

STUDYING ISKCON AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATION

Akhaya Kumar Nayak*

Abstract: *International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is an organization spearheading a religious revivalist movement aiming at reviving Gaudiya Vaishnavism (a part of the Bhakti movement) and spreading it across the globe; a mission which Lord Chaitanya, the harbinger of Bhakti movement envisioned 500 years ago. The present paper analyses ISKCON as a social movement organization and explains this religious movement by applying Resource Mobilization Theory of Zald and McCarthy. Based on the primary documents published by ISKCON, secondary research publications and participant observation, the paper examines the variety of resources that were mobilized towards formation of ISKCON in the USA, how the initial linkages were secured for ISKCON with other organizations; both religious and nonreligious, the dependence of this movement upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to direct this movement. The paper also touches upon all the phases that ISKCON has undergone in the process of mobilization to institutionalization. Finally it winds up with certain predictions on the future of this movement on the basis of the phases it has already passed in the life cycle of a movement.*

Key words: ISKCON, Social movement, Resource mobilization theory, Social movement organization, Bhakti movement.

ISKCON at a glance:

A 69 year old *Vaishnava*¹ saint named Abhay Charanarabinda Bhakti Vedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada who turned 70 in mid sea started his journey to America in 1965 to preach the message of Lord Chaitanya² and to fulfill the wish of his spiritual master

*Research scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, Kanpur 208016.

Email: akhina@iitk.ac.in

(Guru) Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati Goswami³. Upon arriving at Boston port of America he wondered why Lord Krishna⁴ had sent him to such a land where sense enjoyment is rampant and nobody seems to be interested in spirituality. Drugs, illicit sex, meat eating, gambling etc. are very much part of their way of life (Goswami 1983) which according to the *Vaishnava sidhanta* are out and out detrimental for spiritual life. But being a *Sanyasi*, he was not too much perturbed and started his activities of singing the Hare Krishna Mahamantra i.e. *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare* in a sweet voice accompanied with a pair of cymbals or sometimes with a *Mridanga* and giving short lectures on Mahamantra and Vedic philosophy to people (mostly hippies and occasionally some respectable middle class men) in a storefront at 26 Second Avenue, New York city where he initiated his first batch of 11 disciples to the Krishna Consciousness.

Accompanied by those disciples and other volunteer musicians he started *Sankirtan* and Lecture daily for people spending their leisure time in Tompkins Square Park, New York. Within two months he could influence a handful of young Americans who took recourse to drug, sex and detachment from main stream to realize God. With the help of these 10 to 20 young Americans, Swamiji started the organization named International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Then within next 12 years he was able to erect around 108 Hare Krishna temples throughout the world and having millions of followers in all most all the major countries of the six continents (Ketola, 2008) establishing ISKCON as a strong, determined and a very powerful socio-religious movement organization of 20th century.

Origin of ISKCON as an Organization:

Against the occasional perception of ISKCON as a new religion or a new sect, it is actually an organization reviving an age old tradition, an older movement, of course in a newer form with some additional features of missionary spirit. Ketola (2008) writes, Hinduism had never been missionary until Prabhupada established ISKCON. But he is

not fully correct because Chaitanya, who started the Bhakti movement, himself travelled the length and breadth of India and preached Vaishnava philosophy, sent his followers in different *Sankirtan* group to different villages which attracted large number of people and also instructed his dear disciples like Rupa Goswami and Sanatan Goswami to stay in Vrindavan and to write most exclusive Bhakti literatures (CC Madhya, 2007) which would have the power to attract any body towards Bhakti. Apart from him other *Acharyas* in succession like Bhakti Vinod Thakur⁵ who was a district magistrate also did a lot of preaching in Bengal and outside Bengal. But most prominent of previous acharyas was Prabhupada's own spiritual master who established 64 *Gaudia Maths* inside India, which *during* his life time preached the message of Bhakti very successfully but fell immediately after his death. He also sent some of his disciples like B. H. Bon and B. P. Tirtha in 1933 to Europe (Sherbow 2004) for the purpose of preaching though they were not so successful. Some of them could not preach in the west and others managed to get a few disciples but returned back to India. ISKCON is different from other socio-religious movement organizations where the founder claims no magical power as happens in case of some other socio religious movements. Instead, the founder of this movement claimed to be an enthusiastic teacher who repeats the message of Chaitanya unaltered to the masses for whom the message was meant like a postman who delivers the messages unaltered to the person it is meant for (Goswami, 1983). He does not take the ownership of the ideology or philosophy that he was preaching except certain intelligent adjustments required for the modern set up of Western countries but not at all compromising or altering the principles (Das, 2003). After the ISKCON was formed legally, Satsworup Goswami (1983) one of the initial disciples of Prabhupada writes

“It was not that a new religion was being born in July of 1966; rather, the eternal preaching of Godhead, known as *Sankirtan*, was being transplanted from East to West.”

Taking a tour to the origin of ISKCON needs a brief biography of its founder Acharya A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada. Abhay Charan, as he was named by his

father, was born in a Bengali Vaishnava family and grew up worshipping the deities of Radha Krishna and celebrating all the Vaishnava festivals. He took up his education in a British run Indian university and after passing the fourth year he refused to receive the diploma to register his protest in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call of non co-operation and boycott of whatever British after the Jalianwalla Bagh incidents⁶. In his youth a married Abhay Charan went to meet a *Sadhu* on the insistent persuasion of his friend and immediately got the instructions to preach in English in the western countries without even being introduced properly (Goswami, 1983). The saint later on became his spiritual master and urged him to print books whenever he gets money and continued his insistence on preaching in West which Prabupada took seriously and started preparing for that for a long time by translating the first Canto of *Srimad Bhagavatam* in English and printing it in three volumes, publishing a quarterly magazine called Back to God Head, translating the Bhagavat Gita in English and of course leading a very austere life of a Sanyasi in Vrindavan. In between he also attempted to systematically preach the Bhakti Yoga by forming an organization in the fashion of United Nations called "League of Devotees" in 1954 at Jhansi, India which failed after the building used for the office of League of Devotees was allotted by the government to some influential persons to open a ladies club.

He suffered a lot of hardship in getting his books and magazine printed due to lack of resources. But suddenly he got a piece of good news from Ministry of External Affairs that his no objection certificate (NOC) to travel to US was ready since his stay in America was being sponsored by a Muthura businessman Mr. Agarwal. With a sponsored ticket and a cabin in a cargo ship owned by Scindia Steamship Line Company, Swamiji left for America without any specific planning. Upon reaching there he became discouraged but not hopeless after coming in to contact with the life style of Americans. Being stationed at Agarwal's⁷ house he met some American people who came to him more out of curiosity to see and talk to a differently dressed Indian Sadhu. They came to know about him from an article published in an American

local news paper *Butler Eagle* (Sept. 22 1965) titled “Devotee of Hindu Cult Explains Commission to Visit the West” and his photo with a caption “The Ambassador of Bhakti” Gradually he was invited by different groups and institutions starting with Lions Club, Pennsylvania, Y and St. Fidelis Seminary College in Herman, Pennsylvania and Slippery Rock State College. He later on moved to New York City where he stayed with another Indian Yogi and met some inquisitive American intellectuals, students and spiritualists. To have a better avenue of preaching, he then moved to a store front at 26 Second Avenue where he could chant, do *Sankirtan*, translate Bhagavatam and lecture to the inquisitive and interested people. It is in this store front Prabhupada coined the name **International Society for Krishna Consciousness** with acronym **ISKCON** in July 1966. Prabhupada also finalized the 7 neatly explained purposes of ISKCON before it was registered as a nonprofit tax exempted religious organization. They are as follows:

(a) To systematically propagat spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.

(b) To propagat consciousness of Krishna, as it is revealed in the Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam.

(c) To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus to develop the idea within the members, and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Krishna).

(d) To teach and encourage the Sankirtan movement, congregational chanting of the holy name of God as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

(e) To erect for the members and for society at large, a holy place of transcendental pastimes, dedicated to the Personality of Krishna.

(f) To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler and more natural way of life.

(g) *With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.*

Source: Direction of management, ISKCON Legal documents, July 28 1970 retrieved from Vedabase, the electronic data base of ISKCON.

In September 1966, on the day of Janmastami, he initiated 11 disciples to Krishna consciousness for the first time at the same store front of 26 Second Avenue. There after he never looked back. After giving some basic training to his initial but determined disciples he sent them to various cities of America and other countries to develop ISKCON as a worldwide organization.

Development of ISKCON Social Movement Organization:

After the legal birth of ISKCON at 26 Second Avenue, New York, Prabhupada trained his western disciples in Bhakti Yoga and they reciprocated well to their Guru's call so much so that they took initiation in the same year and started preaching his Guru's message in different parts of the America initially and then in other countries with efficiency and determination in spite of a lot of hardship (which they say austerity for spiritual advancement).

Swamiji (as Prabhupada was known by his disciples and other people of America) in the same venue of 26 Second Avenue where he had first initiated 11 disciples initiated four more disciples after 15 days. He prepared his western disciples through *Kirtan*, lecture and training for nearly one month for the next important assignment of public appearance. In October 1966, he made the first public demonstration of *Sankirtan* movement at Tompkins Park (a citadel for drug user hippy boys and girls) in the lower eastside of the New York City. Along with his new found disciples he started singing the Hare Krishna Mahamantra (*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*) and others joined. Some accompanied Swamiji's group with their music instruments, some only gazed widely, some danced with the disciples thinking it to be a new type of eastern dance and some

others teased, mocked and offended the group. Not caring for the adversities Swamiji went on leading the Kirtan for quite a long time and then stood up to speak about the meaning and importance of *Mahamantra*. This continued nearly daily for some time. Then Prabhupada introduced the Sunday feast programme to attract more people which they named as love feast. In the same month ISKCON acquired two old printing machines and started its first printing press. The magazine *Back to God Head*, that was started by Swamiji in India in 1944 and stopped in 1960 due to his engagement in publication of First canto of Srimad Bhagavatam, was the first publication of ISKCON press as monthly magazine with the editorship of one of Swamis disciples. This press, latter renamed as Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, has become largest publisher of Vedic literature publishing millions of Bhagavad Gita and a large array of other literature translated by Swamiji. Along with this ISKCON also established a number of other presses which printed the publications of ISKCON devotees. Gopal Jiu Publication, Bhubaneswar, Mandal Publication San Rafael, Vrajraj Press, New Delhi, etc. are some to name a few. Publishing and distributing books especially Bhagavad Gita was their main weapon of preaching which also provided financial support for the maintenance of ISKCON.

1967 saw the inauguration of second branch of ISKCON in the American city of San Francisco established by Mukunda Das and Janaki Dasi, the first married couple of ISKCON. This is the place where first ISKCON temple was established with proper installation of Sri Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra⁸ the supreme Hindu Deities. This city also celebrated its first *Ratha Yatra*⁹ (car festival) in the West, of course in western style. In the same year first ISKCON disciple was initiated in to the *Sanyasa* (a renounced order of life having the sole purpose of life to preach the message of God) and a number of preaching centers were opened in different American cities like Los Angeles, Boston, Montreal, Buffalo etc. by the efficient disciples of Prabhupada. 1968 took the ISKCON to Europe where a temple was established (at London) in 1969. Then in 1971 ISKCON went to Australia and gradually spread to other continents of

the world. In India ISKCON established three initial centers in Vrindavan, Bombay and Mayapur (the international headquarter of ISKCON) and latter on other cities like Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, Surat, Delhi, Bangalore, Chhenai, etc. Till 1977 up to Prabhupada's demise ISKCON had approximately 108 temples throughout the world (Ketola, 2008)

After the demise of Prabhupada, ISKCON faced a crisis of losing its charismatic founder Acharya but could overcome the shock very soon because of the intelligent governance arrangement system lead down by Prabhupada. Instead of choosing a particular disciple as the successor (as it happens in case of most of the religious movement particularly in India) Prabhupada liked to have a Governing Body Commission (GBC) to manage the ISKCON affairs.

Back ground of ISKCON movement:

The lineage of ISKCON can be traced back to the Bhakti movement pioneered by Lord Chaitanya in medieval period who himself extends his linkage up to Madhvacharya, the great *Acharya* of Brahma *Sampradaya* who is the founder of *Dvaita Vedanta*¹⁰. However Lord Chaitanya professed and preached a slightly different (from Madhvacharya) philosophy called as *Achintya Veda-Aved*¹¹ and founded a different *Sampradaya* known as *Gaudia Vaishnava Sampradaya*¹². Born in 1486 Lord Chaitanya became an erudite scholar in Sanskrit in the areas of grammar, rhetoric, the *Smriti* and the *Nyaya* – most of them by self-learning at an early stage (CC Madhya, 1986). By the age of 18, he had started a *Samkirtana* movement that spread like wild-fire across Nadia. He established Bhakti, the devotional service, as a process that is culmination of highest knowledge and scientific fact, not a mere sentiment. He held Bhakti as the topmost scientific discipline for perfection (Bhakti Rasamrita Swami, 2010). By his strong hold on *Sashtra* (Scriptures), like *Bhagavad Gita*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *Vedanta Sutras*, etc. and ecstatic *Sankirtan* he attracted huge number of followers from all over India. Chaitanya Vaishnavas are known for having refined the

practice and aesthetics of devotion into a sophisticated science. This imposing devotional edifice was constructed upon a solid foundation of philosophical argument and understanding (Gupta, 2007). Chaitanya also ensured that everybody irrespective of his birth is eligible not only for practicing Krishna Bhakti but also for worshipping in the temple and even becoming a spiritual master (Guru). In other words, Sri Chaitanya established one's devotional qualifications, and not birth, as the important criteria for spiritual emancipation. He started the tradition of preaching in large scale to both classes and masses which his disciples too continued.

Personally trained and instructed by him are his disciples Rupa Goswami and Santana Goswami who wrote extensively on *Gaudiya* Vaishnava philosophy. After them came Jiva Goswami whose reputation derives largely from his versatile and vigorous pen (Gupta, 2007). Krishna Dasa Kaviraja estimates the size of his writings as 400,000 verses. Disciple succession after Jiva Goswami went on creating many unalloyed devotees and erudite scholars like Krishna Dasa Kaviraja Goswami who wrote Chaitanya Charitamrita; Narottam Das Thakur, an ardent poet who wrote a number of bhajans summarizing the conclusion of sastras; Viswanath Chakravarti Thakur, an expert scholar in understanding the principles of Sastras, etc. Towards the end of 19th century a famous preacher named Kedarnath Dutt Bhaktivinoda, a district magistrate by profession entered fully into *Gaudiya* Vaishnava life, applying his writing talent to produce almost one hundred works in Bengali, Sanskrit, Oriya, Hindi, and English, which are of prime importance in understanding the scope of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada's mission (Sherbow, 2004). And finally there came the immediate predecessor of Prabhupada, his Guru and son of Bhakti Vinod Thakur, Srila Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati Goswami. He was a brilliant student, a prolific writer having a very strong hold in English language, a man of scholarship in vedic scriptures, an efficient organizer and a strong leader. Founding the *Gaudiya Math* in Calcutta (1920), he expanded his activities through public preaching and publishing devotional literature including a magazine named "Harmonizer". The *Gaudiya Math* gradually increased to

64 centers in India, Burma, and the United Kingdom by 1937 (Sherbow, 2004). Establishing printing presses, he printed daily news papers and monthly and weekly journals and books in Bengali and other languages such as Assamese, Oriya, Hindi and English. By the time of his demise in 1936 he had several thousands of disciples both *Brahmacharis* and *Sanyasis*. One of his disciples was Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada, a *Grihastha* devotee.

The reason behind Prabhupada's starting the movement in America rather than in India was the strong current of Westernization flowing throughout India in 1960s. Trying to preach in India in the mid 20th century, he did not get substantial result. He could not attract the Indian youth towards Bhakti movement. He, thus thought that Indian youth had lost their way, forgotten the Indian culture and were following blindly whatever was western especially American. Starting the movement in America seemed to be a good idea, because he thought that if Americans would start performing Bhakti, Indians would surely follow. His vision was proved fruitful. Before leaving for USA he had only one disciple. After returning from USA he had thousands and now after 40 years of formal initiation of the movement, he has millions of followers worldwide, of which many are Indians also. Inspiration behind preaching through the length and breadth of India was Sri Chaitanya's instruction that :

“bharata-bhumite haila manusya- janma yara

Janma sarthaka kari kara para-upakara” (Kaviraj, 1996 Ädi 9.41)

“One who has taken his birth as a human being in the land of India [*Bharata-varsa*] should make his life successful and work for the benefit of all other people.” Human life is especially meant for God realization, as stated in the *Vedanta-Sutra: athatho Brahma jijnasa*. Anyone who takes birth in the land of India (*Bharata-varsa*) has the special privilege of being able to take advantage of the instruction and guidance of the Vedic civilization. The success of life, thus according to Sri Chaitanya, lies in realizing God which culminates in developing intense love for Him. Having developed love for

God one has to be involved in Philanthropic activity of distributing the love of God by preaching extensively His name, fame, glory and past times. Sri Chaitanya showed it to his disciples by his own example. He travelled the length and breadth of India and preached the message of Lord to everybody (*Yare Dekha Tare kaha Krishna Upadesa, amara ajnaya guru haila tara ei desa* [Kaaviraj, 1996 Madhya, 7.128] meaning Instruct everyone to follow the orders of Lord Sri Krishna as they are given in *the Bhagavad-Gita and Srimad Bhagavatam*. In this way become a spiritual master and try to liberate everyone in this land).

ISKCON as a carrier of Bhakti movement possesses the elements of structural contradiction that Bhakti movement itself possesses. It is against the doctrine of caste system which distributes the rewards on the basis of the birth of a particular individual. Rather it follows the *Bhagavat Gita's* doctrine that a man is considered to belong to a particular *Varna*¹³ by the mode of material nature he is in and the activities he performs in accordance with the mode of material nature he/she is associated with. It also goes against the established belief that Vedic knowledge is only for the Brahmins and should not be given to the men of other castes. It preaches and distributes the knowledge not only to the people of all the caste but also to those who fall outside the caste system such as people from other religions.

Methodology of Study:

Yin (1989) identifies four types of case study research designs deriving from a two by two matrix (see Figure 1.1). The four types of designs are (1) single-case (holistic) designs, (2) single-case (embedded) designs, (3) multiple-case (holistic) designs, and (4) multiple-case (embedded) designs. In a single-case study a case is an analogous to a single experiment and in the multiple-case study; multiple cases fitting to the research area are investigated to address the research questions. In a case study method, the important component is the unit of analysis which defines what the “case”

is. A case may be an event, individual, an organization, a community or a country depending upon the problem. The same case study may involve more than one unit of analysis. This occurs when, within a single case, attention is also given to sub-units. Such a design is called as embedded case study design. In contrast, if the case study examines case as one unit, it is called holistic single case study design.

	Single-Case Designs	Multiple-Case Designs
Holistic (Single unit of analysis)	Type 1 (This research)	Type 3
Embedded (Multiple Unit of analysis)	Type 2	Type 4

Figure 1.1

Source: Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, p. 46, Sage, 1989.

In the present study type 1 design is used which is single case holistic design. Here in this study ISKCON is investigated as a single unit of analysis. Though attention has been given to its sub-units such as BBT, IYF, VOISE etc, these are explained as subsidiary to ISKCON. In the first place ISKCON is not divided in to these sub-units. In second place by explaining the sub units only we cannot understand ISKCON because of the fact that BBT is a separate body existing independent of temple administration and other units are recent developments to facilitate ISKCON’s activities.

Most data is collected from primary and secondary material published by ISKCON and on ISKCON by different scholars. But participant observation has also been used

especially to enumerate the process of mobilization of various types of resources to the organization.

ISKCON as a Social Movement Organization:

A social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society. Social movements are also preference structures directed toward social change (Mc Carthy and Zald, 1977). Mukherji (1977) says that social movements are related to social change and therefore to social structure and social movements have the ability to replace or successively replace a social structure. He also says that social movements on the outset necessarily involve collective mobilization. Mobilization generally refers to situations where an affected group is brought in to action. It is the process whereby people are prepared for active service for a cause that they see as consonant with their own interests (Wilson, 1977). Mobilizations also include the process by which the general discontent and unrest amongst an alienated collectivity is harnessed around organized group(s) which gives direction and substance to the alienation and there by prepares the members of the collectivity for action for cause which they value as an end rather than as means to an end (Mukherji, 1977).

Social movements, whose related population is highly organized internally (either communally or associationally), are more likely than others to spawn organized forms. A Social movement organization (SMO) is a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement and attempts to implement those goals. All SMOs that have as their goal the attainment of the broadest preferences of a social movement constitute a social movement Industry (SMI).

The individuals and organizations in relation to a social movement may be categorized along a number of dimensions. For the appropriate SM there are adherents and non-adherents. Adherents are those individuals and organizations that believe in the goals

of the movement. The constituents of a SMO are those providing resources for it. At one level the resource mobilization task is primarily that of converting adherents into constituents and maintaining constituent involvement. However, at another level the task may be seen as turning non-adherents into adherents. The term bystander public is often used to denote those non-adherents who are not opponents of the SM and its SMOs but who merely witness social movement activity. It is useful to distinguish constituents, adherents, bystander public, and opponents along several other dimensions. One refers to the size of the resource pool controlled, and McCarthy and Zald used the terms mass and elite to describe crudely this dimension. Mass constituents, adherents, bystander public, and opponents are those individuals and groups who are controlling very limited resource pools. The most limited resource pool which individuals can control is their own time and labor. Elites are those who control larger resource pools (McCarthy and Zald, 1977).

McCarthy and Zald (1977) summarize the traits of social movement from Resource mobilization perspective in following manner:

1. Social movements may or may not be based on the grievances of the presumed beneficiaries. Conscience constituents¹⁴, individual and organizational, may provide major sources of support. And in some cases supporters-may have no commitment to the values that underlie specific movements.
2. The concern with interaction between movements and authorities is accepted, but it is also noted that social movement organizations have a number of strategic tasks. These include mobilizing supporters, neutralizing and/or transforming mass and elite public into sympathizers, achieving change in targets. Dilemma occurs in the choice of tactics, since what may achieve one aim may conflict with behavior aimed at achieving another. Moreover, tactics are influenced by inter- organizational competition and cooperation.
3. Society provides the infrastructure which social movement industries and other industries utilize. The aspects utilized include communication media and

expense, levels of affluence, degree of access to institutional centers, preexisting networks, and occupational structure and growth.

The resource mobilization approach emphasizes both societal support and constraint of social movement phenomena. It examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements. Resource mobilization also sees the process of mobilization to institutionalization.

Looking from the broader perspective of Bhakti movement, ISKCON can safely be termed as an SMO carrying out Bhakti movement throughout the world. Social movement industry of Bhakti movement constitute a number of other famous and not so famous SMOs also like Gaudiya maths, Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math by Bhakti Rakshayak Sridhar Maharaj, Krishna Chaitanya mission by Bhakti Vaibhava Puri Maharaj having its head quarter at Puri, Gaudiya Vedanta Samiti by Bhakti Prajna Swami etc.

Bhakti movement as a whole aims at changing the very structure of human society by replacing both the goals and means. It propagates that the goal of human life is not to satisfy the senses by earning the better facilities of enjoyment. Rather the goal of human life is to realize a higher purpose that is to realize the self and understanding the ultimate truth, God, who they say is a person (Lord Krishna/Narayan/Vishnu) and is the real object of love (BG 2.70, 1972, Brahma Sanhita 1.1). Bhakti movement also approves of those means which are prescribed by scriptures. To simplify the means, ISKCON puts some restrictions on its followers in terms of 4 regulative principles, namely no meat eating (including Onion and garlic), no intoxication (including tea and coffee), no gambling (illicit means of earning money) and no illicit sex (sex other than for procreation).

Mobilization of Resources:

In any social movement four types of resources have to be mobilized namely capital or financial resources, professional or human resources, organizational resources and communication resources or mass media (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).

Professional Resources:

The first and foremost resource to be mobilized for ISKCON before its inception was the human resource. This was a herculean task for its founder Acharya¹⁵ Srila Prabhupada since except for some bystander public there were no supporters of this movement in west. So he had to convert some bystander public, who are not opposed to the ideology of the movement, into adherents and then those adherents into constituents and again to train those constituents properly and use them further to convert more bystanders into adherents and consequently to constituents. Once a sizable amount of constituents were mobilized to the organization, he even tried to convert the opponents to adherents and constituents. But this was not emphasized and was sometimes discouraged. One of the ten offences also states that one should not instruct a faithless (*ashradhalu*) person about the glories of holy name. The concentration, thus, was on the conversion of by standers in to adherents and consequently in to constituents.

The authorities (at first Srila Prabhupada and afterwards his disciples) used various methods and tactics to convert the bystanders in to adherents and adherents in to constituents. They can approximately be enlisted as follows;

- a. Congregational chanting or *Sankirtan* (singing the devotional songs especially *mahamantra* i.e. *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare* with musical instruments) was the first technique applied to attract the by stander public. Allowing everybody to participate along with their music instruments, if they are trained in any, and appreciating their efforts was another impetus in this direction.

Dancing while singing was an additional reinforcement for the new comers which convinced them that in contrast to the established notion, religious life or devotional life is not monotonous rather it is interesting and joyful.

- b. Once people come to the temple, devotees (the constituents of the movement) tried to create a cordial and homely atmosphere for everybody by providing them the means of subsistence (free Prashadam, free clothes, free accommodation, etc.) which developed among them a sense of belongingness to the organization.
- c. For recruiting new members as constituents and sustaining them in the organization, the authorities took up the crucial tasks of first fixing the goals i.e. to realize the self or to know ones constitutional position as they say by *athatho brahma jijnansa*. One's constitutional position is that he is the eternal servant of Krishna, *Jivera Sworupa haye—krishnera 'nitya-dasa* (CC Madhya, 20.108). One should always try to situate himself in his constitutional position and endeavor to attain the love of God Head by surrendering to Him, *Sarva dharman parityeja mam ekam saranam vraja* (BG 18.66), and second prescribing the means to achieve those goals i.e. practicing devotional service (following four regulative principles, 16 rounds of chanting the Hare Krishna *mahamantra* in a string of 108 beads, taking *Prashadam*- food offered to Lord Krishna and always staying in association of devotees (A- association, B- reading books C-chanting 16 rounds and D- diet). These goals and means are fixed in line with goals and means of the organization ISKCON. For fixing the goals and means they had to do the following things
 - i. Reinforcing the goal of individuals if it is similar with the vision of the organization and prescribing the means approved by the organization (in accordance with their scriptures i.e. *Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, and Chaitanya Charitamritam*) by convincing them the difficulty of attaining the goal if they follow other means.

- ii. Fixing new goals and means as stated above if they do not have one and rationalizing them philosophically and sometimes giving explanations scientifically.
 - iii. Altering the goal of the individuals if they have a different one other than the vision of the organization by proving futility of their existing goal and of course providing the prescribed means.
- d. ISKCON took a step forward for easy recruitment of members by establishing *Gurukulas*. The aim behind establishment of *Gurukulas* was to socialize the children in the Krishna conscious way of life from the very beginning and recruiting them in the organization as effective preachers.
- e. To facilitate the mobilization of human resources they established some sub-organizations like ISKCON Youth Forum (IYF), Vedic Oasis for Imparting Spiritual Education (VOISE) etc. which concentrate their attention on special section of potential recruitment.

Financial Resources

Mobilization of financial resources or capital is very crucial for any movement to emerge and sustain itself. The major source from which the ISKCON mobilized finance is by printing and distributing books, magazines and newsletters from its own printing press and publishing house known as Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust (BBT). From 1966 to 1973 book distribution was tremendous and ISKCON earned a sizable amount from this act. But in 1970, there was a decrease in the number of books (Ketola 2008) distributed which caused a concern. They, therefore, invented alternative modes of mobilizing resources such as selling paraphernalia i.e. incense sticks, *Dhup batis*, photos, poster, T-shirts etc which gave them stable income. Other than this ISKCON also mobilized financial resources from following sources:

- a. By introducing the system of life membership where by a person willing to be a life member will have to pay a fix amount of money and will get a set of

books translated by Prabhupada. They will be given some special treatments in special festivals, guest houses and management matters. The amount received from a person willing to be a life member varies from Rs. 1,111 in 1970 to Rs. 20,000 in 2009,

- b. Receiving sponsorship for special festivals, daily rituals, part of mega celebrations, part of daily rituals etc,
- c. Establishing Govinda's restaurants near temples in many cities,
- d. Establishing international standards of guest houses,
- e. Conducting marriage ceremonies and other rites of passage of devotees' life,
- f. Establishing *Gosalas*, the cow sheds where all variety of developed cows are reared with utmost care to produce milk to be used for preparing milk preparation in temple and Govinda's restaurants,
- g. Developing ISKCON communities where devotees produce agricultural goods in a village set up,
- h. Establishing *Gobar* Gas plants and manufacturing various items in those farms like tiles, mosquito coils etc. apart from cooking gas,
- i. Launching special drives for collecting donation for constructing temples, etc.

Communication Resources

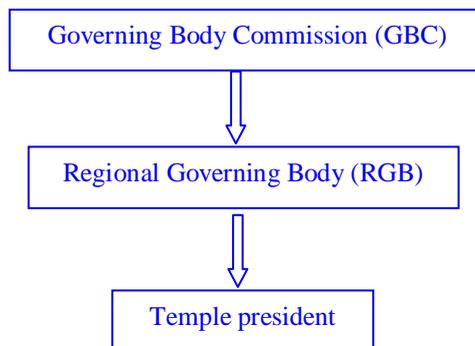
In fact ISKCON is very efficient in mobilizing communication resources or mass media in its favour. Appearance of Prabhupada in America, the very first step in establishment of ISKCON was communicated to people through "Butler Eagle September 22, 1965", a local daily news paper which opened up many invitations for Prabhupada to lecture in reputed American Universities (Goswami, 1983). Of course in initial days these media hypes were not systematically planned but later on ISKCON learnt to use media in its favour very meticulously. Following are some of the ways how ISKCON mobilized the communication resources in its favour.

- a. Revival of Back to God Head magazine which was published by Prabhupada back in India in 1940s and 50s. This magazine publishes articles of various

- types: scientific, philosophical, economic etc. related to the motto of the organization to convince people from various walks of life.
- b. Establishing rapport with media personnel, having a media manager who invites both print and electronic media to have press conferences before major events and to have media coverage after the event.
 - c. Creating a number of websites like www.iskcondesiretree.net, www.iskcon.com, www.krishna.com, www.rupa.com, www.vrindavandarshan.com and www.24hourkirtan.com to name a few along the home pages for various temples.
 - d. Introducing ISKCON TV and ISKCON Radio.
 - e. Creating devotees networks by sending group emails
 - f. Using Short Messaging Service for advertising major events and inviting guests to important programmes, etc.

Organizational Resources

ISKCON is an organization for both classes and masses (Bhakti rasamrita Swami, 2010). It has a three tier organizational structure for the management purpose.



GBC is the topmost body of governance which frames and implements the mandates for the functioning of the organization. They are considered as the representative of Prabhupada. But the body does not dissolve at a time. Some members leave the commission after 4 years and the remaining members recruit new members to the body.

ISKCON centers in each country are divided into various zones on the basis of the number of temples existing in a particular area. Regional governing body looks after the zonal administration and management. Two to three Governing Body Commissioners remain a part of the Regional Governing Body who act as the representative of GBC to zonal bodies. This system rules out the possibilities of any conflict and confusion between International body (GBC) and Zonal body (RGB). At the temple level one president is elected democratically from among the devotees connected to that temple. Mostly he resides inside the temple as long as he remains the president of that temple.

Apart from this structure, ISKCON has established a sister organization named Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust (BBT) which works independent of GBC for management. Though some GBC are also trustees in BBT, it functions separately with its own management structure (Legal Documents, ISKCON 2003). But the benefit accrued from the BBT is used for ISKCON. Apart from this, ISKCON created some sub units within it, like ISKCON Youth Forum (IYF), Vedic Oasis for Imparting Spiritual Education (VOISE) etc. to carry out the process mobilization of human and financial resources from a particular section of the society.

Linkages of ISKCON with Other Organizations:

ISKCON does not have much linkage with outside organizations. From the very beginning it was not at all supported by establishment. At best it was tolerated by them. Prabhupada wrote many letters to the eminent political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, etc. from among whom only Lal Bahadur Shastri invited him to have a meeting and supported his printing of Srimad Bhagavatam, but others largely ignored him. However ISKCON managed to secure links with some individuals and groups and used these links to spread its activities. Initially ISKCO secured links with some reputed individuals from music industry of America and Europe like Alex Ginsberg- a rock star, George Harrison of Beatles. Once Prabhupada even participated in a function called Mantra rock dance organized

by the owner of one rock band and made thousands of psychedelic drug users sing and dance to the tune of Hare Krishna *mahamantra*, of course he did not like it very much and never appeared in such programmes further. He used George Harrison to propagate *Vaishnava* songs loaded with *Vaishnava* philosophy especially in western world. His “My Sweet Lord” Album became a best seller. This linkage also mobilized a lot of financial resources to ISKCON as Harrison gifted his own property in USA to establish a farm community and a temple. ISKCON could also secure proper linkages with some of the business establishments especially successful businessmen like the son of Henry Ford of Ford Corporation. This connection also enabled the organization to effectively mobilize financial resources.

Apart from this, ISKCON, despite of not having any formal linkages with educational institutions, opened many small associations called as Bases or Bhakti Vedanta Clubs where it attracts the students of that institute by doing regular programmes. Sometimes these clubs function independent of ISKCON control and management but have strong linkage with temples. This linkage helps ISKCON to mobilize human resources for future recruitment.

Tactics used by authorities to sustain the movement:

Along with the tactics used by authorities to mobilize different types of resources (professional, financial, organizational and communication), they also use following tactics for sustenance of the organization.

1. ISKCON formed a Governing Body Commission for the management of the organization and to overcome the limitation of individual succession. Prabhuapda did not want his organization to go Gaudia Math’s way which broke in to pieces after the demise of its founder Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati Goswami¹⁶.
2. They separated Bhakti Vedanta Book trust from the ISKCON management and kept the trustees of BBT permanent for lifetime. This helped them to have

division of responsibilities and efficient management of both the organizations having the clear cut regulations of fund management.

3. Authorities have also started training programmes of different levels for Brahmacharis and Sanyasis to train them properly for preaching.
4. They have addressed specific sections of society by forming different sub-units like IYF, VOISE etc.
5. For effective management of temples they have devised a mixed system of bureaucratic and democratic type having a President at the top and different coordinators to look after different aspects of services and management. The temple President and the Coordinators are selected democratically.

Future of ISKCON:

A movement undergoes through different stages since its inception to its decline. The Bhakti movement carried through ISKCON also moved through different stages. First stage of a movement is emergence in which a movement is not clearly defined and so was ISKCON. In this stage the movement is largely an individual effort and collectivity is not so prominent. When Prabhupada started Bhakti movement in West it was purely an individual endeavor. Then in the second stage he managed to mobilize human resources for it and formed a collectivity that supported and helped Prabhupada to carry out the movement. They have formulated some strategies and plans to spread the movement and implemented those strategies in the field. In the third stage one formal organization was formed named ISKCON and they carried out the activities in an organized manner by formulating clear cut and concrete strategies. They undertook public demonstration of Kirtan and lectures, introduced Sunday feast programme, distributed books, magazines and pamphlets, celebrated festivals by inviting large number people, etc. All these activities went on in an organized and systematic manner. They have mobilized a large amount of all kinds of resources (financial, professional, organizational and communication) and spread it widely. Last stage of any movement is decline. In this stage two things may happen. First, the goal of the

movement is realized and the movement becomes absorbed in the main stream. Second the movement fails to achieve its goals, continues for a longer period of time until the goals and means adopted by the movement become redundant after which the movement ceases to exist. ISKCON as a movement organization has not yet faced its last stage. The Bhakti movement that it carries out is still spreading and more and more people are joining continuously along with the continuous flow of other resources. It is very difficult on its part to fully achieve its goals. So it will go in the alternative direction. It will continue its activities for a longtime until the society feels its goals and means completely redundant.

End Notes:

¹ Worshipers of Lord Vishnu or Krishna as the Supreme personality of God Head and thus they act according the prescriptions of world's most ancient scriptures like Vedas, Bhagavat Purana and most importantly Bhagavat Gita which is considered to be spoken by the God himself.

² SriKrishna Chaitanya was harbinger of Bhakti movement in India. He founded Gaudia Viashnavism and preached the message of Krishna as it is given in Bhagavat Gita and Srimad Bhagavat Puran. In Chaitanya Charitamrita(the biographical literature on Lord Chaitanya written by Krishna Das Kaviraja, he gave the following instruction to all the vaishnava devotees of Lord as follows; *Bhara bhumite haila manusya janma yara, Janma sarthaka kara para upakara* (cc adi 9.41)

which means "One who has taken his birth as a human being in the land of India [Bhārata-varsha] should make his life successful and work for the benefit of all other people. Prabhupada took that message.

According to Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada Srichaitanya predicted that

Prithivite achhe yata nagaradi grama sarvatra prachara haibe mora nama.

"In all the villages and towns all over the world, everywhere, this sankirtana movement will be preached. (Prabhupada 1970) Prabhupada took these messages/instructions of Chaitanya very seriously and set out to USA to preach the message of Krishna.

³ Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati Goswami was a Gaudiya Vaishnava Sanyasi who accepted disciples from all the varnas of the society and gave them brahmana initiation withstanding the resistance from the upper and powerful castes of the then Indian society. His brave act of doing Govardhan and Vrindavan Parikrama (Circumambulating the Govardhan Hill and the whole of Vrindavan Dham, a holy place for Hindus where Lord Krishna took birth) with disciples from all the castes raised much opposition from powerful upper caste but he did not succumb to their power and continued to do so. Combined with this fearless attitude in preaching and his strong arguments against Impersonalism earned him the title Simha Guru (the Lion Spiritual master) in the history of Bhakti movement

⁴ Krishna is the name of the supreme personality of God Head according to Vaishnava Philosophy which the saint belongs to.

⁵ Bhakti Vinod Thakur was the district magistrate of Puri, a temple town in east coast of an Indian State of Orissa and a learned Scholar of Vedic literature towards whom the British officers were very respectful. A special railway line was built especially for him by the British in Mayapur which shows the amount of respect they were giving to him. He is also considered as the seventh Goswami after six Goswamis who were direct disciples of Sri Chaitanya.

⁶ In the youth he was a patriot and an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi for he believed that Gandhi who always carried a Bhagavat Gita and was said to be acting according to it, would bring spirituality in to the field of action (Goswami, 1983)

⁷ He was the son of Mr. Agarwal who sponsored Swami's stay in America.

⁸ Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are worshiped by the Vaishnava as forms of Krishna, Balaram and their sister Subhadra.

⁹ Ratha Yatra is an annual festival of Lord Jagannath in Puri where three large chariots are built and the deities of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are put on their respective chariots. Lakhs of Devotees throng here from different parts of the world to pull the chariot of Lord. It is a three km journey of chariots and after 7 days chariots return to temple with a similar festival.

¹⁰ Dvaita stresses a strict distinction between God (Brahman) individual souls (Jivas). According to Madhvacharya, souls are not 'created' by God but do; nonetheless, depend on Him for their existence.

¹¹ This philosophy preaches the Inconceivable one-ness and difference. God is simultaneously one and different from His creation. Creation is spiritual as long as used in the service of God and is material as soon as used for sense-gratification. The material nature although God's energy cannot influence God. A *jiva* is simultaneously one with and different from Krishna (God). A *jiva* is qualitatively equal with God but quantitatively always remains infinitesimal.

¹² Sociologically, the *Vaishnava Sampradayas* can be enumerated as follows: 1) *Śrī sampradāya*, founded by Rāmanuja, 2) *Brahma sampradāya*, founded by Madhva, 3) *Kumāra sampradāya*, founded by Nimbārka, 4) *Rudra sampradāya*, founded by Vishnusvāmi and Vallabha (1479–1531), 5) *Rāmanandins*, founded by Rāmananda (b. 1299), 6) GaudīyaVaishnavas, founded by Caitanya, and 7) Sant-tradition, founded by Kabir (1398–1518). (Ketola 2008)

¹³ There are four varnas according to Bhagavat Gita such as Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra from which the caste system is believed to be originated

¹⁴ Conscience constituents are direct supporters of a SMO who do not stand to benefit directly from its success in goal accomplishment and related with this is the term Conscience adherents which includes the individuals and groups who are part of the appropriate SM but do not stand to benefit directly from SMO goal accomplishment.

¹⁵ A spiritual teacher who teaches and leads the students by his own example i.e. by practicing whatever he preaches.

¹⁶ Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati Goswami, the spiritual master of Bhakti Vedanta Swami established 64 Gaudiya Maths throughout India. Soon after his demise there was a succession

dispute among his disciples. There was also conflict among the disciples on the issues of ownership of different Maths and occupation of different quarters within the Math Premise. In this way the dream of Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati of establishing Bhakti movement as a worldwide phenomenon was shattered immediately after his demise.

References:

- Swami, Bhakti Rashamrita. 2010, *The Global Impact of Vedantic Teachings of Sri Chaitanya*, Lecture delivered at IIT Kanpur, October.
- Das, Sachisuta. 2003, *A Transcendental Dairy, Vedabase, A Complete teachings of Swami Prabhupada*, Bhakti Vedanta Archives.
- Eyerman, Ron. 1991, and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goswami, Bhakti Sidhanta Saraswati. 2003, *Brahma Samhita Chapter 5 verse 1*, Bhakti Vedanta Trust, Mumbai.
- Goswami, Satswarup Das. 1983, *Prabhupada*, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, Mumbai.
- Goswami, Satswarup Das. 1970, *Prabhupada*, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, Mumbai.
- Gupta Ravi M. 2007, *The Chaitanya Vaishnava Vedanta of Jiva Goswami*, Routledge, New York.
- <http://directory.krishna.com> accessed 8:00pm 20th Nov 2010.
- <http://www.iskconcinema.com/content/following-srila-Prabhupada-dvd-3-remembrances>.
- Kaviraj, Krishna Das. 1996, *Chaitanya Charitamrita: Adilila*, translated by A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, Mumbai, 1996, Chapter 9 and Verse 41.
- Kaviraj, Krishna Das. 1996, *Chaitanya Charitamrita: Madhya Lila*, translated by A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, Mumbai.
- Ketola, Kimmo. 2008, *The Founder of the Hare Krishnas as Seen by Devotees A Cognitive Study of Religious Charisma*, Brill, Leiden.
- Legal Documents, (ISKCON), 2003, *Vedabase, Complete Teachings of A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada*, Bhakti Vedanta Archives.
- Mccarthy, J.D. and Zald, M.N. 1977, Resource Mobilization and Social Movements; A Partial Theory, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No 6, May, pp 1212-1241.

- Mukherji, P.N. 1977, Social Movement and Social Change: Towards a Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Frame Work, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol 26, No 1, March, pp 38-59.
- Prabhupada, A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami. 2007, *Chaitanya Charitamrita condensed*, Bhakti Vedanta Book trust, Mumbai.
- Prabhupada, A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami. 1972, *Bhagavat Gita Chapter 2 Verse 70*, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust; Mumbai.
- Prabhupada, A C Bhakti Vedanta Swami. 1970, Hari Kirtan: The Yoga for the modern age, *Back to God Head Magazine*, Issue 34.
- Sherbow, Paul H. 2004, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami's preaching in the context of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, in Edwin F. Bryant and Maria L. Ekstrand's *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, Columbia University Press, New York. 2004.
- Wilson, John. 1977, *Introduction to Social Movements*, Basic Books INC Publisher, New York.
- Yin, Robert K. 1989, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, p. 46, Newbury Park: Sage.
-