

Planting the seed of Hare Krishna consciousness in Kenya: The beliefs and activities of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Kenya

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.14.02.2024.p14606

<https://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.14.02.2024.p14606>

Paper Received Date: 17th December 2023

Paper Acceptance Date: 27th January 2024

Paper Publication Date: 6th February 2024

Abstract: *The world is the birthplace of many faiths and has accommodated and nourished multiple religions. The intricate mosaic of diverse faiths, beliefs, traditions and languages in many countries is indeed amazing. The central aim of this study is to examine the activities of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Kisumu County. This is a transnational religious movement with its roots in Chaitanya Vaishnavism, a Hindu tradition originating in India. The central argument of this research is that Hare Krishna's in Kenya are generally viewed in several restricted ways, notwithstanding their material or financial assistance to victims of calamities for philanthropic purposes. This study is an attempt to isolate one of the many Hindu socio-religious groups in Kenya - the Hare Krishna also referred to as ISKCON, and trace its entry into Kenya and outline its doctrinal principles and practices. There are very low levels of religious literacy and lack of knowledge among Kenyans on the Hare Krishna movement. To many Kenyans, the ISKCON movement exists below the radar and often out of the public eye and largely unfamiliar and unknown to most Kenyans. The lack of public knowledge of Hare Krishna has been a major source of misrepresentation, stigmatization, and demonization of the movement which underscores the importance of disseminating accurate facts about Hare Krishna as one of the New Religious Movements in Kenya. This study established that ISKCON came into Kenya through Mombasa and spread to Nairobi in 1970 and was facilitated by local Indian businessmen who extended this consciousness to Kisumu. Its core beliefs are based on traditional Hindu scriptures. It systematically propagates spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world. The study demonstrates that "conversion" in the ISKCON context is marked by a process of gradual "drifting" into ISKCON's fold, not a sudden change and conversion to ISKCON's belief system is facilitated by the adoption of the ritual practices central to ISKCON.*

Key words: *Hare Krishna, ISKCON, Krishna consciousness*

Introduction

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is a global community of followers who engage in the practice of bhakti-yoga, which is the timeless discipline of offering loving service to God. The Society was established in 1966 by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, a devout follower of God who represents an uninterrupted lineage of spiritual teachers tracing back to Lord Krishna Himself. The legitimacy of the ISKCON movement as a religion and form of religious expression stems from its establishment as a substantial and enduring movement that actively contributes to diverse religious contexts (Berg, & Kniss, 2008). Contrary to most New Religious Movements in Africa, this particular one is not isolationist as it actively participates in diverse forms of outreach aimed at the public. The outreach initiative aims to engage a wide range of locations, such as rural communities, urban areas, townships, colleges, the internet, and public spaces. The movement sustains its influence across university campuses, exhibiting a robust online presence through social media and other digital platforms. Temples are accessible to the general public, who are extended an invitation to participate in events such as the Sunday Love Feast and religious services. Within the realm of public life, followers participate in ceremonial practices and festivities (Frisk, 2015).

The primary objective of festivals like the Festival of Chariots is to unite diverse local cultures in the act of chanting Lord Krishna's name. ISKCON movement has an advantage over other New Religious Movements (NRMs) due to its robust material dimension. The temples are steadfast and the followers proudly display attire that plainly indicates their religious identity. Observers display curiosity towards individuals adorned with shaved heads, topknots, tilaka markings, vibrant orange robes, yellow saris, dhotis,

and engaged in drumming activities (Karassyova & Tarkan, 2021). Nevertheless, like to other New Religious Movements (NRMs), the ISKCON movement faces challenges in gaining traction in the realm of religions and ideas, particularly due to the prevailing dominance of the Christian religion in Africa. Devotees must also strive to win over the affections and convictions of individuals, a challenging task due to the fact that the majority adhere to various forms of Christianity or other theological or philosophical belief systems, distinct from the teachings advocated by the ISKCON movement (Karassyova & Tarkan, 2021). This implies that the movement is encountering obstacles that hinder its ability to become a widely accepted religion in Kenya, at least in the near future. However, due to its appeal to nonconformists and individuals searching for existential significance and direction in life, its credibility as a form of religious manifestation necessitates examination within its wider social framework (Bryant & Ekstrand, 2004).

Hare Krishna is an esoteric branch of Hinduism. Hare Krishnas typically categorize their belief system as a monotheistic branch of Hinduism, as they hold the view that all deities are different expressions of the singular divine being, Vishnu or Krishna. The organization promotes a devotional approach to faith, wherein followers establish a connection with Krishna and show their deep admiration for him via the acts of dancing and chanting (Brooks, 2021). The ultimate objective of Hare Krishnas, on the other hand, is to establish a transcendental and affectionate connection with Lord Krishna. The term "Hare" denotes the pleasurable potency of Krishna, similar to the Christian concept of mankind's ultimate objective being the worship and eternal enjoyment of God (Rochford, 1985).

Origin and spread of the movement in Kenya

Multiple researchers have extensively researched the history of The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The official biography of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, written by Satsvarupa das Gosvami in 1993, provides a thorough and detailed examination of the founder's life and the early growth of ISKCON. Additionally, there are other anecdotal accounts available by Giriraj Swami (2000). The founder's biographical information, the institution's history, its beliefs and teachings, worship practices, codes of behavior, and specific procedures all demonstrate a strong alignment with the ancient Vaisnava culture and heritage, particularly the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition following Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

Bryant & Ekstrand (2004) provides a concise account of the life of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in a biography. Abhay Charan, often known as, was born in Calcutta in 1896 to parents who were devout followers of Krishna, which greatly influenced his upbringing and immersed him in a rich cultural environment. Despite being more enthusiastic about cultural events than attending school as a child, he displayed exceptional academic prowess, particularly in speech expression, debate, and discussion. Subsequently, he enrolled in the Scottish Churches College in Calcutta, where he successfully pursued his studies in Philosophy, Economics, and English. Following his graduation, he wholeheartedly committed himself to the principles and mission of Mahatma Gandhi. Subsequently, he pursued a career as a pharmacist. It was during this specific timeframe, in 1922, that he encountered Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati Thakur, upon the urging of a companion. This encounter led to his formal acceptance of Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati Thakur as his spiritual mentor. In 1965, at the age of sixty-nine, he embarked on a journey to America with minimal funds and a collection of books, securing passage on a boat through begging. Following a challenging period, he triumphantly created and officially registered the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York City in 1966. Over the next ten years, he went on to create 108 temples in prominent locations worldwide (Ketola, 2004).

The movement rapidly emerged in the fertile environment of the 1960s. Western principles were undergoing scrutiny while Eastern philosophy was gaining popularity. ISKCON was becoming a significant participant in the United States' changing religious landscape, as the greater culture of the country was transitioning to a new religious paradigm. Bhaktivedanta Swami gathered numerous volumes of what he referred to as "Vedic literature" and then presented them to the global audience as scholarly publications on ancient Indian scriptures. Several translations were praised for their precision in conveying the true meaning of ancient scriptures, enhanced by the Swami's profound understanding, derived from extensive study and practical experience as a teacher in a tradition that has endured for thousands of years (Bryant & Ekstrand, 2004). During this period, ISKCON expanded its presence throughout Africa, but the philosophical roots of ISKCON can be traced back to Krishna's era some 5,000 years ago. In 1972, two American followers, Rishi Kumar Swami and Kshudhi das, came to Johannesburg as directed by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. The process of establishing ISKCON in South Africa is documented in *Destination South Africa*, which chronicles their challenges, particularly with the South African police during the apartheid era, as well as their hardships and accomplishments (Gupta, Das, Yesilbag, Mizuhara & Rotello, 2018).

The Kenyan ISKCON community gradually formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s when devotees from outside started renting a property in Mombasa and then in Nairobi. These buildings were later turned into temples. The purpose of their visits to Kenya was to spread the ideas and beliefs of the ISKCON movement (Sooklal, 1987). Srila Prabhupada, the revered spiritual leader, determined that His Holiness Brahmananda Svami should undertake a voyage to Africa with the objective of spreading the doctrines of their religion. His Holiness Brahmananda Svami finally reached the port of Mombasa and visited the Lord Siva Hindu shrine. A substantial number of folks would often visit the place to see the "American sadhus." Moywaywa and Ifedha (2015) propose that individuals should be provided with indispensable commodities such as fruits, flowers, cash, and various other miscellaneous items. Brahmananda Svami shown hesitancy in spreading Krishna consciousness among the native populace and participating in public recitation of the Hare Krishna mantra. Brahmananda Svami was uncertain about the potential response from the authorities in Mombasa (Kinanga & Ifedha, 2015). Therefore, he primarily focused on delivering sermons exclusively to Indian nationals residing in Mombasa.

This led them to gradually recognize their unique position within the global population due to the Indian population's reverence towards sadhus, acts of generosity and kindness, and lesser inclination towards pursuing sensory pleasures compared to individuals in Western societies. This can be linked to the persistent existence of artifacts from the deeply spiritual Vedic civilization within India. The original Indian converts demonstrated their ethical inclination by providing a wide array of services during the hard early era and

by showing zeal in familiarizing themselves with their fellow countrymen. The individuals who had converted were thereafter asked to join others and give presentations on the topic of Krishna awareness at various social gatherings (Moywaywa & Ifedha, 2015). As a result, the Indian population promptly and genuinely adopted Krishna awareness. One devotee who showed great dedication to Prabhupada was Shakti Mati Devi Dasi, who put forth significant efforts on his behalf. Shakti Mati played a pioneering role in the ISKCON African Mission (IAM) by being the first person of Indian Hindu background to get initiation and live within the temple premises during that time. At first, Brahmananda focused his efforts only on the Gujarati community, who provided him with financial backing. Nevertheless, they clearly discouraged any further participation and disapproved of anyone seeking a monastic way of life or receiving initiation guidance. Due to her Punjabi heritage, Shakti Mati was not bound by the specific regulations that only applied to the Gujarati community (Moywaywa & Ifedha, 2015).

Brahmananda Svami was invited by an Indian family to travel to Nairobi in order to celebrate the important event of Lord Krishna's birthday, also known as Janmastami. Upon their arrival in Nairobi, the Indian family arranged a gathering at a Radha-Krishna temple. During the event, kirtana (devotional chanting) and teachings on the Bhagavad-gita were conducted. The attendees were amazed by the growing interest in Krishna consciousness among Americans. Many Indian families in Nairobi expressed their willingness to support the activities of ISKCON. Later, three passionate individuals from the United States also became part of the group (Moywaywa & Ifedha, 2015). Srila Prabhupada thereafter accompanied His Holiness Brahmananda Svami to Nairobi. In Nairobi, Srila Prabhupada demonstrated the principles and teachings that were required of a sannyasi. Srila Prabhupada would stay in the homes of different Indian individuals, enjoying their comfortable accommodations, delicious meals, and suitable sleeping arrangements. However, he would never stay at one place for more than three days. Following the Vedic idea advocating that sannyasis, or individuals who have renounced worldly attachments, should avoid staying in one place for an extended period, Srila Prabhupada would frequently move between different families. Ghosh (2020) argues that this constraint hinders individuals from cultivating a fondness for material extravagances, which may potentially annoy their hosts.

In the afternoons, Srila Prabhupada would participate in darsana, which involves granting an audience, with the family members and their guests in their houses. Previously, he would participate in confidential conversations with the male inhabitants of the family in the mornings. In addition, he actively organized and led kirtanas and delivered instructive lectures into the late hours of the night. As a result, a significant number of influential individuals of Indian descent living in Nairobi had close personal connections with Srila Prabhupada and gladly became lifelong members. As per Karapanagiotis (2021), there is a widespread involvement with the Hare Krishna movement in modern times. Following this, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami expanded the life membership initiative in Nairobi, while maintaining the practice established by Srila Prabhupada of relocating residences every three days. He exhibited good communication skills through his actions. People were able to personally witness the act of refraining from alcohol, engaging in sexual activities that are considered illegal, consuming meat, and participating in gambling. They also observed the adoption of practices such as waking up early, taking cold baths, participating in kirtanas (devotional songs), and engaging in japa (repetitive chanting) (Karapanagiotis, 2021). Karapanagiotis notes that,

A Vaisnava engages in preaching by means of both verbal communication and practical actions. This distinguishes them from various spurious yoga organizations, whose constituents may possess expertise in speculative philosophy or adeptness in presenting yoga in an appealing manner to a target audience, yet lack the capacity to embody the rigorous discipline necessary for attaining spiritual enlightenment in their personal lives (Karapanagiotis, 2021; 25).

After his visit to Nairobi, Prabhupada emphasized to Brahmananda the importance of reaching out to the broader African populace, rather than exclusively targeting the Indian community. The segregation of individuals of Indian and African heritage might be seen as a manifestation of the fundamental physiological perception of human existence. Prabhupada believed that through preaching to those of African heritage, he could perhaps confront and refute existing misunderstandings, ultimately achieving his goal. At first, Srila Prabhupada inspired him to actively participate in preaching specifically aimed at people of African heritage. He declared, "This represents our genuine endeavor in the African continent" (Karapanagiotis, 2021:123).

After becoming aware of the above conditions and their resulting effects, Brahmananda started to plan an intellectual discussion to be presented by Prabhupada at the prestigious University of Nairobi. These talks drew the attention of hundreds of interested participants. The movement gained popularity in Kenya due to its emphasis on love and exuberant worship, which resonated with the desires of many young individuals. Srila Prabhupada promoted his teachings as both uncomplicated and inherent to human nature. He instructed on the simplest and most direct method to have communion with God and attain spiritual emancipation in the world (Karapanagiotis, 2021). Brahmananda utilized many promotional tactics, including media commercials, the production and exhibition of posters, and the dissemination of visually captivating pamphlets, in order to optimize participant turnout. The program was attended by a heterogeneous crowd comprising of professors, dignitaries, and African students. The large number of attendees resulted in all seats being filled, causing a considerable amount of people to stand outside and watch the event from the doors and windows (Brown, 2012). Following Prabhupada's succinct presentation, the participants conveyed their gratitude by applauding and standing up from their chairs in a standing ovation. Afterwards, an enthusiastic kirtana, a film presentation on the movement, and a lavish feast were arranged for all participants. The indicated encounter had a significant influence on personal growth, while also contributing to the increase of favorable attention towards the African movement. Prabhupada offered counsel to the Kenyan inhabitants on the advancement of their developing nation during his speech.

".... It is imperative to cultivate spiritual growth as an integral aspect of holistic development. It is advisable to refrain from emulating the lifestyles of Europeans and Americans, as their way of life is

deemed to be lacking in humanistic qualities. In the event of a subsequent conflict, it is anticipated that the deployment of an atomic bomb will result in the complete annihilation of their defensive structures and associated infrastructure (Brown, 2012:13).

The students of Nairobi University demonstrated their gratitude by applauding after Srila Prabhupada's speech. Following that, the dissemination of kirtana, a film production, and prasada occurred. ISKCON garnered extensive positive media coverage as a result of their active involvement. Prabhupada emphasized the crucial significance of spreading his ideas to a broad audience. Prabhupada not only participated in the university program mentioned earlier, but also actively focused on initiatives aimed at the economically disadvantaged neighborhood. He believed in the importance of human existence, which centers on recognizing that individuals are spiritual beings separate from their physical bodies. Moreover, he proposed that the primary objective of ISKCON was to actively participate in the worship and devotion of Sri Krishna, who is widely recognized as the Supreme Lord (Brown, 2012).

Following Prabhupada's departure from Nairobi to India, the devotees were deeply inspired by his teachings and guidance to continue their missionary endeavors in Africa. In a letter sent to Hansadutta on October 8, 1971, it was said that the speech given at the University of Nairobi was considered successful.

The newspaper item used the following specific terminology: "ISKCON SWAMI EXPLAINS PHILOSOPHY... Yesterday, a highly productive meeting was held at the University of Nairobi. Yesterday evening, Acarya Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and his disciples delivered a presentation titled the 'Hare Krishna Revolution' at the University of Nairobi's Taifa Hall. The event attracted a large audience, and it showcased a combination of impressive theatrics and the unwavering principles of Gita philosophy. The African male individuals are approaching our community and expressing their admiration for our philosophical principles.

In November 10, 1971 Srila Prabhupada in his arrival Lecture in New Delhi explained:

As a young individual hailing from America, Europe, and Canada, I respectfully inquire of my fellow male counterparts... Currently, I am engaged in a journey throughout the continent of Africa. During my visit, I had the opportunity to explore both Mombasa and Nairobi. Furthermore, the African males are also engaging in the act of dancing.

Soon after, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami, along with his group of followers, arranged their first outdoor kirtana event at Kamakunji Park in Nairobi. At the event, they sang devotional songs with a pleasant melody and generously distributed bundi, a delicious sweet treat, which was enjoyed with great enthusiasm by the gathered crowd. The program was implemented on a weekly frequency, and its growing popularity resulted in a substantial influx of young Kenyan individuals engaging in the effort. The local Swahili newspaper enthusiastically commemorated this accomplishment. The picture showed a person wearing a tilaka and having a shaved head. The commentary advised being careful when greeting individuals like this and avoiding saying "Jambo!" The word "Hare Krishna" is vocalized. The Swahili term for greeting someone is "jambo" (Haddon, 2013).

The devotees orchestrated sankirtana processions and disseminated literature within the key business hub of Nairobi. In order to enable nighttime events, social halls were rented in various residential neighborhoods. Significantly, on every occasion when the image of Lord Jagannatha was displayed, the audience reacted with acclaim. In order to make it easier to move their books and eating utensils, they decided to purchase a car that had a noticeable carrier attached on the roof. Afterwards, the vehicle underwent a transformation and became a brightly decorated Hare Krishna Safari van through the addition of a tape player and a powerful loudspeaker system. People would spontaneously perform street dancing while moving across the cityscape, while also playing a cassette recording of Srila Prabhupada passionately reciting the Hare Krishna mantra (Brown, 2012).

In 1971, Srila Prabhupada provided guidance for the founding of the first International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temples in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya. In the same year, in Nairobi, HG Shakti Mati devi dasi, a respected African devotee of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), received initiation. She held a prominent role in the movement, actively engaging in activities in both the United Kingdom and Vrindavan, and also founding the temple in Calgary (Rochford, 2007). In January 1972, Srila Prabhupada traveled back to Nairobi with the intention of taking charge of the World Hare Krishna Festival held at the Nairobi city stadium. During this time, Srila Prabhupada settled in a newly bought temple, a large home situated near Nairobi's busy business center. Srila Prabhupada urged individuals to enhance their educational pursuits prior to going on their trip to India. As a result, the individuals undertook extended excursions across the western and northern parts of Kenya, actively spreading religious doctrines (Rochford, 2007).

An extensive array of events was arranged, including kirtana, film screenings, talks, life membership enrollments, book distribution, and prasada distribution. These activities took place in both urban areas and the surrounding rural regions. Afterwards, Sankirtana processions were carried out along the main street. Subsequently, the group issued a request to wealthy individuals to provide financial backing for the procurement of extensive compilations of Srila Prabhupada's publications, together with five-year subscriptions to the BACK TO GODHEAD magazine (Bhaktivedanta, 1994). The aforementioned acquisitions were subsequently donated to libraries, educational institutions, and universities in all towns as a commemoration of the remarkable persons. The institutions conveyed profound gratitude for the books received from other sources. In addition, a considerable quantity of periodicals were disseminated to the general public free of charge after getting sufficient financial backing. Currently, the religious belief system has gained considerable recognition, evident from the abundance of temples in Kisumu and Mombasa that exhibit similar architectural styles (Bhaktivedanta, 1994).

The inception of the first International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temples in Nairobi and Mombasa took place under the supervision of Srila Prabhupada. In the specified year, Nairobi saw the introduction of HG Shakti Mati devi dasi, a

notable African devotee associated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). She held a prominent role in the movement, carrying out responsibilities in both the United Kingdom and Vrindavan, and also founding the temple in Calgary. Rocana dasa provided his services in Nairobi from late 1979 to 1982, a period that continued after the initial establishment of preaching activities in that area (Matilal, 2002).

Although the original devotees overcame many barriers, service in Africa remained challenging. Rocana reminisces on multiple encounters he had in Kenya:

Prior to my arrival, Ajamila dasa held the position of authority at the Nairobi temple. I embarked on a journey to India accompanied by a small group of English devotees, among them was Kripamoya dasa. A significant portion of the Indian individuals present at the location were followers of the Swami Narayana sect originating from the state of Gujarat. Our interactions with this particular group yielded really favorable outcomes. The individuals in question made substantial contributions to our religious institution and social cause, while also possessing and overseeing a significant portfolio of agricultural and construction enterprises. In terms of proselytizing to the African population, our endeavors yielded inconsistent outcomes. There was a limited presence of African preachers, with the notable exception of an African American individual who embarked on missionary journeys accompanied by his Caucasian American wife and child. Undoubtedly, the task of delivering sermons to the populace was challenging due to this particular factor area (Matilal, 2002:24).

In April 17, 1970 Rocana dasa wrote a Letter to Balamukundji and expressed:

I am greatly pleased by the assistance extended to our Krishna Consciousness movement by our Kenyan Indian acquaintances. If there is a collaborative effort between Hindus or Indians and ourselves, there is a possibility of assuming the responsibility for overseeing the administration of African Temples in the future. The Krishna Consciousness movement is not limited to any particular sect, as is widely acknowledged. Krishna's inclusivity extends to all beings, encompassing both humans and animals. He caters to a diverse range of religious affiliations, not solely limited to Hindus. Hindus generally do not exhibit strong liberal tendencies, however, Lord Caitanya, a prominent figure in Hinduism, is known for his inclusive and accepting nature. He extends a warm invitation to individuals from all corners of the world, provided they demonstrate a sincere dedication to serve Krishna. The potential impact of this movement would be significant if individuals of Indian descent, particularly those residing outside of India, were to unite and adhere to my stringent guidelines rooted in the principles of the Vedic tradition. I am actively engaged in executing this commendable missionary endeavor, employing all available means to ensure its successful implementation.

In another letter to Jayapataka in October 5, 1971 he explained that:

The program is operating efficiently in the Nairobi location. On the following day, the University of Nairobi will be hosting a substantial gathering alongside scheduled television appearances. I will be residing in the residences of several hospitable Hindus who have extended their invitations, for a duration of four to five days. It is expected that our center in Nairobi would exhibit comparable levels of efficacy to our other established locations. It is imperative for Dinanatha to promptly make his way here, given that two devotees of African descent from New York have recently arrived at this location. The indigenous population of Africa has exhibited considerable enthusiasm and engagement, rendering the continent an ideal location for the propagation of Lord Caitanya's mission. Furthermore, the life membership program is currently demonstrating a high level of success. Approximately 30,000 Kenyan shillings have been collected thus far.

In November 1994, the city of Nairobi celebrated the opening of a newly constructed Hare Krishna temple, which had supplementary amenities such a conference room, guest house, and asrama. The followers distributed a twelve-page addition in the Daily Nation, the largest newspaper in Nairobi, to officially announce the opening of the temple. The Radha-Krsna Deities, named Radha-Bankebihari, were revealed when the temple doors were opened, just as shown in the cover art of the insert. The title stated, "Promoting Emotional Openness: Embrace the Influence of Govinda."

The Hare Krishna Temple in Nairobi was inaugurated on May 1, 1995. The booklet contained textual material regarding the subjects of vegetarianism, Srila Prabhupada, the act of singing Hare Krsna, and the entity referred to as Hare Krishna Food for Life. Many passionate followers sent multiple letters in response to the aforementioned article that quickly followed the announcement on the temple's inauguration. The article titled "The New Hare Krsna Temple in Nairobi" published in Back to Godhead Magazine on May 1, 1995, included correspondence that offered proof of the increasing impact of the Hare Krsna movement on the viewpoints of the native people in Kenya. One of the correspondences read,

Please, we are very much interested to learn more about the Hare Krishna temple, how to let Govinda in, and how to be among your devotees.

2nd Brigade Headquarters
The Kenya Army
Gilgil, Kenya

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.14.02.2024.p14606>

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I am very much interested in your Food for Life Program. Although I come from a rural community and there is not much I can contribute, if you feel that a donation of one or two acres can be of assistance to you, I shall be happy to give it. If there is any other way you feel I can be of any assistance, please contact me. Meanwhile, I leave you with the chanting of the Lord's holy names: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

*Andrew K. Waitutu
Kiambuthia Village
Kangema-Muranga, Kenya*

I read information about the Hare Krishna Society in the Daily Nation, and my heart was opened to a new spiritual and intellectual awareness. I was particularly moved by the article on vegetarianism and its spiritual dimension, which helps us develop a natural appreciation and love of God.

*Wamalwa Maube
Kaimosi Teachers College
Tiriki, Kenya*

I was greatly impressed by your educational, enlightening, and intellectually stimulating article on the subject of vegetarianism which appeared in the Daily Nation. I must add that I was fascinated by the articles on Krsna as a whole. Having been born in a Christian family, I must admit I have always been suspicious of the practices and intentions of any religion or movement that did not believe in Christ. But having gone through your articles, I was surprised to learn that your teachings are not in any way basically at variance with Christian teachings, as they are also inspired by love, not only for human beings but also for animals. I would like to request more information on the Krishna movement.

*George Edwin Omouk
Nairobi, Kenya*

I am a Christian church pastor, and I firmly believe in God and Jesus Christ. I am in charge of four church congregations in Nyambena District of Eastern Province. I was very much touched by a story with your beliefs which appeared in the Daily Nation. I was particularly impressed with your article on vegetarianism. As church pastors we preach, "Love your neighbor," as Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. I now come to understand from your article that Jesus did not only mean human beings but animals also. It is a matter of fact that the other day I witnessed the slaughter of a camel for meat. It is certainly true that it underwent a lot of suffering, and most of us who were there had to run away, as we felt some mercy for this poor beast. Your article I have gone through several times, and as from now I will teach my Christians this doctrine to avoid eating any meat and to extend our love to all God's creatures. I wish for all Christians to be vegetarians, but to help me in this effort I kindly request you to please furnish me with any literature you might have available on this subject.

*God bless you and your work.
Yours in the service of Christ,
Rev. Ambrose Gichunge
Bread of Life Mission
Eastern Kenya Diocese
Laare, Kenya*

In April 2016, ISKCON news reported that the newly established "Hare Krishna Training Centre" in Nairobi, Kenya, had gained popularity among local students as a place of residence. The students participated in activities such as singing, reading the writings of Srila Prabhupada, and following the four regulative principles of Krishna consciousness. Manager Govinda Prema Das and his staff began to comply with Prabhupada's instructions by actively involving indigenous Africans, rather than solely concentrating on Hindus. This idea was the origin of the previously mentioned concept. During a speech given in Nairobi in 1971, Brahmananda Das was informed by the founder of ISKCON that the mentioned location was, in fact, an African country. The individuals in question were the owners of the business. It was crucial to convey admiration and commendation towards them. In a later communication, he expressed his contentment to Chyavana by conveying his joy in discovering the African lads' growing dedication to their religious rituals. He wrote a letter to Sudama, giving him advice on how to actively spread information in academic institutions, and stressing the importance of having a clear outreach strategy.

Srila Prabhupada, a renowned figure in academia, had the privilege of visiting numerous educational institutions, usually known as "campuses." In addition, he had the honor of speaking to a substantial crowd of around 2,000 people during a significant event at the University of Nairobi in October 1971. Over the years in Nairobi, giving sermons to indigenous Africans in this manner showed different degrees of effectiveness and frequently presented significant difficulties. Devotees who attempted to form Bhakti Yoga organizations at educational institutions had difficulties in obtaining posts inside the primarily Christian administration. Nevertheless, in 2011, Govinda Prema attained triumph by initiating a conversation with the deans of the dormitories who were in charge of student housing. In April 2016, an article published by ISKCON news reported that Govinda Prema stated they formed amicable connections with others,

offered them prasada (consecrated food), and received authorization to exhibit posters endorsing their fortnightly Simple Living, High Thinking Seminars. A group of twenty individuals initially engaged in these activities, which took place on a weekly basis, notably on Wednesdays and Saturdays, at Bhaktivedanta Hall, situated within the premises of ISKCON Nairobi. A rough total of 120 students from the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Mount Kenya University, and Zetech University were present. Govinda Prema explained that the educational strategy consists of teaching knowledge obtained from Prabhupada's written works, specifically *The Science of Self Realization*, *Journey of Self-Discovery*, and *Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers* (Penumala, 2023).

The aim is to showcase the relevance of Prabhupada's teachings and Vedic culture in today's world, thereby enriching individuals' everyday lives. Within the educational context, students are obligated to partake in periodic tests, usually following the completion of a sequence of four or five courses. Moreover, at the end of the academic year, students are given the honor of 'graduating' and getting a diploma that recognizes their expertise in the domain of ethics and morals. According to the report of Govinda Prema in the ISKCON news of April 2016, participating in a character training program might improve one's chances of success in the professional field by allowing future employers to acknowledge their involvement in such a program (Penumala, 2023). After four years of lecturing students in student accommodation, the devotees decided to create their own hostel called "The Hare Krishna Training Centre" in 2015. Govinda Prema stated that the goal was for students who had achieved mastery in the "Krishna conscious theory" during their Simple Living, High Thinking Seminars to apply their learned knowledge successfully. As per a report from ISKCON news In April 2016, the Training Center had an initial enrollment of only six students. Nevertheless, it has undergone substantial expansion in the previous year and can currently accommodate a total of forty individuals (Nesbitt, 2018).

It is noteworthy to emphasize that the current members of the Center are exclusively male. However, there are intentions to develop a distinct Training Center exclusively for women. On weekdays, from 5:30am to 8:00am, all students participate in a morning program that includes japa (repetitive chanting), an inspirational session, and breakfast. Afterwards, they engaged in their academic endeavors at the institution, usually finishing their activities about 5pm. In the evening, everyone gathered at the central area to have prasadam, perform personal purification, and take part in an evening japa session, a short kirtan, and an extra educational session. Govinda Prema stated that the course syllabus included the Bhagavad-gita, Nectar of Instruction, Nectar of Devotion, and Srimad-Bhagavatam. Moreover, the students are allocated particular subjects to provide presentations on. For example, a student who was enrolled for three months recently gave a speech on anger management. The student used the story of Durvasa Muni and Ambarisa Maharaja from the Bhagavatam as an example (ISKCON news, April, 2016).

On Sundays, students participate enthusiastically in the extensive morning program organized at the ISKCON Nairobi temple, and then dedicate their time to community service for the rest of the day. Afterwards, they engage in a lively kirtan session that lasts throughout the evening. Govinda Prema states that the Hare Krishna Training Centre is able to retain students due to several elements, such as the high level of cleanliness, the provision of prasadam (sacred food), the emphasis on safety, the sense of brotherhood and friendship among the students, and the imparting of philosophical teachings. Parents may get satisfaction when they see their children embracing a clean and health-conscious lifestyle in a respected environment during their visits. Typically, students devote their whole college experience to the Training Centre. After graduating, the students continue to actively participate as committed members of the larger ISKCON Nairobi community. They actively educate their spouses about Krishna awareness and frequently accompany their families to the temple (ISKCON news, April, 2016). According to Govinda Prema, individuals believe that it offers them practical solutions to the everyday challenges they face in life. As per a report by ISKCON news in April 2016, there have been cases where former law students who received training from the organization have later obtained work as court or parliamentary aides. These individuals have conveyed a deep and significant change in their lives, crediting this favorable change to the guidance they received from ISKCON.

Conclusion

This book offers comprehensive analysis of the establishment and growth of the Hare Krishna movement, documenting its origins in the United States and its subsequent spread to Kenya. Under the leadership of Srila Prabhupada, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami introduced the application of ISKCON principles in Mombasa and Nairobi, Kenya, which later extended to include other cities in Kenya such as Kisumu. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) addresses the diverse needs of modern society, going beyond its theoretical framework. Throughout the past 53 years, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has developed several temples, centers, and rural villages in various places across the globe. ISKCON has also built a significant number of vegetarian eateries. Furthermore, there are further community efforts such as the Food for Life Project and several local assembly organizations that facilitate the provision of free food resources. Currently, there are institutions like the Bhaktivedanta Institute (BI) that function as scientific research divisions, advocating for the use of Vedic ideas in the investigation of the origins of the natural world and living beings. Several online projects, including ISKCON.com, Krishna.com, and various Krishna websites, were launched. Presently, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), established by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, proudly maintains a worldwide presence, encompassing a network of more than 500 centers spanning several countries.

The propagation of the movement faced obstacles in its expansion throughout Kenya. The main challenge has been to effectively spread the principles of Krishna consciousness in accordance with the teachings of the founder and spiritual master, while also persuading individuals that adopting a Krishna conscious lifestyle is the best way to address the current challenges of modern society. The presence of Christian missionary activities in Kenya has had a substantial and lasting impact, making a considerable contribution to the country's growth. Ensuring the effectiveness of transmitting Krishna consciousness in its authentic state is essential for tackling the obstacles faced by the Hare Krishna mission in Kenya and Kisumu. The movement has prioritized its endeavors towards

fostering the growth of native persons who have wholeheartedly embraced the ideas of the movement, with the objective of growing them into positions of leadership within different metropolitan areas in Kenya. This strategy approach aims to efficiently address the above listed difficulties. Yogesa dasa adhikari is presently located in Nairobi, making arrangements to take on the role of leading the Nairobi temple. Additionally, it is important to mention that Sarvavit dasa brahmachari is presently undergoing instruction in Mombasa to prepare for his future position as the temple president. He has lately completed a new induction and is scheduled to take on his specific responsibilities within a period of six to twelve months. Upon taking up their positions, they will undertake leadership duties within the ISKCON mission in Africa.

There is a growing trend of people receiving training in many service domains, including Deity worship, cooking, gardening, farming, and related activities, according to their unique capacities. The aforementioned organization will eventually take over the tasks currently being performed by the Hare Krishna movement's global students. The ISKCON movement in Kenya has undergone significant development by effectively adjusting to the evolving social environment. Although originating from India and the East, this movement has managed to gain significant popularity among a small number of believers, particularly young people, in Kenya (ISKCON Vaishnava Research Forum 2012).

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