



Suzanne Opton

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna Guns 'n' Ammo, Guns 'n' Ammo

He can be seen in airports selling miniature American flags, or on busy street corners singing hypnotic chants. He wears a saffron robe, his head is shaved, there is a faraway look in his eyes. He is a devotee of the Hare Krishna movement, and he claims to be on the path of peace, love and the ultimate religious experience. But if you peek under his robe, you just might find a .45. And if you look into his japa-bead bag,

there could be a pound of cocaine.

Consider:

- In Holland, two Krishna devotees, one a former temple president in Tokyo, are convicted of trying to smuggle two kilos of heroin through the Amsterdam airport;
- In England, a Krishna devotee

is awaiting trial on charges of possessing 65 pounds of hash oil;

- In Hawaii, a devotee is busted for possession of a pound of morphine base;

- In Southern California, seven devotees, including a Laguna Beach temple president, are convicted for participation in a multimillion-dollar hash oil smuggling ring; two others are charged with possession of three kilos of cocaine; another is convicted

by Michael Dorgan

of possession of more than a pound of pure heroin;

- In Northern California, police discover several Krishna arsenals and an ammunition factory and charge 11 devotees with 18 felonies, including armed robbery, burglary, auto theft and possession of a submachine gun.

Those are just a few highlights. When they are combined with evidence of paramilitary training at Krishna communes and rumors of Krishna safehouses in a half-dozen countries, the movement takes on the appearance of a renegade band of guerrilla gurus bent on blasting their way to eternal bliss with heads filled with drugs and hands filled with blazing automatics.

But as Hindu scripture tells us, appearance can be illusion. What is the reality? It's not easy to know. There may be several. At the very least, there are two.

One reality, that of those sympathetic to the movement, is that the organization has at times been the innocent victim of cynical individuals who use it as a cover for illicit activities. These sympathizers say that because the movement is in the business of providing spiritual salvation to all comers—including the drugged, the dangerous and the dispossessed—it is open and therefore vulnerable to those who would exploit it.

Another reality, that of a growing body of critics, is that the Krishna movement has become more concerned with material gains than spiritual ones and is blind to, if not in complicity with, numerous illegal activities. Critics also claim that the movement, or at least certain factions of it, has been corrupted by powerful gurus in the grip of mad visions of imminent holocaust.

The first problem in finding out what's really going on within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) comes with finding out just who's in the movement. Whenever a devotee gets busted, it seems, it is announced he has never truly been a devotee or has already been expelled.

Take the case of the seven presumed devotees convicted earlier this year in connection with the Southern California hash oil smuggling ring. Bharata Das, aka Harold Wilson, national press spokesman for ISKCON, says it was a case of mistaken association. "That was a bunch of people who were ex-devotees," he said in an interview. "You really can't hold our movement accountable for people on the fringe."

But according to Travis Levesque, an agent for the federal Drug

Enforcement Administration who worked more than two years on the case, the hash-oil operation was set up by a man who was then president of the Laguna Beach Krishna temple.

That man was Roy Christopher Richard, who was sentenced to five years in jail for his part in the illicit trafficking. According to Levesque, Richard and Joe Davis, a Krishna crony, recruited temple members as mules to carry the oil, hidden in typewriter cases, from Pakistan to California.

The Krishna connection did not end there. In 1976 Davis and Richard founded Prasadam Distributing International—named, ironically, after

In the raid on the Lake County commune, police found a grenade launcher, 17 rifles and shotguns and thousands of rounds of ammunition.

the food offered to the deity Krishna—apparently to launder money from the smuggling operation. Despite a seemingly unlimited supply of cash from drug sales, Prasadam ran into financial trouble. Davis and Richard went to Alexander Kulik, himself a dealer of assorted drugs, for help.

Kulik also had Krishna connections. He may not formally have been a devotee, but he was devoted enough to have delivered, according to his later trial testimony, more than \$2 million in drug profits to ISKCON founder His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. He also testified he donated more than \$80,000 to the San Diego Krishna temple. Kulik reportedly responded to Prasadam's pleas for help by pumping a cool \$1 million into the business.

At this point events took a turn toward the bizarre. Davis believed he was being ripped off by some of his business partners. So he and Kulik hired three mobsters, who had been relocated with new identities to California from the East Coast through the federal government's witness protection program, to act as enforcers. The mobsters squeezed three Prasadam partners, including alleged cocaine dealer Steve Bovan, out of the business. The former partners, in turn, kidnapped Kulik and collected \$100,000 ransom.

Following Kulik's release, a contract was reportedly put out on the former partners. Soon Bovan was

found dead in a parking lot with nine bullet holes in him. The next day Kulik, who was living in a \$400,000 house, was arrested while sleeping in his \$100,000 car. There was more than a pound of China white heroin, valued by the cops at \$1 million, in the trunk.

Meanwhile, Kulik's brother David was heading toward legal problems of his own. David, identified by law enforcement officials as a member of the Los Angeles Krishna temple, was busted in London in April of 1979 for possession of 65 pounds of hash oil.

More recently, two other members of the Los Angeles temple were arrested on drug and conspiracy charges. Responding to reports of a disturbance at a home in Santa Ana in April of this year, police found one of the temple members handcuffed and suffering from multiple bruises and burns. When they searched the house, the cops found three kilos of cocaine and nearly \$250,000 in cash.

On the rare occasions Krishna officials do acknowledge that certain persons implicated in recent drug and gun cases are devotees, they are quick to assert that any unsavory behavior is the fault of the individual, not the organization.

Haihaya Das, until recently the president of the Berkeley Krishna temple, says, in effect, that to hold ISKCON responsible for the acts of people like Alexander Kulik would be like holding the Catholic church responsible for the acts of the three Italian mobsters who killed Kulik's associate. Then, mixing comparisons to clarify his point, he adds: "If you work at Coca-Cola, they're not responsible for what you do at night."

Certainly not. But at least they would recognize your name if they read it in the newspaper. Not necessarily so with the Krishnas. Each devotee has two names—his or her original name plus an Indian religious name—and some devotees have more names than the dancing god Shiva has arms.

The Krishna fugitive most wanted in California has at least three names. He began this reincarnation as Michael Ralph Pugliese. Then in 1978, while in Hawaii, he legally changed his name to Dino Bhandu. A year later, in Washington State, he again went to court and changed his handle to Lance Presley. Since then, according to police, he has been known to different people by all three names.

Pugliese, who police say was the personal servant of Srila Hansadutta Swami, one of ISKCON's 11 spiritual masters, is wanted in California on charges of forgery, grand theft, felony



Temple members pose at the entrance to the "Palace of Gold."

battery and credit-card fraud. He is also wanted in Tokyo for robbery.

Pugliese may have learned his sleight-of-name tricks from Hansadutta himself. Born Hans Kary in 1941, the guru has been primarily known as Hansadutta since joining the Krishna movement in 1967. In 1979, however, Kary went to court in Washington State and legally changed his name to Jack London. Despite the name change, police say he has since often used his original name, including on four occasions when he bought guns.

One of the guns registered to Hans Kary, a long-barrel Colt 45, was found by police last spring in an unregistered Mercedes Benz parked near the sect's Berkeley temple. Also in the car were four rifles, including two military assault rifles, two other handguns and a 9-mm Ingram submachine gun.

After being told by a devotee that the car was being used by his spiritual master, the cops arrested Hansadutta for possession of a weapon illegal under federal law—the Ingram. Charges against him were not pressed, however, after Krishna member Vladimir Panasenکو, aka Vipra, came forward several days later and said the machine gun was his. Later, charges against Panasenکو were also dropped as the police's extensive search of the Mercedes was ruled illegal.



Devotees joining together for a bit of lunch.

With Panasenکو, as with Alexander Kulik, the question again arises as to who is and who is not a Krishna member. Press spokesman Bharata Das affectionately dismisses Panasenکو as merely a fun-loving gun nut who "just wanted to go pop off a couple rounds to see what an automatic weapon was like," and says he was "never really much of a devotee."

But according to the cops who raided a 400-acre Krishna commune in Lake County, California, a few months earlier, Panasenکو wheeled up in a black Mercedes during the raid and announced he had just been named manager of the commune by Haihaya Das, who was then still president of the Berkeley temple, which oversees the commune. Whether the Krishnas would turn over the top post in a major commune to someone who was "never much of a devotee" is open to question. What does not seem questionable is Bharata Das's description of Panasenکو as a "gun nut."

When Panasenکو stepped from the Mercedes, he was wearing a holster. When police searched the car, they found a 9-mm Browning automatic. It was not mentioned in police reports if Panasenکو, who was born in Russia but reared in Germany, was wearing any Nazi paraphernalia, as he reportedly did around the commune.

The raid on the commune was made in connection with a credit card case. Police found not only thousands of dollars worth of tools and household materials that had been purchased with stolen credit cards, but also a grenade launcher, 17 rifles and shotguns and thousands of rounds of ammunition. They also found a document titled "Rough Plan for Temple and Fortress Combo," which featured drawings of a temple sitting on an underground fortress.

What police failed to find were any of several rifles and handguns purchased with the hot credit cards. In fact, they found no handguns at all. But because they did find several cases of ammunition which could be fired only in handguns, they strongly suspected that commune members had been tipped off about the raid and had hidden or removed many of their weapons.

Nor did the cops find their principal suspects in the case: commune president Walter Bernstengel, aka Vrndavan Candra, 32; Peter Kaufmann, aka Chakavarty, 29; and Hartwig Dalldorf, aka Harerma Nana, 33. All are believed to be German nationals. According to one source, they were brought to the United States by Hansadutta to improve his fund-raising efforts.

Dalldorf, who was identified by commune members as the commune's weapons instructor and who is also



Affixed to a Los Angeles hilltop is this series of Fiberglas statues depicting the various changes of physical life.

wanted by Mendocino County, California, authorities on grand theft and burglary charges, has ties to Hansadutta going back at least to 1974. That year they were both busted in Germany on charges of possession of illegal weapons and begging under false pretenses. Headed by Hansadutta and operating out of a castle near Frankfurt, the German band of Krishnas reportedly collected \$1.1 million in just seven months by claiming donations would feed starving children in Biafra and Bangladesh. But according to the German prosecutor, only \$6,900 went to India and none to starving children.

The whereabouts of Dalldorf, Bernstengel and Kaufmann are unknown, but they are believed to have fled the country, possibly to hole up in one or more of the Krishna retreats which are said to also serve as safehouses. According to agent Levesque, the movement maintains safehouses in numerous locations, including the Philippines, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Indonesia.

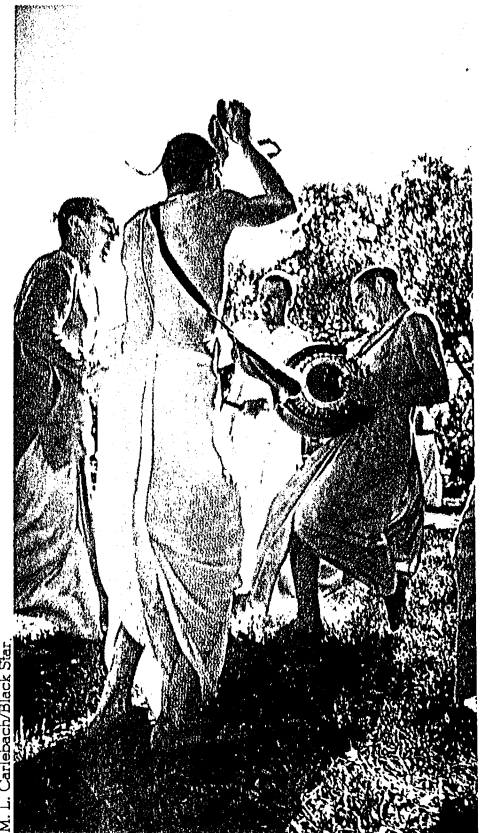
When the cops raided the Lake County commune they were met by a group of wide-eyed devotees who told them they were arming for a "holocaust," which they said had been predicted by a "pure devotee." A pure devotee is one who can see past and future as well as present. There could

be little doubt they were speaking of Hansadutta.

In an affidavit in support of a search warrant filed before the raid, Berkeley police inspector Charles Crane wrote: "I have been informed directly by seven members of the Berkeley Hare Krishna temple that... Hansadutta Swami is the man personally responsible for the accumulation of firearms by members of this group, and that he encourages these persons to accumulate and possess assault-type combat weapons and ammunition."

According to one devotee, Hansadutta is in deep meditation somewhere on the East Coast; according to another, he is on a world tour. Whichever the case, the elusive swami—who rules over territory that stretches from San Francisco to Sri Lanka and encompasses the northeast coast of the United States, Hawaii and the Philippines—could not be reached for comment on Crane's allegation or for an elaboration of his vision of the holocaust.

Despite a growing number of references to him in police files and newspaper articles, the handsome (despite his shaved head) and charismatic Hansadutta retains an aura of mystery. But then how could there not be such an aura surrounding a man who, after being born in Germany and raised in the Bronx, becomes a leader in an



A group of devotees abandon themselves to the glory of Krishna.

Eastern religion and a self-appointed general preparing for a holocaust?

Born in Brunswick when Germany was in the grip of a different vision of holocaust, little Hans Kary moved with his parents to New York in 1950 at age nine. He became a U.S. citizen, served a stint in the Navy and then embarked upon a career as a freelance photographer. That career ended, however, when in 1967 he joined the Krishna movement.

Quickly, he rose through the ranks. In 1968 he was appointed a missionary and roamed the world spreading the word. By 1974 he was in charge of ISKCON operations in a half-dozen European countries. That was the year he was busted for begging under false pretenses while operating out of a \$1,800-per-month rented castle near Frankfurt. Then in 1978, a few months after being convicted of the false begging charges, Hansadutta was appointed to the movement's highest position—he became one of the 11 "spiritual masters." With the title came a vast domain, an apparently unlimited budget and the authority to initiate new devotees, over whom he would wield unquestioned authority.

Now, with Hansadutta gone and the heat on, other sect members have become hesitant to speak of holocaust. But they make it clear they see trouble dead ahead.

Haihaya Das, for example, flatly

denies his movement is arming itself for a holocaust. But he does acknowledge that Krishna members are being relocated from cities to the countryside because their leaders "know there's going to be a world war" and "the way the economy's going, something can happen pretty soon."

But why the guns? Haihaya says movement members have only what they need for self-defense. Asked if he believed grenade launchers, such as the one discovered during the Lake County raid, are needed for self-defense, he said that item was overblown in the news reports—it had simply been a matter of someone buying a certain rifle and "a grenade launcher just comes with that kind of rifle."

As for reports that military-style training has been conducted at the Lake County commune, Haihaya said: "Maybe we didn't manage well. Maybe some people went there in the mountains to practice something, but that wasn't our organization. All our activity is to help people advance in their spiritual life." Which is one helluva job in these days of...

Kali-yuga: A time of quarrel and anxiety, the winter of the universe. We've lost our vision of the Godhead and live only for the indulgence of our senses. But though indulged, our senses are never sated, and our appetites grow more ravenous as we grow more demented. Meanwhile with 427,000 more years of Kali-yuga to go it doesn't look like things will be getting better real soon.

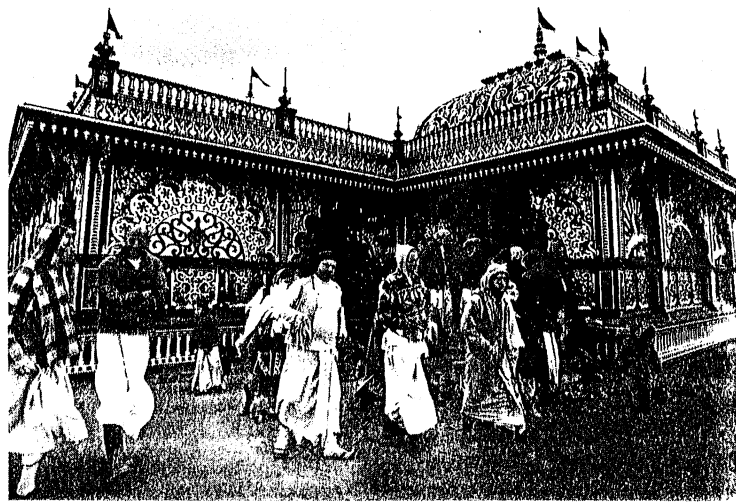
Cataclysm and catastrophe fill the future. Every imaginable horror will ravage the planet and then *unimaginable* horrors will follow. Those who today eat hamburger will tomorrow eat their own young; there will be nuclear war, pestilence, famine and disease. Finally, all will be consumed in a great conflagration.

But there is hope! For among us demon meat-eaters, drunkards, fornicators and gamblers there is arising a corps of devotees who have renounced this world of dust and turned their senses to what lies beyond. Like all of humanity, these devotees have achieved their human shapes by passing through 8,400,000 forms of life. But unlike the rest of us,

when the devotees have concluded their current lives they will not again repeat the slow and painful cycle of reincarnation. They will return to the Godhead, return to...

Krishna: the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He first took human form 5,000 years ago as the transcendental, flute-playing cowherd boy of Vrndavan. Then 500 years ago he again appeared, this time as Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, to present to the world bhakti-yoga, the central element of which is the maha-mantra, the hypnotic chant that can now be

When a local sheriff went to a sporting goods store to buy ammo, he was told the entire stock had been bought by Krishna members.



heard on the sidewalks of almost every city in the United States.

The teachings of Caitanya were passed down through a succession of swamis until they found an heir in A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, an Indian pharmacist and religious writer who, at age 70, boarded a freighter and headed for America. It was 1965.

After collecting a few followers in New York's Lower East Side, Prabhupada split for San Francisco and the Summer of Love. In Haight-Ashbury, his ranks began to swell. There was no talk of holocaust in those days. People weren't into holocaust; they were into getting high. "Stay High Forever," urged the leaflets passed out by Prabhupada. "No More Coming Down. Practice Krishna Consciousness. End All Bringdowns."

But in the heart of hippieland the acid was already getting bad. For

many, chemically fueled visions of world peace and spiritual bliss had already shattered and the pieces lay with the dogshit and hamburger wrappers in the gutters of Haight Street. They had fled suffocating lives in Pittsburgh and Kansas City, in New York and Corn Town, Iowa, and had chased their dreams to the end of the continent. Now their dreams had burst and there was nowhere else to go. Or was there?

Many had put in a lot of time on sidewalks and highways, always going somewhere yet never getting anywhere. If drugs had failed to deliver what some had promised, they had at least provided glimpses of a richer perception and what seemed higher consciousness. Perhaps the true journey lay inward. When Prabhupada spoke, they listened. What he said was:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama
Rama Rama, Hare Hare*

Devotees repeat this maha-mantra 1,728 times each day, which is 16 laps around their strings of 108 japa beads. It's all they really need to do to achieve spiritual realization, but its effects are greatly enhanced if they don't eat meat (which dulls the brain), don't have illicit sex (which

saps the spirit), don't take intoxicants (which do all sorts of things) and don't gamble (which is wasting time with anything other than gaining Krishna consciousness).

The maha-mantra spread from San Francisco like Orange Sunshine and the Grateful Dead. Though no reliable figures are available, one Krishna official says the sect now has 5,000 full-time monks worldwide and hundreds of thousands of followers. In the United States alone, he says, the movement has between 60 and 70 temples and several thousand members.

With people came money and property—lots of it. Among notable contributors were ex-Beatle George Harrison, who donated a 23-acre

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*"O all-attractive, all pleasing lord, O energy of the lord, please engage me in Your devotional service."

Hare Krishna

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estate near London, and Alfred Ford, a great-grandson of Henry who is financing a Krishna museum in Detroit that is billed as nothing less than a "spiritual Disneyland." But most of the Krishna empire has been built from the nickels, dimes and dollars collected through street sales and begging, at which the Krishnas are unsurpassed.

They peddle buttons at ball games, flags at rallies, magazines on street corners and sometimes even dress up as Santa Claus to collect donations at Christmastime. "It's a sad sight," lamented a column in the *Valley Advertiser* of Valley Station, Kentucky, "... Santa standing in the middle of Dixie Highway begging for money. How do you explain to your children that the candy-cane waving fellow in the red suit with a white beard is not a Santa Claus but rather a member of a cult?"

At times Krishna solicitations have been known to get a bit heavy-handed. Dozens of suits have been filed across the country charging Krishna members with using deception, intimidation and shortchanging in their efforts to make money. Currently there is a suit awaiting trial in Los Angeles in which an airport mechanic claims a devotee kicked out three of his teeth and then beat him with brass knuckles because he told a contributor that the solicitor was a member of the Hare Krishna movement.

No one seems to know just how vast the Krishna empire is—at least no one who's talking. When national press spokesman Bharata Das was asked about the extent of ISKCON holdings, he responded: "I don't have the faintest idea. I won't make any comment on that. But I'll tell you one thing, we're primarily not into property holdings. We're a preaching movement."

For not being into property, the Krishna movement has acquired a substantial amount of it. Because ISKCON is registered as a religion, which protects it from most financial scrutiny, and because it functions through dozens of corporate entities, its financial dealings flow through a nearly impenetrable maze. But the *Sacramento Bee*, which conducted a three-month investigation of ISKCON, reported that in California alone the organization owns a large publishing company (which publishes religious tracts in 26 languages), the nation's largest incense and essential-oils manufacturing company, a separate incense and oils distributing

company, a 24-track recording studio, a warehouse equipped to supply 45 artists, a catering service, a travel agency and a bullet-manufacturing operation.

The bullet factory, Sgt. Pepper's Guns (named in appreciation of George Harrison?), has apparently closed down since its licensee, Krishna member Ronald Roy Walters, was arrested for passport falsification. Those who question the relationship between military hardware and spiritual enlightenment will also find curious the fact that among the reading materials police found when they raided Walter's apartment were Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, the virulently anti-Semitic "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and a manual on the use of burglary, wiretapping and surveillance. Walters, like neo-Nazi Panasenko, appears to prefer his Eastern spiritualism with a pinch of Western fascism.

In addition to the businesses, the *Bee* found that ISKCON and its followers in California own "at least 1,100 acres on three farm-ranches and millions of dollars in developed urban property, including almost all of four square blocks in Culver City and most of two adjoining blocks in Berkeley." Other known ISKCON properties in the United States include large farms in Florida, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and West Virginia, as well as a newly acquired 100-room oceanfront luxury hotel in Miami Beach.

The West Virginia farm-commune has also been a center of controversy. Founded in 1968 near Moundsville, the complex is the home of about 300 devotees and features a "Prabhupada Palace" that has a 22-karat gold leaf dome. Though named New Vrindavan after the town in which Krishna first appeared, it seems unlikely the deity would recognize the place if he were to again take human form. Patrolled by guards armed with riot shotguns and AR 15s, the commune has more the look of an armed compound than an idyllic ancient Indian village.

The resident devotees say they have armed themselves only because of harassment by local rednecks. While it's certainly true they've been harassed—there was even one incident in which four members were shot by two men trying to return one of the men's daughters, who had presumably joined the group—the commune appears to have armed itself far beyond what is necessary for simple self-defense. When a local sheriff went to a local sporting goods store to buy ammo, he was told the entire stock had been bought out by

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Hare Krishna

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Krishna members.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* has estimated ISKCON's holdings at \$50 million, but many observers consider that figure extremely conservative. Some estimates run into the hundreds of millions.

ISKCON's worldly empire is overseen by the Governing Board Commission (known as the GBC) composed of 24 members, 11 of whom are the spiritual masters appointed by Prabhupada shortly before his death (or "disappearance," as devotees call it) in 1977.

The appointment of 11 successors was viewed by many observers as curious if not downright suspicious. Traditionally, transmission of leadership in such a movement is from one old man to another, the successor having been prepared for his task over many years, usually decades. Now suddenly there were 11 successors, most of them young and relatively inexperienced.

According to religion expert Lowell Streiker, executive director of the Freedom Counseling Center in Burlingame, California, which counsels families disrupted by cults, it was in Prabhupada's choice of successors that many of ISKCON's current problems have their roots. He blames the successors for what he terms the "Americanization" of the movement.

"They introduced pragmatic standards; started playing the good old American money game," says Streiker. "Those who brought in the most money were the most spiritual. Rewards and discipline were not equal for the successful (at making money) and the unsuccessful." In short, Streiker claims the movement now has "too many half-baked leaders, without age and without experience."

Half-baked, perhaps, but powerful nonetheless. Only the 11 spiritual masters have authority to initiate new devotees, and the devotees' devotion to their spiritual master appears to be nearly total.

So if a spiritual master like Hansadutta says a holocaust is coming, it's time to load the rifles. And if their trigger fingers tremble, devotees can find strength from that passage in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna admonishes the warrior Arjuna:

Fall not into degrading weakness, for this becomes not a man who is a man. Throw off this ignoble discouragement, and arise like a fire that burns all before it. □



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