

Received date: 13.12.2024
Accepted date: 14.02.2025
Publication date: 17.03.2025



Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems

International Academic Journal

ISSN: 2790-0169; E-ISSN 2790-0177; OCLC Number 1322801874

Hare Krishna: Bridges Between Vaishnavite Heritage and Contemporary Hinduism

Rabiaa Guiridi¹

Abstract

The Hare Krishna movement stands as one of the most prominent examples of the dynamism seen in modern religious movements, successfully attracting followers from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. This article explores the factors that contributed to the success of this sect, as well as the mechanisms used by the Hare Krishna movement to spread its beliefs and values. Furthermore, the article highlights the role of the sect in building bridges between Vaishnavite heritage and contemporary Hinduism. More precisely, it examines how the Hare Krishna movement has become a symbol of spiritual renewal within Hinduism and how this has impacted the global religious landscape.

Keywords: Hare Krishna Sect – Vaishnavism – Hinduism.

Introduction:

Our research, titled *"Hare Krishna: Bridges Between Vaishnavite Heritage and Contemporary Hinduism,"* falls within the broader question of the representation of Hinduism in the contemporary world. The materialistic nature of Western civilization has paved the way for spiritual sects of Asian

¹ Dr., Costantine University—Algeria, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0477-0428>

origin, which, over time, have established independent and recognized entities across various continents. Among these sects is the Hare Krishna movement, globally known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). This religious organization is actively involved in social activities by bringing together believers under the banner of glorifying the deity Krishna and chanting his name, believing that this practice liberates them from worldly suffering and grants them eternal happiness.

The Hare Krishna sect raises numerous questions about the relationship between Hindu religious heritage and modernity—specifically, how a religious movement can preserve its original identity while adapting to contemporary demands. This leads us to the central research question: *How has the Hare Krishna movement contributed to preserving and renewing Vaishnavite heritage while simultaneously building bridges with contemporary Hinduism?*

To answer these questions, the research will address the following points: an introduction to the deity Krishna in Vaishnavism, focusing on the symbolism of the deity and the teachings of the sect, including Krishna’s status in Hinduism; an overview of the Vaishnavite sect and its teachings; a section dedicated to the founder of the Hare Krishna chant; an introduction to the Hare Krishna sect and its founder; and finally, an exploration of the key doctrines and teachings of the sect.

As for the reasons that prompted me to research this topic, it is due to the scarcity of Arabic references and studies on this sect, which motivated me to conduct a scientific study to dispel misconceptions and clarify the ambiguities surrounding this movement, while also exploring its beliefs and teachings. The Hare Krishna movement stands out as one of the most prominent Eastern religions that have gained traction in the West.

Most of the sources for this research are in English due to the aforementioned reason. Key references include the writings of the sect’s founder, Bhaktivedanta Swami, such as *The Teachings of Lord Chaitanya* and his role as the present Acharya of Krishna Consciousness and founder of ISKCON. Additional sources include the sect’s monthly magazine, *Back to Godhead*, the *Krishna Consciousness Handbook*, and the official website of the movement: www.iskcon.org. Also notable is the work of Edward F. Bryant, an English scholar specializing in Indian religions and the history of Krishna at Rutgers University, along with other references that will be introduced throughout the research.

Accordingly, I have chosen to explore the topic “*Hare Krishna: Bridges Between Vaishnavite Heritage and Contemporary Hinduism*” using the historical method to investigate the relationship between the development of the concept of the deity Krishna in Vaishnavism and the emergence and evolution of the Hare Krishna movement. This study will trace the historical development of this concept and examine how it is reflected in the beliefs and practices of the sect. Additionally, the

historical circumstances that influenced both the evolution of this concept and the rise and spread of the Hare Krishna movement will be analyzed.

Furthermore, using the analytical method, this research will explore the origins and doctrines of the sect, focusing on the status of Krishna, the teachings of the sect, and the role of its founder, aiming to understand the relationship between the Hare Krishna movement and Vaishnavite heritage, as well as its contribution to shaping contemporary Hinduism.

I. Krishna in Vaishnavism: Symbolism of the Deity and the Teachings of the Sect

1.1 The Status of Krishna in Hinduism:

Hindu belief is characterized by the existence of many deities, most of which are considered to be different manifestations of a single supreme reality. In Hinduism, the deity often takes a human form to facilitate personal and direct interaction with devotees. The most renowned embodiment of this concept is the deity Krishna, whose life, achievements, and divine mission on earth have been extensively detailed in sacred Hindu scriptures.

According to Hindu historical accounts, Krishna is believed to have appeared approximately five thousand years ago and is thought to have lived as a human for 125 years. He is considered the lord of the Hindu household, renowned for his extraordinary and remarkable deeds. Krishna is regarded as the supreme personality of the Godhead and stands as the most popular and charismatic figure in Indian mythology and imagination. He is one of the ten incarnations (avatars) of the god Vishnu (the second person of the Brahmanic Trimurti). Some sects even consider him a complete deity. Consequently, Krishna has become a source of inspiration for Indian art and literature, often depicted as a blue-skinned god adorned with various jewels and playing the flute.

Krishna's persona embodies a rare blend of contradictions: the mischievous cowherd boy, the musical dancer adored by the Gopis of Vrindavan (the devoted maidens deeply in love with the divine), and the beloved, lively young man, as well as the shrewd statesman, warrior, and savior in times of crisis. In the Hindu perspective, the contradictions within Krishna's character form the essence of his myth. He is not merely a deity but a cosmic embodiment that integrates contrasting human and divine attributes, representing love, compassion, strength, and wisdom, as well as the playful child and the charming lover.

1. Krishna between Sacred Texts and Popular Narratives

A. Krishna in Sacred Hindu Texts:

1. Krishna in the Vedas:

Although Krishna is a central and essential figure in Hindu belief, there is no direct mention of him in the Vedas. Instead, Vishnu is mentioned in the Vedas as Aditya, the Sun God. This absence is likely due to the nature of the Vedas as collections of mantras focused on religious rituals, placing emphasis on rites and natural deities rather than storytelling, heroism, or moral teachings.

2. Krishna in the Upanishads:

The Chandogya Upanishad contains what scholars consider the earliest reference to Krishna, where he is mentioned as *Kiputra-Krishnadeva*, meaning “the black-colored god,” along with his disciple *Ghora-Angirasa*, a solar priest, in a passage teaching liberation from desire. However, a critical question arises here: can we confidently assert that the Krishna mentioned in the Upanishads is the same Krishna known from the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita? Especially considering that the Upanishads are philosophical texts centered on the concepts of *Atman* and *Brahman* (the means to achieve liberation from desire), whereas the traditional image of Krishna is that of a beloved mythological hero.

3. Krishna in the Mahabharata:

In the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, Krishna plays the role of a spiritual guide to the warrior Arjuna, offering moral and ethical counsel as the charioteer during the Kurukshetra War to help the Pandavas reclaim their kingdom. Here, Krishna is portrayed historically as a national hero, blending the roles of a moral philosopher and a strategic statesman.

4. Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita:

In the two great Indian epics, Vishnu is incarnated as Rama in the *Ramayana* and Krishna in the *Mahabharata*, with the *Bhagavad Gita* being a key text within the latter. The *Bhagavad Gita*, the most renowned Hindu scripture, is often interpreted as a theological discourse delivered by Krishna to his disciple and friend, Arjuna. Scholars regard this discourse as a pivotal moment in Krishna’s mature life. Krishna’s participation in the Kurukshetra War was not physical; he appeared as a counselor to Arjuna, one of the main characters in the *Mahabharata*. Thus, Hindu epics emphasize the multiple incarnations of Vishnu, including Rama and Krishna, with Krishna playing a central role in the *Bhagavad Gita* by presenting profound philosophical insights on life and moral duties.

B. Mentions of Krishna in Non-Hindu Sources:

The account of Megasthenes serves as an important historical testimony to the interaction between Indian and Greek civilizations. Megasthenes visited the court of the Indian Emperor Chandragupta Maurya at the end of the fourth century BCE and provided valuable insights into the character of Krishna as perceived in ancient India from an external perspective. Megasthenes is credited with writing the book *Indica*, although the original text has not survived. However, classical historians such as Arrian and Diodorus extensively quoted from it.

In *Indica*, Megasthenes describes the tribe of the *Sourasenoï*, who particularly worshiped Heracles, in a region that included the cities of *Methora* (Methura/Mathura) and *Kleisobora*, traversed by the navigable river *Jobares* (Yamuna). This description aligns with the Greek stereotypical view of foreign deities, often comparing them to their own gods. Evidence suggests

that the *Sourasenoi* were actually the *Shurasenas*, a branch of the *Yadu* dynasty to which Krishna belonged, and that Heracles corresponds to Krishna. The city of *Methora* is indeed *Mathura*, Krishna's birthplace, and the *Jobares* river is the *Yamuna* river.

This correlation is further supported by Curtius's account of Alexander the Great's encounter with Porus, whose soldiers bore the image of Heracles at the forefront. In summary, this passage offers valuable insight into the interaction between Indian and Greek civilizations, with Megasthenes's account serving as an invaluable observation of life in ancient India from an external perspective, helping us understand how the Greeks perceived Hindu mythology.

Early Buddhist texts, such as the *Niddesa Pali* dating back to the fourth century BCE, provide a glimpse into the religious landscape of pre-common era India. This text references the worship of Krishna (*Vasudeva*) and his brother *Balarama* prior to the beginning of the common era. The mentions in this text indicate that the worship of Krishna was sufficiently widespread to merit acknowledgment and commentary, albeit sometimes in a negative light, suggesting that Krishna's worship was an integral part of the diverse religious scene of that time.

Krishna's life reflects a complex evolution of his character, marked by mythological stories about his birth, human existence, divine achievements, and philosophical teachings—narratives that were transmitted through oral tradition and eventually preserved in sacred texts over an extensive period.

1.2. Vaishnavite Teachings:

A. Introduction to the Vaishnavite Sect:

Vaishnavism (or Vishnuism) is the largest religious branch within Hinduism and has profoundly influenced India's intellectual and cultural history. It was embraced by Gupta kings, such as Heliodorus, and prominent philosophers like Ramanuja, Kabir, Chaitanya, and Tukaram. Vaishnavism produced significant religious literary works such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Tamil Alvars' hymns, and the *Padavalies* in Bengal. It is distinguished by its strong emphasis on *bhakti* (loving devotion) and *prasada* (divine grace), giving it deep spiritual richness and diverse artistic and literary expression.

Vaishnavites worship Vishnu or one of his incarnations, such as Krishna, as the supreme deity. Unlike the traditional view of Vishnu as the preserver of the universe, Vaishnavism perceives him as both the creator and dissolver, making it a form of Hindu monotheism. Scholar Monier Williams described Vaishnavism as representing the “true religion” of India due to its focus on a personal relationship between the devotee and Vishnu, manifested through *bhakti* (devotion). This development made Vaishnavism one of the most popular Hindu sects, with Krishna, in particular, revered as the compassionate and loving deity, often seen as a savior and liberator.

Vaishnavism encompasses a broad religious current with numerous sub-sects and diverse beliefs. Despite this diversity, Vaishnavites agree on the worship of a single supreme deity while acknowledging other deities with specific attributes and functions as manifestations of the supreme god. Vaishnavites are known for preserving their distinctive rituals and customs, including wearing the *Urdhva-Pundra*, a sectarian mark made of two vertical lines meeting at the bottom in a curve symbolizing the footprint of Lord Vishnu. This mark distinguishes Vaishnavites and signifies their religious affiliation.

Vaishnavites believe that their supreme deity is the eternal essence of the universe, manifesting in various names such as *Bhagavat* (the Blessed), *Purushottama* (the Supreme Person), *Narayana*, and *Hari*. This deity is described as eternal (*Aja, Sasvata*), the creator and sustainer (*Dhata*), the embodiment of immortality (*Amritam*), and the eternal father, mother, and teacher of the universe. According to Vaishnavite teacher Madhava, this deity surpasses Brahma and Shiva as he remains indissoluble, periodically incarnating (*avatars*) to save his devotees from suffering, as seen in his primary incarnations: Rama Dasharathi and Krishna Vasudeva, leading his followers to liberation (*moksha*).

Thus, as the largest branch of Hinduism, Vaishnavism represents a significant religious and cultural force in India and beyond. Its emphasis on fostering a deep personal relationship between the devotee and the deity (*bhakti*) through loving devotion to Krishna and other Vishnu incarnations aims to achieve spiritual union and liberation from the cycle of life and death.

B. Philosophical Teachings of Vaishnavism:

- **The Concept of the Personal God:** *Ishvara*, considered the essence of existence and absolute consciousness, is explored deeply in the *Bhagavad Gita*, portraying him as the transcendent and ultimate reality according to Vedantic philosophy. Despite this infinite conception, Vaishnavism embraces a monotheistic view of a personal god who manifests in the material world and interacts with creation. This divine incarnation, as envisioned in Vaishnavism, serves as a means of liberation and preservation of the universe, appearing in various forms (*avatars*) to guide humanity toward the ultimate goal of union with God.

- **Vaishnavism’s Unique Stance on the Brahmin Caste and Priesthood:** While Brahmins traditionally serve as religious intermediaries in Hinduism, Vaishnavism emphasizes *bhakti*—direct and devoted worship of Vishnu—thereby diminishing the importance of religious intermediaries. This direct relationship between devotee and deity democratizes worship, granting all believers, regardless of social background or caste, equal access to the divine.

- **Use of Vernacular Languages:** In its mission to spread *bhakti* (devotional worship) as widely as possible, Vaishnavism employed vernacular languages like Hindi, Tamil, and Marathi in its literature and rituals. This linguistic choice reflects its intent to make religious teachings

accessible to the masses, transcending linguistic barriers that often separated sacred texts from the common populace.

- As a monotheistic religion according to researchers, Vaishnavism emphasizes the necessity of adhering to a specific moral and spiritual lifestyle aimed at achieving union with God (moksha). One of the fundamental pillars of this spiritual path is the need for a qualified spiritual teacher (guru). The guru plays a crucial role in dispelling the spiritual ignorance of the disciple and enabling them to comprehend the profound philosophical knowledge related to Vaishnavism. Therefore, receiving the blessings and guidance of the spiritual teacher is essential for those seeking spiritual liberation.

- Vaishnavism has a long and rich history filled with influential figures who have contributed to shaping its identity and teachings, such as the philosopher Ramanuja, who is considered the original exponent of Vaishnavism as a philosophical school and theological system. He focused his efforts on emphasizing the role of bhakti (devotion) in worship. Other notable philosophers include Nimbarka and Madhava, leading up to the most renowned figure and saint of this tradition, Sri Chaitanya, whose life and achievements will be explored in detail and analysis.

B - The Founder of the "Hare Krishna" Chant:

- A Translation of His Life:

Chaitanya Prabhupada (1485–1533) was a prominent spiritual leader in India and a key figure in the history of Vaishnavism, known for his teachings that encouraged direct worship and attachment to Lord Krishna. He was born in Navadvipa, a sacred city in the Indian state of West Bengal, to a Brahmin family from whom he received a traditional education before turning to teaching himself. From a young age, Chaitanya exhibited a strong inclination toward spirituality and devotion. In his teenage years, he underwent a profound spiritual experience that led him to leave his home and profession, dedicating his life to spreading love for Krishna and raising awareness of Him through a series of short and long journeys across various parts of the country, engaging with scholars from different regions.

Chaitanya, who became known as “Krishna Chaitanya,” founded the Gaudiya Bhaktimovement, a branch of Vaishnavism that focuses on direct worship of Krishna through singing, dancing, and service. His teachings were both simple and profound, encouraging everyone to experience divine love regardless of caste or gender.

The researcher Hunter, in his book about the state of Orissa, describes the phenomenon of Chaitanya worship, noting that the devotion to Chaitanya evolved into a form of divine worship beginning in Orissa. For example, in the city of Puri, a temple was dedicated to his worship, and other

shrines were established across India in his honor. After his death, this devotion developed to the point where images of Chaitanya were worshipped as a divine symbol and placed in temples, with the events of his life being magnified and sanctified, reinforcing his status as a divine figure.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's teachings centered on the concept of divine love as the primary driving force for spiritual development. He indicated that this love stems from rooting and deepening human love, aiming to elevate it to the level of divine love. Chaitanya sought to universalize the experience of divine love by encouraging the practice of kirtan, a form of communal worship involving the chanting of Krishna's names, with the aim of opening the doors of divine consciousness to all individuals, regardless of their social backgrounds. According to Chaitanya, kirtan is not merely a routine religious activity but a profound spiritual experience characterized by the ecstasy of love and devotion. He believed that this spiritual experience enables individuals to transition from material consciousness to divine consciousness, leading to the realization of the ultimate truth of existence.

This kirtan, or mantra, which is a mystical poetic verse from the sacred Hindu scriptures, is as follows:

“Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare...”

Its roots, as illustrated, are derived from Sanskrit names for the Supreme Being, with the following meanings:

- Hare: The energy of God.

- Krishna: God Himself, and one of the names and incarnations of the deity Vishnu.

The practice of chanting "Hare Krishna, Hare Rama" is considered an effective means to achieve spiritual liberation. Believers hold that this chant acts as a powerful incantation to dispel negative energy and attract divine blessings. By repeating these sacred names, one can deeply connect with the universe and attain inner peace.

The disciples of Chaitanya, residing in Vrindavan, the birthplace of Lord Krishna, authored numerous books that interpreted and delved deeper into the teachings of the sect. They added new insights to these teachings, inspired by the prevailing philosophies and literary aesthetics of their time. Among the most famous followers of Chaitanya's school in contemporary Vaishnavism is Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), which is regarded as one of the recent developments in the Vaishnava religion.

The last paragraph demonstrates how Chaitanya's teachings, which were interpreted and expanded by his disciples, remain vibrant and influential today. By establishing the Krishna Consciousness Movement, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada contributed to the

dissemination of these teachings in the modern age, emphasizing their enduring influence and evolution across time and in various, even different, contexts, as we will see.

Second: Introduction to the "Hare Krishna" Movement and Its Founder.

2.1. The Spread of Hinduism to America:

The migration of Hindus to America underwent a significant transformation after the U.S. immigration laws were amended in 1965. Previously, immigration was strictly restricted, but it became more flexible, allowing for an increase in the number of Indian immigrants. However, this increase in numbers did not immediately translate into a visible rise of Hindu religious identity in the United States. It took some time before Hindu Americans overcame challenges related to practicing their religious rites freely and building their own temples.

The history of Indian migration to the United States spans several centuries but underwent major shifts. In the past, religious prohibitions among Hindus restricted their movement to the West, slowing the migration process. However, with the development of trade in the 20th century, small numbers of Indians began arriving, and mass migration did not occur until the repeal of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. Today, Indians represent the largest group of Asian origin in the United States, distinguished by high levels of education and professional achievement.

The Hindu practices in the United States have sparked interest among anthropologists, driving them to study the complex processes of cultural transformation undergone by the religion. As Professor Stephen Vertovitch notes, Hinduism has shown remarkable flexibility in adapting to its new environment, resulting in the emergence of new forms of practice and belief.

Indian Hinduism is characterized by its great diversity in practices and beliefs, which reflect the cultural and social diversity of India. When Hindus migrated to the United States, they faced the challenge of maintaining their religious identity in a new environment. The interaction with American culture led to the development of a new form of American Hinduism, which blends essential elements of Hinduism with American values. This development led to a more coherent formulation of Hindu beliefs, while simultaneously preserving some traditional aspects. Amidst the social and political changes in the United States during the 20th century, Indian Americans recognized the importance of uniting their community and building a strong collective identity. This led to the rise of cultural and religious movements that sought to define and present Hinduism as a vital and renewed religion in the American context.

A significant event occurred in 1993 in the field of interfaith dialogue—the Chicago Religious Conference, which marked a turning point in the history of global Hinduism. Hindu reformers, led by Swami Vivekananda, utilized this platform to present Hinduism as a global, tolerant religion. Vivekananda played a pivotal role in this regard, presenting the philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga as core elements of his message, which contributed to the formation of a positive image of Hinduism in

the West. Through these efforts, the reformers succeeded in establishing Hinduism as one of the world's major religions.

In conclusion, we can say that Hinduism has undergone a remarkable transformation in the United States, from limited migration to a vibrant and diverse community. The new immigration laws and the interaction with American culture have played a key role in shaping a unique "American Hinduism" that blends authenticity and renewal. Influential figures and religious conferences have also played an important role in presenting Hinduism as a global religion, helping to solidify its place in the American religious landscape.

2.2- Translation of the Life of Bhaktivedanta Swami Vivekananda:

The study of the spread of Hinduism in America reveals a prominent figure who played a crucial role in establishing one of the most important modern Hindu sects. In this research, we will explore the life and achievements of the founder of the Hare Krishna movement and highlight the major milestones in his journey.

Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, born in Kolkata, India (1896-1977), whose original name was **Abhay Charan De**, specialized in philosophy, economics, and English at the University of Calcutta. He was a political activist, a husband, and a father. Although he was a successful manager of a pharmaceutical company, he became disillusioned with politics and turned to become a disciple of Saraswati "Chaitanya," who introduced Abhay Charan De to the Vaishnavite sect and the worship of Krishna. Saraswati instructed him to spread Krishna consciousness to the English-speaking world.

Bhaktivedanta Swami was a prominent disciple of Chaitanya, and he prophesied that his teacher's teachings would one day spread worldwide. He worked tirelessly to spread these teachings, especially in India, where he established many religious centers. Despite these efforts, the full realization of this vision was only achieved decades later, with the arrival of **Vivekananda** in America. Vivekananda contributed to realizing the vision of Bhaktivedanta Swami by presenting Hinduism as a global religion, attracting followers from various cultures and races.

Swami Vivekananda was profoundly influenced by his spiritual teacher **Ramakrishna**, and he was also impacted by Western thought that he encountered in New York. He combined ancient Indian wisdom with modern Western thinking, offering a balanced view of India. Despite being influenced by the West, he remained true to his spiritual heritage, drawing inspiration from his ancestors, such as Bhaktivedanta Swami. Vivekananda emphasized the importance of spirituality as a solution to societal problems and called for unity among all religions and cultures.

In conclusion, the life of **Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada** serves as an inspiring example of dedication and perseverance in spreading the spiritual message. He was able to fulfill the vision of his spiritual teacher, Chaitanya, in spreading awareness of Krishna worldwide, despite

the challenges and difficulties he faced. His influence is still felt today, as the Hare Krishna movement continues to grow and spread across the world.

2.3. Introduction to the "Hare Krishna" Movement:

In light of the challenges faced by Indian immigrants in preserving their religious identity in America, **Swami Bhaktivedanta** founded the Krishna movement. This establishment was a response to the vision of his teacher **Chaitanya** and aimed to provide a spiritual environment for Hindus in the West. The movement faced numerous challenges at the outset, but it managed to grow and expand thanks to the efforts of its founder and his followers. In this section, we will explore how the Krishna movement adapted to American culture and spread the teachings of Krishna among various social groups.

The **Hare Krishna movement** seeks to spread the worship of Krishna and the teachings of Vaishnavism worldwide. The movement is based on the concept of **bhakti**, which is a form of loving worship of Krishna as a means to achieve this goal. The movement employs a variety of methods to achieve this, including collective chanting, dancing, distributing sacred texts (Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and Bhagavata Purana), and organizing religious events. These methods aim to attract people to Krishna worship and encourage them to change their lifestyle in accordance with Vaishnavite teachings.

The first temple of the movement was a small shop in **New York** on 26th Street. From there, the movement quickly spread across North America, reaching London, Hamburg in Germany, and eventually spreading worldwide. It was in this small shop that the name **International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)** was coined.

In July 1966, **Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada**, the founder of ISKCON, laid the intellectual and organizational foundations of the movement, setting seven clear objectives. Within a short period, he succeeded in attracting followers and establishing Krishna worship communities in the United States. In this way, Prabhupada founded a global religious movement that has had a profound impact on the lives of millions around the world.

The movement experienced remarkable growth over a century, with 108 grand temples dedicated to Krishna worship being built worldwide. It also published millions of copies of its religious books, contributing to the dissemination of its teachings across various segments of society. These efforts attracted thousands of followers from diverse cultural backgrounds, reflecting the appeal of the spiritual message carried by the movement.

Prabhupada also conveyed his views through a magazine called **Back to Godhead**. After moving to America and gaining followers, he was given the title **Prabhupada**.

Before his passing, **Prabhupada** personally selected twenty-four prominent reformers to serve on the governing board for the missionary work of the organization, instead of choosing a

single successor as is customary in Hindu traditions. He left his movement in the hands of many disciples after his death, and the members of the society continued spreading their master's teachings worldwide.

From 1969 to 1973, temples were opened in Europe, Canada, South America, Mexico, Africa, and India. In 1970, the **Governing Body Commission** (GBC) was established, the administrative body of ISKCON to oversee the growing community. In 1972, the first publishing house, **B. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust** (BBT), was established, which is now the largest publisher of books on Krishna Consciousness in the world. Additionally, the Bhakti-Yoga Krishna.com website was launched as an online project by BBT.

Between 1966 and 1977, **Srila Prabhupada** translated more than 40 volumes of great classics of Krishna conscious literature from Sanskrit to English and provided detailed commentaries on the works of previous masters. These books include the **Bhagavad Gita**, **Srimad Bhagavatam**, and **Bhagavata Purana**, along with 18 volumes on the history of the Lord Krishna's incarnations. These books were published by BBT in over fifty languages, with millions of copies sold and distributed worldwide by members to people across the globe.

In 1973, **Life ISKCON For Food** launched food relief programs in disaster-stricken areas and cities around the world. The movement is characterized by a strong institutional structure that works to spread its beliefs, attracting followers from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly from the West, where these followers adopt Hindu customs and traditions as part of their religious identity.

Male believers distinguish themselves by shaving their heads, except for a small tuft of hair called the "sikha," symbolizing their dedication to the spiritual teacher. Female followers wear saris and bind their hair, signifying their religious identity. As part of their daily rituals, they mark their foreheads with clay, serving as a reminder of the sanctity of the body and their connection to God Krishna. In the American society, followers of this movement became well-known for chanting in Sanskrit and dancing in public spaces, as well as distributing religious books in airports and on the streets.

The movement witnessed significant growth, with the number of its centers reaching 225 in sixty countries by the 1990s.

The **Hare Krishna movement**, or the **International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)**, is a branch of the **Gaudiya Vaishnavism** spiritual tradition, focusing on the worship of Lord Krishna. Founded by **A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada** in the mid-20th century, it propagated the teachings of **Bhakti Yoga**, a spiritual path aimed at achieving divine love through practices like chanting the Holy Names of God and devotional service. This movement successfully

spread a diverse Hindu culture in the West, emphasizing spiritual values and tolerance, thereby impacting the cultural and social lives of many communities.

The success of the **Hare Krishna movement** in spreading Hindu teachings in the West demonstrates the ability of spiritual ideas to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. It also highlights the importance of strong leadership and effective institutions in spreading any ideology or belief.

2.4.- Beliefs and Teachings Adopted by the Followers of the Movement:

1- Belief in God:

The followers of this movement believe that God is not just a philosophical concept, but a real being with whom one can communicate and interact. This belief is based on the **Vedas**, which they regard as the oldest sacred texts in the world. They believe that God has personal attributes and can be visualized, as evident in the image of Krishna playing the flute. They reject the idea that these images are mere myths; instead, they see them as true expressions of the nature of the one God, who manifests in various forms such as Krishna and Vishnu.

Both Christianity and Krishnaism emphasize the importance of God incarnating in human form as a means of communication with humanity. This belief, reflecting the followers' aspirations to draw closer to God, likely played a significant role in the spread of the Krishna movement in the West, where it resonated with many searching for spiritual meaning in their lives.

The followers also believe that everything in the universe is a reflection of its original source, and this reflection evolves from perfection to imperfection. Just as water droplets carry the qualities of the ocean, humans, as the highest form of life on Earth, carry the qualities of God, albeit in a limited and constrained form. According to the founders and believers of the movement, the main goal is to awaken the true spiritual consciousness in every individual and help them realize their eternal connection to God Krishna as their true self.

The followers of this movement believe that God is one but manifests in different forms, times, and places. They view the worship of Jesus Christ in Christianity and the worship of Krishna in Hinduism as expressions of the same divine truth, albeit in different ways. While the Bible calls for the worship of God, the **Bhagavad Gita** directs its followers to worship Krishna. They believe that Krishna is the original form of God, from which all other forms emanate. The followers aim to spread the love of God and bring people closer to Him.

Swami Vivekananda adopted a flexible approach in presenting his ideas, modifying them to align with Christian concepts, which helped him reach a broader audience.

2- Belief in Sacred Texts:

The **Bhagavad Gita** is the cornerstone of the beliefs of the Hare Krishna movement. This philosophical text, written about 2,500 years ago, tells the story of a great religious battle in India

and provides profound spiritual teachings through a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and God Krishna.

In addition to the **Bhagavad Gita**, the movement's beliefs also include other sacred texts in Sanskrit and Bengali, which were translated into English by **Swami Vivekananda**. These include:

- **The Srimad Bhagavatam:** This is one of the holiest texts in Vaishnavism, often regarded as a summary of all Hindu sacred scriptures. It contains mythological stories and sacred figures and explains deep spiritual concepts such as divine love, spiritual liberation, and the nature of existence.

- **The Sri Brahma-Sanhita:** This text is considered a cosmic prayer to God Krishna, describing His beauty and absolute perfection. The followers of the Hare Krishna movement regard it as an accurate description of the true nature of God.

- **Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita:** This book chronicles the life of **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu**, the founder of the modern **Bhakti** movement, and elaborates on his teachings of divine love and spiritual liberation. It serves as a practical guide to applying the principles of **Bhakti Yoga**.

Bhakti Rasa Tantra - Sindhu: This book deals with the subject of divine love (Bhakti) in great detail. It divides divine love into different types and explains how to develop each one. This book is considered a fundamental reference for understanding the concept of divine love in Vaishnavite philosophy.

3- The Doctrine of Karma:

In Hindu philosophy, **Karma** is a principle that connects action and consequence within a unified cosmic system. The term is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kri*, which means "to do," and literally translates to action or deed. Karma reflects the belief that the universe operates according to a system of cause and effect, where no action passes without leaving an impact. Thus, Karma is a principle of individual responsibility, where each person is accountable for their actions and their consequences. This principle does not aim to blame individuals but to encourage them to make conscious, wise decisions to achieve spiritual balance and harmony.

The Hare Krishna movement asserts that the concept of Karma, according to its beliefs, is a temporary state that can be overcome through specific spiritual practices. The movement claims that practicing **Bhakti Yoga**, one of these practices, purifies the soul and brings the individual closer to divine consciousness, ultimately destroying negative Karma and liberating the individual from the cycle of birth and death. Accordingly, it is believed that the principle of causality, known as Karma, is closely linked to human experience, where actions and thoughts in the present directly affect one's future existence according to fixed causal laws.

4- The Doctrine of Samsara:

This movement claims that most individuals live in a state of material illusion (*Maya*) according to the Sanskrit concept. This illusion is manifested in indulgence in material pleasures, which dominate the mind and direct human behavior. In contrast, the movement asserts that true happiness is purely spiritual and can only be achieved by purifying the soul from material impurities and completely surrendering to God Krishna. According to them, the material world is the prison and tomb of the soul, but it can be liberated from the endless cycles of reincarnation (the cycle of birth and death) by re-establishing an eternal and loving relationship with God Krishna. As Krishna says in the **Bhagavad Gita** (8:16): "O Arjuna, the worlds return again, even the world of Brahma, but he who comes to me will never be reborn." The life cycles, according to their philosophy, are intrinsically connected to the law or doctrine of Karma.

5- Meditation and Bhakti Yoga:

Meditation is a spiritual practice present in all religious and spiritual traditions in India. Yoga systems use various meditation techniques, and **Bhakti Yoga** (devotion to God) is one of them. This movement's primary mission is to spread this process. Chanting the names of God Krishna is the main feature of the yoga practiced by this school and is enhanced by immersing the mind in listening to, reciting, and remembering the stories of God Krishna. The main steps include individual, quiet meditation on the name of God Krishna using prayer beads, similar to a rosary, and **Kirtan**, which is a general meditation where people sing the names of God together accompanied by musical instruments. This practice is carried out in a group and is called **Sankirtan**. This meditation technique is one of the most famous aspects of the movement, as it represents the most visible face of the sect through chanting the holy names of God Krishna for the purpose of eternal union with God Krishna (the doctrine of the oneness of existence).

6- Dietary System

The Hare Krishna movement has strict rules regarding diet for its followers. As the founder **Vivekananda** stated: "The diet designed is not for me who eats much or for him who eats little, our system is designed to provide the body with necessary nutrition, without yielding to the whims of the changing senses." The mystical inclination in his words is clear, as the purpose of eating is to strengthen the body for worship. Accordingly, vegetarian cooking is referred to as "the kitchen religion." Followers refrain from eating meat, fish, and eggs, and only consume vegetarian food prepared from milk, sugar, grains, fruits, and vegetables. Those who follow this vegetarian diet claim that it leads to achieving psychological and social stability by reducing the desire for violence associated with eating meat, which may help reduce conflicts and disputes.

The Krishna movement has significantly contributed to promoting the vegetarian diet worldwide, publishing numerous books dedicated to this field. A notable example is the book by

Yamuna Devi, which won the prestigious **James Beard Award** as the best cookbook globally, with sales exceeding one million copies. This demonstrates the wide acceptance of this type of diet. One of the movement's impacts in the contemporary world is the emergence of individuals adopting vegetarianism as a lifestyle, which has a distinctly religious background. The movement owns restaurants around the world and hosts vegetarian cooking classes at its temples, offering millions the chance to follow and embrace a vegetarian diet.

The Hare Krishna movement, through its **Food For Life** program, offers the largest free vegetarian food initiative globally, distributing more than one million fresh vegetarian meals daily. The program has proven effective in responding quickly to natural disasters and wars, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chechnya, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Typhoon Haiyan, and Hurricane Katrina, where volunteers provided food and psychological support to the affected.

Former Indian President **Pranab Mukherjee** remarked on the **ISKCON** movement, stating: "I have learned today that the ISKCON movement runs an extensive network of centers worldwide, providing healthy meals to millions of people, including children. This initiative reflects the noble human values rooted in Indian civilization, which encourage serving the community and helping those in need."

In conclusion, the **Hare Krishna Movement** can be seen as a contemporary religious phenomenon that, like other religious movements, aims to offer an alternative spiritual vision in a world full of challenges. It focuses on love, devotion, and dedication, aiming to find meaning in life and offering a path to inner peace.

2.5. The Basic Teachings of the Movement:

The core teachings of this movement center on the concept of restoring true spiritual consciousness, based on realizing the eternal relationship between the individual and the divine self (Krishna). The movement believes that the state of separation from this consciousness is due to ignorance and indulgence in material desires.

The **International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)** adopts an exclusive view of spiritual knowledge, claiming that it is the only institution in the Western world possessing the "transcendental science" that enables the perception of the divine self. As one article from their magazine *"Back to Godhead"* states: "Our current material civilization, based on eating and sex, is an existence that is equivalent to the life of lower animals like dogs and pigs. Human life provides an opportunity for knowledge, leading to the liberation of the self from bondage."

The movement strongly criticizes what it considers the "materialism" in Western societies, arguing that a life focused on material sensory pleasures, such as eating and sex, does not rise above the level of lower animals. **ISKCON's** claims regarding "transcendental science" and material civilization seem closer to religious propaganda than objective scientific analysis. These claims lack

precision and methodology, relying on oversimplification of reality, and include assertions that cannot be scientifically proven.

Basic Teachings of the Movement: The core teachings for which the Hare Krishna movement was founded are outlined in the mission statement of the **International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)** as follows:

- The primary goal is to provide comprehensive spiritual education to society, enabling individuals through spiritual life techniques. They believe that this education will contribute to balancing the values of life, ultimately leading to global unity and peace.
- Spreading **Krishna consciousness**, as outlined in sacred texts like the **Bhagavad Gita** and **Bhagavad Purana**.
- Strengthening social bonds within the community by emphasizing common values and spiritual beliefs, particularly that devotion to Krishna can contribute to the development of individual and collective thoughts, as well as enhance a sense of belonging to all humanity, where each person is seen as an integral part of the cosmic consciousness represented by Krishna.
- Practicing a religious ritual known as **Kirtan**, which involves chanting sacred names, a teaching propagated by **Chaitanya Prabhupada**, a pivotal figure in the movement.
- Members of the Hare Krishna community are encouraged to create and maintain sacred spaces dedicated to worshipping Krishna.
- Encouraging unity among members of the community to foster an easier, more natural way of living.

Finally, to achieve the above objectives, the movement publishes magazines and books, and engages in solidarity campaigns, among other activities.

This movement also places great importance on the spiritual leader or **Guru**, regarded as the only one capable of understanding the deep meanings of sacred religious texts. This role was exemplified by **Swami Prabhupada**, who became the ultimate reference for understanding Krishna consciousness. Followers are expected to obey and honor the Guru as the successor of Krishna and to follow a set of rules, including abstaining from gambling, extramarital sex, and avoiding drugs and intoxicants.

Furthermore, the movement acknowledges that it represents the core of monotheism in Hinduism. In a statement, the movement clarified its relationship with Hinduism, stating that it follows the teachings of the Vedic scriptures and the practices of the Vaishnavism sect, particularly the devotion and surrender to Krishna and chanting his name as a primary practice. The movement also emphasizes that it is non-sectarian, not limited to a particular religion, and promotes universal principles applicable to all faiths. According to this perspective, **Hare Krishna** believes that the world is in a state of spiritual ignorance, and that the teachings of Krishna, considered divine

revelation, are the only solution to this condition. The movement aims to share these teachings with everyone, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds.

As **Vivekananda** affirms: "Anyone, anywhere, can practice Krishna consciousness and become a supporter or member of ISKCON without changing their religion; they can simply practice Krishna consciousness through chanting the holy names of the Lord." This is a clear and public call for religious unity and the blending of different faiths.

Thus, the doctrinal map of the Hare Krishna movement reveals a complex structure that seeks to combine traditional Hindu authenticity with external influences. While the movement maintains its connection to Hinduism, it also aims to present itself as a global movement by adopting shared human values. This can be understood as a strategy to attract followers from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds by presenting a global and tolerant image.

Conclusion:

The journey of exploring "Hare Krishna: Bridges Between Vaishnavite Heritage and Contemporary Hinduism" has been a deep dive into the beliefs of a contemporary religious movement rich in history and heritage. By tracing its Vaishnavite roots that date back centuries, and its contemporary manifestations in the global Hare Krishna movement, we can clearly see how the movement has succeeded in combining tradition with modernity, offering a contemporary interpretation of Hinduism that meets the needs and questions of its adherents in the modern world, as they claim.

In this research, we highlighted the historical and religious origins of the Hare Krishna movement, analyzing its doctrinal foundations, rituals, and spiritual practices. We also explored its impact on society, its spread around the world, and the challenges it has faced.

Now, after reviewing the key aspects of this movement, we conclude with the following key findings:

- **Krishna** occupies a central place in Hinduism as an incarnation of the god Vishnu, enjoying widespread popularity for embodying wisdom, courage, and love. His mention in Hindu texts and others affirms his influence and importance in ancient Indian culture.
- **Vaishnavism**, the largest sect of Hinduism, focuses on worshipping Vishnu and Krishna through devotional love (**Bhakti**). Despite its diversity, it believes in a single god who manifests in many forms, seeking to merge deep spirituality with artistic expression.
- The Vaishnavite philosophy emphasizes several principles, including the concept of a personal god "Ishvara" who manifests in the world, and its focus on **Bhakti** (devoted worship), which reduces the importance of religious intermediaries, as discussed by the great pioneers of the philosophy. It also uses vernacular languages to spread its teachings and stresses the importance of the spiritual teacher (Guru) for union with the divine.

- **Chaitanya Prabhupada**, a Hindu spiritual leader, is considered by many of the movement's followers to be a direct incarnation of Krishna. He founded the **Gaudiya Bhakti** movement, which focuses on direct worship of Krishna through singing and dancing. He encouraged the practice of **Kirtan**, which involves chanting Krishna's names as a means of achieving divine consciousness.

- Hinduism experienced a transformation in America, from a limited migration to a diverse community, facilitated by immigration laws and cultural interaction. Influential figures and religious conferences helped present Hinduism as a global religion.

- The Renaissance of Hinduism outside of India, particularly in America, highlights notable spiritual leaders, such as **Bhaktivinoda Swami Vivekananda**, the founder of the Hare Krishna movement, who dedicated his life to spreading awareness of Krishna globally, merging Indian wisdom with Western thought, and whose influence is still felt today.

- The Hare Krishna movement does not present itself as a new religion but as a continuation of the teachings of spiritual leaders, from Saint **Chaitanya** to **Vivekananda**. Followers believe in one god manifested in various forms and adhere to **Bhakti Yoga** as the path to spiritual liberation. They follow a strict vegetarian diet, believe in karma and reincarnation, and claim to be the core of Hindu faith.

- The movement presents itself as a non-profit charity aimed at helping the world achieve the ultimate truth—**union with Krishna**, in a mystical and complex framework filled with beliefs about god, beings, and the world, while emphasizing the role of the spiritual teacher and adherence to sacred texts.

- The movement assures its followers around the world that joining or supporting it does not require changing one's original religion. Practicing Krishna consciousness simply requires chanting the holy names of God, known as the **Mahamantra**.

In conclusion, this movement has successfully exploited the spiritual void created by the materialistic dominance of Western civilization, which reigns in contemporary society, to gather millions of followers across all continents by claiming to adopt a mystical and esoteric doctrine as a means to save the world from empty materialism. Through this scholarly paper, we encourage researchers in the field of **Comparative Religion** to give this movement importance in comparative studies, especially as the Islamic world increasingly interacts with Indian culture—a phenomenon reflected in various cinematic and television productions aimed directly at the Arab Muslim individual, under the pretext of elevating cultural aspects and fostering the exchange of civilizations.

References

1. Anand. (2024). *Life and teachings of Shri Chaitanya*. Retrieved from www.historydiscussion.net.
2. Aishwaryajavalgekar. (n.d.). *The rise of Lord Krishna: Mythological and historical evolution of Krishna worship in Hinduism*. (p. 1).
3. Aishwaryajavalgekar. (n.d.). *The rise of Lord Krishna: Mythological and historical evolution of Krishna worship in Hinduism*. (p. 1).
4. Art in Focus. (2006). *The legend of Krishna: A workshop for educators*. Asian Art Museum. (p. 12).
5. Bauman, C. M., & Others. (2009). *Out of India: Immigrant Hindus and South Asian Hinduism in the United States*. Vol 3, Issue 1, USA. (p. 1).
6. Bauman, C. M., & Others. (2009). *Out of India: Immigrant Hindus and South Asian Hinduism in the United States*. (p. 4).
7. Bhaktivedanta Swami. (1970). *The Krishna Consciousness Handbook*. ISKCON Press. (p. 1, 2).
8. Bryant, E. F., & Ekstrand, M. L. (2004). *The Hare Krishna Movement*. Columbia University Press. (p. 25).
9. Bryant, E. F. (2007). *Krishna*. Oxford University Press. (p. 3).
10. Bryant, E. F. (2007). *Krishna*. (p. 5, 6).
11. Buragohain, P. (2022). *Vaishnavism in Assam*. International Journal of Novel Research and Development, 7(3), 910.
12. Clarke, P. (n.d.). *New religions in global perspective*. (p. 219–220).
13. Dhawan, M. (2011). *Lord Krishna in the art of Haryana: A comprehensive study* (Doctoral Thesis, Punjabi University, India). (p. 104, 105).
14. Dhawan, M. (2011). *Lord Krishna in the art of Haryana: A comprehensive study*. (p. 29–30).
15. Gopal, N. R. (2023). *Krishna's crucial role in the Mahabharata: A divine catalyst*. The Creative Journal, 8(5), 12–14.
16. Jordan, J. E. (2017). *Hinduism as a world religion* (Master's Thesis in Religious Studies and Theology, Leiden University). (p. 11–15).
17. Lahrinawma, V. S. (2007). *Major faith traditions of India*. ISPCK. (p. 128–129).
18. Lahrinawma, V. S. (2007). *Major faith traditions of India*. (p. 128).
19. Lahrinawma, V. S. (2007). *Major faith traditions of India*. (p. 129).
20. Melton, J. G. (2018). *Encyclopedia Britannica: Hare Krishna*. Retrieved from www.britannica.com.

21. Monier Williams, M. (1883). *Religious thought and life in India: An account of the religions of the Indian peoples, based on a life's study of their literature and on personal investigations in their own country, part: Vedism, Brahmanism, Hinduism*. Princeton Theological Seminary Library. (p. 95–96).
22. Monier Williams, M. (1878). *Hinduism*. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. (p. 100).
23. Monier Williams, M. (n.d.). *Hinduism*. (p. 98).
24. Monier Williams, M. (n.d.). *Brahmanism*. (p. 97).
25. Prabhupada, B. (1969). *Back to Godhead*. ISKCON Press. (Vol. 23, p. 24).
26. Shakanta Larav Shastri, S. (1993). *The Bhagavad Gita: The holy Indian scripture* (R. A. J. Jawad, Trans.). Dar Al-Hewar. (p. 79).
27. Tangelder, J. D. (2023). *The Hare Krishna movement*. Retrieved from www.reformedreflection.ca. (p. 1, 5).
28. Thomases, D. (2023). *Following the swami: Diaspora dialogue and the creation of a Hindu identity in a Queens community*. Retrieved from <https://my.Hamilton.edu>. (p. 1).
29. V.S. Lahrinawma. (2007). *Major faith traditions of India*. ISPCK. (p. 128).
30. Williams, M. (n.d.). *Hinduism*. (p. 100).
31. Zakar, S. (1997). *The encyclopedic dictionary of religions, beliefs, sects, and cults in the world* (Vol. 1). Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi. (p. 921).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

IMCRA - International Meetings and Journals Research Association

www.imcra-az.org; E-mail (Submission & Contact): editor@imcra-az.org

Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems - ISSN:
[2790-0169 / 2790-0177](https://www.issn.org/details/issue/ISSN/2790-0169)



DOI prefix

[10.56334/sei](https://doi.org/10.56334/sei)