Many of these interviews were conducted at the four *gurukula* reunions I attended in Los Angeles and at ISKCON’s rural farm community in West Virginia (New Vrindaban) between 1990 and 1994.

My qualitative research was supplemented by three surveys conducted in North America during the 1990s. My qualitative research was supplemented by three surveys conducted in North America during the 1990s. Where appropriate, survey results are reported in the body of the text inclusive of the data tables. In other cases, I have placed tables in appendix 2, to avoid disrupting my discussion.

During the fall of 1991 and early winter of 1992, I conducted a non-random survey of ISKCON members, and 268 devotees responded. The survey targeted first-generation devotees affiliated with nine ISKCON communities in the United States. In the end, however, because the ISKCON members distributed the questionnaires widely, nineteen communities in the United States and three in Canada were represented. My questions focused primarily on family issues, children and education, and organizational and religious commitments.

In 1992/93, I conducted a second nonrandom survey of eighty-seven second-generation ISKCON youths in North America. This survey was aimed at the older members of this generation (eighteen to twenty-five years old), although several high school age youths also took part. My questions were about their experiences in the *gurukula*, their transition into public education, their views of ISKCON, their current life circumstances, and the degree to which they continued to identify with ISKCON and Krishna Consciousness.

Finally, the North America Prabhupada Centennial Survey was conducted in 1995/96 with a total of 556 respondents,³ of whom 251 were full-time members, 145 were congregational members (who are less committed and involved in ISKCON), 94 were former ISKCON members, and 66 claimed to have never officially joined ISKCON. The survey addressed a wide range of issues, including opinions about ISKCON's gurus and international governing body, family life, the place of women in the movement, education of the young, cultural development, types and levels of involvement in the conventional society, individual religious practice, and commitments to and involvements in ISKCON.

As a new religious movement, ISKCON has distinctive qualities that have influenced its development in North America, which reveal the types of struggles the movement encountered in its mission of converting America to its Krishna conscious beliefs and way of life.

Radical Protest and Religious Culture

New religions are one of the significant carriers of the 1960s counter-culture and the spirit of protest associated with that era (Judah 1974; Kent 2001; Rochford 1985). New religions tend to be prophetic movements challenging the legitimacy of the existing social order while at the same time distancing them from it (Bromley 1997, 2004). Particularly in their formative stages, new religions tend to be antistructural, seeing "corruption" and "contradiction" in what others view as a normative reality (Bromley 1997). New religions thus exist "in relatively contested spaces within society as a whole" (Melton 2004:75) and face an ongoing potential for tension with the dominant society (Bromley 2004; Mauss 1994; Stark 1996; Wilson 1990). New religions therefore are not aligned with either the dominant cultural patterns or the dominant societal institutions (Bromley 2004:94).

Because of their radical quality, new religions must construct oppositional religious cultures to support their unconventional beliefs and lifestyles. In crafting these cultures, new religious groups create structures, practices, and symbols meant to integrate followers into their unconventional religious worlds while simultaneously segregating them from the supposedly corrosive effects of the secular culture. Collectively, they tend to foster highly robust and strict religious cultures that place considerable demands on their members (Iannaccone 1994; Lofland 1987;

Stark 1996). Reflecting these characteristics, they usually are isolated from the mainstream culture and favor communalism as a form of social organization (Bromley 1997).

Like all cultures, religious cultures are strongly influenced by the changing social contexts in which they operate. Their cultural expression is driven as much or more by the situations that people and organizations confront as by their beliefs and values. As Swidler argues in reference to culture generally, “Variations in the ways that social contexts bring culture to bear on action may do more to determine culture’s power than variations in how deeply culture is held” (1995:31).⁴ As the institutional challenges faced by new religions changed over time, the contexts in which they operated required new repertoires of action, or cultural “tool kits” (Swidler 1986). These tool kits have often provoked social conflict between supporters of traditionalism and those favoring a more progressive cultural agenda (Rochford 2007), and the outcomes of these internal conflicts have helped determine how new religions develop over time.

ISKCON’s history in North America has been one of ongoing conflict over the nature of its religious culture. Most significant has been the growth of family life and its challenge to the movement’s non-family-oriented origins, radical goals, and way of life. Beginning in the early 1970s, renunciate leaders vigorously opposed marriage and family in an attempt to preserve ISKCON’s goal of transforming American society through preaching and conversion. This denigration of family life led to the abuse and neglect of women and children. Then in the early 1980s, ISKCON changed dramatically when the revenues from its literature distribution plunged and the communal structure that served as the foundation of its oppositional way of life disintegrated. Thereafter, ISKCON became a congregationally based movement composed of independent nuclear families. It was further changed when the legitimacy of ISKCON’s leadership was widely challenged. Pro-change women wanted equal rights. Children sought justice in the courts for past abuse. And long-time members joined other Krishna-based organizations or pushed for change within ISKCON. On the verge of organizational failure, ISKCON attracted substantial numbers of Indian-Hindu immigrants to its communities at the expense of its traditional religious culture and identity. These changes continued as its long-standing members began accommodating to America culture and sought to reshape the movement’s religious culture to reflect these changed realities. By the turn of the new

millennium, the Hare Krishna had given up its radical beginnings in return for a place in America's pluralistic religious landscape.

Overview of the Book

This study of the Hare Krishna movement in North America is meant to contribute to the sociology of religious organizations. It focuses on organizational change, the politics of religious culture, and human tragedy, each of which I consider by tracing the development of marriage and family life during ISKCON's history. In essence, this is a story about how radical religious protest is tamed and transformed and how a new religious movement survives by reinventing itself in the midst of decline and crisis.

After a discussion of ISKCON's origins and early development in North America, the text is organized into the following chapters:

Written in the first person, chapter 1 (Growing Up) is a narrative describing the experience of one young man who grew up in ISKCON. Dasa's story, both compelling and tragic, foreshadows many of the issues covered in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 2 (Family, Culture, and Change) examines in detail the history of marriage and family life from the movement's early days in the 1970s through the early 1990s. Marriage and family life expanded during a period of economic decline, resulting in the collapse of communalism and the emergence of a congregation of independent householders.

Chapter 3 (Child Abuse) presents a sociological framework to show the reasons for child abuse in ISKCON's ashram-based gurukulas during the 1970s and 1980s. In important respects, this child abuse resulted from the firm commitment of renunciate leaders to ISKCON's radical goals and way of life, at the expense of householders and their children.

Chapter 4 (Public Schooling and Identity) considers the transition of adolescents educated in ISKCON's boarding schools into public education. Because it had no system of secondary education, most of ISKCON's young people were forced to attend public schools during their teenage years. Here I look at the devotee youths' experiences and the consequences of this transition for their later identities.

Chapter 5 (Women's Voices) addresses the emergence of ISKCON women's collective voice and the struggle by pro-change women for gender equality. Because renunciate leaders perceived women and family as

threatening ISKCON's mission, they vigorously campaigned against both, leaving women powerless and subject to neglect and abuse. Women's voices rose in protest against their own abuse and that suffered by their children.

Chapter 6 (Male Backlash) explores the response to women's advancement. Like other religious groups, ISKCON experienced a backlash by a small but vocal group of male traditionalists determined to turn back gender reforms and rid the movement of feminist influences. To traditionalists, gender reform represented compelling evidence that ISKCON had abandoned its goal of building an oppositional religious culture based on Vedic ideals.

Chapter 7 (Moving On) traces the paths of the many devotees who left ISKCON during the leadership controversies of the 1980s and 1990s. Because most of those leaving ISKCON remained committed to ISKCON's founder and to Krishna Consciousness, they sought new environments in which to pursue their beliefs. In essence, the Krishna movement spilled beyond the borders of ISKCON and its temple communities, leaving the organization with an uncertain future.

Chapter 8 (Hindus and Hinduization) looks at the growing importance and influence of Indian Hindus in ISKCON's North American communities. As large numbers of devotees left ISKCON, the leadership began a campaign to revitalize its failing communities by expanding local Indian-Hindu congregations. Unintended consequences resulted, however, as ISKCON's religious culture and overall identity became subject to "Hinduization."

The concluding chapter (World Accommodation) describes ISKCON's long-standing members as they try to become established in conventional American society. This worldly accommodation has given rise to new forms of cultural production on behalf of families and the broader devotee community.

Hare Krishna's Origins, Religious Beliefs, and North American Growth

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada founded ISKCON in New York City in 1966. Bhaktivedanta Swami, or Srila Prabhupada as his followers called him, traveled to the United States in 1965 at the age of sixty-nine to make good on a promise to his spiritual master to bring Krishna

Consciousness to the West (Goswami, Satsvarupa 1993:1). With little more than forty Indian rupees (about seven U.S. dollars) and a trunk of books containing his translations of the ancient Vedic literatures, Prabhupada set off to bring the message of Krishna Consciousness to the United States and ultimately to the world (Goswami, Satsvarupa 1993: 7–8). No one could have imagined that this elderly *sadhu* (holy man) from Calcutta would create a worldwide movement in little more than ten years.

Prabhupada represented a religious tradition that began in Bengal, India, during the sixteenth century. Although it is aligned with the more prevalent forms of Hinduism, the Krishna Consciousness preached by Prabhupada traces its beginnings to the Krishna-bhakti movement founded by Caitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1533). A distinctive feature of this tradition is that Caitanya is believed to be an incarnation of Krishna (Rosen 2004:63–64).⁵ In fact, Caitanya elevated Krishna as the supreme manifestation of God, instead of being one of several Hindu gods, as was believed in other forms of Hinduism. He preached a devotional form of Hinduism called *bhakti-yoga*, which emphasized love and devotional service to God as the means to spiritual salvation. In a controversial split with Hinduism, Caitanya preached that all people, regardless of their caste or position in life, could gain self-realization by serving Krishna. In keeping with Caitanya's religious philosophy, ISKCON devotees consider themselves first and foremost Krishna's servants and view human life as a unique opportunity to revive their devotion to God by surrendering to him (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004:54).

Caitanya also developed another innovation unique to Hinduism, which has become a trademark of the Hare Krishna movement. From his intense religious passion, Caitanya initiated *sankirtan*, a practice requiring his followers to go into the streets to dance and sing their praises of Lord Krishna (Rochford 1985:11). When Prabhupada began his movement in America, *sankirtan* (preaching, chanting in public, and book distribution) became the principal means of spreading Krishna Consciousness (Rochford 1985:11–12).

By chanting and performing devotional service under the guidance of a spiritual master, a devotee is able to restore his or her eternal relationship with Krishna and thus bring the soul back to the spiritual realm (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004:54–55). Because of its material contamination, the soul is forced to assume a continuous succession of rebirths (*samsara*). To escape the laws of *karma* and break the cycle of reincar-

nation, devotees seek to perfect their lives by controlling their senses. As this implies, devotees understand that they are not this material body but spiritual souls.

A Krishna devotee participates in a number of religious practices meant to purify the soul. Central to this process of self-realization is chanting the Hare Krishna mantra: Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Consisting of the names of God, the *mahamantra* is believed to be a genuine transcendental sound vibration with the ability to revive our transcendental consciousness (Beck 2004:35–36). Chanting Hare Krishna is ISKCON members’ single most important religious practice.

A major milestone in the spiritual career of an ISKCON devotee is the moment of initiation. First initiation, or *harinama-diksa* initiation, is performed as part of a fire sacrifice. When being initiated by a guru, devotees commit themselves to chanting sixteen rounds of the Hare Krishna mantra daily on a string of 108 *japa*, or prayer beads. They also agree to abstain from eating meat, illicit sex (sex other than for the propagation of God-conscious children), ingesting intoxicants (cigarettes, alcohol, tea, coffee, and drugs), and gambling. The new initiate also receives a Sanskrit name from his or her guru. The name links the newly initiated devotee to a particular quality or form of god (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004:43) and always includes a suffix, or last name, *dasa* for men and *dasi* for women. In each case, this signifies that the devotee is a “servant” before god and guru. A year or more after the *diksa* initiation, a devotee can be considered for “second initiation.” On this occasion the initiate receives the status of *brahmana*, symbolized by the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*). Brahmana initiation enables an ISKCON devotee to perform specific liturgical procedures and practices such as cooking for the deities, serving on the altar, and performing sacrificial rites (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004:44).

Although no longer mandatory, many ISKCON members continue their early-morning worship (4:30 A.M.) at a local ISKCON temple, but nowadays devotees more commonly worship at home with their families. Devotees worship marble or brass deities of Krishna and his consort Radharani on the altar, the spiritual plant Tulasi, and ISKCON’s founder Srila Prabhupada. Music accompanies this worship, with a male or female leading others gathered in singing various Sanskrit and Bengali verses to the beat of *mrdanga* drums and *karatals* (small hand cymbals). Between morning ceremonies, or during the day as time allows,

devotees busily chant their daily rounds. At the end of morning worship in the temple, a class is held on Prabhupada's commentaries on the Vedic scriptures. The ritualistic routine performed by devotees inside or outside the temple is meant to maintain individual and collective purity by focusing the mind first and foremost on Krishna.

North American Growth and Development

After arriving in New York City from India, Prabhupada, or "Swamiji" as his earliest followers referred to him, turned his proselytizing efforts to the young people living on the Bowery on the Lower East Side (Goswami, Satsvarupa 1993). Initially, Prabhupada attracted the attention of a few young people while chanting in Tompkins Square Park. Rather quickly, word spread about "the Swami" among the musicians and bohemian crowd living in the area. Within a short time, several of Prabhupada's followers helped him establish a small temple on Second Avenue in a storefront that had previously served as a curiosity shop called Matchless Gifts (Goswami, Satsvarupa 1993:102–8). In his new temple, Prabhupada lectured on the Bhagavad Gita and other Vedic scriptures of Hinduism and held *kirtans* (congregational singing and chanting). Visitors often brought harmoniums, flutes, guitars, and other instruments, which they played, often while "high" on drugs. In these early days, ISKCON revealed few of the spiritual practices that restricted the lifestyle of those drawn to Prabhupada. During his first year in New York, Prabhupada initiated nineteen disciples and, in 1966, legally registered ISKCON as a nonprofit, tax-exempt religious organization (Goswami, Satsvarupa 1993:130).

ISKCON radically changed after Prabhupada relocated in January 1967 to the emerging hippie community in the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco. At the time, thousands of hippies were migrating to Haight-Ashbury. After situating the temple in the heart of the district, ISKCON recruited an estimated 150 to 200 converts during its first two years there (Johnson 1976:33). Prabhupada and his followers appealed directly to the hippies who literally were at the devotees' doorstep: "Below the large 'Hare Krishna' sign on the outside of the temple was a smaller placard that stated: 'Stay High All the Time, Discover Eternal Bliss'" (Johnson 1976:38).

Because the majority of the hippie recruits drawn to ISKCON had only

recently moved to the area and did not have a permanent or stable residence, ISKCON's communal structure emerged to hold on to the young countercultural youths attracted to Krishna Consciousness. Prabhupada then began to insist that his followers living in the temple complex adhere to the four regulative principles (no meat, intoxicants, illicit sex, or gambling) and that they chant and attend worship services in the temple. ISKCON's San Francisco organization served as a model for devotees deployed to other cities across North America to establish Krishna temples and recruit followers (Rochford 1985:159).

The Krishna lifestyle generally afforded few opportunities for members to maintain societal contacts, as the outside was seen as a source of "pollution" threatening the spiritual development of ISKCON's neophyte members. The isolation of ISKCON's U.S. communities accelerated in the mid-1970s as ISKCON came under attack by deprogrammers and other opponents of cults. ISKCON's communities consequently became increasingly closed religious enclaves where interaction with outsiders was limited largely to proselytizing and distributing literature (Rochford 1985:159–60). Anticult propaganda, widely disseminated by the media, helped reshape the public's image of Hare Krishna from a peculiar, but essentially harmless, religious movement to a threatening and dangerous one (Rochford 1987).

ISKCON was largely supported economically by the practice of sankirtan, the public distribution of religious literature. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, devotees distributed incense⁶ or *Back to Godhead* magazines to the public in exchange for donations. The strategy of combining the movement's missionary goals with collecting money became standard policy for ISKCON until the early 1980s (Rochford 1985:173).

Prabhupada wrote more than sixty volumes, including *Bhagavad Gita as It Is* (1972), the multivolume *Srimad Bhagavatam* (1972–77), the *Caitanya-caritamta* (1974–75), *The Nectar of Devotion* (1970), and many other books on the Vedic scriptures. These volumes included translations of the original Sanskrit and Bengali texts, along with Prabhupada's commentaries, and have been translated into more than sixty languages. Owing to the work of his nearly five thousand disciples and tens of thousands of followers worldwide, 500 million copies of Prabhupada's books and magazines have been distributed around the globe (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004:62).

As ISKCON grew and the demands on Prabhupada's time increased, he recognized that his movement needed a more formal structure of

governance. In 1970, he created the Governing Body Commission (GBC) to help oversee the movement's affairs worldwide (Rochford 1985:18). The GBC meets yearly in Mayapura, India, to make policies, address problems, and transact any and all business related to ISKCON and its communities across the world. GBC members assume administrative responsibility for ISKCON communities in specific countries and regions of the world.

By 1975 ISKCON had established communities and preaching centers in thirty cities in the United States and six in Canada. It also had eleven communities in western Europe and twenty-nine in other parts of the world (Australia, Africa, India, Asia, and Latin America) (Rochford 1985:277). In 1983 the number of communities in the United States had grown to fifty (Rochford 1985:277), and in 2006 ISKCON had a total of forty-four communities (iskcon.com 2005c). ISKCON has a North American membership of about fifty thousand and claims to have one million adherents worldwide.

In the fall of 1977, the devotees' beloved founder died in Vrndavana, India, at the age of eighty-two. Prabhupada's death represented a major turning point in ISKCON's development in both North America and the rest of the world (Rochford 1985:221–55). Unable to travel in the months before his passing, Prabhupada appointed eleven of his closest disciples to serve as *ritvik-gurus* (ceremonial priests). These gurus were responsible for initiating new disciples on Prabhupada's behalf (Rochford 1998a). When Prabhupada died, the eleven appointed ritvik gurus assumed the position of regular gurus, offering diksa (first) initiation to persons who accepted them as their spiritual master (Rochford 1985:222). ISKCON's successor gurus effectively led their own independent movements as they assumed control over separate portions of the globe. Within their geographical zones, they exercised exclusive political, economic, and spiritual authority (Rochford 1998a:104). Controversial from the beginning, this structure of authority known in ISKCON as the "zonal *acarya* system" existed for nearly a decade. During that period, the majority of the gurus became involved in scandals, resulting in the defection of many long-standing members from the organization (Rochford 1998a).

Under the leadership of senior Prabhupada disciples, in 1986 a reform movement successfully pressured the GBC to make a number of changes to ISKCON's guru institution. Most significant was expanding the number of ISKCON gurus, which served to undermine the zonal

acarya system by eliminating the gurus' claims to exclusive geographical zones (for other reforms to the guru institution, see Rochford 1998a). The number of gurus increased from thirty to sixty in 1990 and to eighty in 1993 (Squarcini and Fizzotti 2004:26), and in 2005, ISKCON had more than eighty gurus throughout the world. Despite these reforms however, controversy remains.

Chapter 1 describes one young man's journey growing up during ISKCON's formative years in North America. Although Dasa's story is uniquely his, it nonetheless speaks to the experiences of many boys and young men who grew up as Hare Krishnas during the 1970s and 1980s. In particular, it illustrates how ISKCON's antifamily stance shaped the lives of a new generation as well as those of their parents. It also chronicles how ISKCON's second generation individually and collectively stood up to contest the past as part of creating a future for themselves and their own families.