

Lost Innocence

Krishnas — a Kingdom in Disarray

By RUSSELL CHANDLER
and EVAN MAXWELL,
Times Staff Writers

On Sept. 18, 1965, a small Hindu holy man named A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada sailed past the Statue of Liberty and into New York Harbor on the deck of a tramp steamer.

True to his vows of personal poverty, the former pharmacist from Bengal brought with him only the orange robe on his back, three crates of books and the rupee equivalent of \$8.

But Prabhupada also had a vision.

He believed that if he could convert the richest nation on earth to his brand of God-consciousness, as he called it, the rest of the world would quickly follow suit.

'New Age' Religion

He was, at that moment, the sole embodiment of what has come to be known as the Hare Krishna movement, a fundamentalist Hindu sect that has become perhaps the most visible and controversial "New Age" religion in the West.

From that meager beginning has sprung a remarkable earthly kingdom. It is also a kingdom in growing disarray.

Before his death in 1977, Prabhupada had attracted between 5,000 and 10,000 hard-core disciples around the world and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of followers.

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By LAURIE BECKLUND,
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More than 40 Krishna temples have been established in the United States alone. Worldwide, there are 121 temples and missions in 46 countries.

The movement owns 10 large farms in the United States, a \$3 million-a-year publishing business, square blocks of real estate throughout the country and a chain of vegetarian restaurants.

One Krishna official has estimated that its U.S. street missionaries have collected \$75 million in the last decade.

By material measures, at least, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is very successful.

No Dilution of Heritage

And, as A. L. Basham, a leading authority on India and its religions, said, the ISKCON movement has spread in the West without significantly diluting its Eastern heritage:

"Here, for the first time since the days of the Roman Empire, an Asian religion new to the West is being practiced openly in the streets of the great cities of the Western world by people of Western race and Judeo-Christian background."

Indeed, as Basham avers, Prabhupada's followers have embraced a whole culture, a world view, a diet, a psychology and a geography foreign to most of the West.

The Krishnas' world is rather like a "Dungeons and Dragons" for adults, complete with a caste system and a cast of thousands—demons, deities, spiritual masters, de-

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It sounded like a brilliant and inexpensive way to save thousands of lives: Fill out the pink sticker you get with your California driver's license, sign it in front of two witnesses, and if you die, your organs could be transplanted to help others live.

The idea was a good one, the California Legislature decided in 1976, so it passed the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act that set up the pink sticker system.

For the last five years, the state Department of Motor Vehicles has been sending out four to five million stickers a year in the mail, advising drivers that if they sign the stickers, "donation takes effect upon your death."

But, as it turns out, donation rarely "takes effect upon death" because of the stickers.

At Worst, Tragic Results

An informal survey of organ banks, hospitals, and transplant specialists in the state indicates that the results of the sticker program at best are disappointing, and at worst, tragic.

Hundreds of kidney patients on dialysis in Southern California still have to wait two or three years for transplants. The list of blind people waiting for corneas in Los Angeles alone is nearing 500. Burn centers have only 10% the amount of skin they need to save the lives of seriously burned patients. And there are similar statistics for deaf people who need a middle ear bone to hear and dwarfed children who need a pituitary gland to help them grow.

"There may be two million people

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By ROBERT A. ROSENBLAT

WASHINGTON—To Emilio Baranini, a member of the California Energy Commission, the federal government's on-again, off-again plans for dealing with any future gasoline shortage are a bunch of "claptrap."

And as it turns out, a lot of people in Washington agree with him.

So, if America's foreign oil supplies are curtailed again and the country plunges into another gasoline shortage, the burden of dealing with the crisis will fall on companies, electric utilities, officials and individual citizens, not on the federal government.

It has become clear that Washington will intervene only as a last resort. For after two chaotic experiences with gasoline station wait lines in six years, the federal government still is ill equipped to deal with a crisis in oil.

Rationing Abandoned

Gasoline rationing, kicked out of Congress and the executive branch for several years, has been abandoned as unworkable. So last year was the Reagan Administration that it canceled its request for \$35 million to prepare a rationing plan authorized by Congress.

To top it all off, every state except Nebraska has ignored a request from the federal government that the states join in a complex and cumbersome emergency planning program.

It was in the face of this situation that Baranini and other members of the California commission, h

KRISHNA: From Tiny Sect

Continued from First Page

votees, and *karmis*—the "fornicating meat-eaters" who comprise the world of non-believers.

And though there is no dungeon under it, the Hare Krishnas have a real honest-to-goodness palace, glittering with gold, and laden with tons of marble, ebony and carved teakwood—in West Virginia.

More than one traveler, rounding a sudden bend in a dirt road, has rubbed his eyes in amazement: there, crouched meditatively on a ridge before him, is an ornate Indian palace, purple flags flying.

The Krishnas' world is sufficient unto itself—a chanting monastic world that is filled with adoration of the blue-bodied Lord Krishna, perfumed with the constant, overpowering odor of incense and weighted with thousands of years of accumulated Hindu culture.

Devotees who once were American kids from just down-the-street fall upon this culture greedily. Some of them habitually chew a mild, spicy Indian seed called coriander; others eventually begin to speak English in the faintly nasal sing-song accent of the educated classes of Bombay.

Earthly Problems

But the Krishna devotees have not been able to completely seal off the universe they share with non-believers. They have faced their share of earthly troubles.

Like the early-day Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishna fund-raisers have run head-on into social resistance and legal controls.

And like the first Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, the unusual customs of the Krishna movement have sometimes alienated followers from the rest of the world.

The alienation was so deep at times in the past that harried parents across the land often tried to extract their children from the movement forcibly, with the assistance of deprogrammers and court-appointed guardianships.

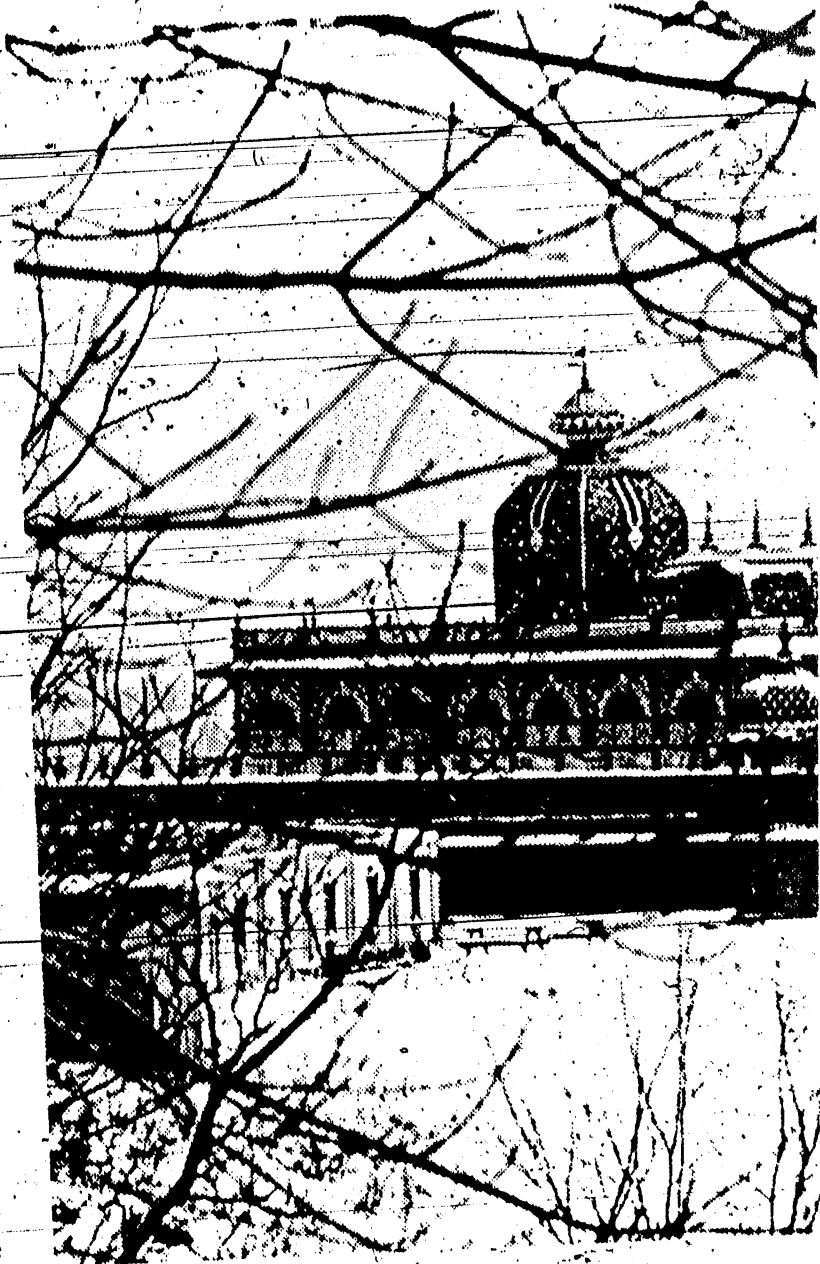
That kind of overt friction is less a problem now, since Krishna leaders no longer accept devotees below the age of 18 without written parental approval. But the alienation remains.

Began in Poverty

Krishnaland has been touched, too, by scandal: drug-smuggling, gun-stockpiling against the ravagers of the outside world, street hustles that left bad impressions and manipulative fund-raising techniques that have generated dollars but angered donors.

These are all relatively new problems for a movement that began in abject poverty among the winos of New York City's East Greenwich Village.

Soon after Prabhupada founded the movement in a New York City storefront, he began attracting scores—



Rounding a bend in a dirt road, the traveler comes up

Among the leading figures in the power struggle are three gurus initiated by Prabhupada, each with his own coterie of devotees and each able to initiate new disciples. They are:

Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada, 43, a no-nonsense intellectual with a flair for architectural design who rules the West Virginia farm and palace; Ramesvara Swami, 29, the bespectacled business mastermind of the

...either becomes more public or it begins to grow inward. The

'A new religion either becomes more public or it begins to grow inward. The Krishnas, I'm afraid, are becoming more elitist, internalized and paranoid.'
 —Former Krishna magazine editor

When hundreds—of young street people, many of them turned out on drugs and disillusioned with conventional paths to spirituality.

Prabhupada taught them that true inner peace lay in chanting "Hare Krishna"—literally "Holy God"—renouncing materialism and leading an austere life. They could escape endless reincarnation and return to eternal bliss within "godhead," or Krishna, he said.

Internal Squabbling

And the cadre of true believers grew. They spread the word and began collecting the money that eventually formed much of ISKCON's power base. With power and money, leaders emerged—and leadership struggles began.

And now, in the wake of Prabhupada's death, devotees of Krishna-consciousness face growing questions of organizational unity, doctrinal purity and plain, old bickering.



GARY FRIEDMAN / Los Angeles Times

Suryanga das bangs the cymbals, chants with other Hare Krishna followers on a Westwood street.

movement's book publishing operation in Los Angeles, and Hansadutta Swami, 40, a charismatic, mystic German who likes firearms and meditates in a silver Air-stream trailer high in the hills of the remote Northern California Krishna ranch.

All three of the gurus were godbrothers together when the movement began. They were known then as Keith Ham, Robert Grant and Hans Kary. They were all products of the kind of spiritual disillusionment that middle-class youths of that era felt.

Even in those exotic days, though, the Krishna monks were a novelty, a departure from what little norm was left. With saffron robes and shaved heads (save for a topknot with which Lord Krishna may jerk them to heaven) they pounded drums, clanged cymbals, danced, and chanted the hypnotic and repetitious "Hare Krishna" mantra.

And collected money.

They seemed peaceful enough, if a bit kinky; sincere, if a bit persistent and overzealous. Even when they moved their pitches, or missionary work, into airports and began pressing flowers as well as books into the hands of harried travelers; they seemed harmless and benign.

But this missionary practice of *sankirtan*—the material base of Prabhupada's heavenly kingdom-building and a religious requirement for devotees—has increasingly been at the heart of controversy inside and outside ISKCON.

According to experts in the Hindu religion, *sankirtan* is the means of "propagating the truth" of Krishna. While *sankirtan* can refer to any form of service or devotion to Krishna (the incarnation of God) performed by the devotee, in the Vaishnava Hindu tradition it has for centuries always included dancing, chanting and singing praises composed of the names of God.

Changes Occur

Gradually, during the last two centuries, distribution of missionary literature and collection of donations were added to the activity.

Krishnas profess that non-believers in the Lord Krishna are misguided, impure souls (*karmis*) who are without salvation because they exploit God's wealth for their own, personal, sense gratification.

Karmis may, however, partake in salvation, even unwittingly, by contributing to Krishna's work. Thus, separating a *karmi* from his money—even if the *karmi* is not aware that his money is going to a Krishna temple—can be viewed as doing the donor a great spiritual favor, Krishnas believe.

Ramesvara, initiating guru in charge of the Southern California zone, says: "We glorify God by getting people to donate money, and using that money to print millions of books."

Sankirtan has also been at the nub of about 150 court cases involving ISKCON, according to the movement's

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Grandfather Hits Krishna Sect When



STEVE FONTANINI / Los Angeles Times

Hare Krishna artist works on details of a religious painting for group's opulent Prabhupada Palace.

chief legal adviser; attorney Barry Fisher of Century City.

"The Krishnas are the most litigious religious group since the Jehovah's Witnesses," who fought hundreds of legal battles to proselytize in small towns, Fisher said in an interview.

What the Krishnas are fighting for, Fisher added, is access—access almost without limit to public buildings, sporting events, state fairs and the like. Any place where crowds gather and people may have money to spend or the inclination to discuss religion.

Whether the Krishnas—and, indeed, a vast variety of religious and political groups—have a constitutional right to wander through large public spaces to sell or distribute items may be decided this summer by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The high court last month agreed to hear arguments in a Krishna case involving the religious group's right to aggressive face-to-face solicitations at Minnesota's annual state fair.

In many of the lower court cases involving *sankirtan*, judges have granted broad, First Amendment protection to the Krishnas.

Collection Quotas

But in a controversial and trend-setting decision now being appealed by ISKCON, a federal judge in Syracuse, N.Y., declared last summer that the Krishnas were "engaged in a widespread and systematic scheme of accosting, deceit, misrepresentation and fraud on the public."

Presiding Judge Howard G. Munson's 42-page decision and order, a victory for the New York State attorney general's office, noted that "when Krishna devotees become proficient at practicing *sankirtan* and collecting money, they are given collection quotas by the Brah-

mins or priests, some as high as \$100 and \$200 a day."

(Former Krishna devotees told Times reporters some Krishna women can easily collect \$400 to \$500 a day, especially during holiday periods at airports.)

The Munson opinion outlined apparent deceptive practices used by Krishna followers at the New York State Fair in recent years: adopting "disguises" of Western dress and wigs to cover male Krishna's shaven heads; slurring the word "Krishna" to make it sound like "Christian;" claiming to collect money for worldwide food distribution for needy children; targeting retarded people and teen-agers for pitches; miscounting change or short-changing donors; and using female devotees to flirt with male donors.

Krishnas also misrepresent their affiliation, Munson declared, by using various non-religious items, or paraphernalia, as a means of obtaining money.

"Artificial flowers and 'Keep On Truckin' buttons... were used strictly because they could be rapidly sold without any questions—especially questions about the Krishna religion," Munson said.

Religious Records

The most commonly used items were religious records, according to the judge, packaged to look like the records of popular recording artists.

"One woman was startled to discover that her 'Stevie Wonder album' sounded like a 'cat in heat,' and she could not figure out why Stevie Wonder would want to ruin his career like that. What she actually heard was a typical Krishna song," the judge wrote.

Krishna leaders and their lawyers have answers to the allegations. Fisher, the chief counsel, said that during the 1979 New York fair, there had been only nine

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here It Hurts — in the Pocketbook

pada's heirs.
A transcript of a conversation between two gurus on Jan. 18, 1980, in Berkeley was obtained by law enforcement authorities. In it, Ramesvara, the Southern California guru, outlined for Hansadutta the danger inherent in the sale of non-religious items.

"Let's suppose this record thing lasts another four months and the IRS tells ISKCON, 'You people have been doing a business and you're not set up as a business, you're not paying taxes, etc., etc., etc. Then what are we going to do? Set it up as a business?'"

Effectiveness Wanes

Other Krishna leaders acknowledge the potential for tax problems, but they are hard-pressed to give up some of their more commercial approaches to fund-raising because traditional *sankirtan* has lost much of its effectiveness.

The public has become "poisoned" against the Krishna movement, the leaders contend.

The poison is spread, they say, by hostile parents of devotees, by deprogrammers, and by representatives of the sensation-seeking news media bent on reviving an old scandal and inventing a new one with which to tar the Krishna movement.

The old scandal, if that is what it was, involves a series of drug-smuggling and murder cases in Orange County that thrust the movement into the headlines in 1977. The new scandal also involves violence and crime, this time in 1980 in Berkeley.

The Orange County caper involved a group of self-professed Krishna devotees who in 1976 set up a marketing firm called Prāsādam Distributing International Inc.; the firm's name is drawn from the Sanskrit word for the Krishna-sanctified food that is offered to temple deities and then eaten by devotees.

The relationship between the principal partners of PDI, as the firm was called, and the Krishna movement is a tangled one. Three PDI partners had been members of the Laguna Beach temple; one of them had been the temple president.

The fourth PDI partner—Alexander Kulik—was not an initiated devotee but was a heavy financial contributor to the Laguna Beach and San Diego temples and to the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, the movement's publishing operation.

Splinter Group

Krishna leaders say, however, that the PDI partners were discredited members of a "splinter group" ousted from the movement for doctrinal reasons.

Whatever the relationship, PDI conducted its business with the trappings of devotion to Krishna-consciousness. Its partners tried to develop and market a line of sanctified health food cookies called "Bionic Bits."

But two problems arose immediately. First, the

Devotees... Krishna mantra 1,728 times each day. They keep track of the repetitions by counting on 108 japa beads they carry in cloth pouches. Sixteen times around the string of beads equals the daily minimum.

Hare Krishna worship also involves elaborate ceremonies in front of altars loaded with statues of Lord Krishna in his incarnate forms and statues of other deities. One popular depiction shows the blue-bodied Krishna as a young cowherd sporting with his consort,

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man's daughter who had joined the movement. And, yes, there had been feuds between the Krishnas and their admittedly conservative—some say "red-neck"—neighbors in Marshall County. Some residents

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arrests of Krishna solicitors and 145 complaints out of the thousands of contacts between Krishna *sankirtan* workers and fairgoers.

"There was a much less outrageous pattern than the judge found," added Fisher's colleague, attorney Robin Moest.

According to Mukunda das, the Los Angeles-based minister of public affairs for ISKCON, a few instances of abuse by overzealous devotees become blown out of proportion by the news media and stigmatize the whole movement.

Issue of Trickery

But are *sankirtan* workers allowed to pry money from unwary *karmis* by "transcendental trickery?"

Kirtanananda, the West Virginian guru, said he disliked the term "deception," but he compared the Krishna rationale to that of a parent who persuades a child to take a foul-tasting medicine by lacing it with sugar.

"Even if it is a little tricky, that isn't bad," he said.

Hansadutta says he has come to reject such thinking. He claims to have halted airport panhandling by his devotees "over a year ago," disbanded "women's parties" (using female devotees to solicit in areas where men congregate), and shut down the "change-up," in which the Krishna solicitor stalls before giving a donor change for a large bill in hopes the donor will tire of the game and leave.

Hansadutta says he intends to finance his work in San Francisco from sales of 60-volume sets of Prabhupada's writings for about \$500 a set.

Taxable Sales

But Hansadutta's followers have in the past also distributed non-religious articles like country-Western records. Such activities may be profitable but they could also be taxable.

Krishna attorneys argue that the non-religious articles—which may include such unlikely consumables as "sanctified popcorn"—are really "gift-greeting items" that are given, not sold. But the possibility that the Internal Revenue Service could cast a critical eye on ISKCON's tax-exempt status has not been lost on Prabhupada's heirs.

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toolies never really caught on, although PDI spent hundreds of thousands of dollars promoting them.

Second, PDI employees began stealing thousands of dollars from the firm.

The employees felt they could get away with that because, according to court records, the source of PDI's investment capital was a flourishing business in hashish oil, a potent and illegal form of marijuana.

The drug was being smuggled into the United States in the foam padding of portable typewriter cases carried by young couriers. Many were Krishna devotees who received as much as \$10,000 per trip, the records showed.

Alarmed by their losses, the PDI partners recruited five men often referred to in later court proceedings as "the Italians" to stop the pilfering. The Italians—who included three East Coast mobsters—all received Sanskrit Krishna names, turning them into the likes of Anthony (Paresvara) Merone and Jerry (Bhayahari) Fiori. Several of them were later convicted on a variety of

Krishnas Pray to Retu

Much of the Hare Krishna religion centers around devotion to Lord Krishna as he is revealed in the ancient Sanskrit scriptures known as the *Vedas*. They tell of the earthly appearance of Krishna (God) as a transcendental flute-playing cowherd boy 5,000 years ago in Vrindaban, India.

Krishna devotees believe that everyone is bound by his own sinful activities, called *karma*, and that suffering results. The Vedic culture, through Krishna consciousness, aims at ending the cycle of continual birth and death caused by *karma*, in which a person's soul is entrapped in material existence through a series of reincarnations.

By chanting the names of God, a devotee can attain spiritual bliss and finally break out of the slow and painful cycle on earth and "go back to godhead," or Krishna.

Devotees are required to repeat the 16-word Hare Krishna mantra 1,728 times each day. They keep track of the repetitions by counting on 108 japa beads they carry in cloth pouches. Sixteen times around the string of beads equals the daily minimum.

Hare Krishna worship also involves elaborate ceremonies in front of altars loaded with statues of Lord Krishna in his incarnate forms and statues of other deities. One popular depiction shows the blue-bodied Krishna as a young cowherd sporting with his consort,

Movement Evidencing Disarray

charges stemming from the death of Steven Bovan, a PDI associate.

Bovan's murder—a gangland-style slaying in the parking lot of a Newport Beach restaurant—brought the PDI structure crashing down and generated headlines that still haunt the Krishna movement.

Krishna public relations monks downplay the drug stories, pointing out that the activities involve only a handful of devotees and that the felonies were committed years ago.

Although they are unable to provide any statistical backing, they contend that the crime rate among Krishna devotees is "far lower" than it is in the population at large.

But events of 1980 in and around the Berkeley temple provoked another examination of the movement, and another round of unflattering publicity. A series of police raids uncovered stacks of firearms and barrels of ammunition amassed by devotees, apparently for the defense of Prabhupada's kingdom.

Turn to the 'Godhead'

Krishna Mantra's Meaning

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

The translation of the mantra is: O all-attractive, all-pleasing Lord, O energy of the Lord, please engage me in your devotional service.

Radharani, in an Eden-like setting in the village of Vrindaban.

In the temple ceremony called *arati*, a devotee stands before Krishna's statue on the altar and offers the deity flaming lamps of camphor and ghee (clarified butter), fragrant flowers, peacock fans and a special white whisk broom called a *camara*.

Altar deities are dressed and "fed"—offered food—daily by temple attendants, who care for their wardrobes and prepare fresh garlands of flowers to adorn the statues' necks each day.

Devotees are expected to observe the four cardinal principles of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness: abstain from all intoxicants and drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, and from tea and coffee; refrain from sexual activity except within marriage and then only to produce babies; eschew gambling, and eat no meat, fish or eggs.

In March, Berkeley police officers, armed with a search warrant, raided the Lake County farm of Berkeley guru Hansadutta. The police recovered materials they said devotees had bought with credit cards stolen from another Krishna member. The raid also turned up more than a dozen weapons, most of them shotguns and small-caliber rifles.

Several months later, raids by police uncovered more arms and ammunition: material to manufacture 300,000 rounds of 7.62-mm military type bullets in a Berkeley-area operation called "Sgt. Pepper's Guns" operated by a devotee, and 10 firearms in a Sacramento storage locker.

Time after time, Krishna leaders have said that the guns were meant only for defense or target practice, and that most of the people involved were really "fringies," associates living outside the direct control of the temple.

That claim was less easy to maintain, however, when in May, 1980, Hansadutta himself became involved. A Berkeley policeman, Joe Sanchez, found firearms, including an illegal submachine gun in the trunk of a car used by Hansadutta at the Berkeley temple.

Russian Gunsmith

Responsibility for the weapons ultimately was taken by Vladimir Panasenko, a Russian-born mechanic and gunsmith who, according to some accounts, had been Hansadutta's chauffeur. Krishna leaders now contend the relationship was more distant.

Ultimately, the automatic weapons charge was thrown out of court when a judge ruled the search of the car was illegal. But the soil that attaches, in some people's minds, to the stockpiling of arms has liberally splattered the orange robes of the movement.

Krishna leaders say the stain is really only the figment of the imaginations of sensationalist and hostile members of the news media.

Mukunda das, minister of public information for ISKCON, says that such sensationalism over the years has so inflamed the public against Krishna devotees that incidents of violence against temples and ashrams (communes) became a major concern within the movement.

Additionally, Krishna leaders say, the weapons found in Northern California, as well as those in other Krishna holdings, are legal, are defensive rather than offensive, and probably represent no heavier a concentration of firepower than is found in the average American home.

Some former members and law enforcement officers feel differently, however. Paul Ford, a former devotee, said that when a pipeline fire broke out in the street outside the Los Angeles temple in 1976, he saw four or five devotees appear almost immediately with rifles.

Law enforcement officials in Los Angeles, West Vir-

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gling and elsewhere closely monitor firearms transactions involving Krishna members and associates.

"One of my biggest concerns is finding out exactly how many weapons they have and why," said Sgt. Thomas Westfall of the Marshall County, W. Va., Sheriff's Department.

Westfall said that between April, 1979, and December, 1980, one devotee at the New Vrindaban colony had purchased at least 10 weapons, including an HK German 223-caliber assault weapon and a three-inch barrel .44-caliber pistol with a shoulder holster, from local gun stores.

The concern, among police and former devotees alike, is not that the Krishna movement represents some sort of armed and aggressive threat to the rest of society but that religious doctrine and the ingrown nature of communal Krishna living have combined to foster unhealthy paranoia and a survivalist ethic among devotees.

Former devotee Ed Senesi, who held several positions of authority in the movement, including editor-in-chief of the Krishna magazine, during his nine years as a Krishna, said:

"After 10 years or so, a new religion either becomes more public or it begins to grow inward. The Krishna movement, I'm afraid, is becoming more elitist, internalized and paranoid."

Krishna leaders do not deny their religion expects widespread civil violence.

Societal Breakdown

Kirtanananda, head of the West Virginia colony, spoke of the impending breakdown of society:

"Everybody believes in that, don't they? It's only common sense. If people don't become Krishna-conscious, they will have to fight. That is the law of material nature. . . . Without Krishna-consciousness there is sure to be fighting."

Said Hansadutta: "If there is anyone who can't see there will be a war sooner or later, he is a fool."

The black sheep among gurus, as Hansadutta is sometimes called, says he believes the arms incidents in his zone are overblown. He freely acknowledges, however, enjoying "shooting off a few rounds at an old car, a row of bottles or a tin can. It's normal and I think people should know I think so."

Hansadutta also likes to sing, and an aide said he was currently cutting a record album titled "Guru, Guru, on the Wall." The recording opens to the sound of machine gun fire. The Krishna movement's governing board reportedly tried to ban one song on the record, which includes these lyrics:

"I once saw a guru, a fantastic dancer, holy gangster, a carefree prankster. . . . Guru, Guru, on the wall, who is the heaviest of them all?"

Other Krishna leaders are not as comfortable as Hansadutta seems to be with the idea of firearms, or at least with what they think the public reaction to those guns might be.

Ramesvara, in Los Angeles, criticized Hansadutta as a "survivalist" who had allowed his interest in guns to embarrass the movement.

But even Ramesvara acknowledged that "a gun or two" may be necessary to help Krishna protect the temple.

What Ramesvara said he wishes to avoid is the impression that Krishna devotees are an armed camp, expecting, at any moment, to have to defend their material world against the ravages of food rioters and unruly hordes of karmis.

Whether apocalypse is imminent seems to be an unresolved question in the movement, one of many that have surfaced since the passing of its founder.

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, when he departed his earthly kingdom in 1977, left behind an organizational structure ripe for disunity. In part, that is because of the nature of Hinduism.

In the relationship between the Hindu guru, or spiritual master, and his disciple, the master's power is absolute.

"If your guru says, 'Jump in the fire,' you must jump," said Senesi, the former devotee. "Having an absolute order from your guru is as good as having a direct order from God."



Hansadutta:

Self-styled black sheep of group



Until 1977, all Krishna devotees were direct disciples of Prabhupada. Their allegiance and dedication was to him.

But, anticipating that with his passing the lines of authority would have to change, Prabhupada designated 11 of his closest followers—many of whom had joined him in 1966—as "initiating gurus." Each is capable of bringing new members into the Krishna fold, and each is in charge of specific geographical zones.

Hindu tradition and the new organizational structure clashed almost immediately. Some devotees, after Prabhupada departed, found it impossible to transfer their loyalty to any of the 11 new gurus.

"We were supposed to accept the spiritual authority

ates" by preaching they were the "illegitimate children" of Krishna. As Jadurani was packing to leave the colony, Kuladri said, one woman upset by her preachings attacked her physically, slapping her until she was bloody.

Her departure from the movement, or at least from the good graces of its leaders, was important because Jadurani was one of the first women initiates of the movement. She exerted significant influence among female members at a time when women were increasingly important because of their involvement in bankirtan operations.

Krishna women, although valued for their domestic and fund-raising abilities, are not accorded leadership roles in the movement. They are regarded by some male leaders as "troublesome" because their presence in the community increases sexual desire among male devotees, sidetracking them from pure devotion to Krishna.

A married male devotee who subsequently takes the order of *sanyasi*, a monk-like vow of celibacy, sheds his marital responsibilities, leaving his wife as though she were a widow.

Other signals of leadership problems within the movement include apparent deep and only thinly veiled animosities among some of the 11 initiating gurus, five of whom are currently based in North America. Some observers feel the ill will could break into open fratricide.

Division Denied

Not surprisingly, some gurus deny that potential exists.

"Prabhupada was always aware of these possibilities and took steps to avoid them," Ramesvara said. "We are all the godsons of Prabhupada. There is no division."

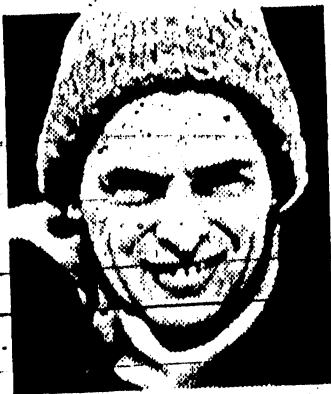
Ramesvara added that it was "not possible" for any one of the 11 surviving gurus to become the all powerful successor to the spiritual master because Prabhupada's final will precluded that.

But at least two of the other gurus in the United States disagreed.

Kirtanananda, who controls the gold, marble and ebony palace in West Virginia, and Hansadutta, who controls Krishna operations in the Northwest United States, Canada and parts of Asia, both said such a succession could happen.

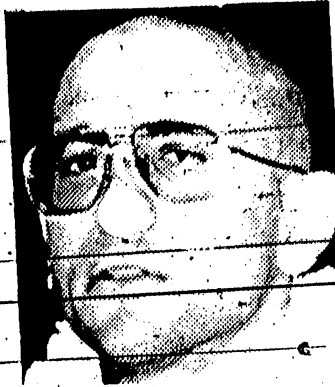
Hansadutta said his reputation as the "black sheep guru" would probably rule him out. But Kirtanananda,

Please see KRISHNA, Page 17



Kirtanananda:

Intellectual who rules farm, palace



Ramesvara:

Leader of group's book publishing

of the new gurus on a level equal with that of Prabhupada, but I couldn't do that," recalled Senesi. "I kept remembering when Ramesvara and I were both devotees together. I could never quite forget that he was not Prabhupada, but Bobby Grant. . . from Roslyn, N.Y."

Other disputes arose. Judy Koslofsky, whose Krishna name was Jadurani, was virtually banished from the movement after she began, in the words of one leader, "preaching the idea that none of the 11 gurus had the right to initiate disciples."

Kuladri das, president of the New Vrindaban colony in West Virginia, uncomfortably acknowledged that he asked Jadurani to leave his community "after she had been kicked out of most of the temples on the West Coast."

She was, he said, "distressing many of the new initi-

Carpet Town

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LAST WEEK

KRISHNA: From Tiny Sect to Kingdom

Continued from 16th Page

asked whether he, himself, could eventually be that leader, replied: "It's possible."

The three young gurus also appear to disagree on the role of the Governing Body Commission (GBC), the organization of 24 leaders set up by Prabhupada to oversee ISKCON. Did Prabhupada intend for the GBC to administer the day-to-day operation of the new religion?

According to Prabhupada's will, the GBC "will be the ultimate managing authority of the entire International Society for Krishna Consciousness."

The will also provided for each temple to be managed by three executive directors, appointed for life, and that the system of management instituted by Prabhupada could never change.

The three gurus agree that individual temples and gurus are given great independence and autonomy.

But Kirtanananda and Hansadutta said there is no true structure to the movement. They emphasized the independence of individual operations such as their own, pointing to variations of style, fund-raising and living arrangements among Krishna communities throughout the country.

On the other hand, Ramesvara maintained that there are structures to handle certain aspects of daily administration for the entire movement such as public statements, legal affairs and book publishing.

Power Bases

The three young gurus operate from quite different power bases.

Ramesvara holds a critical administrative spot as well as his spiritual role as guru.

As chief of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, the publishing arm of ISKCON, Ramesvara controls the distribution of books that form the heart of most sankirtan operations.

One of the early New York converts and for years the movement's treasurer, Ramesvara also controls the Los Angeles temple and the surrounding apartment-com-

plex on Waseka Avenue in Culver City.

As trustee of a separate trust, Ramesvara also controls a 420-acre ranch in the Tulare County community of Three Rivers. At one time he denied knowledge of the ranch, but he now says it will be used as a "monastic kind of place" for selected devotees.

Hansadutta said he and Tamal Krishna Swami, guru of the Texas-Oklahoma area, have called for an audit of the book trust accounts under Ramesvara's control because, Hansadutta alleges, book money may have been spent for real estate and other things contrary to Prabhupada's specifications.

Krishna property holdings in Ramesvara's zone are extensive. He complained in the transcribed conversation with Hansadutta that his monthly operating expenses for the Los Angeles temple alone were more than \$70,000, even with the "unpaid" labor of his devotees.

Kirtanananda has less diverse holdings and positions, but he designed, built and controls the impressive golden palace in the West Virginia hills—sometimes called the Krishna Vatican.

To an outsider, the palace and adjoining 2,000-acre farm may seem little more than a tourist attraction. But for the 300 disciples of Kirtanananda who live at New Vrindaban—as well as for many others in the movement—the Palace of Gold is the Taj Mahal of the West and a holy place.

The third grappler for the top guruship, in the minds of some, is self-admitted "black sheep" Hansadutta.

Like the other two, Hansadutta was an early convert to Krishna-consciousness, joining after he had served a 3-year enlistment in the U.S. Navy. At one time he was in charge of European Krishna operations and he later spent two years in India.

He returned to the United States and took over the Northern California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia zone, where he operated quietly until early 1980. Then the series of incidents involving guns and ammunition occurred, giving the movement a public-

Sears

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OFF

relations thrashing from which it has not yet recovered.

The Governing Body Commission, which normally meets only once a year in Mayapur, India, convened in emergency session in Ramesvara's Culver City offices, stripped Hansadutta of his U.S. sector and handed it temporarily to Ramesvara.

Hansadutta accepted the demotion and left Berkeley, moving for a time to the West Virginia temple and then to Asia. But many of his immediate disciples were less sanguine.

Berkeley police reported at least one fist fight between disciples of Ramesvara and Hansadutta outside the Berkeley temple. Some of Hansadutta's followers moved to Santa Cruz and formed a low-profile colony.

Cleanup Vowed

Despite the problems, Ramesvara said publicly that he intended to clean up anything illegal in the Berkeley operation on behalf of the rest of the movement.

But by the end of 1980, Hansadutta had returned to reclaim the sector, saying that he did so with the GBC's "resisted blessings."

Some devotees, even those of other gurus, are attracted to the kind of austerity and orthodoxy Hansadutta represents, as well as to his personal magnetism and sense of humor.

Kirtanananda, as leader of what some consider the "purest form of Krishna life style" in the United States at New Vrindaban, appeals to the same impulses among devotees, and he does so without Hansadutta's flamboyance.

The fact that both gurus tend to operate from rural settings—Mt. Kailasa and New Vrindaban—far from the corrupting influences of *karmi* city life, also appeals to devotees disenchanted with or burned out by urban decadence.

By contrast, Ramesvara and his followers are still very involved with city life. Perhaps because of his involvement with the book trust, Ramesvara operates more like a businessman than a farmer or an itinerant preacher.

More than any other Krishna guru, he operates through a well-organized and efficient staff at his temple in Culver City. He shares *prasadam* meals with visi-

tors in a conference room that appears to function as an executive dining room. His publications and multi media presentations are smooth, slick and effective.

Ramesvara is a strong proponent of what he acknowledges is a relatively new form in the United States for conducting Krishna's earthly business: greater emphasis on the creation of congregations.

Members of these Krishna congregations, as do those of many other religions, hold outside jobs and support the temple by tithing (giving 10% of) their income rather than primarily through their own labor and by performing *sankirtan*.

Devotees' Purity

Ramesvara believes ISKCON's greatest potential for growth lies in the congregational approach, although he recognizes the danger of compromising devotees' purity under a system of part-time parishioners rather than full-time monks.

Another change Ramesvara expects is that the number of initiating gurus will expand greatly, perhaps as soon as next month when the GBC meets in India. Someday there may be "hundreds of initiating gurus," he said during a wide-ranging 3-hour interview.

Such a move would dilute the power of the 11 men who now hold exclusive rights to initiate devotees in North America. And it would probably create a more orderly, if decentralized, structure for the movement parallel to that of many mainline religious groups.

But it is unclear whether the disputes within the earthly kingdom of Krishna will produce a mystical college of cardinals or a wildly disparate junta of individualistic holy men.

And, in an odd way, the successes of the Krishna movement have exacerbated its problems. When Prabhupada steamed into New York in 1965, he had little reason to worry about the material world. He owned no earthly kingdom.

Prabhupada was innocent of the world, in much the same way the young people who flocked to him were innocent.

The loss of that innocence has been painful. It is a process that continues. Where it will lead only Krishna, or God, knows.

Bargain Days

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WOMEN ONLY

Colony in Rural West Virginia

Krishna 'Farmhouse'

By RUSSELL CHANDLER, Times Staff Writer

MOUNDSVILLE, W. Va. — "We want to get back to plain living and high thinking," declared Kirtanananda Swami Bhaktipada with a sweep of his hand as he showed visitors a panoramic view of the Hare Krishnas' farm straddling the hills and dales of this rural wooded countryside.

"City life is artificial. If you have a little land and a cow, your economic problems are solved," he continued, his breath steaming in the cold of a clear West Virginia winter morning.

The Krishna colony here, called New Vrindaban, has more than a little land—2,000-plus acres, in fact—and a herd of several hundred dairy cows and a brace or two of oxen.

Domed Palace on Hilltop

The 300 devotees, or followers, of Lord Krishna and their guru, Kirtanananda, chant, pray and work up to 18 hours a day. They do indeed practice an austere life style. It is linked to a spiritual culture that stresses ending what the swami calls a life of earthly "botherations" so they may "go back to godhead."

While the devotees' heads have focused on heavenly things, their hands have built, over the course of nearly a decade, a magnificent black-and-white-domed palace atop the highest hill for miles around.

The palace, now a memorial to the departed founder and master swami of the International Society for



STEVE FONTANINI / Los Angeles Times

The Kuladri das family, Krishna colony members, stroll through snow at farm in West Virginia.

Presidents' Day Sale

small electronics

se' Is Opulent Palace

Krishna-Consciousness, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, is opulent by any standards. It reportedly cost \$500,000 but that was only for materials. Labor was, of course, donated by devotees.

Prabhupada's Palace was the brainchild of Kirtanan-

anda, 43, the son of a Southern Baptist minister of Peekskill, N.Y. Kirtanananda, formerly Keith Ham, came under Prabhupada's sway while studying for a doctoral degree in religious history at Columbia University in 1968.

The glistening building, covering 5,000 square feet with 63 tons of marble of 40 varieties, 80 stained glass windows, 3 tons of carved Indian teakwood and a dome frosted with four pounds of 22-karat gold leaf, seems as out of place in rural West Virginia—maybe even in the United States—as Kirtanananda Swami does in his Indian *dhotti*, or "skirt," orange ski cap and muffler, tooling.

Please see FARM, Page 14

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FARM: 2,000 Acres and Palace on Hill

Continued from 13th Page

around the farm in his blue K-5 Chevy Blazer.

If the palace does not follow the rules of architecture, nor its designer the mien of a Hindu seer, neither does New Vrindaban fit the Western concept of religion.

Up by 3 a.m., the devotees—single men and women and married couples with young children—leave their sparsely furnished dormitories and cabins to gather by 4:30 a.m. in the temple sanctuary to chant "Hare Krishna" and be instructed in achieving transcendental bliss.

Devotees' Daily Routine

The pungent aroma of incense, burned during elaborate rites before statues of Hindu deities, gives way to the spicy smell of sanctified vegetables (*prasadam*) cooking for a 7 a.m. breakfast.

Then, devotees are off to their various jobs: cooking, cleaning, farming and a variety of craft-oriented skills to complete the palace complex and to produce for public sale goods such as Tiffany-style lamps and jewelry.

Announcements, tapes of Krishna gurus' lectures and Hindu music blare incessantly over loudspeakers indoors and out.

There is midday *prasadam*, served, as are most meals, on the floor in metal trays. And there is more chanting and work until bedtime, usually 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

The 70 or so children at New Vrindaban leave their parents' care when they are 5 years old and are taught in boys' or girls' "boarding schools" scattered throughout the farm. The children learn Sanskrit, arithmetic, a little science and geography—and a lot about Lord Krishna. They sit cross-legged on the floors of the converted farmhouse schools and sleep in bedrolls near their teacher.

They are the first generation to be raised in the Unit-

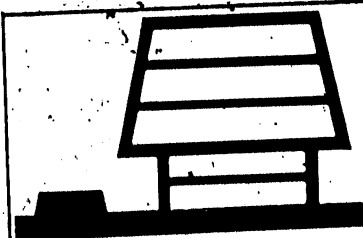
ed States according to Krishna practices, in the hope, say their elders, of avoiding the contamination that spews from secular culture.

New Vrindaban seems a bucolic, peaceful place. Not even the cockroaches that crawl on the temple walls may be killed, because Krishnas believe in reincarnation and the sacredness of all life.

So perhaps it seemed a bit incongruous that a conversation with Kirtanananda during his 12-course noon *prasadam* in the palace the other day should turn to firearms and violence.

Certainly it was true, the guru said between mouthfuls of cucumber yogurt and mung bean soup, that the commune had armed itself in 1973 after four members were shot by two men who were trying to retrieve one

Please see FARM, Page 15



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Los Angeles
Times

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line of sanctified health food cookies called "Bionic Bits."

But two problems arose immediately. First, the

FARM: A Domed Palace on the Hill

Continued from 14th Page

man's daughter who had joined the movement.

And, yes, there had been feuds between the Krishnas and their admittedly conservative—some say "red-neck"—neighbors in Marshall County. Some residents openly resented the Krishna "invasion" that began a decade ago when Kirtanananda founded New Vrindaban on 113 acres he rented for \$15 a year. Many locals have since sold their property to the Krishnas and moved away.

But vandalism, sniping at Krishna buildings, suspected arson and other hostile exchanges have quieted down in the last several years, law enforcement and New Vrindaban officials agree.

Kirtanananda seemed genuinely surprised—"shocked," he said, when a reporter recently told him that one of his devotees had bought a large number of weapons, including anti-personnel-type shotguns and pistols, within recent months at local gun shops.

"I have no objection to a certain number of persons in the community having weapons for self-protection," he said. "But they should be in the hands of cool, level-headed, Krishna-conscious persons. If there is a need for violence, we can become violent."

Purchaser of Weapons

Several weeks later, Kirtanananda said that the young man who had bought the weapons "has agreed to sell his guns, at my suggestion."

Kirtanananda prefers to promote Prabhupada's Palace as a rustic, spiritual haven—not an armed compound. The image of what he calls "a spiritual Disneyland, a Krishna theme park," is better for tourists.

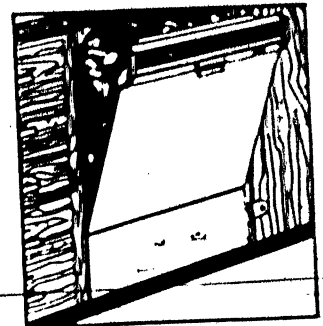
He plans to build seven more temples on the hills of new Vrindaban; the first is designed to be 20 times the size of the existing palace. The project also calls for a vegetarian restaurant, a Vedic cultural museum, camping areas, arts and crafts shops, a tourist hotel and theater for 400, and lavish grounds with 150 sculptured fountains and formal, manicured gardens.

Already last year, Kirtanananda said, 40,000 visitors traversed the rutted backroads to admire Prabhupada's monument, and the Ohio Valley Tourist Assn. is bracing for 100,000 more in 1981.

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GARY FRIEDMAN / Los Angeles Times

Suryanga das bangs the cymbals, chants with other Hare Krishna followers on a Westwood street.

wittingly, by contributing to the movement. . . .
parating a karmi from his money—even if the karmi is not aware that his money is going to a Krishna temple—can be viewed as doing the donor a great spiritual favor, Krishnas believe.

Ramesvara, initiating guru in charge of the Southern California zone, says: "We glorify God by getting people to donate money, and using that money to print millions of books. . . ."

Sankirtan has also been at the nub of about 150 court cases involving ISKCON, according to the movement's

Grandfather Hits Krishna Sect When

By EVAN MAXWELL, Times Staff Writer

The Hare Krishna movement, which is heavily financed by direct economic action in the nation's airports, got a dose of its own medicine from a Chicago grandfather who once was a labor organizer.

The events took place in 1975 and 1976, but are the subject of a lawsuit that is expected to come to trial in the next six months.

At the heart of the lawsuit is David Yanoff, now a 16-year-old high school student in Chicago. He lives with his father, Jerome, and wants to be a film maker.

But in 1975, David was a precocious 11-year-old Krishna devotee, headed, some said, for a position of leadership in the movement. His involvement with Krishna began in August, 1975, when he came to the Los Angeles temple to spend a month with his mother, Karen Wilson, a devotee and secretary there.

During his month at the temple, David fell in love with the Krishna life style, according to depositions and interviews with persons involved in the present lawsuit. The boy decided to become a devotee, a decision his father objected to, forcefully.

Jerome Yanoff, supported by relatives, appeared

one Sunday at the Culver City temple and tried to retrieve David, who was dancing with other children during a festival. Temple leaders resisted; there was an argument, then a scuffle, and Yanoff was evicted without his son.

When Jerome returned several months later, armed with an Illinois court order granting him custody of the child, neither David nor his mother were anywhere to be found. Temple leaders said they knew nothing about where they were.

The matter remained at an impasse for 16 months. Jerome Yanoff and others in his family hired private investigators to trace the child. The boy's grandfather, Morris, even wrote directly to the spiritual head of the movement, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, enlisting his help.

But nothing worked.

Nothing worked, that is, until Morris Yanoff, a retired Chicago labor union organizer, remembered an important lesson of unionism—the value of direct economic action.

With some of his retired friends, Yanoff set up a kind of informational picketing operation at O'Hare International Airport, the busiest in the country and

Collection Quotas

But in a controversial and trend-setting decision now being appealed by ISKCON, a federal judge in Syracuse, N.Y., declared last summer that the Krishnas were "engaged in a widespread and systematic scheme of accosting, deceit, misrepresentation and fraud on the public." Presiding Judge Howard G. Munson's 42-page decision and order, a victory for the New York State attorney general's office, noted that "when Krishna devotees become proficient at practicing *sankirtan* and collecting money, they are given collection quotas by the Brah-

ords, according to the judge, packaged to look like the records of popular recording artists.

"One woman was startled to discover that her 'Stevie Wonder album' sounded like a 'cat in heat,' and she could not figure out why Stevie Wonder would want to ruin his career like that. What she actually heard was a typical Krishna song," the judge wrote.

Krishna leaders and their lawyers have answers to the allegations. Fisher, the chief counsel, said that during the 1979 New York fair, there had been only nine

Please see KRISHNA, Page 15

Where It Hurts — in the Pocketbook

a goldmine for Krishna fund-raisers.

Yanoff said in a recent interview that at the time, Krishna fund-raisers were deliberately hiding their religious affiliation to mislead potential donors. Yanoff said he and his corps of counterpickets would wait until a disguised Krishna devotee engaged someone in conversation.

"Then we would walk up and say, 'Don't you think you should find out who these people are before you contribute.'"

"The Krishna kids had a very careful pitch worked out and any little interference from us pretty well shut them down."

Yanoff and his cronies kept up their campaign for more than three months. The local Krishna temple, which relied on O'Hare for much of its support, was being driven toward economic disaster, Yanoff said.

"We were killing them," he said, without a trace of remorse.

But Krishna leaders continued to maintain their ignorance of David's whereabouts. Finally, just before the lucrative Christmas travel season, a Chicago Krishna leader approached Morris Yanoff.

"He said, 'David is coming home. Now will you

please call up right away and pull your people out of the airport?'"

The Yanoffs had to agree not to air their allegation that the Krishna movement had hidden David and his mother in a French commune for more than a year. Just before Christmas, 1976, David arrived back in Chicago.

Jerome Yanoff now is plaintiff in a civil suit seeking more than \$7 million in damages from the movement for stealing his son.

Ramesvara, guru of the Los Angeles temple and a defendant in the case, denies the charge, maintaining that the leaders did nothing to assist Karen Wilson in what was essentially a private child custody battle between two parents.

Robert Brock, Yanoff's attorney, said he expects the case to come to trial, perhaps as early as this summer.

Karen Wilson, David's mother, is expected to testify against the Los Angeles temple. Last year, she left the Los Angeles temple, joined the Berkeley temple and is now a follower of Hansadutta, the Northern California guru who is Ramesvara's chief rival.