

FOREWORD

In 1965 an elderly man from India came to the United States to fulfill a promise to his Spiritual Master to preach Krishna Consciousness in the West. Unbelievably, in a matter of only a few short years, he and his followers had built a worldwide religious movement of nearly 5000 initiated disciples and tens of thousands of followers and supporters. Moreover, many millions of books and other pieces of spiritual literature had been distributed in every corner of the globe. With success came controversy, however, as a well organized anti cult movement sought to limit the influence of Hare Krishna. Charges of brainwashing provided the media and the general public with a quasi theory to account for the growth of “menacing cults” like Hare Krishna. Yet in uncritically accepting false claims about “mind control,” many never came to understand the social and cultural significance of new religious groups such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more popularly known as Hare Krishna. Nor did most members of the public understand the legitimate appeals of ISKCON; the richness and authenticity of its spiritual tradition, its lifestyle of “simple living and high thinking”, and, perhaps most importantly, the charisma and spiritual potency of its founding leader, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Śrīla Prabhupāda.

It has been almost fifteen years since the disappearance of Śrīla Prabhupāda in November, 1977. While much has happened to Prabhupāda’s disciples and his movement

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during this time his memory and inspiration live on forever. Most, of course, immediately think of the legacy represented by Prabhupāda's translations and commentary on the Vedic literature, or his movement with communities of devotees located throughout the world. Yet there is another part of this legacy that lives on in the individual and collective memory of his disciples. In this first volume of Hari Śauri's *Transcendental Diary* the reader comes to understand the man who has touched the hearts and minds of so many people around the world.

Some might point to good luck, others Krishna's arrangement, but by whatever means, Hari Śauri found himself in the enviable position of serving as Prabhupāda's personal assistant over a sixteen month period from November, 1975, until March of 1977. By way of Hari Śauri's diary we gain a personal and detailed understanding of Prabhupāda the man, as well as the spiritual leader. Hari Śauri provides us with a window into the activities, thoughts, and concerns of Prabhupāda. In this volume we travel with Prabhupāda throughout India between November, 1975, and April, 1976. One comes away from this book with a personal connection to Prabhupāda, appreciating his love for Krishna as well as his many disciples. We witness Prabhupāda's sadness as his young followers faced personal and spiritual problems; his never ending joy and delight as book distribution simply exploded in 1975 and 1976; and, the purpose of his chastisement for the occasional errant disciple, including the author.

Yet we learn more about this remarkable man and his ability to inspire his followers. We join Prabhupāda and his disciples on many morning walks. On these occasions, we see the intellectual as well as the spiritual side of Prabhupāda. He debates with his disciples often challenging the logic and theory of evolutionary science and the "rascal scientists." We see Prabhupāda's mastery of argument and his commitment to doing Krishna's work no matter what the caliber of the opposition. It is clear, as well,

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that these debates with his disciples help sharpen their own philosophical understanding and preaching skills.

The value of this volume and the ones to follow can not be overstated. To the disciples of Prabhupāda, the accounts contained here are a spark bringing to light endless stories and emotions that only further their connection to the Spiritual Master. To those devotees who had no personal contact or association with Śrīla Prabhupāda, this book serves a particularly important purpose; it becomes the basis for “knowing” Prabhupāda in a more intimate way. It allows new disciples and aspiring disciples to connect with the purity and inspiration of Prabhupāda and the mission of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Through Prabhupāda’s example of full surrender to his own guru one also learns how to approach and serve the Spiritual Master. To the average reader with no direct involvement in Prabhupāda’s movement this book is also a source of inspiration. It is nothing short of miraculous that one man could inspire so many people throughout the world to become God conscious. We learn here how and why this has happened.

For scholars and students of religion the material presented represents a critically important historical record. Anyone seeking to understand Prabhupāda’s movement specifically, or the centrality of charismatic leadership to the development of religious movements, will want to consider this book. The use of a diary to record and present Prabhupāda’s life has helped assure that the material presented is richly detailed and an accurate reflection of unfolding events. Hari Śauri has given the reader a clear and rather straight forward presentation of events rather than engaging in historical reconstruction meant to serve partisan or theoretical interests. As such, it will be of great interest to historians and sociologists of religion who seek to understand the cultural and social significance of Prabhupāda and the broader Hare Krishna movement.

In 1976, I had the good fortune of seeing Prabhupāda during his final stay at ISKCON’s Los Angeles community.

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At the time I was new to my research and could only vaguely understand the significance of Prabhupāda as a man and spiritual leader. Over the years it has become clearer to me that Prabhupāda was and is the lifeline of the Hare Krishna movement. While no longer physically present, his example and teachings still inspire those who are touched by him and his movement. Hare Krishna.

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