

## FOREWORD

**T**his fourth volume of Hari Śauri's *A Transcendental Diary* provides one of the most detailed and fascinating accounts of the formation of a new religious movement available. As the personal servant of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, founder and guru of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the author enjoyed unprecedented access to both the public and private life of the Swami, and fortunately for the reader, Hari Śauri recorded his experiences in lucid detail. Augmented by archival material in both written and recorded form, Hari Śauri has presented a document for which both devotees and scholars should be greatly indebted.

In this volume we follow Bhaktivedanta Swami on the last leg of his final world tour to Teheran, then to Bombay, Hyderabad, New Delhi, and the sacred town of Vrindaban. We experience an almost minute-by-minute account of the Swami's meetings with politicians, scholars, scientists, industrialists, lawyers and ordinary citizens, as he tirelessly preached Krishna consciousness to them and persuaded them to support his movement. More importantly perhaps, we see the interactions with his disciples as Śrīla Prabhupāda attempted to keep them steady in their own faith, instruct them in ritual and practice, guide them in their own preaching, and generally demonstrate how to manage an ever-growing international religious organization.

A significant problem in studying and understanding religious movements is the usual scarcity of first-hand

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information during their early years. Most often we receive reflective, embellished reconstructions of the early history. With *A Transcendental Diary*, however, Hari Śauri presents vivid accounts of the activities and conversations of Śrīla Prabhupāda without interpretation.

While the *Diary* includes information on many relevant topics, perhaps its greatest contribution concerns insight into the importance of the illusive quality called charisma. Apart from the social, cultural and historical conditions surrounding the formation of any religious movement, social scientists agree that one essential factor centers around the personal qualities of the leader. A charismatic, prophetic individual is to be found at the center of all religious movements. Starting usually with a small band of enthusiastic and committed followers and little organizational structure, many new religious movements are short-lived. Few continue past the death of the founder, while fewer have lasting historical significance. Christianity, Buddhism and Islam are obvious examples of the latter type. ISKCON, still flourishing thirty years after its founding and almost twenty years after the Swami's passing, promises to also fit into that rare category.

Bhaktivedanta achieved the unlikely goal of transplanting Indian culture to the United States and around the world. During the late 1960s and throughout most of the '70s, he attracted thousands of disciples and unknown numbers of lay practitioners to the worship of Krishna. As the *Diary* shows, this required strong, firm and expert leadership of an extraordinary magnitude. Hari Śauri's account allows us to better understand the meaning of personal charisma by providing a full and detailed account of Śrīla Prabhupāda's daily life during the years he worked as the Swami's personal servant.

For example, we are awed at the Swami's high level of energy, despite old age and failing health. For hours every night, regardless of where he happened to be, Prabhupāda translated India's sacred books into English and wrote commentaries on their meaning. This resulted in the pub-

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lication of most of the significant religious texts of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, and sales of these books represented a large portion of the organization's income. We also see first hand in this volume Śrīla Prabhupāda returning again to India, working tirelessly to revitalize his native culture, which he saw as on a rapid materialistic decline. In his encounters with a wide variety of Indian citizens who came seeking his blessings, Śrīla Prabhupāda never missed an opportunity to preach to them and persuasively argue that his foreign disciples be accepted in India.

We also see how Śrīla Prabhupāda personally read and answered the many letters that came from his disciples around the world, giving them both practical and spiritual advice. No problem, however daunting, was left without some clear solution. He was directly involved in the expansion and management of the entire ISKCON organization, interceding to successfully purchase land for a farm, or build an urban temple. These are only a few examples of the personal qualities of Bhaktivedanta Swami documented by Hari Śauri. One thing that is clear from *A Transcendental Diary*, however, is that ISKCON's success during its early history depended directly upon the personal knowledge, skill, and energy of its founder.

With this new and detailed information about the personal charisma of Śrīla Prabhupāda, the intimate portraits of the Swami's private activities, and the many other insights into the development of a new religious movement, students of religion, social scientists, devotees and the general reading public must extend congratulations and gratitude to Hari Śauri for the publication of the *Diary*. It is a resource that only he could have produced and one that will further our understanding of ISKCON and its founder greatly.

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