

<https://doi.org/10.25050/JDTREA.2023.3.1.165>

Angela R. Burt, *Hare Krishna in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 96 pp. ISSN 2635-232X, \$22.00 (online)

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The Elements in New Religious Movements (NRMs) series published by Cambridge University Press are useful for researchers and students alike, as they are compact, well-researched and clearly written, and have a contemporary focus. Angela Burt's study of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has five chapters (including an Introduction and Conclusion); this review will address each chapter in turn.

"Introduction and Historical Origins of the Hare Krishna Movement" opens the book with a historical sketch of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition from Chaitanya in the early sixteenth century to A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (1896–1977), who brought devotion to Krishna to the United States in 1965. The issue of whether to classify ISKCON as a NRM, as opposed to a part of "Hinduism" (a problematic Western-originated term that nevertheless designates a "world religion" in the twenty-first century) and the essentially transnational nature of its development, are briefly touched upon. Burt also provides a short review of scholarship on the group and methodological lenses that may be applied fruitfully, including Rodney Stark on conditions required for a religious movement to succeed, and David Bromley and Gordon Melton's ideas about alignment processes.

Chapter 2, "Beliefs and Practices" covers living in temple environs, taking guidance from a guru, studying Srila Praphupada's books, mission, diet, marriage and family, pilgrimage, retreats, and festivals. Chapter 3, "Institutional and Community Dynamics," discusses the structure of ISKCON, with its Governing Body Commission (GBC), the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust which issues ISKCON publications, and temple presidents at each temple. The ebb and flow of devotees between the West and India is noted and temples in Vrindavan and Mayapura remain focal points for ISKCON in India, and international pilgrims. ISKCON was initially Western in membership, but has over the decades increasingly acquired Indian members and come closer to mainstream Hinduism in orientation. Burt is careful to explain that ISKCON membership is a formal status and a larger community that identifies as Gaudiya Vaishnava exists, with the assemblage of all being "the Hare Krishna movement" (30). This section also discusses of the exit of members from the mid-1980s onwards to other Gaudiya Vaishnava groups, mostly, and the scandals concerning Kirtanananda Swami (b. Keith Ham, 1937-2011) or Bhaktipada, who was expelled from ISKCON in 1987 and avoided a conspiracy to

murder charge, but “was convicted of racketeering and mail fraud violations in 1993” (31). Schisms are covered, and the fascinating ISKCON Revival Movement, which aims to replace ISKCON’s management with a new structure that acknowledges only Srila Prabhupada as initiating guru, is especially interesting. Multiple shifts from monastic to congregational life and from Western to Indian congregants, the development of an online presence and from street proselytization to varied modes of outreach, through restaurants, retreats, yoga centres, and festivals are canvassed. Today, there is less emphasis on wearing robes and having shaven heads, yet some things are constants: literature “remains a core proselytization practice” (42) and a range of teaching and research institutions contribute to members’ education.

Chapter 4, “Issues, Controversies, and Challenges,” is a study of various things that have made ISKCON controversial since its inception in the 1960s, such as the ‘cult controversy’ accusations of brainwashing and mind control in the 1970s, especially in America, and state persecution in the Soviet Union from around 1980. The contemporary Russian Federation is determinedly against ISKCON, too, claiming that members are religious extremists and that the group itself is a “demonically oriented religion” and a “totalitarian cult” (50). Burt discusses a range of legal disputes, from cases restricting book distribution as an activity in the United States, through the successful United Kingdom campaign to keep Bhaktivedanta Manor open as a worship space, to cases concerning child abuse in ISKCON. These are outward-facing disputes with host societies. There are also internal disputes, importantly about succession and “institutionalized child abuse,” which she terms “one of [ISKCON’s] darkest secrets” (55). Attention is also devoted to the theological question of the origin of the soul; in 1995 the GBC pronounced in favour of Prabhupada’s expressed view that the soul “falls down into the material world” after rejecting a personal relationship with Krishna in the spiritual realm (56). A controversial book, *In Vaikuntha Not Even the Leaves Fall* (2019) was banned and one of its authors, Satyanarayana Dasa, left ISKCON to found the Jiva Institute in Vrindavan. This controversy feeds a current of thought that Prabhupada often expressed views that were “offensive to various groups including women, people of various nations and races, members of the LGBTIQI community, scholars, scientists, and other Gaudiya Vaishnava groups” (57). Controversy still exists over the editing of Prabhupada’s books and the moves since the 1990s to allow women to take prominent roles in ISKCON are similarly polarising. ISKCON in India is usually the strongest conservative voice, so a new group, Krishna West, was established in 2014 by Hridayananda das Goswami; this group operates within ISKCON and strongly pushes a Western identity for the movement, opposing the Hinduisation and Indianisation of the religion. Burt covers debates about LGBTQ+ members, the rise of veganism, and the Covid-19 pandemic, contrasting the conservatism of early ISKCON with attempts to be more inclusive and in line with changes in host societies.

Chapter 5 provides a short conclusion to the book, which has a summary of contents, a reiteration of the value of frame alignment and resource mobilization theory as lenses through which to analyse ISKCON, and stresses again Burke Rochford's view that the success of ISKCON depends on the path it commits to in "a rapidly changing world" (69). There is a comprehensive list of references at the end, which will be of great use to students studying the history and sociology of Krishna Consciousness. Angela Burt has produced a pithy, wide-ranging, and relevant book on ISKCON for this series, and is to be congratulated. I recommend it to all interested in NRMs, Indian religion, transnational movements, and the sociology of the contemporary world. It is a must for the libraries of educational institutions.