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Airports and Public Places

Since the early 1970s, deviant religious groups have gained widespread notoriety in the United States and all over the world. The growth and expansion of these new religions—popularly defined as cults—has led to a vociferous public outcry. A major reason for this negative reaction involves the recruitment strategies and information-spreading efforts of these cults. Charges of brainwashing and attempts by anticultists to deprogram members of deviant religions reflect the intensity of the controversy these cults have engendered. While scholars have studied the recruitment strategies and information-diffusion efforts of such deviant groups as the Unification Church (Bromley and Shupe 1979; Lofland 1966), the Children of God (Davis and Richardson 1976; Davis 1981), and Hare Krishna (Judah 1974; Rochford 1982), there has been no investigation to date which addresses the public outcry generated toward the new religions and the ways in which this reaction has influenced their choice of strategies

and overall patterns of development in the United States or elsewhere.

To promote social change in accordance with its ideological prescriptions, every social movement must act on the society in which it operates. If a movement wants to disseminate its message and mobilize the resources required to reach its goals (i.e., people, power, and money), leaders and members alike must develop outward-reaching strategies directed toward these ends. In reaching out, however, a movement's actions become subject to public scrutiny and evaluation. Public interest and response—whether favorable, neutral, or hostile—in turn affect the growth and survival of the movement. As a number of investigators of social movements have noted, the public's definition of and response to a social movement can have a variety of consequences for its development. The public's response can influence the resource mobilization opportunities available to a movement, its choice of recruitment strategies, the kind of opposition it encounters, the nature of its goals and values, and its overall prospects for survival and prosperity (McCarthy and Zald 1974; Snow 1979; Turner and Killian 1972; Zald and Ash 1966).

In this chapter, I examine ISKCON's emerging resource mobilization strategies in light of the American public's changing attitudes toward the Hare Krishna movement. I then analyze how ISKCON's strategies and public image have in turn influenced its overall patterns of development in America during the 1970s. I demonstrate this relationship by describing and analyzing an activity known within ISKCON as *sankirtana*: originally a practice by which Krishna devotees went out into public places to chant, distribute literature, recruit new members, and solicit donations but which by the mid-seventies had begun to take on a more monetary character. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first part presents a natural history of ISKCON's use of public places during the seventies. The second part details the changes in ISKCON's public place strategies that began in 1973. The third part describes and analyzes the ways in which the public backlash toward ISKCON influenced both its choice of recruitment strategies and its overall history as a social movement during the 1970s.

A History of ISKCON's Use of Public Places

Public places have been crucially important in the development of ISKCON in the United States. They have been important for the movement's recruitment efforts and for raising financial support for ISKCON's communities. My devotee survey revealed that 42 percent of ISKCON's members in the United States were recruited through public place contacts with movement members. The distribution of literature and other forms of public solicitation (seeking donations and selling various consumer goods) in public places have financially supported ISKCON's expansionary efforts.[1]

Beginning in 1968, Srila Prabhupada instituted the practice *Hare Nam*[2] as a means of preaching Krishna Consciousness, recruiting members, and raising money in public settings. Until 1972, ISKCON's communities were almost completely supported by groups of devotees venturing out into the streets and other public places to distribute literature and seek donations from the public. As one long-time ISKCON member explained:

> When I joined the movement in '71, the whole temple went out each day. There were twelve to fifteen people at that time. We chanted in the street from eleven in the morning until six in the evening. Half the group chanted and half stood on the corners, with *dhotis* and *telac* on, extending a BTG [*Back to Godhead* magazine] out saying [to people passing by] 'Take one.' And each devotee would come home with $8, $10. Average income to the temple each day was between $50 and $75. But our rent was only $400 a month, so it was enough (Philadelphia 1982).

The strategy of combining the movement's missionary goals with collecting money became standard ISKCON policy throughout the 1970s. In 1971, ISKCON established the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust in Los Angeles to publish Prabhupada's translations and commentaries on the

Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, and other Vedic scriptures. With his teachings now in print, Prabhupada instructed his disciples to distribute his books in volume.[3] Between 1972 and 1974, ISKCON members distributed the movement's literature primarily in shopping malls and parking lots across Canada and the United States. While these locations proved productive for ISKCON's distribution of literature, a major change took place in 1974 that had a revolutionary impact on the future of ISKCON's book distribution.

Under constitutional protections provided by the First Amendment (*Murdock* v. *Pennsylvania*, 1942)[4] ISKCON shifted its *sankirtana* efforts from the streets and parking lots into airports, national parks, and state fairs.[5] When these public locations were opened to *sankirtana*, ISKCON's literature distribution increased dramatically, between 1974 and 1976. As table 7.1 indicates, *sankirtana* devotees in 1976 distributed over eighteen thousand hardback books per week throughout Canada and the United States. At the Los Angeles International Airport alone, devotees were distributing as many as five thousand to six thousand each week in 1976. Literature distribution doubled each year between 1974 and 1976, then declined modestly until 1979, when it began to fall off significantly.

Economically, the growth in book distribution resulted in a financial boom for the movement. ISKCON members received an average of four to five dollars as a donation for each of the large books they distributed to members of the public. With a cost to the movement of approximately $2.50 per book, ISKCON made considerable profit from the large volume of books distributed. If we take the conservative figure of four dollars received for each book, ISKCON grossed over $13 million between 1974 and 1978 just on hardback books alone.[6]

As a result of the financial prosperity brought about by this growth in book distribution, ISKCON purchased half a dozen new and larger temples in 1975 and 1976. The decision to acquire larger temples was based on the assumption that the movement's ranks would continue to grow and that book distribution would continue to expand as it had in these years. By 1975, however, ISKCON's recruitment numbers had al-

Table 7.1.
Average Amound of ISKCON Literature Distributed Weekly In the United States and Canada by Year*

Year	# Weeks	Large books	Medium books	Small books	(Total)	Communities reporting (average)
1974	(36)	1,748	6,830	19,570	(28,148)	(12)
1975	(45)	3,434	5,759	40,750	(49,943)	(18)
1976	(32)	18,406	8,555	118,724	(145,685)	(24)
1977	(42)	23,393	5,203	93,693	(122,294)	(25)
1978	(51)	28,976	4,014	91,813	(124,803)	(26)
1979	(52)	20,442	6,634	75,640	(102,715)	(21)
1980	(19)	11,985	1,724	19,921	(33,630)	(18)
1981	(26)	10,456	5,692	35,594	(51,743)	(18)
1982	(41)	11,852	22,273	24,534	(58,659)	(20)

*These data are compiled from ISKCON's weekly *Sankirtana Newsletter*, which began in 1974. The figures reported by each of ISKCON's communities are deemed to be generally reliable by my sources within the movement. Gross exaggerations by any community would become apparent when the claimed number of books distributed failed to match the actual number ordered from the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust in Los Angeles. Since book distribution is very competive between ISKCON communities, it is unlikely that the leadership in Los Angeles would fail routinely to monitor the figures reported by other ISKCON communities. I have computed weekly figures because the *Sankirtana Newsletter* was not published consistently during the 1974–1982 period.

ready begun to decline,[7] and in 1977 book distribution began to level off as well.

It was in the midst of the apparent affluence of the movement in 1975 and 1976 that the seeds of ISKCON's coming decline were being planted. The mass distribution of books brought large sums of money into the organization, but this did not come about because the public was becoming more receptive to Krishna Consciousness. On the contrary, the rapid growth in literature distribution reflected ISKCON members' use of a variety of interactional strategies meant to increase the volume of literature distributed and to maximize the financial return from each book. These changes ultimately altered the very structure and purpose of *sankirtana* and brought the movement into conflict with the public. From the public's perspective, *sankirtana* was seen as motivated more by financial concerns than by religious principles.

From Preaching to Selling: Micro-structural Changes in Sankirtana

As early as 1973, a number of changes were already underway in ISKCON's *sankirtana* practices. Initially, these changes appeared to reflect no more than ISKCON's continuing search for more effective missionary work. By the end of the seventies, however, ISKCON's *sankirtana* practices were becoming ever more financial in character.[8] A devotee who joined ISKCON in 1971 provided a description of the changes that took place:

> Even in the early seventies Prabhupada was saying 'Just a magazine [*Back to Godhead*]. If they can give a quarter, fine.' So you would preach to them [people met in the street] and then ask 'Could you just give a quarter donation?' And if they didn't give it to you [we] just let them go. It was no big deal then . . . . We didn't want to pressure anyone, we just wanted to give them a taste of Krishna (Los Angeles 1978).

But, as this devotee further explained, *sankirtana* had undergone a fundamental change by the mid-seventies:

> While there was some trouble with devotees being aggressive [in their *sankirtana* efforts], up until '74 and '75 it was limited and excusable really. If there were any problems it was just the immaturity of the devotees and it came off that way. But then you saw the aggressive sort of thing. Finances became important. Everything became conscious, organized. You could see there was a change. Not just goofy mistakes like before. They were organized (Los Angeles 1978).

While this insider's account is suggestive, it ultimately says little about the interactional dynamics underlying the changes that took place in *sankirtana*. In the following discussion, I will look at four interactional changes in *sankirtana* that reflect ISKCON's changing uses of public settings.

Changes in the Targets of the Devotees' Contact Attempts

With the decline of the counterculture in the early seventies, public places became less productive locations for recruitment purposes. The youth of the counterculture were no longer available in large numbers in communities such as the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco and the Bowery on the Lower East Side of New York. With the demise of public places for purposes of recruitment, ISKCON shifted its public efforts mostly into airports to take advantage of the better prospects they offered for distributing the movement's literature. With this shift, ISKCON members began seeking out a range of social groups in these public places that would not have gained much attention previously.

Systematic observation of the devotees' book distribution efforts at the Los Angeles International Airport in 1980 revealed that devotees

generally sought out people who would have little or no prospect of becoming ISKCON members, or who would not even be sympathetic to the movement's message. This conclusion is based upon observations of 103 attempted contacts between devotees and members of the public. These contacts fell into several categories.

First, devotee distributors often attempted to make contact with older people. Forty-five percent of the people they contacted were over the age of thirty-five (based on age estimates by the author). A substantial number of these people were fifty years of age or older. Because ISKCON can accurately be considered an age-graded association, which favors participation and interest by the young, it seems unlikely that people over the age of thirty could be considered serious candidates for preaching and recruitment. The devotees surveyed revealed that the average age of ISKCON members when they joined was twenty-one. Only eight percent of the devotees sampled had been over the age of thirty at the time they joined. Moreover, the average age of current members is twenty-seven.

Second, one-third of the people contacted by the devotees were Orientals, including many Japanese. While in some measure this high frequency of attempts at contacts with oriental people is an artifact of the ISKCON distributors's proximity to a Japanese airline, the devotees did choose to take up their positions in this area out of a range of other possibilities in the airport terminal. Only one oriental person was among the devotees surveyed (excluding members originally from India). One reason why oriental people might be preferred targets for the devotees is suggested by the finding that they were both more likely to stop and talk with the devotees upon contact, and they were also more likely to purchase a book than other social groups contacted.

Third, the vast majority of the persons contacted by ISKCON members were men. Three-fourths of all contacts initiated by the devotees were with men. Since airports tend to have a higher proportion of men than women, one might suppose that men were the favored targets because of their sheer numbers. It seems, however, that other reasons

were involved. Observation revealed that even women who passed close to devotees were generally overlooked in favor of contacting a man. As discussed in chapter five, men make better prospects for contact and interaction because of the dynamics of male-female encounters. In addition, men, in general, tend to hold larger sums of money on them than women do and therefore they make better (that is, more profitable) targets for ISKCON solicitations.

Changes in the Devotees' Presentations of Self

As any door-to-door salesman can tell, making a sale to a stranger who has not expressed an interest in a particular product is a difficult task. When the salesman is a member of a religious group that is defined by the public as peculiar, strange, or perhaps even threatening, this job becomes even more problematic. While for traditional religious organizations and for a number of the Christian-based new religions (e.g., the Unification Church and the Children of God), such selling can be accomplished rather easily, managing their identity presents a unique problem for ISKCON members because they have taken on the identity equipment (Goffman 1963) of a traditional Eastern culture. To help overcome the stigma attached to their appearance, ISKCON members have devised a number of strategies to disguise their identities during *sankirtana*. In 1973, ISKCON members began wearing conventional clothes to conceal their identity as Hare Krishna devotees (shirts, pants and wigs for the men and dresses for the women).

> Something new has been added to the Hare Krishna movement: the toupee. Numerous male members are wearing hairpieces on their shaved pates these days while they are distributing literature. And both sexes are shedding the orange saffron robes in favor of more traditional dress in public. 'We sort of freak out people with our normal appearance,' said Krishna member John Robertson, 27. 'Our culture is so aesthetic that people get upset when they see anything religious' (*Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1976).

ISKCON members also tried to neutralize their identities as Krishna adherents in other ways. Beginning in 1975, *sankirtana* devotees began to alter their appearances in more extreme ways in an effort to upgrade their respectability in the eyes of the public. I encountered one in this way. I was walking down Westwood Boulevard [in Los Angeles] one afternoon, when a Santa stopped me on the street and offered me a candycane.

SANTA: Ho, ho, ho. Have you been a good boy this year? Responding that I had indeed, the Santa asked, Would you give a donation to help needy people throughout the world?

EBR: What kind of help?

SANTA: (As he raised his money bucket to reveal some small pictures on the side) Book publishing, education, and food distribution.

At this point I recognize the pictures and the organization ISKCON written on the side.

EBR: Oh that's a nice thing to be doing.

As I reached into my pocket for some change, the Santa held the bucket up high to expose numerous dollar bills.

After I had put the money into the bucket, the Santa handed me a *Back to Godhead* magazine and said:

SANTA: I am part of a movement that is seeking to alter people's consciousness, through yoga and meditation (Los Angeles 1975).[9]

By taking on roles that the public can interpret as respectable and harmless, the devotees gain special license to accost persons in public settings. In Goffman's (1963) terms, the devotees project a public image that allows them to be seen as opening persons, thereby facilitating their *sankirtana* efforts.

Changes in the Structure and Content of Sankirtana

Beginning in 1975, ISKCON devotees began employing *sankirtana* tactics that were meant to maximize the financial returns from literature

distributed. The following interaction between the author and a male ISKCON member at the Los Angeles International Airport in 1981, shows the ways in which preaching had become secondary to the goal of raising money:

DEVOTEE: Sir! Sir! Where are you flying today?

EBR: Oh, I'm just here to pick someone up who's flying in.

DEVOTEE: Look what we have for you. We have already given away hundreds today. Everyone is getting one and here is yours (and he hands me a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*).

EBR: Thanks, I appreciate that. This will give me something to read while I wait. (I start to move away, but he opens another text exposing pictures of art work.)

DEVOTEE: Uh, we do ask for a donation to cover the cost of publishing. Give a donation.

EBR: Sure, how much do you want?

DEVOTEE: As much as you can. If you give ten dollars that would really help.

EBR: (Reaching for my wallet) I can't give ten. How about a couple of dollars? (I open my wallet and pull out two one dollar bills, but in so doing I expose a ten dollar bill.)

DEVOTEE: (Looking over my shoulder) Would you mind exchanging that ten dollar bill for some ones? I have a lot of ones.

EBR: Sure (Giving him the ten).

DEVOTEE: (He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a handful of bills, none of which are one dollar bills. He has nothing but fives and tens and grabs one of the fives.) Could you give five?

EBR: No, I'm a student. I don't have much money. How about four.

The devotee reaches into the other pocket, pulls out a number of one dollar bills, and then gives me six one dollar bills.

In this interaction, the devotee made use of a practice known as the change-up. Having gotten agreement to pay for the book, the devotee

then tried to obtain a large bill. With the bill in hand, he then was able to bargain further for a higher price.

More systematic evidence of this profit-seeking motive is provided by a study conducted by the Portland Airport authorities in 1976. Of the 154 persons interviewed[10] who had been contacted by ISKCON members in the airport terminal, fifty-two percent stated that they had not been aware that the person they had encountered was a member of any religious organization. Also, a number of these airport patrons who had been aware that the person they had contacted represented a religious group had no idea that the group was ISKCON; many of them reported that they thought the money was to be used for a Christian charity. More telling is the finding that eighty-nine percent of these respondents reported that the ISKCON member who had contacted them had made no effort whatsoever to discuss religious principles of any sort (Port Authority Study on the Activities of Hare Krishna Members 1976).

Changes in the Objects Distributed in Public Places

A major change took place in ISKCON's use of public places beginning in 1977. When book distribution began to level off during that year, many ISKCON communities began to face economic difficulties. As literature distribution continued to decline over the next five years, ISKCON faced growing serious financial problems. To help bring money into the movement's communities, ISKCON members began to sell a variety of consumer goods in public settings. In contrast to book distribution, during which individual devotees could take it on themselves to preach, the practice of *picking*, as it is referred to by the devotees, affords little or no opportunity to carry out any missionary activities.

Picking is a form of public solicitation that involves seeking straight donations on behalf of a worthy cause (e.g., to feed needy people) or selling nonreligious products to strangers in such locations as rock concerts, shopping centers, roadside rest areas, and in California at the

Department of Motor Vehicles. Items sold to the public include: candles, record albums, candy, cookies, prints of art work, American-flag lapel pins, and buttons (supporting various sport teams and recording artists). When involved in *picking*, devotees wear conventional clothing to disguise their identity as Hare Krishna converts.[11]

Between 1977 and 1979, the devotees sometimes distributed literature when *picking*. After that, this practice became less common and was actively discouraged by the leaders in many ISKCON communities because the distribution of literature often interfered with making a sale. A male devotee, who *picked* at rock concerts on the East Coast in 1980 in order to help finance the many building projects going on at ISKCON's West Virginia farm community, explained why the devotees in his area stopped giving out Krishna books when selling records:

> We had to stop giving out books at rock concerts. People would realize that we were devotees and they would just tear them up anyway. I mean these are sex-and drug-crazed people. There is no point in giving them Krishna like that. They won't read the book anyway (Cleveland 1980).

The inability to preach Krishna Consciousness often created considerable distress for *sankirtana* devotees. A devotee woman from the Los Angeles ISKCON community contrasted her feelings about book distribution and *picking* in a 1980 interview:

> EBR: When you distribute books does it feel like a different kind of thing than doing records?
>
> DEVOTEE: I do books and records. When you're doing the books it's different because you are giving them Krishna. But you see, a lot of times when you're doing records you can't give them a book. A lot of times they won't take them. Right now I am fried out on doing these records. . . . I want to go and preach to people. I actually want to tell them about Krishna. I'm a devotee. I want to spread Krishna Consciousness, not sell records (Los Angeles 1980).

The decision of ISKCON's leaders to favor *picking* at the expense of book distribution effectively blocked putting forward the movement's missionary goals in public places. *Picking* involves selling commodities to a public who has no commitment, or even potential commitment, to Prabhupada's mission of spreading Krishna Consciousness. This form of public solicitation works quite differently from book distribution because it involves no presumption that the buyer has any interest in ISKCON or in the philosophy of the movement.[12]

Strategy, Public Definition, and Decline

As a number of investigators of social movements have noted, the developmental pattern of any movement is neither fixed nor solely determined by its goals and ideology (Snow 1979; Turner and Killian 1972; Zald and Ash 1966). Instead, the history of a movement is strongly influenced by the dynamic interplay between its values, goals, and strategies, on the one hand, and the way these are defined and reacted to by the public, on the other.

In the early seventies, the recruitment tactics and information-spreading efforts of the new religions became a public issue in the United States. A countermovement of anticultists emerged, bent on discrediting the cults and shaping public opinion against them. The anti-cult movement sought to influence the public's view of the new religions through the media, through conventional church organizations, through chambers of commerce, civic groups, and through an extensive lobbying campaign directed at state and federal legislators (Shupe and Bromley 1979, 1980). Bromley and Shupe describe the anti-cult ideology and how it was used to legitimize the tactics of those opposing the cults:

> Conversion to new religions was explained in terms of brainwashing, drugging or spot hypnosis; this explanation effectively reduced 'converts' to 'victims.' The remainder of the anti-cult ideology provided the rational for such manipulative and abusive practices. Leaders of new religions were portrayed as authoritarians and charlatans who exploited their young followers for power and profit. Thus, these groups were not religious at all but merely self-aggrandisement schemes masquerading as religions to avoid taxation and criminal prosecution. Since conversion was neither voluntary nor to a legitimate religion, even forcible removal hardly represented a serious infringement of constitutional rights or personal freedom (1982:4).

While the claims of the anti-cultists have proved largely unfounded (Bromley and Shupe 1981), the anti-cult movement was largely successful in mobilizing what had been an innocent bystander public into a struggle against the cults. By the mid-seventies, the cults had become a publicly defined social problem. As a result, ISKCON and the other new religions came to be viewed by the public as threatening.[13]

Because of this strong public opposition, ISKCON's mobilization strategies were greatly narrowed; the movement had few choices and chose to pursue covert and illegitimate tactics to help assure its survival. The choices were particularly limited in ISKCON's case because its exclusive communal structure and sectarian beliefs further restricted the financial strategies that otherwise might have been available (e.g., outside employment). To have chosen this employment alternative would have involved changes in the movement's exclusive structural arrangements, which would have in turn risked the commitment of its membership, because, as a result of worldly influences, they would then be subjected to influences pulling them away from the group. Most critically, working outside the devotee community might well have resulted in members forming social ties with nondevotee coworkers, which might have acted as countervailing ties, threatening members' commitment to ISKCON and Krishna Consciousness. Because of the limited strategies available, ISKCON began to stress the financial side of *sankirtana* at the expense of missionary activities. As book distribution began to level off and then decline after 1977, ISKCON's public place strategies shifted once again. *Picking* became the dominant financial strategy.[14]

These changes in ISKCON's *sankirtana* practices during the middle and late seventies further shaped and rigidified the public's image of ISKCON as a deviant and threatening cult. By employing tactics that were viewed by the public as coercive, financially motivated, and lacking in religious content, ISKCON helped to mobilize public opinion against its beliefs and way of life. Literature distribution declined even more dramatically beginning in 1979, and many, if not most, ISKCON communities faced serious economic problems. The public became keenly aware of ISKCON devotees in airports and other public places and actively sought to avoid contact with them.[15] But more formal and systematic efforts were also instituted to control ISKCON's use of these settings. In the mid-1970s, airports, state fairs, and other public facilities throughout the United States began to legally challenge ISKCON's *sankirtana* practices. The authorities argued that ISKCON was using tactics that were more financial than religious and therefore that the movement should be denied First Amendment privileges. Despite a wealth of legal precedents in its favor, ISKCON faced a stiff challenge in protecting its free access to public settings. As the ISKCON member largely responsible for opening public settings to *sankirtana* explained in a 1983 interview, the movement's tactics became the grounds for legal attempts to limit ISKCON's access to these settings:

> While it was initially easy to open these various public places to *sankirtana*, suddenly everything began to change. When we [ISKCON] came back to fight time, place, and manner regulations, we had a hard time. They [airports, etc.] would say: 'Look what you are doing. You are using the change-up on people and other practices of this sort simply to get money from them. We don't think First Amendment rights are at issue.' So they would get the judge thinking that we were involved in fraud. As a result, we could no longer assert *pure* First Amendment rights (Philadelphia 1983).

Initially, the courts reacted only by imposing limitations on ISKCON's use of public settings. These included restrictions on where

ISKCON members could distribute literature in a particular public facility, on how many devotees could distribute it at any one time, and/or placing time limitations on *sankirtana*. In addition, in the late seventies, state fairs in several states won legal rulings confining ISKCON members to booths, thereby limiting the devotees' access to fair patrons (*ISKCON* v. *Barber, Young, and Garlick,* 1980; *ISKCON* v. *Evans*, 1977; *ISKCON* v. *State Fair of Texas*, 1978).

Several state courts, beginning in 1977 and 1978, began hearing lawsuits aimed at denying ISKCON's right to engage at all in public place solicitation. Airports in Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, and other locations initiated litigation meant to deny ISKCON access to airport facilities. Public zoos and a number of state and county fairs from California to New York brought legal actions aimed at ending *sankirtana*. Finally, in 1978, O'Hare International Airport in Chicago was closed to *sankirtana*. As one ISKCON leader explained in 1981, the public reaction that had been generated by the movement's *sankirtana* practices was largely responsible:

> While book distribution went up and up between 1974 and 1977, the public reaction was also building. And then bam, there was a chain reaction: O'Hare [airport in Chicago] went down and there was litigation to get us out of other airports and public places. . . . The airport managers used to discuss with each other at their conventions: 'How do we get the Hare Krishnas out?' (Philadelphia 1982).

In 1981, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (*Heffron* v. *ISKCON*, 1981) that ISKCON members did not have the legal right to distribute literature and solicit donations at state fairs throughout the country. Because of this decision and a number of other legal rulings that either restricted or prohibited *sankirtana*, ISKCON discontinued or limited literature distribution in a number of public settings, particularly airports.

Even as ISKCON faced being discredited by the anti-cult movement, the public, and the courts, it also began to face criticism from within. A growing number of ISKCON members began openly to question the

movement's *sankirtana* practices, to the extent that ISKCON's legitimacy as an instrument for putting forward the cause of Krishna Consciousness was challenged. As one long-time ISKCON member explained in a 1982 interview:

> One thing that you have to realize is that from the beginning to the end, the change-up and so forth were very controversial within the movement. Some devotees were sensitive to how the public would react and realized from experience that *karmies* [members of the public] weren't stupid. They were going to figure it out in due course of time and it was all going to come back on us. . . . Some leaders grossly underestimated the consciousness of the people who were coming into contact with the devotees. They seemed to think that people didn't realize that they were being manipulated . . . But some of us knew that sooner or later it was going to come down. It was a mistake to become unethical with the people (Philadelphia 1982).

The controversies surrounding the movement's money-gathering strategies led to an erosion of member commitment and to mounting internal conflicts, factionalism, and a growing number of defections. The loss of ISKCON credibility in the eyes of a part of its membership became a major force causing ISKCON's decline during the late seventies. While external challenges to the movement could be interpreted as no more than a deepening of the general persecution of ISKCON and the cults in general, internal challenges to the authority of the organization brought ISKCON to the edge of organizational crisis. As Zald and Ash (1966) argue, the decline and failure of a movement organization is often the result of strategies that place the organization's legitimacy in doubt from *within*. By altering the purpose of *sankirtana*, ISKCON's leaders unwittingly set off a process that led to their being discredited, which ultimately undermined the organization's legitimacy and helped to hasten the decline of Hare Krishna in America.[16]

Conclusion

All social movements are involved in a continuous process of exchange with the socio-cultural environments in which they operate. If a movement is to reach its aims, it must mobilize the resources necessary to promote social change. Gaining these resources from society requires that a movement develop outward-reaching strategies. By doing this, however, a movement invites public evaluation and response, which may either facilitate or limit its achievements. As the public outcry against the cults' recruitment strategies and information-diffusion efforts grew during the 1970s, ISKCON was forced to adjust its money-gathering strategies in public settings. Lacking alternative ways of supporting itself, ISKCON began to favor the financial side of *sankirtana* at the expense of the movement's missionary goals. By doing so, however, ISKCON only further intensified the conflict between itself and the public. This conflict, in turn, caused a variety of social controls to be directed toward limiting ISKCON's practices in public settings. Largely as a result of these developments, ISKCON in North America faced decline and organizational crisis by the end of the decade.