Hare Krishna Transformed, by E. Burke Rochford, Jr. New York University Press, 2007, 284pp., pb., \$24.00. ISBN-13: 9780814775790.

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This impressive volume is aptly named, as it documents, explains, and analyses the dramatic changes that the Hare Krishna movement has undergone in recent decades. No one is better prepared to examine recent developments in this movement than Burke Rochford, as his scholarship on the Krishna movement has been impressive, and presents one of the best documented sociologically informed histories of any of the New Religious Movements (NRMs) that attracted so much attention over the past several decades.

This Vedic centered movement began in 1966 in New York City, established by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and representing an important western expansion of the Bengali *bhakti* tradition of Krishna Consciousness. This movement “caught on” with many disillusioned western youth, and the movement spread across America and to other countries, including most western nations, and even into Latin America and India. Later the movement developed as well in eastern and central European countries, and has had a very active presence in places such as Hungary, Poland, and Russia.

Prabhupada died in 1977, and since then the movement has experienced considerable distress, scandal, and change. Those designated to have authority over the movement after Prabhupada’s death did not fare well in that role, and neither did the movement for a lengthy period afterward. Initially the movement attracted thousands of young people, especially males, and convinced them to accept a new and very different set of beliefs, values, and behaviors. And the movement prospered for several years, using innovative, even if controversial, methods to raise funds. However, the financial base of the movement collapsed in the 1980s, forcing many changes in how the movement operated, and leading to many compromises of the values and practices that had been the hallmark of the movement in its beginning. (As an aside, Rochford fails to explain in this volume how and why the financial collapse took place, which is the one major failure of his treatment, since that collapse led to so many other difficulties.)

Rochford has been studying the Hare Krishnas for nearly 40 years, and thus can document changes that he has seen himself. In this volume he focuses on

what happened to the second generation, the Krishna children born to the original devotees. But he also deals insightfully with other significant issues, such as the challenging and changing role of women in the movement, the process of change in how families are viewed, the development of a congregational approach to organization and the Hinduization of the movement that has allowed it to survive, even if in a radically different incarnation. Each of these major areas is the focus of a chapter in the volume, and these will be summarized below. Before doing so, however, it should be noted that Rochford, ever the sociologist, does considerable participant observation of various Krishna centers and activities, as well as a large number of interviews on which he bases his volume, and he also has access to other research that has been done by the Krishna leadership. (There is an informative appendix that presents his instrumentation and additional results.) So, this is very definitely a book grounded in solid data, and it also is well informed of relevant sociological theories where deemed appropriate.

The book's 15 page introduction includes a description of the research that led to this volume, and offers a short history of ISKCON for those not acquainted with Rochford's previous work. An overview of the following chapters is included too. (Note that there is also a glossary of ISKCON terms in the back of the book, which also is helpful.) Chapter one is a very interesting, and disturbing, first person account of one second generation male whose experiences as a young person growing up in the movement were sometimes very traumatic. He experienced separation from his family, considerable physical, psychological, and even sexual abuse at the hands of those operating the boarding schools within the movement. One of the major scandals that occurred within the Krishna movement was the quite abusive treatment of children who were usually sent to the schools as a part of the anti-family sentiment that pervaded the early years of the Krishna movement. The many experiences of the young man described in chapter one are presented as fairly typical, and if so, speaks reams about effects of the anti-child policy that was prevalent in the early years of the movement. Apparently children in general were not valued, and thought to be a hindrance to the achievement of Krishna consciousness by the devotees, especially the more valued men.

The second chapter focuses on the history of families in the movement through the first three decades, and paints a disturbing picture. Families were discouraged as a distraction to achieving a higher state of consciousness. However, as the financial situation of the movement deteriorated in the 1980s, families were forced to move out of the temples and get jobs in the external society. This led, predictably, to more of an emphasis on families,

even as ISKCON leaders continued to denigrate families. This movement out of the temples was a direct cause of the virtual collapse of communalism in the movement and the development of a more congregational approach to life in ISKCON.

Chapter three goes into considerable detail concerning the revelations of child abuse at Krishna schools, where many children were quite literally dumped to avoid the development of close parental ties between child and parents, and also to discourage the growth of a family-oriented culture. This chapter is not for the faint of heart, but must be understood as part of the history of the movement.

The fourth chapter focuses on the effects of families with children giving up on the Krishna schools and enrolling their children in public schools. This occurred also as a result of families giving up on communal life and moving out of the temples because of the lack of financial support to keep the temples operating. The chapter's poignant stories of how the children reacted are moving, and concerning for any who value alternative lifestyles in contemporary materialistic society.

Chapter five focuses on the experiences of women, who generally were degraded by the operation of Krishna theology for decades. Women were viewed as temptresses who would deter men from achieving higher forms of consciousness. Thus, they were relegated to the status of servants who were to be seen (but not often) and certainly not heard. This chapter details the somewhat successful efforts of "pro-change" women to modify the culture and practices of the movement, efforts that were helped considerably by the loss of financial support, and the lack of men to fill all the leadership positions in the various temples around the world. However, there was a backlash against these efforts by pro-change women (and the ISKCON leaders who supported them), and some men within the movement fought hard against any changes in the status of women, bringing charges that feminist values were destroying the movement. This effort, which ultimately was defeated, is detailed in chapter six, perhaps with more detail than the effort warranted.

Rochford attempts to set the changes in ISKCON within a broader context in chapter seven, describing how the movement overall has changed, as have the experiences of the typical member of the movement. These major changes have put the entire movement at serious risk of disappearing. There is similar literature available on other movements which he might have accessed, but this chapter is at least a strong statement about how the Krishna movement was forced to change in the face of all the problems, scandals, and pressures experienced as the movement grappled with changing internal as well as external conditions.

Chapter eight describes the coming to the rescue of the Hindu cavalry that arguably has kept ISKCON from disappearing altogether, at least within America. A combination of factors has led to truly remarkable, even if unintended, changes in ISKCON. There were present in America many Hindu immigrants from India and other places who were without a place of worship in an American religious landscape dominated by congregationalism. The Krishna temples were quite noticeable, and well-advertised for decades by active ISKCON members promoting their faith among non-Hindu Americans. But, as it turns out, more Hindus were noticing than those being targeted by the proselytizing activities. And, when the temples became embroiled in financial problems, some of them starting welcoming immigrant Hindus into the temples, in an effort to stave off the total collapse of the temples. This worked, perhaps too well for some, and now many Krishna temples are dominated by Hindu immigrants, some of whom have different ideas about which deities are important and should be worshiped, as well as other cultural matters. So, many problems have arisen, and much conflict, but it is clear that there is no going back to the supposedly halcyon days of the beginning of the movement.

Many temples are now being operated by Hindu immigrants, and many devotees of the “traditional” ISKCON type are now living outside the temples, on their own, and have loose ties with the temple. This latter group is discussed in the last chapter, which describes briefly how the lives of devotees have changed with the new regime and set of cultural practices. This sobering chapter is quite a commentary on what has happened with many idealistic youth who chose to join, at least for a time, some of the controversial newer religions.

This book is a major statement about what can and has happened to one of those NRMs that arose in the 1960s and 1970s. The experience of ISKCON is unique in terms of how the Hindu immigrant community has rescued the movement, but in many other ways the story of what has happened to transform ISKCON is one that has been repeated in many other of the NRMS that captured the imagination of the public for several decades. I recommend Burke Rochford’s latest book heartedly as a well done and sociologically informed case study. It is also quite well written, and flows well.