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The Hare Krishna People

(a 30 minute documentary 16mm film)

by

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Introduction

In July, 1970 I was offered an assignment by Asia Magazine to do a photographic essay on the activities of the devotees of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, better known as the Hare Krishna people. I spent one week with the devotees in their New York center and one week on their West Virginia farm. The picture story with article written by myself was published soon after. This article led to another assignment by Earth Magazine on the same group. This time I lived with the devotees in their new center in Brooklyn. After the Earth Magazine article was published, I returned to R. I. T. to finish my final quarter of study before putting in full time work on my thesis. Because of my close contact with the ISKCON movement, I decided to do my masters thesis on a photographic comparison between Zen and Bhakti Yoga as practiced by the members of the Hare Krishna movement. Soon afterwards I narrowed my proposal to only the Hare Krishna group because of the wealth of information and background I found in this religion.

It was natural that a photo exploration of ISKCON would take me to India because it is the origin of their beliefs and life style. Also the Spiritual Master and founder of ISKCON His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, was at that time living in India. Therefore, early in December 1970, I flew to India. This was the beginning of my

intimate association with the devotees of Krishna Consciousness which has lasted for the last four years. During this period I photographed extensively the activities of the devotees and have live as one of them, adopting many of their customs and beliefs, finding them much more conducive for a peaceful and rewarding life than the western way in which we have been brought up. The devotees kindly allowed me to live with them and supported me during this period. In turn, I offered my services as a photographer and my work in black and white and color 35mm photography has been published in most of the monthly issues of the Society's monthly journal 'Back to Godhead'.

By the end of my four year stay with the devotees, I was enthused as to how to present most effectively to the general public and as a thesis in itself, the activities, life style and philosophy of the Hare Krishna people. The natural progression of all my photographic activity and aspiration up to this time found its fulfillment in the cinema. The Society provided my wife and I with 16mm sound sync movie gear. Although my experience with movie making was only in 8mm and then very limited, I somehow managed with 16mm. I found that my sense of composition and timing which I learned in still photography helped.

From India we flew to Mexico, America and Europe filming the Hare Krishna people. This continued for four months, then I sat down in New York for another four months, and then late in 1974 the movie was finished. The film speaks for itself and hopefully will spark some interest in the viewer to investigate further the philosophy of the Hare Krishna movement

which has changed the lives of thousands of people. Photography can only do so much, and in this case I have used it as a tool to encourage further investigation on a personal level into the deep philosophy and ancient culture of the Vedic civilization which has been brought intact from India and introduced so expertly to the Western countries.

For my masters thesis, I propose to present the finished product of my photographic exploration of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the film entitled 'The Hare Krishna People' to an audience of interested persons. The film will be shown and then there will be a question period following the screening. Discussion will be held on techniques used in the film and topics related to the ISKCON movement and philosophy. The showing would be advertised and open to the general public.

When the film on the Hare Krishna people was first proposed to the ISKCON Society, it was suggested that we first go to New York where we could first view all the footage stored in a film archives in the Hare Krishna temple in New York. There we found an assortment of single 8, super 8, and 16mm footage which we viewed in two days. The vast majority of the footage was badly shot and much of it scratched and unusable. Therefore, I made a proposal to start from scratch and shoot the entire film from the beginning. A budget was submitted to ISKCON which came to \$10,000 for the purchase of equipment and production of the film. In the end the equipment came to \$5000 and the film itself cost \$ 8,000.

We did not really have a shooting plan in mind in the beginning nor did we have a clear idea of how the film would turn out in the end. At this point I did not know how the Hare Krishna movement had developed in the West. Although I had heard of the expansion of the movement in the Western countries, I had spent the last three years in India and had been out of touch with ISKCON in America and Europe. Therefore, the general plan for shooting was to visit the major temples, see what was going on, and shoot the interesting features of each temple.

Our first stop was Paris where we met the Spiritual Master and shot some of the singing and dancing in the streets of Paris. My wife did the sound work and I was getting used to the Bolex EBM. After Paris, we traveled to London to Bhaktivedanta Manor, a stately English tudor house in the

countryside outside of London. Here we found that our sound sync footage was not in sync because of improper connection between the camera and tape recorder. Therefore, later on in syncing the sound with the picture, we had to go through the laborious process of cutting out pieces of 16mm mag film in between pauses in the sound sync dialogue so that the sound track would match the film. This time consuming process gave us great appreciation for sound sync gear that actually works.

All in all, during our travels which took us to Mexico City, Dallas, West Virginia, and Los Angeles, we shot 15,000 feet of film. Again, the general shooting procedure was simply to go to a place, see what was going on in the particular temple and shoot the interesting features of that place. This meant that I was to shoot much more footage than if the film were planned out scene by scene, but this seemed to be the only way to proceed under the circumstances.

After four months of traveling and shooting, I sat down in New York with a simple editing set up consisting of a movie scope, winds, guillotine splicer and 15,000 feet of film. The general plan was to view all the footage and select the best and piece it together according to area and place. We first went through all the original and cut out the best footage to be workprinted. This is not usually done with the professionals. They have all the original workprinted so as not to scratch it. Instead, we wound all the original through the movie scope and cut out about 6,000 feet to be workprinted thus saving a good deal of money. Fortunately, we did

not find that the original was in any way damaged by this 'unprofessional' procedure. Since we did not have any experience putting together a 16mm sound movie, I purchased the book Independent Filmmaking by Lenny Lipton. This provided useful information especially in editing and matching the sound with the visual.

Eventually the 6000 feet of film was edited down to about 3000 feet, and it seemed at the time that no more could be cut out. This feeling was actually due to overattachment to ones own film. I found out then that one had to be ruthless in the editing process. Much of the footage that seemed so important was not really necessary at all. A very small amount of footage on a particular subject was usually enough to give the viewer a good idea of that subject. This was especially true of a film such as this where a wide array of people and places are presented.

There were certain things I wanted to definitely include in the film such as the incense factory, the school for the children in Dallas, the West Virginia farm, and the Los Angeles world headquarters. We had sufficient footage of all these places and as we edited out the best footage, the film seemed to take its own shape. During the editing we showed the work print to some selected devotees and also some outsiders and asked them to express their opinions. There were many suggestions and comments some of which were useful others not. This we found very helpful in shaping the final film. As anyone knows who has worked in photography and other creative fields, the artist has the strong tendency to become attached to his work and concepts and becomes too 'close' to

his work. Outside critique is very useful in clearing away some of this false ego. After much cutting and viewing again and again, I finally had a 30 minute film which I was pleased with.

After the work print was cut and finalized, we started work on the sound. We wrote out a rough narration which was polished and expertly expanded by Howard Wheeler, an English professor and initiate into the Hare Krishna movement. His version of the background narration was cut down slightly to fit into the scenes. Then we pieced together two effects tracks, two music tracks, the sound sync sections, and the narration- a total of six sound tracks. Our procedure was to sync the two music tracks together with the final work print, then the two effects tracks, then finally the voice tracks. This syncing of the sound with the visual is most easily done with a flat top editing table. Since we could not afford this, we used the movie scope, a synchronizer mounted with two tape heads, and a 'squawk' box to read the sound. Since it was almost impossible to wind the film at sound speed, the result was a jumble of sound which with some practice we were able to decipher. Eventually, after much listening, cutting, and more cutting and listening, we had a final work print and sound track. Then I took everything to a New York sound lab for a trial mix. Then a few days later after some minor changes, we did the mix which took six hours and \$900 of our funds. Then the original was cut to match the work print, A B rolled, and the optical and original taken to the lab for printing.

As I look back on the film, I can understand that it was only by hard

work and determination that we were able to complete the film with some degree of success. Most problems we tend to create ourselves, but by sincere endeavor to present the subject as openly and honestly as possible, somehow we can succeed. Many times I was ready to give up in despair over some problem which was not really a problem at all but only a mental block. One has to live with a film as I did 24 hours a day. I would go to sleep thinking about the film, sometimes dream about it and wake up thinking about it. Even though sometimes I didn't want to think about the film, I found myself completely absorbed in it and always thinking how to present it most effectively to the general public for whom it was intended. This complete absorption seems to be the price one has to pay for a good film. Whether this is judged a good film is up to those who view it. As the filmmaker I can only say that I lived with this film and it became my life and obsession. Those of you who read this report will hopefully gain something. A copy of the film is with the graduate committee. This particular copy was used by CBS for their documentary on the Hare Krishna people and has been cut and tape spliced together. The film also has been used by other networks in USA, Canada, and Britain. Ha re Krishna!

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