

Challenges in International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

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Abstract: *International Society for Krishna Consciousness is a spiritual organization. It aims at, to spread and educate world people with the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The ultimate goal of such teachings is to develop people spiritually. Therefore, they are spreading the teachings of Srimad Bhagabat Gita which was spoken by Lord Krishna in the battle of Kurukhetra, Srimad Bhagabatam and related scriptures. All these teachings aim at transforming one's consciousness from material to Krishna consciousness and develop immense love among the people for chanting holy name of Lord Krishna and by which he will lead a liberated life and back to Godhead which is the ultimate goal of human life. Now this organization ISKCON has spread its branches throughout the world. Due to its wide spread enhancement, various spiritual crisis and legitimacies are rooted within the organization. In this article some of the issues which may be local or global have been discussed.*

Keywords: Crisis, Consciousness, challenges, legitimacy, Krishna, Iskcon Gurus, Bhagabat Gita

1. Introduction

Human being is a surprise creation in the living world. Human being likes to live in well-formed society. There it will lead a healthy and peaceful life with other beings in the society. We find many varieties of societies wide spread in this world. All these societies are formed based on material rules. How to lead a materially comfort life is trained by these societies. But how to lead a peaceful life in relation to God need a spiritual society. Of course there are many spiritual societies aim at material development are there worldwide. Those are known as human religions. Purely spiritual societies are very rare, so to say none. Though in the beginning, by some mahatma sent by God may form a pure spiritual society in order to impart the teachings of God, in long run it again contaminated with material intensions. In 600 years back India various devotional movements had been found in order to spread bhakti among the human societies. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486 – 1534) spread highest devotional movement among the people called Gaudiya Sampradaya [1]. His ultimate teaching was chanting of holy name of Lord Krishna. Gradually it was become weak due to British rule in India. By the hard work of Bhakti Vinod Thakur and Bhakti Sidhanta Thakur (Goudiya Movement Society) it was taken rebirth and spread in India but could not spread throughout the India [2]. Many attempts are made by Goudiya Society to spread the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in foreign countries, but hardly achieved. But in last 60 years, the disciple of Bhakti siddhant Saraswati Thakur, Bhakibedanta swami prabhupad is capable of spreading the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu throughout the world through the Society called International society for Krishna consciousness (ISKCON) [3]. This ISKCON, also known as Hare Krishna movement is a spiritual organization practices Gaudiya Vaishnavasim [4] [5]. The devotees belong to Iskcon worship Lord Vishnu and its avatars such as Lord Rama, Narashima, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu [6].

In 1960s with Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad who is believe to be the spiritual soldier of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Hare Krishna movement moved to west. Chaitanya

Mahaprabhu emphasized on chanting of Hare Krishna Mahamantra which is composed of Hare, Krishna and Rama. This mahamantra is a 16 words mantra composed of these names only. It is believed that this mantra have unique transcendental sound that have a ability to revive our transcendental consciousness [7]. Bhaktivedanta swami Prabhupad came to New York with a trunk full of translated scriptures and hardly any money [7]. He faced many difficulties and hardships in order to spread the teachings of Lord Krishna, even suffered from two heart attacks abroad. However, he did not deter from his mission. Within 15 years of his arrival he generated large number of followers from all walks of life. This attracted young generation not only from America but also from many western countries as a noble way of living a life [8]. This proves that it is a large platform for Human resources Development [9]. However, after death of Prabhupad in November 1977, there is a great reformation has been taken place in the organization [10].

Challenges and Legitimacy after Prabhupad's Era

Bhaktibedanta Swami prabhupad had faced many challenges and legitimacy issues not only in the foreign countries but in own country in order to establish the organization throughout the world. In spite of all such issues starting from his initial stay at America still his death, he was never set back from his mission. He fought all such issues with spiritual strengths and won all challenges by the mercy of Lord Krishna [4][7]. After prabhupad left this material world, the organization lacked stability in various fields of the organization such as leaderships, resources and legitimacy etc [10]. The organization faced many legal issues. Scandals like kidnapping, brainwashing, murder, drugs, child abuse were become the headache for the organization. There are in all 11 gurus initiated by prabhupada in order to run the organization. Six out of the 11 gurus were expelled from ISKCON on various issues and many devotees had to spent prison time [10][11]. But these crisis were met by the large indian follower's involvement in the organization.

Present Crisis in ISKCON

As the organization grows locally as well as globally, many local as well as global issues have taken their stand within the organization. One of the such issues is financial challenges. Bhaktivedanta Swami had established one hundred and eight temples throughout the world. After his departure from this world, ISKCON has been opened innumerable local as well as global centres for Krishna consciousness in last 50 years. Generally, the inhabitants of such centres are brahmacharis, banaprasta and Sannyasi. They have cut off their relationships with this material world in all respect in order to serve Lord Krishna and guru and lead a temple life. They earn money by begging, selling scriptures, puja materials and prasadam to meet the temple expenditures. The large part of the expenditures is met by donation. Distributing prabhupad's books is also a great source of income. Through distribution of books not only they meet their financial needs, but also spread Krishna consciousness among the people. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu wished that each and every one should trend with this Krishna consciousness. This is the ultimate aim of all the devotees who are joining ISKCON. Therefore, it is growing very fast day by day. Centres for Krishna consciousness are increasing. So huge money is required to run all these centres. The income sources as follow by ISKCON people are no way to fulfil their want. This became a big challenge for ISKCON. Some devotees left their family and join ISKCON in order to lead a spiritual life and also same time they have to earn for their poor family. In many centres the inhabitants are asked to fulfil the financial need for the temple by begging donation, distributing books or puja materials and prasadam. This becomes a mental pressure for them which force them to leave the organization. This crisis is so panic that many centres are lying inoperative due to lack of devotees. The activities of begging for the organization are badly affecting not only the person whom donation was asked but also the devotee who is asking for donation. Sometimes donation is made bound for the people as well as devotees. This forces the people to stay away from ISKCON. Therefore, retardation is taking place from the organization.

Leadership is another major crisis in ISKCON. There are three levels of Vaishnavas, Neophytes, advanced and pure. According to the level of purity, one is engaged in service in the temple. According to scripture whatever service one has been offered should be treated as lord decision. Then one can stay peaceful in his devotional life. Devotees believe that there nothing beyond God's will. Sometimes due to lack of pure spiritual knowledge, devotees have remained dissatisfied with their services and positions. It creates disturbances in the temple or Ashram. There are some rules and regulations for preaching under someone's leadership. There may be conflicts between two leaders due to inter-crossing of preaching area. Goal is to spread Krishna consciousness. If someone's preaching is really doing well, then there should be no boundary for him. Division of preaching area is good to avoid conflict, but may be a obstacle in spread of Krishna consciousness and may create dissatisfaction among the people.

2. Conclusion

Spiritual realization should be free from all types of material contamination. Spreading Krishna consciousness is not a easy task. A devotee should be initiated after he will free from all material contaminations. Such devotees will be engaged for serving Lord Krishna and would be trained for spread of Krishna consciousness. As Prabhupad told all ISKCON properties belong to Krishna. None should try to be master of that property, even don't try to think in one's mind. Mind-set for occupying ISKCON property for own sense gratification brings partition in ISKCON. It is spreading with very first pace. It will really do wonderful if it remain active as it was in Bhaktivedanta swami's time. ISKCON GBC should take it seriously in view of Prabhupad's ambition.

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