

**PLANTING THE SEED OF HARE KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS: THE BELIEFS  
AND ACTIVITIES OF HARE KRISHNA IN KISUMU COUNTY, KENYA**

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RELIGION OF JARAMOGI OGINGA ODINGA UNIVERSITY OF  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.**

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my inventive work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or for any other award.

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**APPROVAL BY THE SUPERVISORS**

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband David, my daughters Patience and Lucky, my brothers and sisters together with my parents Mr. and Mrs. Asiyo.

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## ABSTRACT

The global landscape has served as the origin of numerous religious traditions, fostering the development and sustenance of diverse philosophical and ethical frameworks. However, the coexistence of these various belief systems has occasionally led to disputes arising from inherent incompatibilities. The primary objective of this thesis is to analyze the operations and undertakings of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) within Kisumu County. The subject under discussion is a worldwide religious movement that may be traced back to Chaitanya Vaishnavism, a Hindu tradition that originated in India. The perception of Hare Krishnas in Kenya is sometimes limited, despite their provision of material and financial aid to humanitarian causes, particularly in response to tragedies affecting individuals or communities. ISKCON movement remains very inconspicuous and frequently operates in obscurity, evading widespread attention and remaining mostly unidentified and unrecognized among the majority of Kenyan individuals. The limited awareness among the general public regarding the Hare Krishna movement has resulted in significant instances of misinterpretation, social stigma, and vilification. This highlights the crucial necessity of promoting precise and factual information about the Hare Krishna movement, particularly in the context of its classification as one of the New Religious Movements in Kenya (NRM). This study aimed to investigate the dissemination and establishment of the Hare Krishna movement in Kenya, specifically in Kisumu County. It involved an examination of the doctrinal principles, beliefs, devotional practices, and lifestyle of the Hare Krishna followers in Kisumu County. Additionally, the study assessed the teachings of the Hare Krishna movement regarding peace and their strategy for engaging in interfaith dialogue within Kisumu County. The study used key informant interviews conducted with devotees ISKCON and participants in interfaith dialogue forum in Kisumu together with secondary sources obtained from literary works authored by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, the official biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami, temple Daily Schedule, books, essays, and academic articles authored by disciples of Bhaktivedanta Swami. These provided valuable insights and scholarly perspectives on various aspects related to ISKCON doctrines and teachings. The study targeted members of ISKCON and participants in interfaith dialogue workshop in Kisumu guided by interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the individual experiences within the context of the doctrines, teachings, and actions of the Hare Krishna community in the Kisumu temple. The researchers employed purposive sampling to choose a sample of participants for the study. The sample consisted of ten priests, five African converts to ISKCON, thirteen youths, six representatives from the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCK), two Archdeacons from the Anglican Church of Kenya, one member of the Baha'i faith, two lecturers, and two members of the civil society. The research was informed by Emile Durkheim's (1912) Social Identity Theory, which was utilized to elucidate the processes via which individuals become involved in religious groups and the subsequent transformative effects on their lives. The data shows that ISKCON first appeared in Mombasa and subsequently spread to Nairobi and Kisumu in the 1970s. Indigenous Indian businesspeople in the region supported this expansion. ISKCON promotes Bhagavad-gita and bhakti yoga, which emphasizes devotion to Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Vegetarianism, meditation, and other disciplines are promoted to help people connect with Krishna and achieve spiritual liberation. ISKCON considers communication with people of other faiths as an opportunity to listen, create mutual understanding and trust, and convey our beliefs while respecting theirs. The study suggests emphasizing peace ideals through interreligious interaction in ISKCON teaching. ISKCON should be examined to add new philosophies to theological knowledge and resolve related interreligious conflicts.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	6
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	7
1.4 Research Questions.....	7
1.5 Justification of the Study .....	7
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	9
1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study.....	10
1.8 Operational Definition of Terms.....	11
<b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 The India/Africa connection and the rising local interest in Hinduism in Kenya .....	12
2.3 Doctrines, teachings conversion and transformation of ISKCON.....	16
2.4 Teachings on peace and interfaith dialogue strategies.....	23
2.5 Theoretical Framework.....	33
2.5.1 Social Identity Theory.....	33
<b>CHAPTER THREE.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>37</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	37
3.2 Research Design.....	37
3.3 Area of the Study .....	38
3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size .....	39
3.5 Methods of Data Collection .....	40
3.6 Data collection Instruments .....	41
3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews .....	41
3.6.2 Documentary Analysis.....	43

3.6.3 Participant Observation.....	44
3.6.4 Data Analysis and Presentation .....	45
3.6.5 Ethical and Logistical Consideration .....	46
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>THE SPREAD AND ESTABLISHMENT OF HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT IN KENYA .....</b>	<b>48</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	48
4.2 Origin and spread of Hare Krishna .....	48
4.3 The journey of Hare Krishna to Africa and Kenya.....	53
4.4 Arrival in Mombasa .....	55
4.5 Hare Krishna in Nairobi.....	58
4.6 Summary .....	69
<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>HARE KRISHNA BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN KISUMU COUNTY .....</b>	<b>72</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	72
5.2 The Importance of ISKCON Temples and Preaching Centers .....	72
5.3 The Process of entry into Hare Krishna.....	75
5.3.1 Separation/ <i>Harinama</i> .....	76
5.3.2 Transition / <i>brahminical</i> initiation .....	78
5.3.3. Incorporation/ <i>sannyasa</i> initiation .....	83
5.3.4 Dressing of Hare Krishna devotees?.....	86
5.4 Doctrines, principal beliefs and devotional practices of Hare Krishna .....	88
5.4.1 The Vedas and Bhagavad Gita.....	88
5.4.2 Karma/reincarnation .....	95
5.4.3 Vegetarianism .....	99
5.4.4 Lifestyle of Hare Krishna devotees.....	102
5.4.5 Bhakti /Yoga .....	107
5.4.6 Chanting.....	109
5.4.7 The process of chanting Hare Krishna mantra.....	117
5.4.7 Image Worship.....	119
5.4.8 Marriage, Sexual Relations and Child Rearing Practices .....	122
5.4.9 Festivals .....	131
5.4.10 Gender Roles in Hare Krishna Community .....	132
5.5 Summary.....	134

<b>CHAPTER SIX .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>INTERFAITH DIALOGUE INITIATIVES USED BY HARE KRISHNA ON PEACE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN KISUMU COUNTY.....</b>	<b>135</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	135
6.2 Strategies Used by Hare Krishna community to promote peace .....	136
6.2.1 Interfaith workshop for peace .....	136
6.2.2. Religious and Philosophical basis of Interreligious Dialogue .....	140
6.2.3 Christian Perspective of Dialogue .....	143
6.2.4 Ahimsa: Core Teaching for doing Inter-Religious Dialogue.....	144
6.2.5 Role of Bhagavad Gita in Promoting Peace .....	148
6.2.6 Baha’i Faith Teachings on Dialogue.....	150
6.3 Interreligious Programs at Hare Krishna Community .....	156
6.3.1 Conceptual Models of Peace Building.....	160
6.4 Summary .....	162
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN.....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.....</b>	<b>164</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	164
7.2 Summary of Findings .....	164
7.2.1 Spread and Establishment of Hare Krishna movement in Kenya and Kisumu .....	164
7.2.2 Hare Krishna’s beliefs and practices.....	165
7.2.3 Teachings on peace and interfaith dialogue strategy in Kisumu County.....	166
7.3 Conclusions.....	168
7.4 Recommendations .....	169
7.5 Future Research .....	170
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>179</b>
Appendix I: Consent to Participate in a Research Study .....	179
Appendix II: Permission to Conduct Study and Confidentiality Statement .....	180
Appendix III: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: Resident Devotees .....	181
Appendix IV: NACOSTI Letter.....	184
<b>GLOSSARY.....</b>	<b>186</b>

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in the United States in 1966 by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Adherents of ISKCON hold the belief that the philosophical underpinnings of the organization trace its origins to the period when Krishna, a central figure in Hinduism, was present on Earth approximately five thousand years ago. Numerous publications encompassing what the contemporary founder of the Hare Krishna movement, Bhaktivedanta Swami, referred to as "Vedic literature," were disseminated and presented globally as scholarly examinations of ancient Indian scriptures. The translations were presented as accurate interpretations of the original texts, enriched with the Swami's own perspectives. These translations were the result of extensive scholarly research and practical experience by a highly knowledgeable individual belonging to an ancient lineage (Bryant & Ekstrand, 2004).

Hare Krishna is a mystical sect within the Hindu religion. The Hare Krishna movement is commonly classified as a monotheistic sect within Hinduism due to its belief that all deities are manifestations of Vishnu or Krishna. Adherents of the aforementioned movement are urged to cultivate intimate connections with Krishna and express their devotion through various rituals, including but not limited to chanting and dancing. Although this Hindu organization exhibits a distinct reverence towards Krishna, it predominantly adheres to Hinduism, as Krishna is considered an incarnation (or "Avatar") of Vishnu, an ancient deity within the Hindu pantheon. Furthermore, adherents of the Hare Krishna movement maintain their belief in the concepts of reincarnation and karma, while also adhering to the Hindu literature known as the Bhagavad Gita (Brooks, 1989).

In the context of Hare Krishnas, the primary objective entails cultivating an altruistic affection towards the Supreme Lord Krishna. The term "hare" might be interpreted as a reference to the pleasure potential associated with Krishna, similar to the Christian belief that humanity's ultimate purpose is to serve God and derive eternal enjoyment from this relationship. Despite being classified as a Hindu sect, the Christian undertones of ISKCON have been widely acknowledged (Rochford, 1985). The Hare Krishnas' focus on ecstatic encounters and spiritual transcendence, as demonstrated via their practice of chanting and dance, invites parallels to the mystical "devotion" observed among Sufi

Muslims (known as "Whirling Dervishes") and certain mystical expressions within Christianity.

In the year 1965, Abhay Charan De Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, an elderly Indian advocate of Krishna worship, introduced the Hare Krishna movement to the United States. At the age of 63, the Swami relinquished his previous lifestyle and assumed the role of a guru, driven by unwavering dedication to Krishna. According to Bryant and Ekstrand (2004), the individual embarked on a journey to New York City at the age of 70 with the intention of disseminating his beliefs. The socio-cultural climate of the 1960s, characterized by the critical examination of Western values and the increasing popularity of Eastern philosophies, provided a conducive environment for the fast expansion of the Hare Krishna movement.

ISKCON played a significant part in the emergence of a new religious paradigm that was gaining momentum in the United States. Swami served as the founder and spiritual leader of ISKCON till his demise in 1977 (Gosvm, 1980). The utilization of lavish images in the Bhagavad-Gita and ISKCON's monthly publication, the Book on Godhead, has significantly contributed to the financial stability of the organization at present. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Hare Krishna movement had a significant surge in popularity, reaching its peak. This surge was accompanied by a notable presence of Hare Krishna members in public locations, such as airports. However, due to concerns regarding potential harassment of travelers for donations, legislation was implemented to prohibit such behavior.

Members ISKCON have elevated levels of personal aspirations. Membership in the organization necessitates the process of carefully choosing a guru and committing oneself as a student. According to popular belief, the cultivation of Krishna consciousness is seen unattainable without the presence and guidance of the Guru. This guru holds significant importance. The individual undertaking the initiation expresses their loyalty to the guru in the capacity of a spiritual guide and vows to demonstrate the highest level of respect for them. According to Rhodes (2001), one should dedicate their full being to the practice of Krishna-centered rituals and service. Consequently, adherents of ISKCON opt to gather in communal environments, wherein they direct their unwavering attention towards the deity Krishna.

To ensure the Krishna-centric nature of all activities within these communities, comprehensive guidelines have been formulated. These communes exhibit a significant influence from Indian and Hindu traditions. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that individuals who were formerly affiliated with these communities, as well as other observers, have raised concerns regarding their involvement in illicit and unethical activities, all the while experiencing a sense of security within their isolated environments. In this regard, ISKCON has faced allegations of substantial wrongdoing. However, it is important to note that these accusations should not be automatically attributed to the core concept of ISKCON, but rather to the actions of certain individuals within the Hare Krishna community. Christians observe a correlation between the decline of moral standing among some influential televangelists and Christian leaders, as noted by Richardson and Introvigne (2007).

The fast expansion of ISKCON was accompanied by allegations of indoctrination made by anticultists. The influence of brainwashing theories on the understanding of religious conversion has had a significant effect on the growth of ISKCON, even in the absence of much empirical backing from the field of social science. The media's widespread dissemination of anti-cult propaganda has altered the general impression of the Hare Krishna movement, transforming it from an eccentric yet harmless group in the eyes of the public. Over the course of time, the reputation of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has increasingly been associated with concerns over its propensity to pose risks. Following its classification as a hazardous cult, ISKCON has heightened difficulties in attracting fresh adherents and securing the necessary financial support to sustain its communal establishments (Winkel, 2019).

During the 1980s and subsequent years, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) encountered a period characterized by a reduction in its influence, internal conflicts, and a process of transformation. ISKCON experienced a significant decline in its fortunes due to a sharp decrease in its recruitment efforts. The United States saw a prolonged period of upheaval and uncertainty, which significantly expedited the decline of ISKCON subsequent to the passing of Prabhupada in 1977. The book distribution efforts of ISKCON in North America experienced a significant decline, reaching approximately 50% of its 1978 levels. The communities affiliated with the

ISKCON experienced significant adverse effects due to the subsequent decline in sankirtana donations (Rochford, 2004). During the latter part of the 1970s, ISKCON devised a range of economic options with the aim of generating essential financial resources for its communities. In addition to distributing books in public locations, fans also engaged in the sale of record CDs, artwork, candles, snacks, and a variety of buttons advertising sports teams and rock bands. According to Rochford (2004), individuals affiliated with the ISKCON assumed the garb of Santa Claus and engaged in soliciting funds from the general public throughout the festive period. The rise in acceptance of these innovative and highly effective business strategies among the majority of ISKCON leaders resulted in a significant decline in book distribution. Although these tactics yielded positive financial outcomes, they encountered opposition from both internal and external sources. According to Rochford (2004), opponents of the movement interpreted these changes as evidence that ISKCON's initial objective of disseminating Prabhupada's Krishna Consciousness had been supplanted by an emphasis on financial matters and maintenance.

According to Melton (2004), ISKCON movement serves as an illustrative example for scholars studying new religious movements (NRMs) due to its manifestation of several features that pose challenges to the established norms within both religious and secular groups. In accordance with Inose's (2017) research, a diverse array of New Religious Movements (NRMs) can be differentiated based on many factors such as their scale, organizational structure, leadership approach, doctrinal tenets, and ceremonial customs. Additionally, a contributing factor to the obscurity of NRMs is their characteristic of being quite diminutive in size. Despite being the subject of academic scrutiny and research, the ISKCON remains relatively unknown to a significant portion of the population, particularly in Africa, due to its limited visibility and public awareness. As a consequence of this, it is frequently disregarded by the general populace, as evidenced by the dearth of attention it garners.

During the period spanning from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, individuals from other countries who were dedicated followers of ISKCON embarked on journeys to Kenya with the intention of spreading the teachings and doctrines of this religious organization (Sooklal, 1987). The initial visitor procured a structure in Mombasa, which was subsequently transformed into a place of worship. During this particular time frame, their

primary emphasis was directed towards the dissemination of religious teachings within the Indian community residing in Mombasa. Consequently, they gradually came to acknowledge the distinctive significance they held inside the sentiments of the native African populace. The ISKCON Vaishnava Research Forum of 2012 indicates that the early development of the movement was facilitated by the devotees' engagement in delivering presentations at several Hindu temples in Nairobi, as well as at the University of Nairobi.

People attended the event to partake in the auditory experience of the speakers. The movement's focus on love and exuberant worship resonated strongly with a significant number of young individuals in Kenya, hence augmenting its attractiveness inside the country. Srila Prabhupada advocated his own teachings by asserting their superior clarity and rationality. He presented the most efficient and straightforward method to establish a connection with the divine and attain a sense of internal liberation. The growth and development of the ISKCON movement in Kenya can be attributed to its ability to adapt and accommodate changing social standards. According to the ISKCON Vaishnava Research Forum of 2012, despite its origins in India and the East, the ISKCON movement has gained notable traction among the youth demographic in Kenya.

Regrettably, there exists a dearth of available data pertaining to this particular group. However, scholarly investigations into the phenomenon of aging have revealed that neo-Hindu movements, like the ISKCON movement, have garnered considerable appeal due to their notable absence of doctrinal dogmatism and their provision of a pluralistic framework for understanding divine truth (Hofmeyr, 1982). The ISKCON movement in Kenya encountered numerous problems in adjusting to the socio-political setting of the country, primarily due to its emergence in the aftermath of the era of colonialism (Dasi, 2013). Nevertheless, the primary challenge encountered by the Kenyan mission pertains to the dissemination of Krishna consciousness among the general populace in a manner consistent with the original teachings of the spiritual master. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the Christian missionary movement has exerted a notable influence in Kenya and other parts of Africa for an extended period of time, making substantial contributions to the overall progress and advancement of the nation. The Hare Krishna movement has encountered challenges in its efforts to supplant this particular ideology.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The Hare Krishna movement in Kenya is characterized by a notable deficiency in religious literacy and a limited understanding of diverse religious traditions among its adherents. The ISKCON movement is perceived by a significant number of Kenyans as operating inconspicuously and frequently evading public attention. Research on the ISKCON movement reveals that it remains relatively obscure and unknown among the majority of Kenyan individuals (Ross, 1985). The aforementioned movement is considered to be of marginal significance, as it is accepted by a considerably smaller number of individuals compared to the adherents of mainstream religious traditions. The subject in question remains mainly obscure to the general populace, and may be regarded as a mere point of interest for those who possess knowledge of its existence. ISKCON movement is predominantly recognized and understood only by individuals who are either insiders or have close affiliations with its members (INFORM, 2014).

The limited awareness among the general population regarding the Hare Krishna movement has resulted in significant concerns, misinterpretations, social stigma, and negative portrayals of the group. This highlights the crucial necessity of promoting precise and reliable information about Hare Krishna as a prominent (NRM) within the context of Kenya. Numerous studies have raised inquiries on the personality types of individuals who become Hare Krishna devotees (Weiss & Comley, 1987). These studies have reached the consensus that a significant portion of ISKCON adherents exhibit a "sensate personality" orientation, indicating a propensity towards the pursuit of sensory gratification. Previous research has indicated that Hare Krishna members may possess depressive personalities (Margo et al., 1984) and display narcissistic tendencies characterized by a withdrawal from reality (Bradon, 1977).

The presence of many perspectives serves to validate the notion that the ISKCON movement is experiencing a deficiency in scholarly investigation, particularly in comparison to other (NRMs), both inside Kenya and globally. In the context of Kenya, the existing material pertaining to the presence of the movement within the country is outdated and primarily focuses on the inception and establishment of the movement in Mombasa and Nairobi. Limited material has been documented regarding the dissemination of the ideas outside Mombasa and Nairobi. Consequently, there is a

pressing need for a comprehensive examination of the genesis, perspectives, and customs of the ISKCON movement in Kenya. Additionally, there is a need for a more current evaluation of the ISKCON movement in Kenya. Being classified as a NRM, ISKCON operates within religious spheres that are subject to ongoing debates within Kenyan society.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study was to examine the activities and beliefs of Hare Krishna in Kisumu County, Kenya.

Specifically, the study was guided by the following objectives:

- i) To trace the spread and establishment of the Hare Krishna movement in Kisumu County.
- ii) To examine Hare Krishna movement beliefs and practices in Kisumu County.
- iii) To assess with a view to establish influence of Hare Krishna teachings on peace and interfaith dialogue strategy in Kisumu County.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

- i) How did the Hare Krishna movement spread into Kenya and Kisumu County?
- ii) What are the principal beliefs, devotional practices, and style of living of the Hare Krishna movement in Kisumu County?
- iii) What are the teachings on peace strategies used by Hare Krishna on interfaith dialogue in Kisumu County?

### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

Over the past two decades, the media has extensively focused on the subject of "NRMs." These news reports often consist solely of narratives that depict acts of extreme cruelty or violence, commonly referred to as "atrocious tales." The utilization of negative terms such as "brainwashing" and "mind control" is a common occurrence. The level of autonomy granted to individuals in terms of their participation in the movement seems limited, with minimal influence over the decision to join and a complete absence of agency in the choice to depart. Through a comprehensive analysis of movements such as Hare Krishna, it is possible to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the movement and counteract the prevailing negative perception that it has acquired over time, necessitating a process of rectification or their truthfulness.

The impact of certain emerging religious tendencies on contemporary civilisation is indisputable. Certain leaders within (NRMs) who possess charismatic qualities have been found to bear responsibility for the fatalities of their adherents. Various acts of extreme violence, unlawful behavior, and other grave accusations have been brought up, and in certain instances, they have been substantiated. Certain factions employ physical aggression as a means of achieving their objectives, but others, such as ISKCON, employ deceptive tactics. The reports, for the most part, employ a practice of selective reporting. The attribution of guilt for suicides occurring within cults frequently occurs without thorough examination of alternative circumstances that may have contributed to the tragic outcome.

One of the prevailing hypotheses within the field of sociology of religion posits that religious revivals play a significant role in aiding individuals in coping with emerging social issues, since they address a previously unmet human need. The emergence of religious movements can be attributed to social and economic hardship, as posited by the 'relative deprivation theory' (Glock, 1973; Stark & Bainbridge, 1987). Religion has a significant role in facilitating individuals' adaptation to their surroundings by affirming and legitimizing cultural norms, while concurrently fostering a sense of communal belonging through the common adherence to certain beliefs.

Several scholars have posited that the rapid speed of contemporary society has resulted in a disconnection between individuals and their cultural heritage. The problems within Western civilization have engendered a sense of insecurity among individuals, prompting many to adopt a strictly pragmatic perspective when perceiving the world. Consequently, these individuals experience a renewed sense of deprivation (Anthony & Robbins, 1981). Stark and Bainbridge (1987), explains that one reason for the emergence of cults suggests that new religious believers are frequently young individuals who have unfulfilled needs. Nevertheless, it appears that a significant majority of adherents to contemporary NRMs originate from socioeconomically privileged origins, with a special emphasis on individuals belonging to the middle and higher socioeconomic strata. The prevailing argument posits that the predicament faced by individuals is mostly rooted in a diminished sense of purpose or existential deprivation, rather than just being attributed to economic adversity.

There exists some misconceptions pertaining to the teachings and operational procedures of the ISKCON organization, necessitating their thorough examination and clarification. The investigation of the personality types exhibited by individuals who identify as Hare Krishna followers has been the focus of several scholarly studies. Research conducted by Poling and Poling (1986) on ISKCON, a significant number of its members exhibit what the authors refer to as "sensate personalities." Pre-converts to ISKCON are often depicted as individuals who exhibit sensuality and harbor concerns about potentially succumbing to excessive sensory gratification. The presence of sensory orientation in the ritual can be attributed to the use of food with sensory appeal, the incorporation of clay figurines as representations of deities, and the literal interpretation of narratives. However, it is crucial to understand the religious perspective of the Hare Krishna Movement in relation to sensory perception and its role in controlling sensual desires. Further investigation is required to validate these observations; nevertheless, prior research has indicated that individuals who follow the Hare Krishna movement exhibit depressive traits (Margo et al., 1984) and tend to participate in a narcissistic withdrawal from the actual world (Bradon, 1977). Research on the Krishna community as a collective entity, on the other hand, indicates that their cognitive capacities fall within the average range (Ross, 1985).

Gaining exposure to fresh perspectives on religion necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Hare Krishna's diverse beliefs and actions. In Hare Krishna tradition, chanting has various advantages such as fostering peace, promoting self-awareness, cultivating joy, facilitating liberation from the cycle of Karma and reincarnation, and nurturing devotion towards the divine being. These benefits are among the many aspects emphasized by the Hare Krishna community. Numerous adherents have reported experiencing improved mental and physical well-being subsequent to engaging in a session of chanting.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Kenya is a nation characterized by its multicultural composition. Nevertheless, rather than serving as a cohesive force in societal cohesion, it is exacerbating preexisting issues. The propensity of individuals to exhibit respect and embrace diversity is often hindered by their limited social consciousness and insensitivity. The Hare Krishna group contributes

to the transformation of the aforementioned scenario in Kenya by imparting knowledge to the Kenyan population about the significance of diversity in fostering societal improvement.

This study contributes to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources. Gaudiya Vaishnavas adhere to the principle of abstaining from the act of killing animals for sustenance and do not subscribe to the notion that sins can be absolved via the practice of bloodshed. In essence, jivatmans, or souls, undergo a perpetual cycle of transmigration across many animal species. Srila Prabhupada (1997:194-201) observed that, there may be adverse karmic repercussions when the progression of souls towards the human form is disrupted or temporarily halted. These consequences could manifest as the soul descending into lower species.

This study examined the relationship between religion and peace, specifically focusing on the Hare Krishna movement. The text elucidated the philosophical underpinnings of the Hare Krishna Movement, so substantiating its significant contribution to promoting intergroup and interreligious harmony. The proposition that religion plays a substantial role in the community poses a challenge that necessitates empirical validation, as individuals persist in seeking resolutions to the predicaments of societal progress and harmony. The proliferation of religious diversity has resulted in multifaceted implications for individuals across several domains, encompassing the economic, political, spiritual, and social aspects of their lives. Hence, the objective of this study was to examine the correlation between the Hare Krishna community and endeavors aimed at fostering religious tolerance and cohabitation within Kisumu County.

### **1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the operations and activities of ISKCON within Kisumu County, located in the country of Kenya. In order to investigate this issue, the research conducted an analysis of the dissemination and establishment of the Hare Krishna movement in Kenya and specifically in Kisumu County. The study also examined the doctrinal principles, beliefs, devotional practices, and lifestyle of the Hare Krishna movement within Kisumu County. Furthermore, the research explored the process by which individuals convert to the Hare Krishna movement and evaluated the teachings of the Hare Krishna movement regarding peace and strategies for interfaith

dialogue within Kisumu County. This study was constrained to Kisumu County; however, previous research has provided significant insights into the presence of other regions, such as Siaya, where the Hare Krishna monks reside. Simultaneously, the utilization of a solitary temple for the study inadvertently excluded alternative sites that could have potentially provided further insights. This is because ISKCON activities are only conducted in one temple-the only of Hare Krishna in western Kenya. The scope of the geographical area under investigation is rather limited, hence constraining the pool of potential participants and informants.

### **1.8 Operational Definition of Terms**

**Development:** this term refers to the struggle of a given social segment to transform itself towards improved quality of life and participation of an enlarged percentage of its members. This sought to involve an analysis on the contribution of ISKCON in improving education, health and social life of the people to advance their living conditions in general.

**Reincarnation:** This term sought to refer to a process of starting life in a different physical form after death in the physical world or on earth. In this study, it could also refer to transmigration.

**Krishna:** This term sought to refer to the Supreme Being whom the Hare Krishna Movement worship and revere. It also refers to the reign of Krishna over all that submitted to his Lordship and a time envisaged with the disappearance of discrimination, poverty, oppression, sickness and other social ills.

**Mantra:** This term sought to refer to the Chanting done by the Hare Krishna devotees to awaken their souls while calling on Krishna to take control of their lives.

**Vedas:** This sought to refer to a collection of hymns and religious text written in Indian language which the Hare Krishna devotees believe in as sacred. These hymns are usually used during worship.

**Temple:** This sought to refer to both the building and the Hare Krishna devotees and followers who believe in the teachings of Krishna.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter sought to acknowledge works done by other scholars on the spread and establishment of the Hare Krishna movement in Kenya, doctrinal principles and practices, processes of conversion into Hare Krishna by converts and Hare Krishna teachings on peace and interfaith dialogue strategy in Kisumu County.

#### **2.2 The India/Africa connection and the rising local interest in Hinduism in Kenya**

During the colonial period, Hindus constituted the predominant portion of the British workforce in Kenya, and their influx into the country persisted as voluntary migrants in pursuit of economic prospects. Nairobi serves as the primary residence for the predominant Hindu community in Kenya, with individuals originating from various regions of India, notably Gujarat, South India, Western India, Central India, Buhar, and Uttar Pradesh (Kapila, 2009). The task of compiling an exhaustive inventory of the Indian states from which Hindus trace their origins is exceedingly challenging. The origins of the majority of free migrants are often untraceable due to the absence of mandatory reporting to centralized authorities (Salvadori, 1989).

The historical periods preceding and during colonialism in Kenya played a significant role in fostering the growth and establishment of Hindu-Christian relations. The nature of this connection is largely defined by the sociopolitical and economic circumstances of pre-independent Kenya. The establishment of trade connections between India and the east coast of Africa predates the advent of Europeans (Patel, 2007). The anti-slavery movement, which had been experiencing significant momentum in West Africa, was introduced to East Africa during the latter part of the 1860s. The British naval vessels patrolled the Indian Ocean, intercepting slave ships and liberating all enslaved individuals on board, as a means to uphold the prohibition on the trafficking of slaves. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS) placed significant emphasis on the resettlement of emancipated slaves. Sir Bartle Frere, the special envoy of Britain to Zanzibar, expressed his support for Christian missions as a means to assist liberated slaves in their search for suitable resettlement options (Patel (2002).

Over the course of time, Asian Kenyans have made noteworthy contributions to Kenyan society in several domains such as medicine, literature, and athletics, despite their somewhat isolated position. The Hindu community in Kenya has taken proactive measures to address prevalent health concerns by establishing an organization known as the Social League. The Asian African community has received commendation for their efforts in grappling with the matter of identity within a nation where they are noticeably underrepresented as a minority group. There is a potential for the emergence of a novel epoch wherein individuals adhering to Hinduism and other religious affiliations can engage in unrestricted intercommunication (Patel, 2007).

A comprehensive examination of the interplay between Hindu and Christian groups in pre-independence Kenya elucidates the tendency of Christian missionaries to overlook the Indian population in their proselytization endeavors, instead directing their efforts primarily on the indigenous African communities. The potential explanation for this phenomenon could be attributed to the relatively lower economic status of indigenous Africans, rendering them more susceptible to the process of evangelization. The collaboration of Hindus and local Kenyan Africans during the construction of the Uganda Railway facilitated cultural convergence between the two groups. The authors Akaranga and Moywaywa (2015) assert that the individuals in question were involved in the mistreatment of their non-European colleagues, which was perpetrated by the management team of the railway construction project, who had a position of dominance due to their white ethnicity.

In contrast to those belonging to indigenous Kenyan communities, Hindus were compelled to rely on their own efforts in commercial and industrial pursuits. The individuals in question exercised caution in avoiding excessive reliance on Western aid, notwithstanding its provision by Christian organizations. Individuals achieved economic self-sufficiency by maintaining autonomy over their own cognitive faculties. Despite variations in religious beliefs, linguistic practices, caste systems, ethnic backgrounds, and occupational pursuits, the Hindu population in Kenya has managed to maintain a cohesive sense of community, mostly driven by a collective feeling of national pride (Amatya Sen, 2000).

As a consequence of this, they exert significant influence as a formidable lobbying entity within the corporate realm. Hindus commonly exhibit a tendency towards political reserve and prioritize their entrepreneurial pursuits. Individuals who are inclined to openly disclose their political affiliations tend to exhibit a conservative bias. The preference of Hindus for rich residential areas such as Parklands, Pangani, and Kileleshwa has historically been seen. However, there is a noticeable shift in this pattern as a growing population of middle- and upper-class Africans are now choosing to reside in these once exclusive enclaves. The persistence of Asian home isolation poses a formidable challenge that may require considerable effort to overcome (Kapila, 2009).

African Christians have witnessed instances of Hindu conversions within their communities. The Arya Schools in the Ngala district of Nairobi are currently being served by an African Hindu chaplain who has transitioned from a previous practice of Christianity. There has been a sudden emergence of fervent Hindus in Kenya who have started participating in Christian churches. Both Kamlesh Paul Pattni and Sunil Kapul can be classified inside this particular category. However, it is noteworthy that these recent converts tend to either start their own religious institutions or exhibit a preference for congregations where individuals of Asian descent already constitute the majority. The International Christian Center is an organization that actively embraces new members and has a substantial Asian membership base (Moywaywa, 2013).

It has been observed that certain aspects of Kenyan Hinduism possess potential for productive interfaith discourse with Christianity. The fundamental tenets of Hinduism in Kenya align with those observed by practitioners of this faith across the globe. These include a comprehensive worldview, the practice of devotional temple worship, the significance of the priestly function, and a belief in Samsara (the continuous cycle of rebirth) and the authority of Vedic scriptures. The religions of Christianity and Hinduism in Kenya exhibit a variety of similarities, which present opportunities for cultivating mutually advantageous engagements (Kapila, 2009).

Indeed, these two religions exhibit significant disparities in terms of theological and cultural aspects. Notwithstanding these inequalities, the respective followers have managed to cohabit harmoniously during the post-independence era. The dissimilarities between Hindus and Christians, both in terms of their historical development and

theological perspectives, present a perplexing quandary. In this particular context, it is worth noting that Christians and Muslims exhibit a closer theological and historical relationship (Ombongi, 1993). However, it is noteworthy that in this country, the two religions have demonstrated a higher degree of coexistence and harmony compared to other regions.

This calls for more investigation into the widely held notion that the Christian-Muslim hostilities in Kenya and Africa can be attributed to religious disparities. If such a scenario were to occur, it seems probable that parties with greater religious disparities would be more inclined to participate in violent confrontations. The Hindu community in Kenya has established a significant historical connection with the indigenous African population via various cultural practices and customs. The aforementioned strands can be observed within several domains such as employment, education, health, business, as well as religious and political discourse (Ombongi, 1993).

Hindus are present in diverse professional domains, both as employees and as entrepreneurs. In such circumstances, individuals often engage in regular and close interactions with indigenous Africans, either as colleagues or individuals in positions of authority. Multiple Hindu organizations have made significant financial and organizational commitments to educational institutions in the United States. Numerous educational institutions, encompassing both public and private sectors, are characterized by a diverse student body consisting of individuals from Hindu and Christian backgrounds. This amalgamation of students from different religions and cultures renders these schools very conducive environments for fostering interfaith and intercultural interaction (Moywaywa, 2013).

Christians and Hindus engage in social interactions through many means, such as participation in interfaith groups, involvement in marriage rites, and through familial visits. Moywaywa (2013), believes that the Hindu community in Kenya predominantly maintains a non-political stance. However, there are instances where individuals from this community actively participate in political endeavors, either by running for public office or by endorsing political candidates. As a result, these engagements facilitate interactions between Hindus and other Kenyans of African heritage, who primarily identify as Christians.

### **2.3 Doctrines, teachings conversion and transformation of ISKCON**

This study holds significance as it examines and juxtaposes the spiritual and material dimensions, focusing on their respective levels of purity and emphasizing the distinctiveness of the spiritual realm in stark opposition to the material cosmos. The pervasive presence of feelings associated with spiritual purity, in stark contrast to the impurities of the worldly realm, has been noted by Dennill and Naudé (2007). Srila Prabhupada (2000) posits that the state of being worldly is responsible for fostering ignorance, delusion, falsity, and darkness. Conversely, God is regarded as the ultimate origin of knowledge, truth, permanence, and light.

Based on the findings of the study, it has been seen that the heart serves as the primary source of mental activity within the human body, with the circulation of blood facilitating the transmission of this cognitive energy to various regions throughout the organism. Consequently, the process of self-realization holds significant importance on the journey towards attaining a state of heightened spiritual awareness. This analysis underscores the prioritization of the sacred existence within the spiritual domain, as opposed to the ordinary existence on this earthly plane, as observed in ancient Judaism, conventional Christianity, and Hinduism. The primary objective of religion is to enhance the overall well-being and standard of living for individuals within the present earthly realm.

The primary objective of human existence, characterized by heightened consciousness, is to attain the spiritual realm. Individuals who have prioritized sensory enjoyment and thereby failed to achieve liberation from material existence are considered akin to animals (Srila Prabhupada, 1986). Similar to how adherents of the Hare Krishna movement are able to catch a glimpse of the sacred and spiritual existence that supersedes the mundane and materialistic world, during the eschatological phase, followers of other religious traditions can also achieve a proleptic experience of the spiritual realm through purification while still being in a physical state (Dennill & Naudé, 2007).

Based on scholarly investigation, it has been determined that disobedience, commonly referred to as sin, is the root cause of contamination and necessitates the use of purification measures. This perspective bears resemblance to the belief held by the Qumran cult, which posits that the physical corruption of humanity is a consequence of

its spiritual defiance. In the biblical narrative, Adam and Eve, who are often regarded as archetypal representations of the male and female genders, made the decision to emulate the divine qualities of God rather than acknowledging their subordinate position to Him. This notion finds parallel in the Christian tradition in Jesus Christ's story of the prodigal son, as discussed by Dennill and Naudé in 2007. The concept within Vedic philosophy wherein the soul yearns for self-governance and descends from the spiritual realm to become ensnared in the material world bears a striking resemblance to the aforementioned notion. According to Srila Prabhupada (1985), it is imperative to undergo multiple cleansings to address both moral transgressions and their corresponding physical manifestations.

Academics have increasingly directed their focus towards ISKCON since the 1980s. Scholars in the field of sociology of religion have extensively examined ISKCON in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of its ideology, organizational framework, and religious rituals. Over the course of the past three decades, there has been a substantial surge in religious adherence among the population of Kenya. Religion is seeing a resurgence and a notable resurgence in Kenyan society. Contemporary religious communities in Kenya encompass a diverse array of faith traditions, encompassing Pentecostalism, neo-traditional religious organizations, ceremonial specialists, Western missionary-established churches, and Islamic communities.

Furthermore, there is a growing trend of increased popularity among believers for neo-Hindu (and Buddhist) traditions, which have been established in the region since the 1970s. The surge in the establishment of Hindu temples in Kenya throughout the 1970s serves as a significant signal of the religion's widespread appeal. Several groups that exemplify this phenomenon include the Radha Govinda Temple, the Hindu Monastery of Africa, and the Arya Samaj. The incorporation of Hindu terminology such as karma, mala shakti, guru, and mantra into the current religious discourse in Kenya serves as evidence of the growing influence of Hinduism. Additional signs encompass the prevalence of Hindu shrines within Kenyan households and the widespread adoption of Hindu naming rituals, wherein babies are bestowed with names such as Aditi, Rama, Saraswati, Durga, Krishna, Maya, Lila, and Shiva.

Nevertheless, there is a limited amount of academic research conducted in Kenya on various aspects of ISKCON. Specifically, scholarly investigations on ISKCON's internal structure have been conducted by Rochford (2007), gender dynamics have been explored by Lorenz (2004), instances of child abuse have been examined by Wolf (2004), factors contributing to individuals leaving the organization have been studied by Gelberg (1983), and ISKCON's classification as a (NRM) has been analyzed by Wilson (1999). However, the academic literature on these topics within the context of Kenya remains scarce. Scholars have yet to analyze the cultural friction that exists between tradition and the ideals and practices of ISKCON, as discussed by Bryant (2004). Additionally, the scholarly examination of ISKCON's interactions and affiliations with other organizations in Kenya remains unexplored, as noted by Nye (1996). The issue of schisms (Collins, 2004) and heresies (Bloch, 2007) inside the movement has not been well addressed by researchers at an institutional level.

The works of B. Rochford have proven to be valuable in reconstructing the events and developments that transpired inside the movement in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. Rochford has conducted extensive research on the Hare Krishnas since the 1970s. The principal objective of the individual in question is to further the examination of religious establishments within the realm of sociology. In Rochford's (1985) study, an examination is conducted on the experiences of individuals who identify as ISKCON devotees in the United States. The research delves into the strategies employed by the organization for attracting new members, as well as explores the process of assimilation and adaptation that newcomers undergo when embracing the group's unconventional lifestyle. Rochford's primary research focus during the initial phase of his career, commencing in 1982, has revolved around the examination of the processes by which individuals become involved in social movements. Through a comprehensive examination of the recruitment strategies, theological principles, and external societal influences associated with the Hare Krishna movement, it has been shown that the rapid growth experienced by the movement throughout the 1970s was mostly influenced by pragmatic adjustments made to suit specific contextual circumstances, rather than being driven only by ideological motivations.

In a subsequent phase of his professional journey, Rochford (2007) conducted an analysis of the evolutionary trajectory of ISKCON, focusing on the organization's capacity to

adapt and resurface during challenging periods. The researcher examined the correlation between the economic downturn experienced in the 1980s and 1990s and its impact on the decline of communal temple life, afterwards giving birth to the prevalence of independent families. In his study, Rochford examines the evolution of temple life throughout the 1970s, specifically focusing on the shift from radical objectives and lifestyle to a movement that prioritizes family values. A transition occurred from a societal structure that discouraged the establishment of familial units to one that actively promoted and accommodated families of varying sizes.

While the aforementioned studies provide insights into the progressions within the United States, they fail to uncover the societal transformations that have taken place within the Kenyan movement over the course of the last thirty years. This study examined the sociocultural contexts in which ISKCON has built its presence in Kenya. The examination of the principles of the ISKCON movement in Kenya, with regard to its assimilation of the doctrines and rituals of mainstream Christian Churches, remains an unexplored area of study. This analysis draws parallels to the work of Anil Sooklal, who conducted a historical and South African-focused investigation of the movement in Durban, aiming to comprehend the perspectives of the wider local African populace towards ISKCON (Bishop, 2022).

To date, there has been a lack of scholarly investigation into both the inception of this particular religious tradition and its potential impact on the enrichment of indigenous belief systems. The objective of this study was to effectively communicate accurate facts regarding the ISKCON movement in Africa and Kenya, focusing on its role as a novel Western religion that challenges prevailing social, cultural, and theological conventions. This movement exhibits a significantly smaller following when contrasted with the more prevalent religious activities observed in Kenya.

The majority of individuals are not aware of this subject matter, and those who possess knowledge on it may perceive it as merely intriguing. Similar to other (NRMs), a comprehensive understanding of ISKCON is most effectively attained by individuals who possess prior knowledge of its adherents or maintain some form of close association with them. The significance of its location on the periphery should not be disregarded. According to INFORM's 2014 report, ISKCON asserts a global following of at least one

million congregational devotees. In contrast, numerous other (NRMs) tend to have smaller memberships, ranging from a few hundred to several thousand individuals at the upper end of the scale. Consequently, despite its peripheral status, this particular (NRM) has gained recognition in South Africa as well as in other nations where it is present.

The ISKCON organization encompasses a strong and active missionary division. Unlike several (NRMs) that can be considered esoteric, this particular movement actively engages with the general public through various means. The target audience of this initiative includes many settings such as rural communities, metropolitan neighborhoods, town centers, college campuses, the World Wide Web, and natural environments (King, 2013). The movement exhibits activity within Kenyan tertiary institutions, including colleges and universities, as well as in the digital realm. Publicly accessible events such as the Sunday Love Feast and worship services are conducted within temple premises. Rituals and public festivities are frequently observed among the community of believers. Events such as the Festival of Chariots serve as a catalyst for individuals from diverse geographical locations to come together in a collective expression of devotion through the chanting of Krishna's name.

The ISKCON movement possesses a robust material dimension, which potentially enables it to assert a position of superiority over other (NRMs). The temples of this religious tradition exhibit a resolute presence, while its followers proudly don attire that signifies their religious devotion. The presence of various distinctive physical attributes, such as shaved heads, topknots, tilaka markings, vibrant orange robes, yellow saris, dhotis, and resonating drums, elicits a sense of curiosity among onlookers. This evidence refutes the notion of a proclivity towards isolationism, as posited by several scholars (Urban, 2015). The ISKCON movement encounters obstacles in the realm of religious and ideological competition, particularly inside Kenya, where Christianity holds a prevailing status. In numerous African nations, including Kenya, the extent of integration of local populations is notably restricted and sometimes lacks visibility.

Devotees are faced with the challenge of competing for the affections of individuals, particularly considering the prevailing prevalence of Christian or other religious and philosophical belief systems among the majority of people. This suggests that the current tendency is unlikely to obtain widespread acceptance and establish itself as a prevalent

religious practice in the country in the near future. However, the availability of potential believers will remain inexhaustible. Individuals who deviate from societal norms and seek profound existential significance are inherently attracted to it, a phenomenon commonly observed in the context of numerous (NRMs). The perpetual necessity of this field of research arises from the persistent desire of individuals to impart fresh spiritual significance to the cosmos.

The findings of a study done in South Africa suggest that individuals who are receptive to adopting a theological perspective that offers a comprehensive framework and resolutions to matters of profound significance are more inclined to undergo conversion compared to those who do not possess such openness. Individuals who have a sense of detachment from mainstream culture and society, along with a desire for an alternative identity, are susceptible to the process of conversion. ISKCON movement is susceptible to the challenges encountered by other (NRMs). Despite facing significant challenges during the apartheid era, the movement has experienced a resurgence in contemporary times, fostering an environment conducive to religious tolerance and the exercise of freedom of speech. Given the historical instances of prejudice perpetrated by the state (Dunbar and Swart 2012), individuals belonging to prevailing religious traditions (Wallace 2006), and the wider populace (Falkof 2012), it would be imprudent to presume the maintenance of such circumstances in the future. Fortunately, the ISKCON movement is able to operate without obstacles due to the protection of religious freedom and freedom of expression as enshrined in the South African Constitution. The discourse of the devotees is indicative of a carefree way of life, devoid of any insinuation of the movement or its followers facing persecution or discrimination.

The methodologies employed by the movement have undergone changes and advancements over its history. According to Urban (2015), there has been a decrease in temple membership as individuals choose to establish families in suburban or urban environments. The ISKCON South Africa National Council has noted the lack of enthusiasm about adopting a full-time residency at the temple as a matter of considerable concern. In order to comprehend the reservations that exist within our community regarding the adoption of full-time service, it is imperative to assess the existing arrangements and provide potential solutions to address any deficiencies. This will contribute to enhancing the feasibility of full-time service as a realistic alternative for our

community (International Society for Krishna Consciousness, 2019). The overwhelming majority of individuals who engage in religious practices choose to make infrequent visits to temples rather than permanently relocating to these sacred spaces.

The ISKCON movement can be considered as one of the more successful (NRMs) that have emerged in Western and South African contexts. This can be attributed to the devotees' proactive approach of actively engaging with wider audiences, as opposed to adopting a monastic lifestyle and withdrawing from societal interactions. The lives of adherents have undergone significant transformation, particularly in South Africa, which served as the initial breeding ground for the movement. Given the case of Kenya, it is crucial to examine the evolution of the migration, originating from India and the East, in response to changing social dynamics through time. The study concluded that it was imperative to examine potential challenges associated with acclimating to the political and social framework of Kenya.

ISKCON presents itself as a comprehensive solution to various challenges encountered by individuals in contemporary society (Karapanagiotis, 2018, p. 77). In his work, Keshava Krishna Das (2013) asserts that the dissemination of knowledge pertaining to the significant aims outlined in the Vedic tradition serves the purpose of ameliorating the prevalent societal maladies that afflict contemporary society. Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, another adherent, argues that the dissemination of Krishna consciousness has the potential to imbue society with moral principles and offer enduring resolutions to intricate challenges. In the context of Africa, where prevalent harmful and self-destructive behaviors are observed, the significance of the devotee's urge to seek resolutions is particularly noteworthy. In contrast to other (NRMs) that tend to exhibit a proclivity for isolationism, Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami asserts that his movement has an impeccable track record in addressing societal concerns such as drug addiction, crime, unemployment, and abortion.

Rather than disengaging from African society due to tensions and disagreements, individuals actively embrace socio-cultural discourses and values as a means to enhance their presence. There exists significant evidence to support this claim. Certain individuals have undertaken the task of translating religious texts from their original African languages, namely isiZulu, isiXhosa, and SeSotho, into English (Satsvarupa Dasa

Goswami n.d.[a]). This endeavor has been pursued with the intention of enhancing accessibility for English-speaking individuals (Aarushi Dasi, personal email correspondence, 17 July 2021). Devotees perceive the distribution of spiritual knowledge as a method to introduce the teachings of their religion to individuals who lack prior familiarity with them (Satyaraja Dasa, 2011). The Bhakti Yoga Society, a movement, undertakes visits to various campuses in South Africa with the purpose of engaging students in discussions pertaining to the teachings of the Vedas. These teachings encompass topics such as rebirth, karma, sense control, yoga, and the distinction between the physical body and the soul.

#### **2.4 Teachings on peace and interfaith dialogue strategies**

According to Juergensmeyer (1993), religious ideas function as a divisive element, transforming individuals into adversaries and intensifying animosity and discord. According to Cavanaugh (2009), the main impetus behind interfaith dialogue as a form of communication is to exert an influence on societal transformation, specifically in countering the utilization of religion as a means to incite violence. On the other hand, Huntington (1996) posited that a clash between civilizations is inevitable and that religion serves as the pervasive element in this scenario.

According to Patel and Meyer (2011), engaging in interfaith dialogue is a crucial component in effectively addressing the widespread issues of religious misinterpretation, intolerance, and conflict. One potential approach to address the issue at hand involves fostering interfaith dialogue as a means of engaging with individuals of different religious beliefs. However, it is important to acknowledge that just relying on this method would be imprudent, as it does not guarantee the complete cessation of violence or the eradication of the underlying factors that have contributed to the current historical context. Nevertheless, it is imperative to commence one's journey. By engaging in these types of dialogues inside secure environments within their local communities, individuals can enhance their ability to serve as role models when they venture into broader societal contexts.

The beginnings of dialogue are closely linked to the Socratic style of questioning, wherein individuals are encouraged to articulate and elucidate their own ideas on the world. Zappen (2004) asserts that Plato posited the birth of "dialogues" within a rhetorical

framework that prioritized the employment of argumentation as a mechanism for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Through active participation in this particular avenue of investigation, the collective was able to reach a consensus on a comprehensive comprehension and structure that remained unaffected by individual ideological perspectives.

The influence of John Dewey on the democratic education movement is evident in the adoption of dialogue as a pedagogical approach (Ziga, Nagda, Chesler, Cyton-Walker, & Adena, 2007). Prior to the conceptualization of the term "experiential," John Dewey (1938) campaigned for its principles and contended that individuals should engage in problem-solving activities that foster critical thinking within realistic settings (Brockbank & McGill, 2000). Dewey (1938) posits that within an ecumenical context, the concept of a facilitator's role is particularly relevant, as it involves the creation of experiences that foster personal development (p. 40).

Dewey's philosophical framework was rooted in the scientific method, which, in turn, drew its foundations from the lived experiences and everyday realities of common individuals. Dewey stated that conversation has distinct characteristics in terms of its objectives and approaches, setting it apart from other modes of communication. Debate and mediation are approaches that seek to identify resolutions to issues, whereas conversation endeavors to foster a shared comprehension (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). Buber (1997) endeavored to explore profound insights, although his approach heavily relied on the conversational component. According to Friedman (2002), the philosopher Martin Buber expressed the notion that life might be understood as a series of encounters or meetings (p. xiv). The individual displayed a keen interest in the realm of human connection, prompting an investigation into many aspects such as personal spatial boundaries and the dynamics of reciprocal communication. According to Messer (2008), Buber conceptualized dialogue as more than just a discipline or a practice, but rather as a way of life that enables individuals to enhance their humanity by recognizing and respecting others as fellow human beings (p. 20). According to Buber, speech is not governed by norms and is inherently unmanageable. Conversely, the process of interaction emerged organically due to pre-established connections.

According to Arnett (1986), Buber identified several key characteristics of ethical conversation, including openness, knowledge of diversity, acceptance of conflict, mutual respect and trust, sincerity, honesty, and a willingness to recognize mistakes (p. 96). The concept of "between," initially introduced by Buber (1997), pertains to the existential space that emerges during interpersonal dialogue. According to Buber, the individual who engages in building activities is considered to be the dynamic and essential core of a community. Furthermore, the community itself is founded upon a vibrant and mutually beneficial interaction between its members. (Buber, p. 94)

According to Buber (1997), he posited that those who openly express hatred are more closely connected to others than those who lack both hatred and love. This observation pertains to the sanctity of interpersonal dialogue (p. 68). The early studies of dialogue have exerted a significant influence on theorists in the domains of critical, feminist, and anti-racist thought. Freire and Horton established a connection between individuals hailing from marginalized backgrounds and the notion of challenging unjust social systems (Freire, 2000). In order to derive genuine advantages from an event, active engagement is required, in contrast to the perspective put forward by Freire (2000).

According to Friere (2000) as cited in Viera (2012, p.59), genuine dialogue possesses a transformative quality rather than being limited to mere conversation. It possesses the capacity to either bring about a profound change in the participants' understanding of reality or to reinforce the existing status quo that the dialogue aims to challenge. The process of undergoing this transformation necessitates deep contemplation and the subsequent application of those thoughts in practical ways. Gadamar (1975) argued, based on Buber's conceptual framework that the process of understanding within a conversation extends beyond the act of self-assertion and the successful presentation of one's own perspective. Instead, it involves a transformative experience that leads to a state of communion, wherein individuals undergo a change and do not retain their original state (p. 379).

The author stated that the primary objective of dialogue is to establish consensus, so strengthening the arguments put out by each party involved. Gadamar (1975) posited that with the use of hermeneutics, which he conceptualized as "the phenomenon of understanding" (p. xxi), discourse assumes a significant function in facilitating the

attainment of a more intricate interpretation. A physicist specializing in the analysis of conversational outcomes presents an alternative perspective. Bohm's (2010) research presented a challenge to the prevailing acceptance of the fragmentation hypothesis in the field of physics. According to Bohm (2010), it is essential for humankind to engage in coherent thinking regarding the unified and continuous actuality of existence in its whole.

In a Bohmian discussion, individuals convene in a circular formation devoid of a central point or outer boundary, symbolizing the perpetual and unbounded character of the discourse. The phrase "impersonal fellowship" (Bohm, 1992, pp. 205-207) was used by Bohm to characterize the absence of a genuine sense of community in typical daily exchanges. Bohm emphasized the significance of attending to the implicit aspects of communication in addition to the explicit content during a conversation. The unspoken can frequently hold the utmost significance. Bohm (2010) underscored the importance of differentiating between cognition and perception in his scholarly contribution. According to Bohm (2010, p. 24), the statement might be rephrased as follows: The notion expressed by Bohm suggests that the act of thinking and the corresponding emotion occur concurrently, as one thinks due to the purpose to think.

Panikkar (1999), a scholar in the field of interfaith movement, conducted a comparative analysis of the works of communication academics Yagi and Swidler (1993). In this analysis, Panikkar recognized shared characteristics in their approaches pertaining to the commencement of discussions, rules for facilitation, and the importance attributed to dialogue. Panikkar claimed that the task of setting aside one's own religious perspectives in order to genuinely comprehend the experiences of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds is a highly challenging endeavor. Panikkar's (1999) concept of dialogue centers on the interpersonal dynamics and interactions that occur between individuals, rather than solely focusing on spoken communication. According to Flores (2006), it was acknowledged that the individuals participating in a conversation hold greater significance than the specific subjects being deliberated. Bakhtin (1981) posits that talks necessitate temporal and spatial context, and they must exemplify individuals' actualized encounters in order to be comprehended by linguistic means. According to Viera, language serves as a means through which a persistent society acquires the ability to comprehend its collective experiences in a cohesive manner. According to the author

(2012, p. 48), it is evident that this plays a crucial role in facilitating interfaith engagement.

According to Viera (2012), a case study approach was employed to examine the outcomes of an interfaith dialogue among religious leaders within the context of an interfaith seminar. Viera (2012) posits that the motivation behind interfaith dialogue is rooted in the belief that global peace cannot be achieved unless religions reconcile with one another (p. 5). Boulding (2000) suggests that adopting a "best case thinking" approach can offer fresh perspectives on peacebuilding. Many scholars and political leaders assert that achieving peace on Earth necessitates establishing harmony among the world's religions. However, Cavanaugh (2007) argues against oversimplifying this notion, contending that if religions are compelled to engage in dialogue solely for the purpose of global peace, they may be unjustly held responsible for the widespread violence in the world. Cavanaugh asserts that the religious nature of their aggression renders it irrational and divisive. On the contrary, the utilization of violence serves a valid objective and contributes to the establishment of peace. According to the author, there is a perceived necessity to employ military force in order to restore rationality among the targeted group (p. 3).

There exists a commonly held misconception that engagement in interfaith dialogue and cooperation is limited to individuals who identify as religious. However, it is imperative to recognize that interfaith endeavors should extend a warm invitation to individuals from diverse faith traditions and philosophical orientations. In support of this notion, Greg Epstein, the Secular Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University, who actively participates in the President's Interfaith and Community Service Challenge, a White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships initiative, highlights that President Obama has explicitly emphasized the necessity of inclusivity by stating that this initiative should be fully accessible to and encompassing of atheists, agnostics, and Humanists (Krebs, 2014).

In delineating the parameters of his challenge, President Obama articulated, "...What I have comprehended is that irrespective of one's religious beliefs... According to the source "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation" (2011), it is asserted that individuals universally share certain collective aspirations and aspirations. Epstein further argues that atheists and agnostics have actively participated in the interfaith movement,

which aims to explore the potential collaboration between individuals of diverse religious beliefs and philosophical perspectives for the betterment of society. Consequently, the term "interfaith dialogue" pertains to the exchange of ideas and discussions among individuals belonging to different faith traditions.

A dialogue is an exchange of ideas between two or more persons. The theoretical conversation in which religious leaders share the perspectives of their faiths, educating followers and other religious leaders alike. Cooperation and constructive interaction between individuals and groups of people of different religions or religious traditions is what this phrase alludes to (Ganesh, 2013). Each person or group adheres to their own set of values while acknowledging the other's right to do the same. Dialogue between faiths involves more than just talking to one another; it also involves building relationships with one another. It occurs on many different levels, between individuals and communities. For instance, we engage in formal and informal forms of communication with our neighbors, students, and coworkers every day. Therefore, dialogue is not something that only happens on the official or academic level; rather, it is an integral aspect of everyday life, when members of different ethnic and religious groups engage face-to-face and where tensions between them are at their most palpable (Kwok, 2014).

According to Kadayifci-Orellana (2013), the need for interaction among individuals of diverse religious beliefs is imperative in contemporary society. The lack of harmony between different communities poses a significant challenge on a global scale. In order to foster peace and comprehension across various faiths and groups, it is crucial to establish a foundation of shared values. Additionally, efforts should be made to mitigate misunderstandings that contribute to intergroup violence by promoting closer relationships between these communities. Emphasizing the significance of interfaith interaction is also essential in cultivating a genuine culture of pluralism. Religions must also consider how they address the expressions of internal diversity if they wish to contribute to peace.

According to Ladd (2013), interfaith dialogue encompasses a wide range of activities. These activities include offering chaplaincy services in hospitals and prisons, conducting research on human rights concerns and safeguarding sacred sites in times of conflict, endorsing international faith declarations such as the Amma Declaration, and engaging in

various interfaith and inter-faith initiatives. Worldwide, a significant number of individuals partake in the observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week during the month of February. This recurring occasion has emerged as a result of the A Common World initiative and endeavors to enhance the quality and encourage interfaith discourse within national platforms, including the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board and the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom.

The promotion of dialogue among adherents of different faith traditions is advocated in order to foster unity within religious communities (Ladd, 2013). This is because tensions and conflicts can emerge not only between individuals who adhere to different religions, but also among factions within the same religious tradition. Engaging in interfaith discourse serves as a means to enhance one's understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and practices of diverse faiths, thereby expanding one's own worldview. By engaging in conversation, individuals can cultivate a greater sense of empathy towards the spiritual experiences of individuals from various religious backgrounds. Furthermore, it is argued that constructive debate has the potential to facilitate personal growth in one's own faith (Noddings, 2012).

As human desires, inequities, and conflicts rise, so do the challenges faced by modern educational systems and religious institutions. Peace is lost as a result of our involuntary participation in rivalry for more, which devalues such positive human traits as cooperation, humanity, tolerance, fairness, and mutual respect. The value of peace can be instilled in the minds of both children and adults through formal and informal educational settings (Noddings, 2012). To this end, Hinduism places a premium on spiritual education (Paravidya) that aims to instill ethical and moral principles in its followers rather than material education (Aparavidya) that teaches individuals how to earn a living in the world. Traditional knowledge and contemporary research both have their merits. We have become accustomed to learning from the here and now, yet there is far more to be gleaned from our past. Upadhyaya (2010) argues that Hinduism, one of the most traditional eastern philosophies, may provide effective strategies and content for peace education, an area that has received very little attention in recent years.

Prominent philosophies that are deemed significant in the realm of peace education encompass "Shama Shanti," which pertains to the attainment of universal harmony, and

"Basudhaiva Kutumbakam," which espouses the belief that humanity is an interconnected and cohesive entity. The contemporary field of peace education offers the potential for further elaboration on fundamental concepts, such as the notion that education serves as a means of emancipating individuals from various forms of adversity (Adhikary, 2016). Themes such as natural justice, equality, love, and sacrifice are recurrent in both literary works and real-life experiences. The Soni (2010) framework for peace education can be enhanced through a more comprehensive exploration of cultural practices, including the joint family system, the cultivation of harmony within oneself and with others, and the tradition of sruti and smriti, denoting the acts of attentive listening and memorization. Techniques such as meditation, sacrifice, yoga, mnemonic recitation, critical questioning, rhythmic recitation, intellectual reasoning, and narrative were employed by Hindu Gurus and their disciples alike as means of imparting knowledge and facilitating learning (Adhikary, 2016).

Having the right company and providing service without expecting anything in return are both important learning tools. Learning and music go hand in hand. Hindu Sanatana, the practiced worldview, contains a wealth of untapped wisdom that could serve as a foundation for contemporary peace education and guide teachers in the direction of cosmic citizenship (Bhawuk, 2012). Human societies employ religious practices to foster social cohesion and mutual respect. Similarly, many violent confrontations throughout history can be traced back to religious ideologies. Many monarchs sanctioned and orchestrated violent campaigns in behalf of orthodox religious leaders (Ladd, 2013). Religion has both been and remains a major source of motivation [by binding people in certain rules that provide reward for good and punishment for bad] for living peacefully and harmoniously (Gier, 1994), as evidenced by the many bloody wars fought in its name throughout human history (Noddings, 2012, p.89). Neither Hinduism nor Hindu civilization is immune to cultural, structural, and direct forms of violence. When I referred to "Hinduism," I meant the Vedic or Sanatana rituals that are part of daily life for many Hindus.

Kawada (1999) conducted a study examining the religious texts Veda, Upanishada, Ramayana, and Mahabharata to explore their perspectives on peace and the association between knowledge and peace education. According to a report by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 2013, Hinduism does not explicitly prohibit war. The

Vedas contain prayers directed towards deities seeking assistance in combat and the smooth transition of fallen soldiers to the afterlife. The Kshatriya caste is obligated by dharma (duty) to engage in warfare when necessary. The Vedic saying "War begins in the minds of men" serves as a source of inspiration for understanding the origins of conflict. In Hinduism, it can be inferred that the concept of "war" may metaphorically represent the perpetual disruption of global order caused by negative forces. Consequently, the responsibility for maintaining peace and stability falls upon the world's superpowers.

In Hinduism, the critique of religion and the decline of humanity are expounded through the framework of various epochs. The Vedic tradition categorizes the ages of the world as Satya (the epoch characterized by truth), Treta (the epoch marked by a mixture of truth and diminished moral standards), Dwapara (the epoch in which truth is marginalized and individuals predominantly exhibit outward, materialistic, competitive, and ambitious tendencies), and Kali (the epoch in which truth is marginalized and individuals predominantly exhibit materialistic, competitive, and ambitious tendencies). Kali Yuga, characterized by gross materialism, ignorance, warfare, foolishness, arrogance, and the negation of our inherent divine spiritual potential, represents the most arduous period for humanity and the world as a whole (Jenkins, 2002). According to Galtung (1969), a prominent scholar in the field of peace studies, the persona of Kali mirrors the world's manifestation of direct, structural, and cultural violence. During the Kali Yuga, morality has reached its nadir (Dallapiccola, 2003, p.23).

The teachings of the Rig Veda encourage community and cooperation. It advises, among other things: "Let's go together, speak together, be original, sacred, and live a philanthropic life, help your friend, follow the right path, give selfless donations (dana), serve your country, and don't be lazy" (Khemka, 1988, pp. 7-9). Many valuable lessons, including "self-understanding," "interdependence," "respect for others," "self-discipline," "truth," "selfless service," and "living together," can be gleaned from the Rig Vedic curriculum. The Yajur Veda taught its readers the importance of active listening. It reinforced the idea that education is essential to success and riches. The Yajur Veda instructs us to honor our forebears and parents by dedicating ourselves to prayer and sacrifice in the hopes of making their souls happy. Yajur Veda's main takeaways are emotional stability, reverence, honesty, and attentiveness. As with the other Vedas, Atharva Veda promotes wellness, morality, honesty, and modesty (Khemka, 1988).

After conducting a comprehensive analysis of various forms of conversation, including intergroup dialogue, intergroup interaction, peacebuilding, spirituality, interfaith collaboration, interfaith dialogue, and the role of secularism in the discourse on faith, several commonalities have been identified. These commonalities emphasize the significance of relationships, introspection, communication methods, and self-awareness across these diverse forms of conversation. The present study aims to explore the lived experiences of students who engage in co-curricular interfaith discourse. To establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for this investigation, the study will draw upon the existing literature pertaining to the aforementioned interconnected topics related to interfaith dialogue.

This study holds significance as it examines and juxtaposes the spiritual and material dimensions, focusing on their respective levels of purity and emphasizing the distinctiveness of the spiritual realm in stark opposition to the material cosmos. The pervasive presence of feelings associated with spiritual purity, in stark contrast to the impurities of the worldly realm, has been noted by Dennill and Naudé (2007). Srila Prabhupada (2000) posits that the state of being worldly is responsible for fostering ignorance, delusion, falsity, and darkness. Conversely, God is regarded as the ultimate origin of knowledge, truth, permanence, and light.

Based on the findings of the study, it has been seen that the heart serves as the primary source of mental activity within the human body, with the circulation of blood facilitating the transmission of this cognitive energy to various regions throughout the organism. Consequently, the process of self-realization holds significant importance on the journey towards attaining a state of heightened spiritual awareness. This analysis underscores the prioritization of the sacred existence within the spiritual domain, as opposed to the ordinary existence on this earthly plane, as observed in ancient Judaism, conventional Christianity, and Hinduism. The primary objective of religion is to enhance the overall well-being and standard of living for individuals within the present earthly realm.

According to Srila Prabhupada (1986), the primary objective of human existence, characterized by heightened consciousness, is to attain the spiritual realm. Individuals who have prioritized sensory enjoyment and thereby failed to achieve liberation from

material existence are considered akin to animals. Similar to how adherents of the Hare Krishna movement are able to catch a glimpse of the sacred and spiritual existence that supersedes the mundane and materialistic one during the eschatological phase, followers of other religious traditions can also achieve a proleptic experience of the spiritual realm through purification while still being in a physical state (Dennill & Naudé, 2007).

Based on scholarly investigation, it has been determined that disobedience, commonly referred to as sin, is the root cause of contamination and necessitates the use of purification measures. This perspective bears resemblance to the belief held by the Qumran cult, which posits that the physical corruption of humanity is a consequence of its spiritual defiance. In the biblical narrative, Adam and Eve, who are often regarded as archetypal representations of the male and female genders, made the decision to emulate the divine qualities of God rather than acknowledging their subordinate position to Him. This notion finds parallel in the Christian tradition in Jesus Christ's story of the prodigal son, as discussed by Dennill and Naudé in 2007. The concept within Vedic philosophy wherein the soul yearns for self-governance and descends from the spiritual realm to become ensnared in the material world bears a striking resemblance to the aforementioned notion. According to Srila Prabhupada (1985), it is imperative to undergo multiple cleansings to address both moral transgressions and their corresponding physical manifestations.

The majority of scholarly works pertaining to the relationship between religion and peace place significant emphasis on the societal contributions of religious groups. These works delve into the ways in which religious groups facilitate spiritual growth and foster harmonious cohabitation (Bryant, 2002; Belshaw, 2001). The peace management training offered by the Hare Krishna community possesses distinct characteristics and objectives.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework.**

### **2.5.1 Social Identity Theory**

This research examined the religious affiliation of Hare Krishna devotees in Kisumu from the perspective of social identity theory. Emile Durkheim (1912) posited the persistent sociological assertion that religious actions and beliefs encompass a twofold nature, operating at both the collective and individual levels, nearly a century ago. Social identity theory examines the convergence of groups and individuals within a religious community,

the regularity of organized religious engagement, and the level of religious social identification.

Hogg and Abrams (1988) underscore the significance of social identity theory, which highlights the concept of "the group in the individual" (p. 3). The idea posits that individuals reside inside a societal framework of multiple social categories, each characterized by differing degrees of power and status interconnections. Despite the varying breadth and duration of social categories, which can encompass enduring geopolitical entities or temporary work groupings, it is evident that all such categories possess the capacity to impact an individual's self-concept.

The formation of a social identity occurs when individuals define themselves based on the social categories to which they are affiliated. In accordance with Tajfel's (1972, p. 31) perspective, social identity can be defined as the awareness of one's affiliation with specific social groups, accompanied with emotional and evaluative importance associated with the participation within these organizations. The formation of social identities is influenced by cognitive processes within a given context, as posited by Hogg (1996) in the social identity theory. Furthermore, these cognitive processes have an impact on individuals' perceptions of others.

The theory elucidates the manner in which specific behaviors and attitudes within and between groups are shaped by different perspectives. The theory in question offers a more extensive framework for understanding group-mediated social psychological phenomena, despite the fact that the researchers who have formulated and utilized it have primarily focused on elucidating the outcomes of social identity processes in relation to intergroup dynamics such as stereotyping and prejudice (Hogg, 1996). The current study incorporates social identity theory at a theoretical level.

Social identity theory provides a theoretical framework for positing that increased frequency of formal religious participation is associated with a heightened religious social identity, as it focuses on the interplay between psychological and structural factors. According to the social identity theory, groups can be seen as both a psychological phenomenon and a social outcome (Turner et al., 1987). The cognitive and motivational states of individuals contribute to the formation of structured group characteristics,

including roles, structures, and norms. On the other hand, structural group characteristics become integrated into an individual's sociocognitive system.

This comprehensive analysis of the correlation between individuals' psychological perceptions of social groups and their overt external attributes indicates a potential association between formal religious engagement, as an external attribute of a social group, and religious social identity, as an individual's psychological experience within that group. Based on the proposed hypothesis, it is posited that individuals who possess formal membership within a specific social group would experience enhanced social identities in connection to such group, and conversely, the social identities of individuals would reciprocally influence their formal membership.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that although the aforementioned theory places less emphasis on individual emotional experiences compared to other identity theories, several scholars in the field of social identity have put forth arguments linking social identities to psychological well-being (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). According to Hogg (1996), the earliest version of the idea posited that individuals' development of social identities was predominantly motivated by an enhanced perception of their own self-worth. Scholars have also posited that individuals are motivated to engage in social comparisons between their in-group (i.e., the group to which they identify) and out-groups in a favorable manner. This can be achieved by selecting comparison criteria that highlight their in-group's superiority or, alternatively, by seeking to shift their in-group affiliation. Social identities are regarded as valuable due to the theoretical proposition that they provide individuals and communities with a structured basis for their actions. Hogg and Abrams (1988) propose that the cognitive processes underlying the formation of social identities serve to alleviate individuals' distress arising from the complexities of social interactions, by simplifying the social landscape.

In summary, the social identity theory posits that the social identity associated with a particular group is connected to both formal group participation and psychological well-being. Given the observed associations between increased participation in organized religion and enhanced psychological welfare, the application of social identity theory provides a robust theoretical framework for examining the role of religious social identity as a potential explanatory factor. Based on the principles of social identity theory, a

stronger sense of psychological well-being can be attributed to a heightened identification with one's religious community, hence fostering increased participation in formal religious activities.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The rationale of this chapter was to explain how data was gathered from the library and field. This chapter highlighted the area of study, the research design used, the target population, sampling procedures, sample size, research instruments used in data collection and data analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The primary objective of this interpretive phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of participants engaged in interfaith discussions, specifically focusing on Hare Krishna devotees, during the Kisumu Interfaith workshop. It is noteworthy that this workshop was organized and financed by the Hare Krishna community. The preferred approach for doing this particular research entailed a qualitative methodology that centered on the individual. The qualitative research methodology was guided by the study objectives, and the themes were derived through an inductive process, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2012). Subsequently, the subsequent phase involved qualitative analysis, a highly confidential process. As stated by Smith and Osborn (2003), the researcher's interpretive work was conducted at each level of the analysis process.

The qualitative technique that was deemed most appropriate for the objectives of this study was interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), as it aimed to capture the essence of individual experiences (Willig, 2001). Phenomenology is characterized as a philosophical framework for investigating the nature of experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). Creswell (1998) posits that phenomenology is rooted in individuals' subjective experiences and aims to comprehend the essence of a given phenomenon (p. 38). According to Van Manen (1990), the objective of phenomenological human science is to comprehend the significance and experiential aspects of a certain phenomenon (p. 29).

The objective of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is to facilitate the process of sense-making for both the participant and the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2003). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), in the context of phenomenology, the researcher

assumes the role of sense-making and acts as a conduit for reporting the experiences of individuals. In contrast, Creswell (2012) argued that the researcher serves as the sole instrument for data collection in qualitative studies.

There is a likelihood that the sensations and events recorded by the study participants may not have been totally true, given that they were required to recollect their experiences and articulate them to the researcher. As stated by Bodgan and Biklen (2007), the responsibility of interpreting the responses in order to understand and assign meaning fell upon the researcher. The participants' comprehension of Hare Krishna beliefs was examined by the researcher subsequent to their engagement in discussions pertaining to their understanding of the doctrines and teachings associated with the movement (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aforementioned procedure of interpretation was commonly referred to as twofold hermeneutics.

The aim of this study was to investigate personal experiences and focus on an individual's subjective view or narrative of an object or event, rather than aiming to create an objective description of the object or event itself (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The target of study in this research encompassed the experiences, theological concepts, and acts of the Hare Krishna community in Kisumu. Moreover, the concept of symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1995), which centers on the process through which individuals construct significance within their social and personal environments, is associated with IPA. Willig (2001) argues that in order to progress beyond mere sharing of experiences with participants, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of their experiences that enables explanation. This necessitates awareness of the underlying conditions that contributed to the emergence of these experiences.

### **3.3 Area of the Study**

The research was conducted inside the geographical boundaries of Kisumu County, located in the country of Kenya. The investigation was conducted within Kisumu County, where the sole Hare Krishna Temple is located. The Temple is situated along Butere Road, accessible from Kisumu Nairobi Road via Milimani. The Hare Krishna temple located in Kisumu serves as a prominent religious institution within the Asian community residing in Kisumu, representing one of several places of worship available to its adherents. The selection of Kisumu as the study site was predicated on its possession of

the primary temple shrine and its status as the administrative center for the western region.

The primary research site selected for this study was the ISKCON Temple located in Kisumu. The establishment features a dining facility, as well as retail outlets specializing in gifts and books. Additionally, it encompasses a spacious interior area dedicated to the practice of worship and the conduct of religious services. The vicinity of the primary Temple encompasses other edifices that function as residential accommodations for individuals who are fully dedicated to their religious practice. The Temple can be seen as a monastic setting, where resident devotees are required to adhere to a prescribed daily spiritual regimen. This regimen is also accessible to the general public. The Temple serves as the principal administrative center for ISKCON in the western part of Kenya. It fulfills various functions, including housing the organization's headquarters, coordinating its festivals such as Ratha Yatra, facilitating projects such as Food for Life, and managing book distribution initiatives.

### **3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

The utilization of a purposive sampling technique to identify a suitably homogeneous sample for an IPA investigation was deemed justifiable (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The preference for smaller sample sizes was driven by their ability to enhance the in-depth analysis required in IPA, as shown in other forms of qualitative research that prioritize depth over breadth. The objective of qualitative analysis differs from that of quantitative methods in terms of generalizability. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), the strength of an IPA study is in the illumination it provides within a wider framework.

In order to pick a sample of 41 people who satisfied the predetermined criteria of the study, the researcher utilized purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The utilization of this approach facilitated the selection of participants who possessed the requisite information necessary to achieve the objectives of the study. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2010), the utilization of purposive sampling technique enhances the collection of relevant data required for the study. The sample consisted of a diverse group of individuals, including ten priests, five African converts, thirteen youth participants, six representatives from the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK), two archdeacons of the Anglican Church, one Baha'i adherent, two lecturers,

and two civil society members. During the period spanning from October 2021 to June 2022, a total of forty one participants were selected to partake in qualitative one-on-one in-depth interviews conducted at several locations in Kisumu. The study consisted of a sample size of 41 informants, with 18 being female and 23 being male. This finding indicates a higher representation of males compared to females in the study.

The researcher established a professional relationship with the chief priest and program director of the Hare Krishna temple in Kisumu, who agreed to serve as liaisons between the researchers and the possible study subjects employed at the temple. The focus lied on the aspect of quality rather than quantity, as IPA prioritizes a comprehensive examination of individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). Once the data had reached saturation, there was no longer a necessity to conduct additional interviews. According to Creswell (2007), the point of saturation is attained when there is a cessation of novel information that contributes to the advancement of our comprehension of the category. The researcher endeavors to achieve category saturation by actively seeking examples that exemplify the category and persistently conducting interviews until the newly acquired information ceases to contribute more insights into the category (Creswell, 2007).

### **3.5 Methods of Data Collection**

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. The researcher selected the Hare Krishna temple in Kisumu as the optimal site for participant recruitment and conducted interviews with devotees regarding their personal experiences related to interfaith dialogue. The temple is staffed by approximately 20 individuals. The interfaith discussion event was attended by a diverse group of 150 individuals hailing from various institutions and backgrounds spanning the entire county. The participants provided self-reported information regarding their religious or atheistic beliefs.

The hypothesis of the study posited that the community under investigation would provide a deliberately diverse purposive sample, encompassing both institutional and personal aspects. In June 2021, a researcher conducted a pilot trial that was analogous in nature. The investigation was conducted at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology. The sample consisted of three individuals majoring in religious studies, who had actively engaged in study and research, and had attended a minimum of two separate interfaith discussion events in Kisumu. Numerous insights were gleaned

from the pilot experiment, so facilitating the formulation of the study's intended design. The researcher deliberately choose to incorporate university students from other institutions in order to enhance the comprehensiveness of the study, as indicated by the findings of the pilot survey. The objective was to construct a heterogeneous sample of persons in order to generate data that could be readily analyzed.

### **3.6 Data collection Instruments**

#### **3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The primary method employed for data collection involved the utilization of a set of semi-structured interview questions. According to Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005), semi-structured interviews are considered the most effective method for gathering information in the context of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study. As stated by Smith et al. (2009), the structure of the individual interview was deemed highly appropriate for facilitating comprehensive and intimate conversations. The duration of each interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The duration required to enable an engagement that allows participants to narrate their personal experiences using their own language was established as a certain duration (Smith et al., 2009).

Prior to commencing the interview, the researcher reiterated the objectives of the study, provided a comprehensive explanation of the informed consent process, and emphasized the need of maintaining anonymity. The participants were informed that the researcher would select a fabricated name for the organization being studied. The researcher posited that employing the method of recording the interview would facilitate a more meticulous examination of the participants' comments. The participants were informed that a transcription would be created based on the tape. The audio files were securely safeguarded by password protection until they underwent transcription and subsequent deletion. The residence of the researcher is equipped with a secure cabinet that is capable of being locked. This cabinet serves as the designated storage space for the paper-based informed consent forms and demographic data sheets.

Prior to each interview, the researcher reviewed the semi-structured interview methodology as outlined in Appendix E. The technique served as the interview schedule, comprising a set of inquiries categorized into three primary groupings. The sequential arrangement of the questions was designed to facilitate a progressive exploration of the

topic, with each subsequent question building upon the previous one. However, the researcher remained flexible and prepared to modify the order if deemed appropriate. In the study conducted by Smith et al. (2007), it was found that the interview schedule functioned as a flexible framework that could be modified as needed, enabling the researcher to adopt a more engaged and attentive listening approach, as well as a more adaptable and responsive interviewing style.

To ensure strict adherence to the prescribed protocol, the researcher demonstrated flexibility and exercised discernment during the discourse, deviating only when deemed absolutely necessary to elucidate the participants' firsthand encounters. Smith and Osborn (2008) state that during the research process, there is a dynamic exchange of information between the researcher and participant. This exchange involves adapting initial questions based on the participant's responses, allowing the investigator to explore significant and intriguing topics that emerge.

In order to facilitate the researcher's focus on the participant, interviews were audio-recorded. The researcher refrained from conducting data analysis during the interview and instead opted to document just a limited number of concise observations, primarily centered on the participants' communication style (Flowers et al., 2009). The researcher maintained a focus on her ethical obligations towards the participants, employing strategies such as gentle guidance through the questions, utilization of prompts when deemed necessary, regular checks for clarification and comprehension, and exploration of deeper topics to enhance the quality and richness of the data obtained.

The researcher inquired of the respondents whether they had any remaining inquiries prior to concluding the session. As per the researcher's instructions for the subsequent stage of the procedure, the participant will get an email including the verbatim transcription of the interview, accompanied by a thank-you letter (Appendix F) and a letter requesting their review of the transcription (Appendix G). The participant was provided with a period of ten days to verify the precision of the transcript and inform the researcher of any discrepancies. The researcher highlighted that in the event that the subject failed to react within the specified ten-day period, it would be inferred that no alterations were necessary. Additionally, it was noted that participants may be requested to engage in a subsequent telephone or Skype interview in order to provide further

elaboration or clarification on the content discussed during the initial interview. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that all of the participants did not necessitate a subsequent interview due to the saturation level achieved during the initial session.

### **3.6.2 Documentary Analysis**

I had access to a substantial body of literature for examination. First and foremost, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) exhibits a strong dedication to the study and reverence of scriptural writings, particularly those accompanied by authoritative interpretations authored by its founder, Bhaktivedanta Swami. Furthermore, the lectures, written instructions, dialogues, and interviews of the individual in question have been meticulously documented, transcribed, and preserved by followers on a global scale, with a special emphasis on the efforts of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Additionally, a significant portion of the administration of ISKCON is carried out through written communication. Furthermore, it is worth noting that within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), there exists a significant emphasis on the cultivation of writing skills. As a result, many of the distinguished followers of Bhaktivedanta Swami have actively engaged in the creation and publication of a multitude of books, essays, and articles. Additionally, they have also participated in academic conferences and symposiums, where they have presented scholarly papers (Ketola, 2001).

The act of disciples writing books is not incongruous with various other Western religious traditions. According to Hopkins (1977), various Christian churches, Talmudic commentaries, and rabbinical interpretations have relied on a continuous revitalization of historic authority through the acquisition of new spiritual insights (Hopkins, 1997).

The written sources that were consulted can be categorized as follows:

i) The literary works authored by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami encompass a range of genres, including translations and claims of sacred texts such as the Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srimad Bhagavatam, and Caitanya Caritamrita. Additionally, his contributions extend to taped lectures, dialogues, and interviews.

(ii) Historical Works: The official biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami is a significant source of information regarding his life and achievements.

(iii) Books, essays, and academic articles authored by disciples provide valuable insights and scholarly perspectives on various aspects related to Bhaktivedanta Swami and his teachings.

(iv) The Temple Daily Schedule, as outlined in the official handbook, serves as a comprehensive guide to the daily activities and rituals conducted within the temple premises.

(v) The feeding schedules of the Food for Life program and the Articles of Association associated with it offer detailed information on the timing and organization of food distribution initiatives aimed at providing sustenance to those in need.

(vi) The temple constitution serves as a governing document that outlines the principles, rules, and regulations governing the functioning and administration of the temple.

Through a meticulous examination of these papers, the researcher was able to get insights into the organizational frameworks and power dynamics within the institution, the schedules followed by its members, as well as the breadth and depth of its projects. Additionally, this analysis shed light on specific initiatives such as Food for Life, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the institution's overall character.

### **3.6.3 Participant Observation**

This delineates a methodology for gathering knowledge by means of monitoring behavior, events, or physical characteristics inside their natural environment. Cohen et al. (2006) argue that using observation as a data collection method enhances comprehension of the research context by providing detailed supplementary information. The firsthand observation of the Hare Krishna movement's contributions to world peace and its associated spiritual practices was feasible.

The inclusion of detailed depictions of the physical surroundings and the temple in which the devotees reside and conduct their activities was crucial to my research, as it

contributed to the comprehensive investigation of their lifestyle and business practices. The results of my observations were recorded in field notes. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001), there are multiple levels at which these records can be produced. These levels range from hastily jotting down keywords or symbols to more comprehensive transcriptions. Additionally, they can include detailed descriptions that provide a narrative of the events, pen portraits of the individuals involved, reconstructions of conversations, depictions of the physical environments in which the events occur, as well as descriptions of behaviors, events, and activities.

In order to gain insight into the construction of devotees' identities, the researcher also elucidated the ritual aspects of their lives, including daily worship, lectures, festivals, seminars, rites of passage (initiations and weddings), and dress codes, through the method of participant observation (Ketola, 2001).

#### **3.6.4 Data Analysis and Presentation**

The utilization of the analysis approach was deemed appropriate in order to achieve the aforementioned objective, as qualitative research endeavors to analyze and ascribe significance to various phenomena (Merriam, 1988). The objective of IPA analysis, as described by Eatough and Smith (2008), is to discern the emergent patterns or themes present in the experiential data. This approach focuses on identifying both similarities and differences, as well as commonalities and subtleties, primarily within individual cases and later across numerous examples. (Page 79). To identify recurring patterns, the researcher engaged in multiple iterations of transcript analysis, involving careful reading and re-reading of each transcript subsequent to repeated listening sessions.

The nodes were organized into four significant themes by the researcher subsequent to the coding of the transcripts. The analytical approach employed in this study was derived from the procedures outlined by Smith et al. (2009). These procedures encompassed several key steps, including thorough reading and re-reading of the data, initial note-taking, identification of emerging themes, exploration of connections between these emergent themes, progression to the subsequent case, and identification of overarching patterns throughout all cases. The researcher thoroughly examined each transcript in its entirety prior to engaging in a systematic procedure of re-reading and analyzing it section

by section. To ensure comprehensive auditory perception of each participant's speech, the researcher employed a technique of simultaneously listening to and reading the transcript, which had been previously determined as efficacious in a preliminary investigation. The first focus of the researcher's notes was centered on generating a comprehensive collection of observations and concepts pertaining to the data.

Subsequently, the subsequent step involved the identification and exploration of developing ideas. During the early phase of notation, basic themes were identified through the process of looking for shared components, significant terms, and the frequency of notions. The researcher endeavored to succinctly summarize the level of detail in the transcripts by presenting concise statements that effectively conveyed the perspectives of the participants. Each case was assigned a distinct code. After completing the coding process for all the cases, the researcher proceeded to conduct a cross-case analysis by revisiting and coding the data.

In order to establish a structure for the process of mapping the themes, a multitude of nodes were constructed. A total of 144 nodes were identified following the coding process conducted across all cases. A physical wall map was created in order to organize the themes following the reduction of both subordinate and superordinate themes. Additionally, linkages were built between themes to further streamline their number. Themes that show a lack of relevance or failed to establish connections with other themes were omitted. According to Willig (2001), there exists a distinction in the way particular themes interact with one other, with some exhibiting hierarchical relationships, while others tend to group together notions that share comparable meanings or allusions.

The final stage of the analysis process involved the incorporation of the researcher's perspectives on the participants' experiences. A comprehension of the underlying themes and an interpretation of the expressions, cognitions, and affective states of the participants was done at this stage.

### **3.6.5 Ethical and Logistical Consideration**

Glesne (2006) asserts that ethical considerations play a vital role in qualitative research and are intricately intertwined with the researcher's interactions with participants and data (p. 129). The participants were provided with information regarding the informed consent

procedure of the study at the beginning. The participants were provided with the information that they had the option to decline answering any inquiries posed to them throughout the interview. Participants were informed that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

The researcher ensured the confidentiality of the participants by informing them about the precautions used, which mostly involved the use of pseudonyms for individuals and organizations. The participants were neither coerced nor compelled to furnish responses in a specific fashion. The primary aim of the semi-structured interview was to provide participants with a conducive environment to openly discuss their authentic real-life experiences.

The researcher demonstrated a strong commitment to maintaining the participants' voices in their original and unaltered form. The informed consent document provided a comprehensive overview of the rights afforded to the participants. These rights were consistently reiterated and elucidated at several stages of the study, including the initial interest letter, the semi-structured interview, and the evaluation of the interview transcripts. Permission was granted by the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University, the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the Kisumu County Government, and the Kisumu Hare Krishna Temple.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE SPREAD AND ESTABLISHMENT OF HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT IN KENYA**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the origins and spread of Hare Krishna movement into Africa and Kenya. It outlines its entry into Mombasa and spread to Nairobi with a focus on the main activities or approach in planting their consciousness in Kenya. Revelations of the local perspective of this faith are outline as well as the challenges faced in intitial stages of development

#### **4.2 Origin and spread of Hare Krishna**

The Hare Krishna movement, officially known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), traces its origins back to the fifteenth century (1486) when Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the movement's founder, began preaching the supremacy of Krishna as the ultimate deity over all other gods. However, it was not until 1965 in New York City that the Bengali guru Srila A.C. formally established ISKCON as an organization.

At the age of 70, he landed in New York with a mere 40 rupees of Indian currency. He effectively engaged with the countercultural climate of the 1960s by delivering sermons and performing musical acts in public parks, so drawing the attention and support of individuals associated with the hippie movement and the younger generation, rather than just addressing the affluent population of New York City. Subsequent to his relocation to San Francisco after a year, the aforementioned individual's religious movement, which was then referred to as the "Hare Krishna Movement," experienced further expansion. Under the guidance of his spiritual mentor, Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada undertook the task of introducing the practice of Krishna worship to the United States, a country characterized by a multitude of conventional churches and a perceived lack of engaging religious movements (Rochford & Bailey, 2006).

The writings and translations of Prabhupada, including the Bhagavad Gita As It Is and various other scriptures, played a crucial role in the propagation of Gaudiya Vaishnava teachings in Western societies. The scriptural texts of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) are founded upon a collection of writings that have

been translated into over seventy distinct languages. Upon attending to the welfare of his family, he relocated to the United States and embraced the commitments of a sannyasi, a spiritual ascetic who relinquishes worldly pursuits. According to Rochford (2016), the early adherents of his teachings were of individuals from the hippie subculture in New York City. In order to align themselves with the group, these individuals adopted the practice of shaving their heads and donning traditional Indian attire.

On September 17, 1965, Bhaktivedanta Swami arrived in Boston, having traveled from India. During the period spanning from October 20, 1965, to March 18, 1966, the individual in question resided within the confines of Dr. Ramamurti Mishra's hatha-yoga center located in New York. Subsequently, he entered into a leasing agreement for a moderately-sized office space located two floors below the urban yoga facility managed by Dr. Ramamurti Mishra. The individual conducted instructional sessions on the Bhagavad-gita, covering a comprehensive range of yoga practices. According to Bromley and Shinn (1989), the initial audience of the individual in question consisted of acquaintances as well as those who were enrolled as yoga students under Dr. Mishra.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was formally registered and incorporated in New York on July 13, 1966. On September 9, 1966, Bhaktivedanta Swami accepted his initial eleven Western followers as his fully acknowledged disciples. By November, he had a total of nineteen initiates in New York. In December, a group consisting of Mukunda-dasa (Michael Grant), Janaki-dasi (Janis Campanella), and Harvey Cohen (Hari-dasa) collaborated with their family and friends to establish a temple dedicated to the deities Radha and Krishna. This temple was constructed in the vicinity of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The center was formally launched by Bhaktivedanta Swami in January 1967. According to Kocku Von Stuckrad (2006), the individual successfully recruited ten individuals in San Francisco to become his disciples within a brief timeframe.

Single-handedly, he established a confederation encompassing over one hundred temples, agricultural communities, and centers of learning dispersed globally. During the agriculturally productive decade of the 1960s, the Hare Krishna movement experienced significant proliferation. The rise in popularity of Eastern philosophy coincided with a growing skepticism towards Western ideas. The individuals engaged in the practice of

kirtan, a sort of public chanting and dance, while also promoting and selling their teacher's literary works within airport premises. According to Ketola (2002), these religious groups became well recognized symbols of the 1960s. After a short period of time, the office space became inadequate, prompting Bhaktivedanta Swami to relocate to 94 Bowery. This particular location was predominantly inhabited by those engaged in drug usage, homelessness, and the countercultural movement known as hippies. The popularity of his bhakti sermons and chanting sessions experienced a significant increase. Bhaktivedanta Swami let male disciples who opted to participate in his ashrama program to reside at the premises located at 26 Second Avenue. According to Ketola (2004), the establishment in question served as the inaugural Western Center for Bhaktivedanta Swami.

Bhaktivedanta Swami requested both male and female devotees, regardless of their marital status, to establish centers in different places across the United States and abroad in order to advance his cause. By April 1969, the United States of America had a total of fifteen International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) locations, with one center located in Montreal, Canada, and another in London. During the month of November in the year 1970, there was a total of 29 temples or centers affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). At that time, Bhaktivedanta Swami had garnered a dedicated group of approximately 500 individuals who were actively engaged in following his teachings, out of which 366 were formally initiated as his disciples. According to Eberly (2016), the number of those who had formally pledged their discipleship to Bhaktivedanta Swami had reached 4,734 by November 1977.

At the time of his demise on November 14th, 1977, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) boasted a global network of over eighty centers, with a dedicated following of over 1,500 initiates. In the year 1970, Bhaktivedanta Swami extended the mission of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) to India, with the assistance of his disciples from the Western world. Consequently, the organization was officially registered in India as the Bureau of ISKCON, as documented by Bhardwaj and Rao in 1998. According to Rochford (2007), Bhaktivedanta Swami oversaw the establishment of grand architectural complexes at Mayapura, Vrindavan, and Bombay, India. The expenses were covered by the Mayapura-Vrindavana Fund Trust. The primary source of finance for this Trust was provided by the Bhaktivedanta Book

Trust. The Book Trust received assistance from Western devotees through their book-sankirtana endeavors. The primary catalyst for his unwavering religious commitment was his resolute dedication to his guru's instruction, which emphasized the dissemination of the sankirtana process for liberation to English-speaking individuals and its global expansion (Kuckreja, 2022).

Bhaktivedanta Swami encouraged his followers to initiate the global expansion of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and provide assistance towards the objectives of his book trust, as his mission began to materialize. According to the regular teachings of Bhaktivedanta Swami, it is said that the most effective means of serving Hare Krishna and society at large is through the sale of books (Lowe, 2021). Hence, this endeavor proved to be highly advantageous for both the individual's personal growth and spiritual well-being, as well as for the overall vitality and essence of the movement. It served the noble objective of disseminating teachings, thereby exemplifying the individual's unwavering commitment to his spiritual mentor and dutifully fulfilling the instructions bestowed upon him by said mentor. Furthermore, this event served as a manifestation of the deep loyalty exhibited by the disciples towards their revered mentor, highlighting their eagerness to fulfill the directives imparted by their spiritual guide (Bryant, 2007).

The primary objective of his mission was to effectively convince the American populace to perceive his religious beliefs as a means to access a profoundly positive and fulfilling existence in the hereafter. The religion was given the name Shri Chaitanya, as a tribute to a 16th-century Bengali brahmin who advocated for the practice of devotion to the deities Krishna and Radha. This religious tradition placed a strong emphasis on cultivating God-consciousness through various means, including ecstatic singing, dancing, and chanting. The primary method of chanting involved the repetition of the Maha Mantra, which consists of the names of God: Hare Krishna / Hare Krishna / Hare Rama / Hare Rama / Hare Hare (Rochford & Doktorski, 2013).

The primary objective of the movement is to afford human civilization the opportunity to attain a state of contentment, physical well-being, mental tranquility, and various other favorable qualities through the intervention of a divine entity. The purpose of Hare Krishnas is to establish a transcendental and affectionate relationship with Lord Krishna.

According to Rochford and Doktorski (2013), the objective of consciousness and human existence is to transcend the afflictions associated with a physical reality and attain a state of happiness. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) endeavors to perpetually pursue bliss, but, humanity often encounters shortcomings in the realization of this objective.

The emotion of happiness may manifest momentarily, although its duration is transitory. Suffering is an inevitable aspect of human existence, irrespective of personal preferences or desires. According to scriptural teachings, human beings are considered spiritual entities that are inherently connected to the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna. It is posited that our essential essence is one of joyfulness. What is the underlying reason for our ability to tolerate and withstand pain? Inquiry into the means by which one may rediscover lost happiness and cultivate a life characterized by sustained enjoyment. According to Berg (2005: 121),

Devotees engage in private and public chanting sessions with fellow devotees, believing that the act of vocalizing Krishna's name has a twofold purpose. Firstly, they perceive Krishna as inseparable from his name, therefore considering the chanting as a means to establish a connection with the divine. Secondly, they hold the belief that uttering God's name brings his tangible presence, thereby aiming to benefit both themselves and any observers present during the public chanting sessions. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada advocated for a religious perspective centered on devotion, wherein adherents cultivated a personal connection with Krishna and expressed their affection for him through the practices of chanting and dance (Shinn, 1989). One of the contributing factors to the substantial following garnered by Hare Krishna's public displays of adoration was their notable divergence from the ascetic and emotionally aloof sentiments commonly associated with Hinduism. The Hare Krishna movement exhibits a unique religious orientation centered around the worship of Krishna. However, it predominantly aligns with Hinduism due to the recognition of Krishna as an incarnation, or "Avatar," of Vishnu, a prominent deity within the Hindu pantheon. Furthermore, adherents of the Hare Krishna movement persist in upholding the Hindu concepts of rebirth and karma, alongside their reverence for the Bhagavad Gita (Shinn, 1989).

### **4.3 The journey of Hare Krishna to Africa and Kenya**

His Holiness." Brahmananda Svami has presented a comprehensive account detailing the origins and development of the Hare Krishna movement in Africa. The author suggests that the origins of this phenomenon can be traced back to 1971 in the United States, specifically in Tallahassee, Florida. During this time, the author was instructing a pioneering course on Krishna consciousness at a public university. Brahmananda Svami was the recipient of a correspondence from the esteemed spiritual leader, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. The content of the letter entailed a directive for him to promptly go upon a journey to West Pakistan with the purpose of engaging in missionary activities. Subsequently, he made the conscious decision to comply with the aforementioned instructions. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta initially relocated to New York City, where he was accompanied by a youthful aide who adhered to the principles of brahmacari. Subsequently, the pair embarked on a journey to London and subsequently traveled to Paris via a combination of hydroplane and rail transportation methods (Sooklal, 1987).

In the city of Paris, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta was presented with a favorable occasion to deliver sermons at Dauphine University, the renowned Sorbonne, as well as many yoga collectives. Following a brief stay in Paris, he embarked on a journey on the Orient Express, spanning a duration of forty-eight hours, ultimately leading them to Istanbul, Turkey. It was in Istanbul where they encountered two young males, one hailing from the United States and the other from Canada, both exhibiting notable intellectual prowess and a deep inclination towards matters of spirituality. They expressed their intention to travel to India, afterwards opting to join them on their journey to Pakistan. Throughout the duration of a two-day train journey to the Turkish hill-town of Erzurum, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami engaged in continuous discussions with two young men, Mugambi and Getui, regarding the philosophical concept of Krishna awareness (Mugambi & Getui, 2004).

The Canadian embarked on a journey to India with the intention of engaging in a spiritual quest. Throughout this endeavor, he diligently maintained a journal, documenting their daily reflections and encounters. The Canadian had chosen the title "*A Journey to the East*," inspired by Hermann Hesse's renowned literary work. Within this composition, the Canadian diligently recorded the teachings of His Holiness Brahmananda Svami

pertaining to the philosophical concept of Krishna consciousness. Additionally, he shown a keen interest in engaging with literature related to the Hare Krishna movement by enthusiastically reading books on the subject. Upon their arrival in Erzurum, the Canadian had acquired proficiency in reciting the Hare Krishna petitions for the purpose of providing prasada. Additionally, they were observed engaging in the practice of chanting the Hare Krishna mantra using japa beads. During their time in Erzurum, the Canadian engaged in sankirtana, a practice involving the collective chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra. Equipped with drums, karatalas (hand cymbals), and leaflets, they ventured into the village square, where they seated themselves and commenced the chanting of Hare Krishna (Kumar, 2012).

A substantial assemblage of several hundred inquisitive locals expeditiously congregated, although they found themselves encircled by a multitude of law enforcement officers and undercover investigators who apprehended them and seized their travel documents under the presumption of their affiliation with Christian missionary activities. The act of disseminating Christian teachings was prohibited by law in the country of Turkey. Additionally, they transported their whole collection of books and pamphlets to the University with the purpose of having them translated. Subsequently, the evangelists embarked on a journey to other cities, including Tabriz, Tehran, Meshed, Herat, and Kandahar, before ultimately reaching Pakistan. The prevalence of opium and marijuana consumption in Kandahar was widespread, extending beyond the local populace to include American and European hippies as well (Oonk, 2008).

In the context of Pakistan, "His Holiness" Brahmananda Svami paid a visit to the esteemed Punjab University, engaging in a conversation with the chairman of the department of philosophy and religion. The chairman held the belief that Krishna consciousness was a sectarian religion; however, Brahmananda Svami provided an explanation that contradicted this notion, asserting that Krishna consciousness is, in fact, not a sectarian religion.

The concept of sugar devoid of sweetness does not exist, and so, the attribute of service is inherent to all living entities. The essence of all religions is in the knowledge of Krishna, as it is an inherent quality that is inseparable from every living being. From the one responsible for street cleaning to the highest-ranking political figure, all individuals can be considered as servants within society. The businessperson fulfills the needs

and demands of their customers, the employee carries out tasks and responsibilities for their employer, and the spouse attends to the well-being and support of their wife and children. Ultimately, all individuals are devoted to the service of God, specifically Krishna, who is seen as the ultimate source of all origins. The discipline of Krishna awareness elucidates the means by which one might attain a comprehensive understanding of the present reality and consistently adopt the role of a devoted servant to God (Tigunait, 1998: 36).

During his discourse with a group of students at Punjab University, the speaker encountered a notable shift in the atmosphere as the students displayed signs of hostility and voiced their strong conviction that the Koran held exclusive significance as the sole authoritative text. However, "His Holiness" Brahmananda Svami disclosed to them that *The Nectar of Devotion*, a periodical of theirs, was authored by a devotee who occupied a significant position within the Muslim administration. The participants demonstrated attentive listening skills, afterwards requesting his presence to deliver a lecture to a philosophy class. However, as the passage of time ensued, a greater number of occurrences came to fruition (Tigunait, 1998). The students subjected them to derogatory epithets and levied allegations of espionage on them but they were formerly advised against traversing public thoroughfares due to the potential risk of encountering assailants who would physically assault them as a consequence of eradicating the tilaka, a religious mark, from their foreheads. After being persuaded by the local Hindu community, it was determined that Pakistan was not a suitable location due to the Pakistani government's promotion of anti-Indian sentiments. Consequently, when conflict erupted in East Pakistan, "His Holiness" Brahmananda Svami and the two converts opted to travel from Karachi to Bombay. It is worth noting that this decision coincided with the commencement of Srila Prabhupada's preaching activities in India (Tigunait, 1998).

#### **4.4 Arrival in Mombasa**

Upon his arrival in Bombay, Srila Prabhupada, the esteemed spiritual leader, discerned that His Holiness Brahmananda Svami should embark on a journey to Africa with the purpose of disseminating the teachings of their faith. After a challenging sea journey lasting 12 days, he eventually arrived in the port of Mombasa, situated on the eastern coast of the African nation of Kenya. He arrived at the Lord Siva temple inside the Hindu religious tradition. A significant number of Indians would frequent the site on a daily

basis to observe the "American sadhus." According to Moywaywa and Ifedha (2015), people would be supplied with essential products such as fruit, flowers, currency, and other miscellaneous goods. During this period, their focus was primarily directed towards delivering sermons exclusively to those of Indian nationality residing in Africa, leading them to gradually acknowledge their distinctive position within the global populace. The Indian population exhibited reverence towards sadhus, displayed acts of generosity and kindness, and had a lesser inclination towards pursuing sensory pleasures compared to those residing in Western societies. This can be attributed to the enduring presence of relics from the profoundly spiritual Vedic culture within India. The Indian devotees exhibited their ethical disposition by offering a diverse range of services throughout the challenging initial period and by displaying enthusiasm in acquainting them with their compatriots and they were invited to accompany others and deliver speeches on the subject of Krishna awareness at diverse social events (Moywaywa & Ifedha, 2015).

Despite the absence of explicit instructions from Srila Prabhupada about his missionary activities in Africa, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami arrived at the peculiar determination to focus his preaching efforts primarily on the Indian community, mirroring Prabhupada's approach in India. Despite his inherent inclination, he exhibited reluctance in disseminating Krishna awareness among the indigenous population and engaging in public chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra due to the occurrence at Erzurum. He was unaware of the reaction from the authorities (Kinanga & Ifedha, 2015).

Several people from the surrounding community quickly started to embrace Krishna consciousness in a sincere manner. One such devotee was Shakti Mati Devi Dasi, who would subsequently dedicate extensive efforts on behalf of Prabhupada. Shakti Mati had a pioneering role in the ISKCON African Mission (IAM) as she became the first individual of Indian Hindu descent to undergo initiation and reside within the temple premises at that period. Initially, Brahmananda restricted his efforts to the Gujarati community, who offered him financial support. However, they explicitly discouraged any additional involvement and disapproved of anybody pursuing a monastic lifestyle or getting initiation instruction. Shakti Mati, being of Punjabi origin, was not subject to the constraints imposed by communal legislation exclusive to the Gujarati community.

Following a residence of six weeks in Mombasa, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami was extended an invitation by an Indian family to journey to Nairobi for the purpose of commemorating the auspicious occasion of Lord Krishna's birthday, known as Janmastami. Upon their initial arrival in Nairobi, he organized and executed a very prosperous function at a Radha-Krishna temple. The kirtana and teachings on the Bhagavad-gita held significant value for them, and the populace expressed astonishment at the adoption of Krishna awareness by Americans. There was a considerable number of people who expressed a desire to provide assistance in their undertaking. Subsequently, three people from the United States who were ardent followers also joined. The delivery of these teachings was facilitated by Srila Prabhupada, who had already arrived in London during that period (Kirmani & Kirmani, 2002).

However, subsequent to experiencing illness in London, Srila Prabhupada made the decision to embark on a journey to Africa with the intention of recuperating, as he had come across literature suggesting that the continent's atmosphere possesses exceptional health benefits. The esteemed Brahmananda Svami had taken up residence at the residence of a dedicated member of the community when Srila Prabhupada initially arrived in Nairobi. The His Holiness Brahmananda Svami afterwards submitted to Srila Prabhupada and became an initiated disciple. In subsequent years, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami facilitated accommodations for Prabhupada in a pleasant residence located in Mombasa, a location that had been previously described by the former as being among the most aesthetically pleasing destinations worldwide (Nandi, 2004).

Upon entering his spacious and well-illuminated chamber, Srila Prabhupada beheld a picturesque vista of the aquamarine-hued sea, accompanied by clear skies, radiant sunlight, and a pristine sandy shoreline adorned with palm trees. In contemplation of this idyllic scene, he remarked to Brahmananda, "Undoubtedly, this location ranks among the most extraordinary destinations on Earth." Srila Prabhupada's health was swiftly restored due to several factors, including the favorable mild environment, the diverse assortment of fruits and vegetables, and the abundant selection of nutritious milk products. Subsequently, Prabhupada made the strategic determination to go to Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, in order to initiate the African preaching campaign (Nandi, 2004).

#### **4.5 Hare Krishna in Nairobi**

In Nairobi, Srila Prabhupada exemplified the principles and teachings that are expected of a sannyasi. Srila Prabhupada would reside in the residences of various Indian devotees, and although being provided with exceptionally comfortable accommodations, delectable meals, and suitable sleeping arrangements, he would refrain from extending his stay at any particular location beyond a duration of three days. In accordance with the Vedic principle that sannyasis, or renunciants, should refrain from prolonged residence in any given location, Srila Prabhupada would frequently transition between different households. According to Nandi (2004), this limitation prevents individuals from developing an affinity for material luxuries, which could potentially cause inconvenience to their hosts.

During the afternoons, Srila Prabhupada would engage in darsana, which refers to the act of granting an audience, with the family members and their guests at each property. Prior to this, he would engage in private dialogues with the male residents of the household in the mornings. Furthermore, he actively facilitated kirtanas and offered informative talks throughout the nighttime hours. Consequently, a considerable number of prominent persons of Indian origin residing in Nairobi developed strong personal relationships with Srila Prabhupada and willingly enrolled as lifelong members. According to Karapanagiotis (2021), contemporary engagement with the Hare Krishna movement is prevalent. Subsequently, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami extended the life member program in Nairobi, while adhering to Srila Prabhupada's tradition of periodically changing residences every three days. He demonstrated the ability to effectively communicate through his actions. People had the opportunity to directly observe the abstention from alcohol, illicit sexual activities, consumption of meat, and participation in gambling, alongside the adoption of practices such as early rising, cold bathing, participation in kirtanas, and engagement in japa (Karapanagiotis, 2021).

A Vaisnava engages in preaching by means of both verbal communication and practical actions. This distinguishes them from various spurious yoga organizations, whose constituents may possess expertise in speculative philosophy or adeptness in presenting yoga in an appealing manner to a target audience, yet lack the capacity to embody the rigorous discipline necessary for attaining spiritual enlightenment in their personal lives (Karapanagiotis, 2021; 25).

Following his visit in Africa, Prabhupada reiterated his encouragement to Brahmananda to address the entire African population rather than solely focusing on the Indian community. The complete isolation of people of Indian and African descent might be interpreted as reflecting the underlying physiological understanding of human existence. Prabhupada held the belief that by the act of preaching to those of African descent, he could perhaps challenge and debunk prevailing misconceptions, ultimately leading to the realization of his objective. Initially, Srila Prabhupada provided him with the motivation to engage in direct preaching activities targeted at those of African descent. He proclaimed, "This constitutes our authentic enterprise in the African continent."

Upon gaining awareness of the aforementioned circumstances and their associated outcomes, Brahmananda proceeded to strategize an academic discourse to be delivered by Prabhupada at the esteemed University of Nairobi. Brahmananda employed various promotional strategies, such as media advertisements, the creation and display of posters, and the distribution of visually appealing pamphlets, with the aim of maximizing the number of participants. The program was attended by a diverse audience consisting of professors, dignitaries, and African students. The high turnout led to a full occupancy of seats, resulting in a significant number of people standing outside in order to observe the event from the doors and windows. After Prabhupada's concise exposition, the attendees expressed their appreciation through applause and rose from their seats in a standing ovation. Subsequently, a spirited kirtana, a cinematic presentation about the movement, and an opulent banquet were organized for all attendees. The aforementioned interaction had a profound impact on my personal development, while simultaneously contributing to the amplification of positive attention towards the African movement. During his talk, the speaker provided guidance to the citizens of Kenya regarding the progress of their emerging nation.

".... It is imperative to cultivate spiritual growth as an integral aspect of holistic development. It is advisable to refrain from emulating the lifestyles of Europeans and Americans, as their way of life is deemed to be lacking in humanistic qualities. In the event of a subsequent conflict, it is anticipated that the deployment of an atomic bomb will result in the complete annihilation of their defensive structures and associated infrastructure.

The students expressed their appreciation through applause following the conclusion of Srila Prabhupada's discourse. Subsequently, the distribution of kirtana, a cinematic production, and prasada ensued. As a consequence of their engagement, they received much favorable media coverage.

Prabhupada placed significant importance on the dissemination of his teachings to a wide audience. In addition to the aforementioned university program, the Srila Prabhupada actively engaged in an event that specifically targeted an economically disadvantaged neighborhood, with the aim of accomplishing the stated objective. The author examined the importance of human existence. According to his perspective, the fundamental objective of human existence is to recognize our inherent nature as spiritual entities distinct from our physical bodies. Furthermore, he posits that our ultimate purpose is to engage in the service of Sri Krishna, who is regarded as the Supreme Lord. Due to their limited proficiency in the Swahili language, a significant proportion of the participants were unable to comprehend the discourse delivered by Srila Prabhupada. Nevertheless, the collective experience was characterized by enjoyment and satisfaction. Srila Prabhupada engaged in a lively display of movement, vocalization, and applause, accompanied by expressions of great joy and satisfaction. Shortly after Prabhupada's departure for India, they were greatly motivated by his teachings and guidance to persist with their missionary efforts in Africa.

According to a correspondence addressed to Hansadutta on October 8, 1971, the speech delivered at the University of Nairobi was deemed successful.

The newspaper item used the following specific terminology: "ISKCON SWAMI EXPLAINS PHILOSOPHY... Yesterday, a highly productive meeting was held at the University of Nairobi. Yesterday evening, Acarya Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and his disciples delivered a presentation titled the 'Hare Krishna Revolution' at the University of Nairobi's Taifa Hall. The event attracted a large audience, and it showcased a combination of impressive theatrics and the unwavering principles of Gita philosophy. The African males are approaching our community and expressing their admiration for our philosophical principles.

In November 10, 1971 Srila Prabhupada in his arrival Lecture in New Delhi explained:

As a young man hailing from America, Europe, and Canada, I respectfully inquire of my fellow male counterparts... Currently, I am engaged in a journey

throughout the continent of Africa. During my visit, I had the opportunity to explore both Mombasa and Nairobi. Furthermore, the African American males are also engaging in the act of dancing. The inquiry directed towards the local Indian community in Nairobi and Mombasa pertains to the delayed dissemination of the aforementioned profound communication.

Shortly thereafter, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami, accompanied by his cohort of devotees, organized their inaugural open-air kirtana gathering at Kamakunji Park in Nairobi. During the occasion, they melodiously chanted devotional songs and graciously dispensed bundi, a delectable confectionery, which was enthusiastically relished by the assembled audience. The program was conducted on a weekly basis, and its increasing popularity led to a significant influx of young Kenyans participating in the initiative. This achievement was widely celebrated by the local Swahili newspaper. The image depicted an a person adorned with a tilaka and a shaven head, accompanied by the caption "Exercise Caution in Greeting a person of this Nature, Avoid Uttering 'Jambo!'" The phrase "Hare Krishna" is uttered. In Swahili, the term used to greet someone is "jambo."

The researchers organized sankirtana processions and distributed literature inside the central business center of Nairobi. To facilitate evening engagements, social halls were leased in multiple residential areas. The videos exhibited depicted the Ratha-yatra celebration held in San Francisco. Notably, each time the image of Lord Jagannatha was projected, the spectators responded with applause. To facilitate the transportation of their literary materials and dining implements, they made the decision to acquire an automobile equipped with a conspicuous roof-mounted carrier. Subsequently, the vehicle was transformed into a vibrantly adorned Hare Krishna Safari van by the incorporation of a tape player and a robust loudspeaker system. People would engage in spontaneous street dancing as they traversed the urban landscape, simultaneously playing a cassette recording of Srila Prabhupada fervently reciting the Hare Krishna mantra.

The widely consumed traditional cuisine of Kenya, consisting of maize, meal, and cabbage, has the potential to be disseminated as prasada within the neighboring villages. The establishment of the initial International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temples in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya occurred in 1969 under the guidance of Srila Prabhupada. In the same year, within the city of Nairobi, HG Shakti Mati devi

dasi, an esteemed African devotee of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), underwent initiation. She maintained an influential position within the movement, actively participating in both the United Kingdom and Vrindavan, while also establishing the temple in Calgary.

Srila Prabhupada embarked on a return journey to Nairobi in January 1972, with the purpose of assuming leadership at the World Hare Krishna Festival hosted in the Nairobi city stadium. The inaugural Kenyan adherent was formally started by Srila Prabhupada, who was interviewed by the British Broadcasting Company for a documentary about the festival. During this period, Srila Prabhupada took up residence at a recently acquired temple, which was a spacious dwelling located in close proximity to Nairobi's bustling commercial hub. Srila Prabhupada encouraged people to expand their instructional endeavors before embarking on their journey to India. Consequently, they embarked on extensive journeys throughout the western and northern regions of Kenya, engaging in the dissemination of religious teachings.

A comprehensive range of activities was organized, encompassing kirtana, film screenings, discussions, life membership enrollments, literature distribution, and prasada distribution, which were conducted in both the towns and the surrounding countryside. Subsequently, Sankirtana processions were conducted along the primary thoroughfare. Following this, the organization made a call to affluent people to financially support the acquisition of comprehensive collections of Srila Prabhupada's books, as well as five-year memberships to the BACK TO GODHEAD magazine. The aforementioned acquisitions were afterwards bestowed as donations in recognition of the distinguished persons to the libraries, educational institutions, and colleges of all the municipalities. The institutions expressed great appreciation for the books sent from outside. Furthermore, a significant number of journals were distributed to the general public at no cost subsequent to receiving substantial financial support. Presently, the religious belief system has garnered significant acceptance, as seen by the proliferation of temples with comparable architectural styles in Kisumu and Mombasa.

The establishment of the initial International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temples in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya, occurred in 1969 under the guidance of Srila Prabhupada. In the year under consideration, Nairobi witnessed the

initiation of HG Shakti Mati devi dasi, a prominent African devotee affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). She maintained an influential position within the movement, fulfilling duties in both the United Kingdom and Vrindavan, while also establishing the temple in Calgary. Rocana dasa rendered his services in Nairobi from the latter part of 1979 to 1982, a period that extended beyond the initial formation of the preaching activities in that location. Despite the resolution of numerous obstacles encountered by the initial devotees, the task of serving in Africa continued to be arduous. Rocana recollects several of his interactions in Kenya that have been referenced in:

Prior to my arrival, Ajamila dasa held the position of authority at the Nairobi temple. I embarked on a journey to India accompanied by a small group of English devotees, among them was Kripamoya dasa. A significant portion of the Indian people present at the location were followers of the Swami Narayana sect originating from the state of Gujarat. Our interactions with this particular group yielded really favorable outcomes. These devotees made substantial contributions to our religious institution and social cause, while also possessing and overseeing a significant portfolio of agricultural and construction enterprises. In terms of proselytizing to the African population, our endeavors yielded inconsistent outcomes. There was a limited presence of African preachers, with the notable exception of an African American who embarked on missionary journeys accompanied by his Caucasian American wife and child. Undoubtedly, the task of delivering sermons to the populace was challenging due to this particular factor.

In April 17, 1970 Rocana dasa wrote a Letter to Balamukundji and expressed:

I am greatly pleased by the assistance extended to our Krishna Consciousness movement by our Kenyan Indian acquaintances. If there is a collaborative effort between Hindus or Indians and ourselves, there is a possibility of assuming the responsibility for overseeing the administration of African Temples in the future. The Krishna Consciousness movement is not limited to any particular sect, as is widely acknowledged. Krishna's inclusivity extends to all beings, encompassing both humans and animals. He caters to a diverse range of religious affiliations, not solely limited to Hindus. Hindus generally do not exhibit strong liberal tendencies, however, Lord Caitanya, a prominent figure in Hinduism, is known for his inclusive and accepting nature. He extends a warm invitation to individuals from all corners of the world, provided they demonstrate a sincere dedication to serve Krishna. The potential impact of this movement

would be significant if people of Indian descent, particularly those residing outside of India, were to unite and adhere to my stringent guidelines rooted in the principles of the Vedic tradition. I am actively engaged in executing this commendable missionary endeavor, employing all available means to ensure its successful implementation.

In another letter to Jayapataka in October 5, 1971 he explained that:

The program is operating efficiently in the Nairobi location. On the following day, the University of Nairobi will be hosting a substantial gathering alongside scheduled television appearances. I will be residing in the residences of several hospitable Hindus who have extended their invitations, for a duration of four to five days. It is expected that our center in Nairobi would exhibit comparable levels of efficacy to our other established locations. It is imperative for Dinanatha to promptly make his way here, given that two devotees of African descent from New York have recently arrived at this location. The indigenous population of Africa has exhibited considerable enthusiasm and engagement, rendering the continent an ideal location for the propagation of Lord Caitanya's mission. Furthermore, the life membership program is currently demonstrating a high level of success. Approximately 30,000 Kenyan shillings have been collected thus far.

In November 1994, the city of Nairobi witnessed the inauguration of a newly established Hare Krishna temple, which had additional facilities such as a conference room, guest house, and asrama. The devotees disseminated a twelve-page supplement in the Daily Nation, the largest newspaper in Nairobi, to formally declare the inauguration of the temple. The Radha-Krishna Deities, known as Radha-Bankebihari, were unveiled as the temple doors were opened, as depicted in the cover art of the insert. The title reads, "Facilitating Emotional Vulnerability: Embrace Govinda's Influence." The inauguration of the Hare Krishna Temple in Nairobi took place on May 1, 1995. The document had written content pertaining to the topics of vegetarianism, Srila Prabhupada, the practice of chanting Hare Krishna, and the organization known as Hare Krishna Food for Life. Numerous correspondences were dispatched by ardent followers in reply to the aforementioned insert that promptly followed the announcement pertaining to the inauguration of the temple. The correspondence received and referenced in the article titled "The New Hare Krishna Temple in Nairobi" published in Back to Godhead Magazine on May 1, 1995, provided evidence of the growing influence of the Hare Krishna movement on the perspectives of the indigenous population in Kenya.

One of the correspondences read,

*Please, we are very much interested to learn more about the Hare Krishna temple, how to let Govinda in, and how to be among your devotees.*

*2nd Brigade Headquarters*

*The Kenya Army*

*Gilgil, Kenya*

*I am very much interested in your Food for Life Program. Although I come from a rural community and there is not much I can contribute, if you feel that a donation of one or two acres can be of assistance to you, I shall be happy to give it. If there is any other way you feel I can be of any assistance, please contact me. Meanwhile, I leave you with the chanting of the Lord's holy names: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.*

*Andrew K. Waitutu*

*Kiambuthia Village*

*Kangema-Muranga, Kenya*

*I read information about the Hare Krishna Society in the Daily Nation, and my heart was opened to a new spiritual and intellectual awareness. I was particularly moved by the article on vegetarianism and its spiritual dimension, which helps us develop a natural appreciation and love of God.*

*Wamalwa Maube*

*Kaimosi Teachers College*

*Tiriki, Kenya*

*I was greatly impressed by your educational, enlightening, and intellectually stimulating article on the subject of vegetarianism which appeared in the Daily Nation. I must add that I was fascinated by the articles on Krishna as a whole. Having been born in a Christian family, I must admit I have always been suspicious of the practices and intentions of any religion or movement that did not believe in Christ. But having gone through your articles, I was surprised to learn that your teachings are not in any way basically at variance with Christian teachings, as they are also inspired by love, not only for human beings but also for animals. I would like to request more information on the Krishna movement.*

*George Edwin Omouk*

*Nairobi, Kenya*

*I am a Christian church pastor, and I firmly believe in God and Jesus Christ. I am in charge of four church congregations in Nyambena District of Eastern Province. I was very much touched by a story with your beliefs which appeared in the Daily Nation. I was particularly impressed with your article on vegetarianism. As church pastors we preach, "Love your neighbor," as Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself. I now come to understand from your article that Jesus did not only mean human beings but animals also. It is a matter of fact that the other day I witnessed the slaughter of a camel for meat. It is certainly true that it underwent a lot of suffering, and most of us who were there had to run away, as we felt some mercy for this poor beast. Your article I have gone through several times, and as from now I will teach my Christians this doctrine to avoid eating any meat and to extend our love to all God's creatures. I wish for all Christians to be vegetarians, but to help me in this effort I kindly request you to please furnish me with any literature you might have available on this subject.*

*God bless you and your work.*

*Yours in the service of Christ,*

*Rev. Ambrose Gichunge  
Bread of Life Mission  
Eastern Kenya Diocese  
Laare, Kenya*

According to a report from ISKCON news in April 2016, the recently established "Hare Krishna Training Centre" in Nairobi, Kenya, has become increasingly popular among local students as a residence where they engage in activities such as singing, reading the writings of Srila Prabhupada, and adhering to the four regulative principles of Krishna consciousness. Manager Govinda Prema Das and his colleagues initiated efforts to adhere to Prabhupada's directives by engaging with indigenous Africans, as opposed to primarily focusing on Hindus. This notion was the genesis of the aforementioned concept. During a speech delivered in Nairobi in 1971, Brahmananda Das, upon receiving information from the founder of ISKCON, was made aware that the location in question was indeed an African country and Africans should possess ownership of the business. It is imperative to express admiration and commendation towards them. In a subsequent correspondence, he conveyed his satisfaction to Chyavana by expressing his delight in learning of the African boys' increasing commitment to their religious practices. In a written correspondence, he provided Sudama with guidance, advising him to engage in

proactive dissemination of knowledge within the academic institution, emphasizing the need for a well-defined outreach approach.

The Srila Prabhupada, who is widely recognized for his contributions to academia, had the opportunity to visit many educational institutions, commonly referred to as "campuses." Furthermore, he had the privilege of addressing a large audience of approximately 2,000 people during a notable event held at the University of Nairobi in October of 1971. Throughout the years in Nairobi, the act of delivering sermons to indigenous Africans in this particular fashion exhibited varying levels of effectiveness and often posed considerable challenges. Devotees who endeavored to establish Bhakti Yoga clubs at educational institutions faced challenges in securing positions with the predominantly Christian administration. However, in 2011, Govinda Prema achieved success by engaging in dialogue with the deans of the dorms responsible for student accommodation. According to an article published by ISKCON news in April 2016, Srila Prabhupada said that they established friendly relationships with others, provided them with prasada (sanctified food), and were granted permission to display posters promoting their biweekly Simple Living, High Thinking Seminars.

A total of twenty people initially participated in these activities, which were conducted on a weekly basis, specifically on Wednesdays and Saturdays, at Bhaktivedanta Hall, located inside the premises of ISKCON Nairobi. At now, an approximate total of 120 students are representing the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Mount Kenya University, and Zetech University. Govinda Prema elucidates that the instructional approach involves imparting knowledge derived from Prabhupada's literary works, namely *The Science of Self Realization*, *Journey of Self-Discovery*, and *Perfect Questions, Perfect Answers*. The objective is to demonstrate the contemporary applicability of Prabhupada's teachings and Vedic culture, so enhancing devotees' daily existence. In the educational setting, students are required to undergo examinations periodically, typically after completing a series of four or five classes. Furthermore, towards the culmination of the academic year, students are granted the privilege of 'graduating' and receiving a diploma that acknowledges their proficiency in the field of ethics and morals. As per the report by Govinda Prema in the ISKCON news of April 2016, it is suggested that those who have undergone a character training program can enhance their prospects in the professional sphere by enabling potential employers to recognize their participation in such a program.

Following four years of delivering lectures to students residing in student accommodation, the devotees made the decision to establish their own hostel, which was named "The Hare Krishna Training Centre," in the year 2015. According to Govinda Prema, the objective is for students who have attained proficiency in the "Krishna conscious theory" during our Simple Living, High Thinking Seminars, to effectively use their acquired knowledge. According to a report from ISKCON news in April 2016, the Training Center initially had a modest enrollment of six students. However, it has experienced significant growth over the past year, currently accommodating a total of forty members. Notably, it is worth mentioning that all the existing inhabitants of the Center are male. It is important to note that plans are underway to establish a separate Training Center specifically for women. During the weekdays, from 5:30am to 8:00am, all students engage in a morning program consisting of japa, an inspirational session, and food. Subsequently, they proceed to partake in their academic pursuits at the institution, typically concluding their activities about 5pm. In the evening, devotees reconvene at the central location to partake in prasadam, engage in personal cleansing, and participate in an evening japa session, a concise kirtan, and an additional instructional session. According to Govinda Prema, the course syllabus incorporates the Bhagavad-gita, Nectar of Instruction, Nectar of Devotion, and Srimad-Bhagavatam. Furthermore, the students are assigned specific topics to provide lectures on. As an illustration, a student with a three-month enrollment duration recently delivered a speech on anger management, drawing upon the narrative of Durvasa Muni and Ambarisa Maharaja as depicted in the Bhagavatam. The source of the information provided is ISKCON news, specifically from the month of April in the year 2016.

On Sundays, students actively engage in the comprehensive morning program held at the ISKCON Nairobi temple, followed by their involvement in community service throughout the day. Subsequently, they partake in an exuberant kirtan session throughout the evening hours. According to Govinda Prema, the factors that attract students to remain at the Hare Krishna Training Centre include cleanliness, prasadam (sanctified food), safety, fraternal brotherhood and friendship, as well as philosophical teachings. Parents may get a sense of contentment upon observing their children adopting a hygienic and health-conscious lifestyle within a respectable setting throughout their visits. In general, it is customary for students to allocate the entirety of their college tenure to the

Training Centre. Following their graduation, these students maintain their active involvement as dedicated members of the greater ISKCON Nairobi community. They engage in teaching their spouses about Krishna consciousness and regularly visit the temple alongside their families. According to Govinda Prema, people perceive that it provides them with pragmatic resolutions to the routine obstacles encountered in life. According to a report from ISKCON news in April 2016, there have been instances where former law students who underwent training with the organization have subsequently secured positions as assistants in court or in the parliament. These students have expressed a profound sense of transformation in their life, attributing this positive shift to the instruction they received from ISKCON.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter provides coverage of the inception and expansion of the Hare Krishna movement, tracing its origins in America and its dissemination to Kenya. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was established in 1965 in New York City by Srila A.C, a Bengali guru. It predates the Hare Krishna movement, which originated in the fifteenth century (1486) under the guidance of its founder, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu introduced the concept that Krishna held the highest position among all deities. (Bryant, 2007). The writings of Swami Bhaktivedanta have gained popularity and are now considered as scriptures within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). These writings have been made accessible to a wide audience by means of translation into several languages. Notably, Swami Bhaktivedanta has translated Hindu Scripture classics such as the Bhagwat Gita, Chaitanya Charitamrita, and Srimad Bhagavatam into easily understandable versions in multiple languages. The introduction of teachings in America initially posed a challenge to Western principles, since it also brought forth the portrayal of Eastern ideas. Under the guidance of Srila Prabhupada, His Holiness Brahmananda Svami initiated the implementation of ISKCON principles in Mombasa, Kenya, which subsequently expanded to encompass Nairobi and Kisumu.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) caters to the multifaceted requirements of contemporary society, extending beyond its theological framework. Over the course of the past 53 years, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has established a significant number of temples, centers, and rural villages

throughout various regions worldwide. ISKCON has also established a substantial quantity of vegetarian dining establishments. In addition, there are supplementary community initiatives such as the Food for Life Project and diverse local assembly organizations that facilitate the distribution of complimentary food resources.

Presently, there exist establishments such as the Bhaktivedanta Institute (BI), which serves as a scientific research division that promotes the utilization of Vedic principles in the exploration of the origins of the natural world and living organisms. Several internet projects, such as ISKCON.com, Krishna.com, and various Krishna websites, were introduced. Currently, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, boasts a wide presence with a network of over several centers across Kenya.

The dissemination of the movement encountered challenges in its expansion across Kenya. The primary obstacle has revolved on the task of effectively disseminating the principles of Krishna consciousness in alignment with the teachings of the founder and spiritual master, while concurrently endeavoring to convince individuals that embracing a Krishna conscious lifestyle is the most optimal approach for addressing the prevailing challenges encountered within modern society. Christian missionary movements have played a significant and enduring role in Kenya, contributing significantly to the nation's development. The efficacy of conveying Krishna awareness in its original form is crucial for addressing the challenges encountered by the Hare Krishna mission in Kenya and Kisumu.

The movement has focused its efforts on cultivating indigenous people who have embraced the movement's principles, with the aim of nurturing them into leadership roles within various urban centers in Kenya. This strategic approach is intended to effectively tackle the aforementioned challenges. Yogesa dasa adhikari who resides in Nairobi, was prepared to assume leadership of the Nairobi temple. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in Mombasa, Sarvavit dasa brahmacari received training in order to assume the role of temple president. They underwent a fresh initiation and were expected to assume their respective roles within a timeframe ranging from six to twelve months. Upon assuming their posts, they were to assume leadership responsibilities within the ISKCON mission in Kenya. Currently, an increasing number of individuals are undergoing instruction in

many areas of service, such as Deity worship, cooking, gardening, farming, and other related skills, based on their respective capabilities. In due course, the tasks currently being carried out by the worldwide students of the Hare Krishna movement will be assumed by the aforementioned group.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **HARE KRISHNA BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN KISUMU COUNTY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the doctrinal principles, beliefs and devotional practices of the Hare Krishna movement. It also looks at the structure and symbols in the temple that serve as spiritual texts with symbolic meanings. Every Hare Krishna temple has different artifacts that serve as important texts because of the symbolic meanings they represent. The chapter also discusses Hare Krishna texts, which explain the background and meaning of Hare Krishna doctrines and rituals.

#### **5.2 The Importance of ISKCON Temples and Preaching Centers**

The architecture of the ISKCON Temples is characterized by its unique and aesthetically pleasing design. Most ISKCON temples function as representations of Neo-Vedic, conventional, and traditional artistic expressions. The pillars and walls of ISKCON temples are embellished with narratives depicting the exploits of Lord Krishna. Furthermore, the ISKCON temples serve as a platform for the dissemination and embodiment of Lord Krishna's teachings, as noted by Rochford (2007). According to Rochford (1985), the local temple or preaching center functions as the central hub for both social contacts and religious worship among ISKCON devotees. Every week, individuals belonging to the religious community assemble for the Sunday Feast initiative, whereby they engage in the recitation of Krishna's names, attend sermons, and participate in prasadam. Festivals are observed within the temple premises, where esteemed senior devotees and visiting gurus deliver lectures, conduct seminars and courses, and offer mentorship opportunities (Rochford, 1985).

The temple chamber holds a significant position within the temple complex as it serves as the central gathering place for ISKCON devotees. It is in this sacred space that devotees convene each morning to engage in acts of worship, engage in silent singing, and partake in the teachings derived from the Holy Scriptures. The temple chamber is designated as sacred and reserved specifically for the purpose of housing religious imagery and facilitating the performance of devotional rituals. As per customary practice, it is seen that the image of Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada is positioned on one side of the temple room, while the lavishly adorned deities are situated on the opposite side (Gordon, Bromley, & Shinn, 1989).

The puja materials, comprising a conch shell and a whisk used for fanning the deities, are stored on the left side of the shrine. Adherents often establish a sacred ritual area within the confines of their personal houses. Many families who are devoted to their religious practices maintain a designated area known as a "temple room." This space is specifically allocated for the purpose of engaging in acts of worship, such as offering prayers to deities, engaging in japa chanting, and studying or listening to passages from religious texts such as the Bible. Certain families regularly organize weekly outreach activities, when they invite others to actively engage and share in prasadam, a sacred meal. The temple room is an area or a space for the performance of sacred ceremonial rituals, and is diligently maintained in a pristine condition, adorned with floral decorations, and infused with the fragrance of incense. The utilization of aesthetically pleasing artworks depicting verses from the Bhagavata Purana or Bhagavad Gita is a common practice for enhancing the visual appeal of a given environment (Klostermaier, 2007).

The presence of a substantial marble lotus on the temple floor serves as a symbolic manifestation of the lotus flower's ability to remain buoyant in water without succumbing to moisture, as well as the lotus temple's existence as a spiritual domain that coexists within the material realm without being influenced by its impurities. Consequently, the architectural layout of the spiritual temple facilitates spatial interactions that position people in close proximity to the divine and semi-divine entities, so cultivating a profound and affectionate connection between worshipers and the deities (Dutta & Adane, 2014). In the central area of the temple, there is a depiction of Krishna, a celestial being renowned for embodying qualities of youth, beauty, and festivity, which are shown via his melodic singing and graceful dancing. Notably, Krishna is portrayed with a flute. Radha, the celestial consort of Krishna and his beloved, stands in close proximity to him. According to prevailing beliefs, Radha's unwavering devotion symbolizes the profound love for the divine that ought to permeate the hearts of all adherents. The central focus of the elaborately adorned altar space, which commands attention on the southern wall of the temple, consists of the exquisitely attired depictions of Krishna and Radha (Dutta & Adane, 2014).

The characters Rama, Sita, Lakshman, and Hanuman, who are prominently featured in the epic Ramayana, can be interpreted within the framework of Krishna theology as

manifestations of the deity and exemplars of devotional service. To the left of Krishna, there are four figurines that symbolize the deities Rama, Sita, Lakshman, and Hanuman. The two additional dolls positioned on the right side represent Gaura and Caitanya, who were ardent devotees. Caitanya, a 15th-century Bengali saint, played a significant role in promoting musical kirtan as a means of worshiping Krishna. This involved chanting and dancing to sacred mantras with immense enthusiasm, leading his followers to venerate him as a simultaneous embodiment of both Krishna and Radha. This perception symbolizes the profound love shared between these two deities encapsulated within a singular physical form (Bharne & Krusche, 2014).

Adjacent to the central images of Krishna, there exist diminutive shrines dedicated to Shiva and Ganesh, prominent Hindu deities renowned for their association with dance, drumming, and their devout allegiance to Krishna (Krishna, 2008). The temple's western wall features a life-size depiction of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, serving as a vigilant presence overseeing the prayer area. Gaudiya Vaishnavism was brought to the United States by Prabhupada, a revered Bengali spiritual leader, who initiated the practice of chanting kirtans in Central Park, New York during the 1960s. The statue in the temple room often elicits a sense of awe and adoration, particularly among visitors, including children, who respectfully engage in the act of touching its feet (Krishna, 2008).

The Maha Mantra, a compilation of divine appellations spoken, chanted, and performed through dance by adherents of Krishna, is exhibited on a screen positioned at a distance from Prabhupada. Beneath this screen, one can find a harmonium, drums, generally a pair of mridangam, as well as a table and a basket containing tambourines and hand cymbals that are utilized during the kirtan. The temple room accommodates visitors and devotees who gather on carpets and seats to engage in singing and devotional rituals centered on the Maha Mantra (Zaidman, 1997). The spatial organization of the lotus temple is designed with the intention of representing various aspects of religion, history, mythology, and the deeds of Krishna. Additionally, it incorporates a diverse range of human and semi-divine figures that serve as conduits to his spiritual realm. Furthermore, the temple employs music as a means to establish a distinctive connection between both devotees and non-devotees with Krishna (Zaidman, 1997).

The temple serves as a manifestation of the intrinsic human desire for aesthetic excellence. The temple premises are inhabited by a quintet of peacocks, creatures held in high esteem by Krishna due to their aesthetic appeal. According to Sasidhar and Gonnuri (2020), these entities serve as evidence that God holds an appreciation for aesthetics. The artifacts within the temple exhibit a profound inclination towards aesthetic refinement in all aspects associated with Krishna, particularly those that adorn the vicinity of the altar idols, such as the ceremonial peacock feather fan employed in ritualistic oblations. Adjacent to the entrance of the temple room, there is a remarkable wooden sculpture portraying the deities Krishna and Radha. Additionally, the surrounding walls of the room are adorned with paintings that reflect many significant events from Krishna's life (Sasidhar & Gonnuri, 2020).

The teacher at the Kisumu temple posits that an individual's mere enjoyment of the aesthetically pleasing altar within the Hare Krishna movement might lead to their natural devotion to Krishna. Despite lacking comprehension of the intricate doctrinal aspects, many who frequent Krishna temples, whether as devotees or visitors, are nonetheless captivated by the appealing essence of the deity.

### **5.3 The Process of entry into Hare Krishna**

Prior to gaining acceptance inside the Hare Krishna community, individuals seeking conversion are required to undergo a sequence of ritualistic processes. The primary objective of these ritualization methods is to foster social control and cultivate Krishna Consciousness among devotees, which entails achieving a state of absolute harmony with Krishna. The designation of bhakta (for males) or bhaktin (for females) is bestowed to an individual upon their commitment to fulfilling the prerequisites for initiation. The individual in question proceeds to ascend the hierarchical structure by meeting the necessary criteria for participation in a range of initiation phases. In accordance with established standards, many authoritative entities consistently oversee this progress. According to Bell (1997), devotees undergo three stages of ritualization, including separation, transition, and integration.

Presently, within the community of ISKCON devotees in Kisumu, there exists a profound reverence towards the three successive stages of initiation. Initiation ceremonies are conducted at each level to symbolize the transition from a prior way of life to the

integration into different social strata within the community. The initial stage is referred to as *harinama*, alternatively recognized as "first initiation," while the subsequent stage is commonly referred to as "Brahmin initiation" or "second initiation." The third stage, known as "sannyasa initiation," is hardly employed (Bhattacharya, 2005). The initial induction of a novice marks the culmination of their period of novitiate and their assimilation into the ISKCON community. The third stage of initiation symbolizes the commencement of the renunciant's lifestyle, referred to as *sannyasa*, characterized by the absence of any attachments or responsibilities to the external realm. The second initiation ceremony serves as a ceremonial acknowledgment of one's admittance into the esteemed community of Brahmin priests. According to Bhattacharya (2005), every level of an initiation ceremony serves as a formal proclamation, which is socially recognized, signifying that an individual has attained a new social identity.

### **5.3.1 Separation/*Harinama***

In order to attain formal confirmation and social acceptance as an integrated member of the ISKCON community in Kisumu, a new recruit is required to relinquish their previous identity and way of life. As the individual embraces the daily ritual practices, taboos, social structure, and institutional hierarchy of ISKCON, they experience a gradual detachment from their prior way of life. The process of distinction highlights the significant disparities and overall lack of compatibility between the social world and activities of ISKCON and those of the applicants' previous social environment (King, 2007).

In the Hare Krishna tradition, the *sannyasi*, despite renouncing social identity and societal norms, assumes the role of a peripatetic preacher who prioritizes spiritual matters over materialistic concerns. The initiation rites conducted by ISKCON encompass a progressive process aimed at cultivating an increasing realization of the eternal nature of the metaphysical self. These ceremonies are overseen by a guru who serves as a representative of a lineage of spiritual mentors (Bhaktivedanta, 2012).

The prevailing belief posits that a gradual and profound process of purifying consciousness facilitates the cultivation of the ability to discern between one's authentic self and the illusory perception of social, physical, and worldly identity. The concept of false worldly consciousness manifests in the form of attachments to various aspects of

one's life, including as the physical body, dwelling, material things, offspring, extended family, and riches. These attachments are perceived by the individual as personal identifications, denoted by the terms "I" and "mine," within the context of the worldly self. The transforming purification is achieved by engaging in devotional Krishna activities, which involve ritual organization (Bhaktivedanta, 2012).

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) presents a viewpoint that diverges significantly from the prevailing societal norms in Kenya. In contrast to the prevailing socially sanctioned behaviors prevalent in Kenya, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) social environment is characterized by the observance of ritual practices. Upon joining the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Kisumu, newly arrived individuals are instructed in the customary daily ritual practices, which encompass the recitation of divine appellations. Additionally, individuals also acquire a sense of reverence towards the taboos and dietary restrictions observed inside the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) (Broo, 2003). ISKCON initiates diligently strive to adhere to the norms that are meticulously enforced. The consumption of meat, participation in illicit sexual activities, substance abuse, and gambling are strictly prohibited for initiates. According to Broo (2003), individuals are compelled to engage in the practice of reciting at least sixteen rounds daily, with no exceptions.

The regular practice of chanting and strict observance of food and other limitations ultimately lead to the individual's detachment from their previous social environment and promote social integration within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). It is a regular occurrence for those who are new to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) to feel a withdrawal from their prior social groups and networks within the initial months of engaging in chanting and adhering to the associated taboos. According to Bhaktivedanta (2012), the adherence to prohibitions on alcohol consumption and meat consumption serves to reinforce societal norms and values.

The individual experiences an increasing sense of comfort in the presence of ISKCON adherents, despite their steadfast refusal to engage in such activities at the behest of their former acquaintances. One significant attribute observed during the early phases of admittance into ISKCON is the practice of ritualizing the individual through the

implementation of rule-governed practices. The robust correlation between the everyday rituals of ISKCON and its social structure lends credence to Bell's (1992) assertion that the preservation of social order is primarily upheld by ritual rather than legislation. The hierarchical social structure of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is exclusively accessible to individuals who demonstrate unwavering dedication to adhering to the prescribed rituals. The objective is to establish a conceptual structure that will effectively facilitate and augment the regular engagement in ritualistic activities. In order to facilitate the assimilation of the newcomer into a collective sacred environment and to separate the ritual practitioner from a profane (mundane) context, the implementation of a structure such as this is necessary.

### **5.3.2 Transition / *brahminical* initiation**

In accordance with the established practice, a span of one year is observed following the initial initiation before the subsequent, commonly referred to as brahminical, initiation can be obtained. This particular initiation bestows upon the individual the privilege to assume the role of an altar priest and engage in the worship of deities within the temples affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). In order to be deemed eligible for the second initiation, it is imperative for individuals to diligently adhere to the commitments they made during the initial initiation. Furthermore, it is imperative that the individual demonstrates unwavering commitment to regularly participating in the morning temple services, either within the confines of their own residence or at the neighboring Kisumu temple. According to ISKCON Law 7.2.2.1.3, it is required for the initiating guru to evaluate the preparedness of their student for brahminical initiation. Additionally, before granting the disciple second initiation, the guru must obtain a recommendation from the local ISKCON authority overseeing the individual's service (Rochford, 2007).

The initiation of adherents residing and working within ISKCON is exclusively granted to gurus who have received formal recognition from the ISKCON GBC. Typically, individuals are prohibited from assuming a role inside ISKCON subsequent to gaining Vaishnava initiation from gurus external to the organization. According to Rochford (2007), there is a common practice among second-initiation pupils to engage in the homa ritual with first-initiation disciples. The Gayatri Mantra holds significant religious importance as it is recited by Brahmins in a meditative manner, thrice daily, between

sunrise, noon, and sunset, with the aim of attaining a state of transcendence. According to Broo (2003), the guru bestows the yajnopavita, also known as the sacred thread, upon male students following the ceremony. Additionally, the guru recites the mantra in the left ear of the female disciple.

According to popular belief, the act of saying this particular mantra is purported to liberate individuals from their attachments to material possessions and obligations. The act of preparing meals for the divine being and offering them at the sacred platform is exclusively sanctioned for individuals who have undergone the formal initiation into the esteemed status of brahminhood. As Bhaktivedanta (2012) asserts, initiation procedures often aim to safeguard an individual's inherent and non-negotiable entitlements. During the second initiation in ISKCON, individuals who are new to the practice are granted the privilege to engage in the ritual worship of Krishna's deity forms. The Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana are commonly examined by individuals who are pursuing Brahmin initiation, in conjunction with acquiring proficiency in Sanskrit reading and pronunciation. Typically, Brahmins are urged to pursue a vocation in the priesthood and engage in educational endeavors. Hence, it is unsurprising that the second initiation ceremony is occasionally denoted as priestly ordination (Bhaktivedanta, 2012).

The transitional or brahminical stage is characterized by the individual's dedication to becoming an initiated adherent. Individuals are classified as "novices" when entering the transitional stage due to their commitment, adherence to daily ritual practices, and observance of taboos. According to Austin-Broos (2003), the novice is considered a marginal entity due to their status as a non-initiated member and their continued involvement in their former social networks. The individual who adheres to prescribed procedures in order to attain the necessary qualifications for initiation is sometimes referred to as a novice. The establishment of eligibility for initiation is facilitated through the utilization of a conventional social framework, a complex system of institutional rules, and schemes of ritualization (Austin-Broos, 2003). The ritualization methods observed in this context are influenced by preaching strategies that have been shaped by historical factors.

The guru assumes a pivotal and engaged position in facilitating the progress of the aspiring disciple towards attaining the requisite level of proficiency in rituals, abiding by

prescribed ritual practices, and fulfilling institutional prerequisites within the realm characterized by power dynamics and control. Fundamentally, the period of transition or liminality might be characterized as a state of anticipation. During this period, individuals demonstrate a steadfast adherence to the regulations prescribed by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), thereby enhancing their level of dedication. They also engage in a comprehensive program designed for disciples, which includes the completion of a course and the successful completion of an examination. As a result of their efforts, they receive a written endorsement as a testament to their progress and achievements (Broo, 2003).

The novice is granted permission to establish a relationship with an ISKCON guru only after a considerable duration of time has elapsed, during which the novice has diligently engaged in the daily rituals and has acquired a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental principles of ISKCON's teachings through the study of ISKCON's literature. During this level, the novice acquires the pranama mantra of Prabhupada. The pranama mantra serves as a symbol of respectful deference towards the teacher. After establishing a gradual rapport with the ISKCON guru, the novice finally expresses a desire to become the guru's disciple. According to Cole (2007), once the guru grants permission, the aspirant-disciple is authorized to chant the pranama mantra of the guru.

The prospective disciple consistently recites the guru's mantra before the commencement of each interaction with the guru, as well as prior to engaging in any devotional activity. However, the acceptance of spiritual guidance from an ISKCON guru is subject to stringent institutional regulations. As per the stipulations set by the institution, an individual seeking initiation must have engaged in "devotional service," maintained strict adherence to the aforementioned four regulatory principles, and recited 108 Hare Krishna mantras for sixteen rounds daily, uninterrupted, for a minimum duration of one year (Rochford, 2007).

The institutional norms of ISKCON encompass many supplementary requirements that supplement the acquisition of ritual knowledge through the practice of chanting and adherence to certain taboos for a specified duration. Based on the guidelines set by the GBC (Governing Body Commission), it is expected that an individual seeking initiation should prioritize their reverence and devotion towards Prabhupada, the Founder of

ISKCON, as their primary siksha guru (instructing guru) for the initial six-month period, rather than pledging their service to a particular ISKCON guru (Goswami, 2012).

During the Annual General Meeting of the ISKCON Governing Body Commission held in Mayapur, the primary location of ISKCON in India, a resolution (2012/305) was passed. This resolution recommended that all individuals seeking to become disciples and receive initiation should complete the "ISKCON Disciple Course" prior to selecting a spiritual master for initiation (Goswami, 2012). The main objectives of this course are to assist students in understanding the importance of diksha-guru and siksha-guru within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the unique position of Bhaktivedanta as a spiritual leader, and the responsibilities of ISKCON gurus, specifically in relation to their adherence to Bhaktivedanta's teachings and the hierarchical structure of authority within ISKCON (Goswami, 2012). Furthermore, the objective is to provide the followers with the necessary knowledge to diligently adhere to the initiation vows, achieved through instructing them on the portrayal of the authentic guru's qualifications as depicted in the Chaitanya Vaishnava scriptures. This can assist the aspiring follower in selecting a guru within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Furthermore, it aims to aid potential disciples in understanding the foundational principles of guru veneration and the correlation between serving a guru within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and the organization's overarching goals.

The "Disciple Course" offers prospective participants with knowledge, competencies, and strategies to enhance their faith and self-confidence. The institution's expectations of individuals can be met by their development of certain attributes, which in turn allows them to effectively contribute to the society's evangelistic aims. The prescribed duration for initiation is a minimum of one year, encompassing a preliminary phase lasting six months, followed by an additional six-month period of waiting subsequent to finding refuge under the guidance of an ISKCON guru. The duration of this time is significantly greater than that of the other. This observation demonstrates that individuals generally undergo conversion processes that tend to progress at a sluggish pace. In relation to the commencement of harinama, King (2007) asserts that scholarly literature frequently indicates a novitiate period ranging from six months to a year. However, contemporary practices have extended this term significantly.

The examination queries that candidates are required to successfully complete after their six-month preparatory time serve as an indicator of ISKCON's recruitment procedures. The purpose of these assessments is to evaluate the candidate's foundational understanding of Bhaktivedanta's teachings, their level of commitment, faith, adherence to the four regulatory principles, comprehension of chanting, recognition of Prabhupada as the primary siksha-guru, philosophical knowledge, and commitment to remain within ISKCON. Additionally, it assesses their dedication to accepting the ISKCON Governing Body Commission as the governing authority (King, 2007).

The examination questions effectively mirror the institutional standards and the desired attributes of an ideal applicant for initiation. As stated by Bell (1992), the primary objective of ritualization is to imbue individuals with the ability to employ ritualization schemes in order to exert control over non-ritualized contexts, thereby aligning them to the values inherent in the ritualizing schemes and enabling the manipulation of perceptions. The examination methodology employed by ISKCON, as well as the contemporary "Disciple Course," facilitates a purposeful molding of the perspectives and lifestyles of its adherents.

According to Long and Hadden (1983), the institutional initiation rules of ISKCON serve as a mechanism for facilitating the transition of individuals who are new to the group into fully recognized members. This procedure aims to ensure that newcomers become bona fide participants within the organization. In addition to the institutional ISKCON canon guidelines, the transformation process is influenced by the local ISKCON leadership, which is represented by national or local ISKCON councils and temple boards. The prospective follower will be actively involved and subject to assessment by the regional administration, predominantly consisting of experienced adherents. In reality, the determination to endorse an individual is taken by either the local or national council. The candidate will receive notification on the expectations set by the local or regional leadership, and will then undertake the appropriate actions to fulfill the supplementary criteria. According to Long and Hadden (2003), a significant portion of the hiring, certification, and placement processes for individuals is conducted at the local level.

The institutional laws and regulations of ISKCON primarily prioritize the practice of chanting the names of Krishna, along with some restrictions. Additionally, there are specific standards outlined for addressing an ISKCON guru. The examinations for novices encompass various aspects, including evaluating a candidate's comprehension of Bhaktivedanta's teachings, commitment to daily rituals, and their inclination towards embracing and operating under the hierarchical authority structure of ISKCON. Aspirant initiates are provided with a multi-session "ISKCON Disciple Course" that places significant emphasis on the importance of obedience to ISKCON authority. The regulatory oversight of ritual performance and the establishment of new guidelines for initiation from an ISKCON guru are vested in the national or local leadership of ISKCON. The novice acquires initiation, a ceremonial affirmation of membership in ISKCON, upon the effective fulfillment of the institutional procedures (Long and Hadden, 2003).

### **5.3.3. Incorporation/ *sannyasa* initiation**

In the context of *sannyasa* initiation, the decision to alter the name of the initiate or retain the original name while incorporating the honorific "Swami" in lieu of the suffix "dasa" is at the discretion of the initiating guru, who holds the role of the *sannyasa* guru. In certain instances, those who undergo the *sannyasa* initiation are bestowed with a fresh appellation commencing with "Bhakti" and concluding with "Swami". Consequently, the designation often mirrors the devotee's societal status and position within the hierarchical structure of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). In certain instances, individuals who are Brahmins or twice-initiated members of the household may choose to include the honorific "Adhikara" in their names, thereby indicating their elevated status as Brahmins and their dedication to the cause of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). To emphasize their status as celibate monks, they often append the appellation "Brahmacari" to their names (Broo, 2003).

During the *harinama* initiation, the candidate-initiate respectfully approaches the guru and performs a prostration, symbolizing reverence, by lowering themselves to the ground and touching the guru's feet. The candidate-initiate appears to have recently undergone a bathing ritual, donned new attire, and has the tilaka marks associated with Vishnu on their body. The enhancement of the aspiring initiate's purity of mind is believed to be achieved by the practice of bathing and wearing clean garments. These actions exemplify the

Brahmin ideal of cleanliness, which is believed to facilitate the attainment of brahma-bhuta, a state of heightened spiritual awareness. Subsequently, the guru proceeds to provide a didactic discourse on the methodology of engaging in the practice of chanting the names of Krishna, emphasizing the importance of circumventing negative inner mental dispositions. Following the discussion, the spiritual leader directs the aspiring follower to articulate the initiation pledges, wherein the individual commits to the regular recitation of the Hare Krishna mantra using a set of 108 japa beads, sometimes referred to as prayer beads, for a minimum of sixteen cycles every day.

In accordance with their initiation, aspirants are required to declare a solemn pledge to abstain from engaging in gambling activities, consuming meat, engaging in sexual relations with the intention of procreation, as well as using substances that have intoxicating effects, such as cigarettes, alcohol, narcotics, tea, and coffee (Rochford, 2007, p. 11). then, the guru extends to the initiate a selection of distinct appellations of Krishna, then appending the suffix "dasa" for male initiates and "dasi" for female initiates, subsequent to the completion of one cycle of the Hare Krishna mantra on a freshly acquired set of prayer beads. This observation indicates that the individuals in question have committed themselves to a life dedicated to the mentor's guidance, signifying their affiliation with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) or their association with the Krishna community. Additionally, it demonstrates their affiliation with the familial or collective body of adherents who subscribe to a specific guru. The devotees of the same guru perceive each other as either godbrothers or godsisters. The follower is also bestowed with fresh neck-beads made from the revered tulasi (basil) plant, which holds great significance among Vaishnavas. As per established convention, it is believed that the guru, as stated by Rochford (2007), engages in the act of burning the initiate's prior negative karma.

The conclusion of the event involves the performance of an homa, which is a ritualistic fire sacrifice dedicated to the deity Vishnu. This ritual takes place subsequent to the undertaking of vows, the reception of neck beads and a new name, as well as the provision of chanting beads. During the sacrificial ritual, the initiates participate by offering grains into the sacred fire. This ritual is overseen by either the guru or a specifically appointed Brahmin priest. Upon its conclusion, the initiates symbolically offer bananas, signifying the symbolic burning of their prior karmic actions. After the

ceremonial event, the disciple offers a monetary contribution to the guru, which is commonly referred to as *dakshina* (Rambo, 2003). The student undergoes a subsequent initiation, referred to as *diksha*, during which they receive the *gayatri*, a confidential mantra intended for personal meditation thrice daily. Additionally, upon the guru's observation of the disciple's progress, the student is bestowed with a sacred thread known as *yajnopavita*, only for male individuals. According to Rambo (2003), the guru has the right to deliver both first and second initiations (*harinama* and *Brahmin*) simultaneously, with the consent of the local ISKCON leadership, in cases where the student demonstrates exceptional proficiency.

The *brahmacari*, also known as the celibate student, represents the initial phase of human existence. During antiquated cultural practices, male individuals were traditionally dispatched to an instructor for the purpose of receiving guidance pertaining to their responsibilities within their respective ashramas. According to the *Manu-smriti*, the duration of this particular phase of study might be extended till the individual reaches the age of 36. As per the teachings of the *Dharma-Sutras*, a student is presented with the choice of embarking upon the *grihastha* ashrama, the stage of life as a householder, which encompasses the responsibilities of marriage, parenthood, and familial provision. Alternatively, the student may elect to remain in a state of celibacy following the completion of their educational pursuits (Flood, 1996).

The prevailing demographic of those affiliated with ISKCON consists of both male and female members who typically become associated with the organization throughout their twenties or thirties. It is worth noting that these individuals generally do not partake in rigorous *brahmacari* training before embarking on familial responsibilities. The contemporary ritual setting differs from that of the 1970s. Becoming a member of ISKCON entails residing inside a temple community and engaging in regular ritualistic observances within a distinct religious setting, as previously alluded to throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Prior to joining a temple community, all newly enlisted individuals were provided with *brahmacari* education by a guru. The cultural aspects associated with temple life experienced a decline during the initial years of the 1980s, when individuals who had chosen celibacy started departing from the temples in order to enter into matrimony and establish households (Flood, 1996).

Presently, those who join ISKCON are commonly provided with training within a congregational context. During regular gatherings and scheduled meal events, participants acquire knowledge of the daily rituals and the extensive set of regulations and principles essential for their comprehension and practice. Once new recruits demonstrate a certain level of ability in ritual performance, they are deemed novices, signifying their growing familiarity with the cultural aspects of ritual practice. The ritualistic observance, which is universally embraced by all members of ISKCON, plays a pivotal role in cultivating cohesion and solidarity within the organization. Consequently, this ritualistic conduct engenders a perception of an elevated spiritual power as an internalized actuality (Bell, 1992).

Upon completion of their training, young individuals are presented with the choice of either embracing a life of celibate brahmachari or transitioning into the role of householders. Within the ISKCON community, individuals who have undergone initiation and have demonstrated a considerable period of dedicated practice are exclusively granted the privilege to partake in the vivaha-samskara, also known as the wedding ceremony. During the matrimonial ceremony, the husband and wife pledge to honor their initial vows, foster their children's religious observances, and provide mutual assistance in their respective spiritual pursuits. From an early stage of development, parents instruct their children in the performance of rituals.

#### **5.3.4 Dressing of Hare Krishna devotees?**

After initiates have fully embraced the faith, they begin to adopt specific modes of dress. In actuality, the origins of Buddhism precede the practice of shaving heads and donning orange robes by a considerable number of millennia. In the context of Vedic culture, an individual's clothing choices serve as a manifestation of their societal position and spiritual beliefs. Throughout history, individuals have donned uncomplicated garments with the purpose of cultivating a sense of modesty and liberation from self-admiration, albeit solely in outward appearance. Consistent with this rationale, the Hare Krishna Movement has endeavored to preserve certain elements of the Vedic heritage whenever feasible. In Hare Krishna communities, it is customary for men to wear dhotis, while women adhere to the traditional attire of sarees (Zeller, 2023).

Married guys typically don white robes, whereas young men who have opted for a celibate lifestyle and pursue monastic training don saffron robes. A significant proportion of individuals opt to engage in the practice of shaving their heads, while retaining a sikha, which refers to a solitary strand of hair located at the posterior region. The act of doing this action serves as a representation of both purity and simplicity, as well as an expression of renunciation and submission to the deity Krishna. In India, the application of a U-shaped clay mark known as Tilak on the forehead is a customary practice observed primarily on the banks of venerated rivers. This mark is typically fashioned using yellow clay. In addition to adhering to typical ascetic practices, Krishna devotees who demonstrate true dedication, regardless of whether they reside within a temple community or not, abstain from engaging in any form of intoxication, gambling, and adulterous sexual relationships (Zeller, 2023).

Within the context of Hare Krishnaism, the major function of the guru is to facilitate the acquisition of essential knowledge by disciples, enabling them to proficiently engage in the daily rituals. The significance of chanting practice is given great emphasis, especially during the initial initiation. The second initiation places emphasis on the development of Brahmin characteristics. Both aspiring disciples and those who are already disciples regularly participate in the guru's lectures, engage in kirtans conducted by the guru, seek clarification through questioning, engage in deity worship in the guru's presence, and partake in communal meals with the guru. The relationship between the guru and student is characterized by a set of prescribed guidelines, norms, and protocols.

The guru regularly organizes disciple assemblies, characterized by their intimate nature, wherein pupils are afforded the opportunity to engage in open discussions pertaining to their personal concerns. A sense of communal identity can manifest among individuals who have collectively embraced a shared spiritual leader at such congregational assemblies. The guru may also get an invitation to visit the residence of a student, wherein the disciple may extend acts of hospitality such as offering food or other forms of accommodation. The guru and the pupil have a cordial and reverential rapport. The follower refrains from being excessively complacent with the spiritual teacher and consistently maintains the awareness that they possess a divine essence akin to that of a deity.

#### **5.4 Doctrines, principal beliefs and devotional practices of Hare Krishna**

The Hare Krishna doctrinal elements can be elucidated by the application of Ninian Smart's six components of religion. This list encompasses six fundamental components that are universally found in all religious systems. These phenomena possess social, mythical, experiential, ceremonial, and religious characteristics. While each facet possesses its own unique characteristics, they all play a crucial role in the realm of religion. The ideological aims of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) are clear and unambiguous. Upon its establishment in 1966, the Hare Krishna Movement was accompanied by the formulation of seven principles by AC Bhaktivedanta, which serve as the foundational framework for the movement. The dissemination of spiritual knowledge to society at large and the provision of education on spiritual practices have the potential to rectify the prevailing imbalanced ideals in the world and facilitate genuine peace and unity. The propagation of Krishna consciousness, as elucidated in the Srimad-Bhagavatam and Bhagavad-gita, aims to cultivate awareness of Krishna among individuals and foster a sense of community, thereby enabling them to recognize their inherent connection to Krishna, the supreme entity. Additionally, the promotion of the sankirtan movement, characterized by the collective chanting of God's holy names, as expounded in the teachings of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, serves as a means to spread spiritual awareness. The primary objective is to construct sacred sites that commemorate the divine activities of Krishna, intended for both the members and the wider society. Additionally, the aim is to foster unity among members and promote the dissemination of a simpler, more natural lifestyle. To accomplish these objectives, the organization intends to produce and circulate periodicals, books, and other written materials (Nath, 2010).

##### **5.4.1 The Vedas and Bhagavad Gita**

The core tenets of the Hare Krishna philosophy place significant emphasis on unwavering dedication to sacred texts, including the Vedas and Bhagavad Gita, alongside the aforementioned seven aspects. It is believed that the supreme personality of Godhead bestowed onto humanity a collection of ancient texts, such as the Vedas, the Mahabharata, the Upanishads, the Puranas, and the Vedanta-sutras, during the initial stages of creation. The scriptures have been transmitted across generations by knowledgeable spiritual leaders, undergoing adaptations to accommodate evolving temporal, spatial, and contextual circumstances. However, their fundamental message and

ultimate conclusion have remained unaltered. The philosophy also emphasizes the notion that matters pertaining to human existence remain consistent irrespective of the specific circumstances in which they manifest. The fundamental causes of these issues can be attributed to our mistaken connection with the material world and our neglect of our original connection with the Supreme (Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

The spiritual literature, such as the Vedas and the Bhakti, provide adherents with knowledge that guides their way of life and facilitates their spiritual growth. According to Bhaktisiddhanta, there exist two distinct approaches for acquiring knowledge that surpasses the boundaries of direct human sight. These approaches are commonly referred to as the "ascending" (aroha) and "descending" (avaroha) paths. The process of acquiring new knowledge by rational reasoning, commonly known as theorizing, is often metaphorically described as the ascending road. The avaroha path, as conventionally understood, refers to the acquisition of knowledge that is transmitted directly from Krishna. According to Bhaktivedanta (2012), the information that is transmitted from a higher source is regarded as infallible and immutable.

Bhaktisiddhanta further posits that the ascending approach, predicated upon the utilization of reason, logic, and speculation, proves to be ineffectual in its endeavors to comprehend the absolute. According to this particular viewpoint, the sole means of comprehending concepts that are beyond comprehension is to go onto the path of knowledge, which originates from Krishna and finally descends through the lineage of gurus. According to Sherbow (2004), Bhaktivedanta asserts that the epistemology of ISKCON is grounded in the concept of divine revelation, emphasizing that all knowledge derives from Krishna in the spiritual realm.

In the opening to Sri Isopanisad, Bhaktivedanta Swami posits that people possess four inherent defects, which impede their ability to perceive genuine truth. According to Bhaktivedanta (2012), individuals possess fallibility, a propensity for dishonesty, a tendency to frequently misperceive their own identities, and imperfect sensory capabilities. ISKCON foresees that those who are new to the organization would be inclined to embrace the belief that the theological concepts of ISKCON, which are firmly rooted in sacred texts, can only be understood by adhering to a hierarchical system of spiritual teachers, representing a downward path of knowledge.

The writings are commonly interpreted as representing a transcendental sound vibration that is thought to originate from the spiritual realm. The scriptures are believed to provide infallible information regarding Krishna and his material, as well as, transcendental energies. The notion of *avaroha*, which pertains to the transmission of information in a descending manner, is emphasized in lectures offered by seasoned and knowledgeable practitioners during initial encounters, such as Sunday temple services or outreach activities organized by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The same pattern employed in all ISKCON temples for the presenting of scriptures is elucidated by Bhaktivedanta (2012).

Each prominent ISKCON temple conducts a discourse on a passage from the Bhagavata Purana between the time frame of 7:30 to 9:00 am. The individual delivering the discourse, typically a Brahmin adherent who has undergone initiation, proceeds to recite a Sanskrit excerpt extracted from the Bhagavata Purana in a sequential manner, while being positioned upon an elevated structure referred to as a *vyasasana*. The audience responds to each stanza line with recitation. Subsequently, the orator proceeds to articulate the translation in a sequential manner, meticulously rendering each Sanskrit term from the verse into its corresponding English equivalent. The audience exhibits a tendency to repeat words in both Sanskrit and English. The complete poem is next recited in its entirety, followed by the interpretation provided by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. Subsequent to the recitation and reading, the Brahmin proceeds to provide an instructive discourse wherein he or she expounds upon the pragmatic use of the poetry and commentary within the realm of everyday existence. According to Goswami (2012), there is a question-and-answer session that takes place after the presentation.

The Bhagavad Gita lectures are conducted in the evening, adhering to a consistent structure that normally spans from 7:30 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. For novice practitioners, it is recommended to engage in the daily practice of *sadhana*, which encompasses the recitation of a certain number of names associated with Krishna, participation in deity worship, and the study of sacred texts. According to Beck (2004), individuals who are new to the ISKCON community and live in ISKCON temples diligently participate in both morning and evening lectures. Outsider newcomers are advised to adhere to their customary schedule when residing in a new environment. The lectures delivered at local

temples are commonly accessed online by those residing in households and aspiring devotees. It is recommended for both novices and experienced individuals to commit to memory the original Sanskrit text and the corresponding English translation of significant verses from the Bhagavad Gita. Additionally, engaging in the practice of regularly attending morning and evening lectures is advocated as a means to enhance one's comprehension of the philosophical principles rooted in scripture teachings (Goswami, 2012).

According to the current priest, the Kisumu temple offers three customary courses. The initial course offered is the Bhakta Course, which serves as a seminar designed to instruct individuals new to the Hare Krishna tradition in the foundational principles of its ideology, as well as the appropriate methods for engaging in daily rituals. The study offers a comprehensive understanding of the five principal topics present in the Bhagavad Gita, namely Krishna (isvara), material nature (prakriti), the metaphysical self (jiva), acts (karma), and time (kala). The Bhakti-sastri Course, an educational program spanning approximately three months, constitutes the second phase of the seminar series. The Bhakti Vaibhava Course, a comprehensive two-year program, aims to elucidate the teachings found within the initial six volumes of the Bhagavad. This course is positioned as the third installment in the series. ISKCON places significant emphasis on newcomers acquiring a thorough understanding of the movement's scriptural tradition. Consequently, in order to qualify for initiation, novices are required to possess a comprehensive grasp of the essential principles of Hare Krishna doctrine (Presiding priest, Kisumu, 3rd May, 2021).

The Bhagavad-Gita serves as the primary textual foundation and authoritative source for adherents of the Hare Krishna movement. The Bhagavad-gita is widely recognized as a significant milestone in the realm of Indian enlightenment. The Gita comprises a compilation of seven hundred concise lines that were delivered by Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, to His esteemed disciple Arjuna. This text functions as a comprehensive guide for the exploration of self-realization. The Presiding Priest of Kisumu, on the 3rd of May, 2021, asserts that there is no other philosophical or religious literature that offers a more lucid and comprehensive elucidation of the essence of consciousness, the individual identity, the universe, and the Ultimate Being.

The term "Bhagavad-Gita" can be understood as a direct translation meaning "the divine song." Lord Krishna communicated this statement to his friend, Arjuna. The scripture in question holds a significant position within the Hindu religious tradition, being highly esteemed. It comprises a total of 700 verses. The Gita is organized in the form of a sequence of dialogues between Arjuna, a prince from the Pandava lineage, and Krishna, who serves as his charioteer and instructor. At the onset of the conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Arjuna finds himself grappling with a moral and emotional dilemma. He experiences distress over the inevitable violence and loss of life that will ensue as a result of the impending war, particularly due to the fact that he would be fighting against his own kin. This predicament weighs heavily on Arjuna's conscience and evokes a sense of sorrow within him (Presiding priest, Kisumu, 3rd May, 2021).

The synthesis presented in the Bhagavad Gita pertains to the inquiry into the constituents of the moral path that is essential for attaining spiritual liberation or moksha, which denotes escape from the perpetual cycle of rebirth (Flood, 2004). This inquiry delves into the contemplation of whether an individual ought to opt for a lifestyle characterized by asceticism as opposed to a more conventional and socially integrated existence, when one is committed to fulfilling personal responsibilities and pursuing a chosen job. Alternatively, it examines the possibility of embracing a domesticated life centered on a personalized deity, specifically Krishna, as revealed in religious teachings. The Gita extensively discusses and provides a concise overview of the three primary streams within Hinduism, namely renunciation centered on enlightenment, householder life centered on dharma, and theism centered on devotion. According to Knott (2004), Deutsch and Dalvi argue that the Bhagavad Gita endeavors to establish a state of concordance among these three routes.

The synthesis answer of the Bhagavad Gita proposes the rejection of a binary perspective in favor of embracing a more inclusive and comprehensive approach that acknowledges the coexistence of seemingly contradictory elements. According to Bryant and Ekstrand (2004), it is argued that the practice of "inner renunciation" or "motiveless action" can allow the dharmic householder to achieve the same goals as the renouncing monk. According to the teachings of the Gita, individuals are encouraged to engage in moral actions based on their personal conviction of their inherent righteousness, rather than being motivated by the desire for rewards or the fear of potential gains or losses.

Deviation from a spiritual existence can occur as a result of wants, selfish tendencies, and an excessive craving for sustenance. According to Bryant and Ekstrand (2004), the text posits the existence of a Living God inherent in every individual, and posits that the pursuit of serving this Living God without personal gain is the means by which one can achieve spiritual development and liberation.

According to Galvin Flood, the teachings of the Gita are characterized by their distinctiveness when compared to the teachings of other Indian faiths. These other faiths were known for promoting practices of severe austerity and various forms of self-inflicted suffering, sometimes referred to as "karsayanta." The Gita expresses disapproval towards these practices, arguing that they not only deviate from established customs but also contradict the essence of Krishna himself. Haddon points out that Krishna is believed to dwell within all living beings, so inflicting harm onto the body through ascetic practices would be tantamount to inflicting harm upon Krishna. According to Haddon (2014), it is imperative for even a monk to prioritize the pursuit of "inner renunciation" over engaging in external pretenses.

The Gita, drawing upon the concept that individuals possess inherent temperaments and inclinations (guna), integrates multiple paths towards achieving spiritual enlightenment. According to Winthrop Sargeant, the book acknowledges the existence of individuals who possess varying inclinations towards reflection and intellectual pursuits, emotional connectivity, action-oriented behavior, as well as a preference for experimentation and practical learning. The text presents various spiritual pathways, including the path of knowledge (jnana yoga), the path of devotion (bhakti yoga), the path of action (karma yoga), and the path of meditation (raja yoga), which cater to different individual dispositions. According to Upadhyaya, none of these pathways towards spiritual enlightenment has inherent superiority or inferiority; instead, they converge into a unified trajectory that ultimately leads to a shared objective (Haddon, 2014).

The Hare Krishna tradition, in addition to referencing the Bhagavad Gita, also incorporates teachings from the Hindu Vedas. The Vedas encompass a comprehensive body of knowledge that encompasses various aspects of existence, encompassing not only the physical world but also the entirety of cosmic manifestation, including its origins and ultimate purpose. The Vedas represent the earliest known religious scriptures within the

Hindu tradition. The Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda constitute the four canonical texts known as the Vedas. According to Halbfass (2017), the Vedic scriptures can be classified into four distinct subcategories. These include mantras and benedictions, texts pertaining to rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, and symbolic sacrifices, commentaries elucidating the aforementioned books, and texts exploring meditation, philosophy, and spiritual comprehension.

According to Halbfass (2017), the Hare Krishna tradition perceives the Vedas as being characterized by an impersonal or authorless nature. These manuscripts are considered to be scrupulously preserved from ancient times and contain revelations that were noticed by ancient sages after engaging in protracted meditation. The sole essential approach for acquiring Vedic knowledge is through auditory perception. According to the Vedas, it is imperative to receive knowledge from authoritative sources in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of ultimate reality. Transcendental knowledge refers to a form of knowledge that exists beyond the confines of our immediate reality. The acquisition of material knowledge occurs inside the confines of the universe, but transcendental knowledge is obtained outside the boundaries of this cosmic realm. The assistance of the Vedas, or Vedic wisdom, is seen necessary for humans due to their inherent limitations in comprehending the intricacies of the spiritual realm independently. The origins of Vedic knowledge can be traced back to the Supreme Lord rather than any individual who has been subjected to material conditioning. According to Halbfass (2017), the Vedic tradition posits that the Vedas possess absolute and self-authoritative qualities due to their direct inspiration by the infallible Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The Vedas are not solely recognized and recited by a limited number of individuals in specific geographical areas. The Vedas transcend geographical and cultural boundaries as they are believed to have been revealed by a timeless and immutable source. Consequently, these assertions are regarded as immutable verities. The declarations found in the Vedic texts can be considered as axiomatic truths. In order to comprehend axiomatic facts, which are self-assertive statements, it is imperative to engage with the fundamental principle from which all other statements derive. The concept in question possesses an inherent capacity to establish truth claims independently, without recourse to other sources of authority. Consequently, the Vedas can be seen as a true source of truth

due to their inherent infallibility and their attribution to the divine, being regarded as the same words uttered by God during the genesis of existence (Sivaraman, 1989).

The Vedic teachings have been bestowed to humanity by a divine entity, with the purpose of providing guidance for ethical conduct within our earthly existence. However, those who have chosen to disregard the Vedas, which are considered as divine instructions, and instead opt to pursue their own subjective inclinations, often encounter a state of disarray and confusion. In the contemporary era, individuals tend to assign a lower level of importance to matters pertaining to spirituality. These entities are characterized by their sad circumstances, limited lifespan, impaired memory, and perpetual state of distress. According to Sivaraman (1989), the Vedas can provide as essential instruction for individuals residing in the Kali (conflict) age.

#### **5.4.2 Karma/reincarnation**

The Kisumu Hare Krishna movement exhibits a profound adherence to the principles of karma and reincarnation. The Hare Krishna Movement is characterized by a strong emphasis on moral values. The concept of Karma, which pertains to the universal principle of cause and effect, is a philosophical perspective that exhibits congruence with the notions of ethics and morality. Karma is a philosophical concept rooted in the principle of cause and effect. Fundamentally, it posits that every action undertaken by an individual carries consequences, regardless of whether they are immediate or mediated. According to the Vedic framework, this concept is relevant in both the physical and nonphysical domains. The assertion posits that occurrences are not coincidental, but rather possess inherent purpose and are causally linked to preceding events. According to Thrane (2010), all phenomena can be attributed to a larger, overarching plan.

Karma does not align with the concept of predestination. This concept amalgamates the notions of human agency with predetermined fate. For karma to operate effectively, it is essential that it encompasses both components. This phenomenon can be exemplified by positing that when an individual opts to engage in a certain action, they are exercising their volition to autonomously determine their course of action. Nevertheless, individuals are obligated to accept the repercussions of their decisions, so rendering them susceptible to any potential outcome. It operates to some extent as a mechanism for inducing guilt. According to Thrane (2010), individuals who adhere to this particular religious belief find

the system to be highly effective, serving as their main framework for understanding and practicing ethics.

The aforementioned phenomenon is seen in the everyday practices of every follower, as these practices are intended to demonstrate their commitment, readiness to make concessions, and profound affection for Lord Krishna and their consciousness of Krishna. The choices and actions of every devotee are influenced by their belief in the concept of reincarnation. The concept of reincarnation posits that following the cessation of life, an individual's soul undergoes a process of transmigration, wherein it is moved from one corporeal form to another. The soul is characterized as a non-material, everlasting spiritual entity that exists within every living being (Thrane, 2010).

The concept of karma revolves around the activities performed by an individual throughout their lifetime. The aforementioned factor significantly influences an individual's subsequent reincarnation. It is imperative for individuals to fulfill their dharma in order to cultivate positive karma. Dharma refers to the inherent relationship between an entity or an individual and their role within the tangible realm. The assertion that is being made posits the notion of a timeless truth that serves as the foundation for upholding the equilibrium of all aspects of existence. The inherent nature or essence of fire is to undergo combustion, while water's inherent nature is to extinguish. Similarly, a mother's inherent duty is to provide care and nurture for her child. Consequently, the concept of dharma pertains to the intrinsic and essential essence of an object (Bronkhorst, 2011). Adhering to one's dharma and fulfilling one's obligations in the material sphere contributes to the accumulation of positive karma and facilitates the progression of one's spiritual journey towards a subsequent existence in the presence of Krishna. The Bhagavad-Gita scripture holds significant importance as a foundational element of the Hare Krishna movement, both inside the New Vrindaban community and globally (Bronkhorst, 2011).

As stated by Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, there has never been a point in time where my existence, your existence, or the existence of all these monarchs was absent, and there will never be a future moment where any of us would cease to exist. According to Muniapan and Satpathy (2013), the soul is an enduring life force that exists beyond our physical existence and is present within every individual. Jagannatha Dasa, a devotee at

the Kisumu temple, drew an analogy between the relationship of the physical body and the spirit, likening it to that of a driver and a car. The driver might be conceptualized as the metaphysical essence, while the car serves as the corporeal vessel. Despite the driver being physically present and in control of the car, it is important to recognize that the driver and the vehicle are separate entities. As time progresses, the car undergoes a natural process of aging and deterioration, ultimately reaching a state of diminished functionality. At this juncture, the driver opts to transition to a replacement vehicle. The soul, analogous to the driver of a vehicle, is a discrete entity residing within our corporeal forms, exerting control over the physical being until such time as the physical body undergoes the inevitable process of aging and deterioration, rendering it incapable of sustaining life.

Following the cessation of life, the soul undergoes a process of regeneration, wherein it assumes a new physical form into the transmigration of the soul into a fresh corporeal vessel, the individual does not possess recollection of its previous existence. However, the karmic residue accumulated from past actions remains indelibly imprinted into the soul. According to a prevalent belief, there exists a myth which posits that upon the process of reincarnation, the soul undergoes a loss of memory pertaining to its previous existence. Recalling specific details of experiences from a previous lifetime, even those that transpired some years ago, might prove to be a challenging task.

Individuals, however, do possess recollections of the knowledge they have acquired, which is commonly known as samskara. Samskara enhances our intuitive faculties, which serve as the underlying force propelling us towards enlightenment, often operating at a subconscious level. According to Madhavananda Das, as conveyed in personal correspondence on November 13th, 2022, intuition plays a crucial role in keeping us aligned with our spiritual path, facilitating our recognition of the wisdom acquired across multiple lifetimes. The ritual of Samskara is conducted with the purpose of instilling a deep and enduring impact on the individual on whom it is enacted. According to Dasi (n.d.), the impression experienced by an individual has the potential to influence their thoughts and emotions in a manner that facilitates the development of their spiritual well-being.

Prabhupada drew a parallel between the aforementioned memory impairment and the psychological condition known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The occurrence of events during an individual's lifespan has the potential to shape their identity and perspective on the world, occasionally resulting in negative consequences. Individuals who experience a catastrophic demise that extends beyond the realm beyond life may be predisposed to being born with physical or psychological impairments, as well as a cynical outlook on the world. In contrast, the soul embarks on a fresh journey with a renewed perspective and an opportunity for redemption in pursuit of the ultimate goal, enlightenment. Enlightenment is attained by the recognition of the distinction between the self and the physical body. The acquisition of this knowledge is essential for attaining a state of spiritual oneness with the divine. Each individual embarks on an own path towards attaining enlightenment within the perpetual cycle of life and death (Prabhupada, 1972).

According to the *Bhagavad-Gita: A New Verse Translation*, all actions, often referred to as karma, are believed to arise from the presence of desire. This implies that although it is not necessary to abstain from engaging in activities, it is imperative to prevent them from compromising our moral integrity. According to Prabhupada (1972), the significance is in an individual's approach towards their job, rather than the ultimate outcome of the work itself. The karmic implications of an individual's soul exert a significant influence on the frequency of their reincarnation in following lifetimes. Individuals who pose a threat to the well-being of society or prioritize their own self-interests over others, when presented with the chance to inhabit a human form, will not attain enlightenment. At the culmination of the body's useful lifespan, the soul shall undergo a reincarnation process, assuming a position at the lowest level of the hierarchical structure. According to Ananda Vidya (personal communication, September 29, 2021), in the hierarchical order, water dwelling species are followed by insects, monkeys, cows, humans, and demigods, which are considered the lowest form.

Karma does not accumulate for entities positioned lower than humans in the hierarchical order, as these entities possess the faculty of free will. In the absence of free will, an entity is solely driven by its innate and primal impulses, such as the pursuit of sustenance, rest, procreation, and other basic biological imperatives. The animal undergoes a hierarchical progression until it assumes the human form, at which point it is expected to

actively pursue enlightenment because to its inherent lack of understanding regarding devotion and its tendency to engage in acts of violence towards other animals.

The cyclical process persists until the desired goal is achieved, allowing the soul to transcend its physical constraints and transition into the world of spirituality. The adherents of New Vrindaban diligently incorporate a range of Krishna's teachings into their everyday routines as a means to attain their desired objective. Individuals endeavor to absolve themselves of karmic consequences through the conscientious fulfillment of their temple duties, adherence to moral conduct as perceived by society, unwavering pursuit of divine enlightenment, and demonstration of reverence for all sentient beings by exclusively consuming plant-derived sustenance obtained through non-violent means (Tucker, 2021).

#### **5.4.3 Vegetarianism**

The adherents of the Hare Krishna faith who regularly visit the Kisumu temple adhere to a vegetarian diet. This dietary restriction prohibits the consumption of all animal-derived goods, encompassing eggs and meat. Nevertheless, it is common for them to regularly partake in the consumption of dairy products. The core scriptures of the Hare Krishna faith, namely the Vedic literature, the Bhagavad-gita, and the teachings of Srila Prabhupada act as the intellectual foundation for the followers' adoption of a vegetarian lifestyle. Nevertheless, the predominant group of adherents characterizes their dietary practices as "Krishnatarian," signifying their use of food items specifically specified by Krishna. As a result of adhering to a lacto-vegetarian dietary regimen, their food consumption is exclusively dedicated to Krishna. In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, it is evident that individual adherents of vegetarianism have formulated their own personal justifications for embracing this dietary practice (Fischer, 2016).

As per the Vedic scriptures, the adoption of a stringent vegetarian diet and the abstention from causing harm to any sentient being capable of experiencing pain are regarded as paramount decisions for a Hindu individual in their pursuit of attaining purity. According to the Vedas, it is stated that individuals who engage in the act of killing animals are unable to fully appreciate or derive satisfaction from the teachings pertaining to the Absolute Truth (Varjavandtst). According to Donaldson (2016), the Vedic scriptures

argue that the tendency of humans to value and respect fellow humans while disregarding and devaluing animals is indicative of a lack of spiritual understanding and an imbalanced philosophical perspective. As per the teachings of the Vedas, it is posited that both the living and deceased individuals are unable to attain a state of pleasure in instances where harm is inflicted against innocent persons due to self-centered motives (Knapp, n.d.). Based on a passage derived from the Yajur Veda, the consumption of animal meat is emblematic of a lack of awareness regarding the concept that our physical forms are considered the property of Krishna, hence prohibiting the act of causing harm to other sentient beings that embody His essence. According to Donaldson (2016), the assertion is made that individuals should refrain from utilizing their inherent physical form to cause harm to all living beings, regardless of whether they are human or animal. This perspective is associated with the concept of vegetarianism.

The Mahabharata, another Vedic epic, places significant emphasis on the adoption of a vegetarian diet. There are several lines within the text that promote the practice of vegetarianism, exemplified by one particular phrase that states, "The transgressions resulting from acts of violence impose limitations upon the longevity of the individual responsible for such actions." (Donaldson, 2016:123), consequently, it is advisable for persons who prioritize their personal well-being to refrain from consuming beef.

According to Knapp (2005), there is a correlation between individuals who engage in animal cruelty and their propensity to exhibit violent tendencies towards humans, as well as a predisposition to harm other living beings. "Sinners are individuals who engage in the act of bringing an animal to be slaughtered, purchasing an animal for the purpose of slaughter, engaging in the sale or purchase of meat, participating in the cooking of meat, and consuming meat. Based on the literature, an individual who sustains themselves by consuming the bodily tissues of another organism will encounter distress in their subsequent corporeal manifestation as dictated by the process of reincarnation (Knapp 2005). According to Hildebeitel (2001), the Hindu Scriptures state that individuals who seek to enhance their own physical well-being by consuming the flesh of other beings will experience a state of suffering, regardless of the species they are reborn into.

The adherents at the Kisumu temple diligently adhere to the teachings of the Bhagavad-gita in order to guide their conduct. As per Krishna's declaration in the Bhagavad-gita, the act of presenting an offering consisting of a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water, accompanied by

love and devotion, shall be acknowledged and accepted by Him. In the Bhagavad-gita, specifically in verse 9.26, it is stated that... Devotees have observed that Krishna does not make any explicit reference to animals or flesh in his teachings. As per the teachings of the Bhagavad-gita, it is stated that individuals should approach their actions, dietary intake, acts of offering and generosity, as well as any undertaken austerities, with the intention of dedicating them as offerings to the divine being. This notion is expressed in verse 9.27 of the Bhagavad-gita. Consequently, individuals choose to consume vegetarian cuisine because to Krishna's personal practice of abstaining from animal consumption (Gandhi, 2010).

The Gita also imparts the teaching that providing sustenance to Krishna serves as a means of absolving his adherents from a diverse range of transgressions. Hence, it might be argued that it would be morally wrong for an individual to partake in any consumption that deviates from what is deemed acceptable by Krishna. As per Krishna's teachings, adherents who align themselves with him are granted absolution from various transgressions due to their consumption of food that has been consecrated through sacrificial rituals. Some individuals, who engage in culinary activities for personal sensory pleasure, exclusively consume indulgent or sinful foods. The reference provided is to verse 3.14 of the Bhagavad-gita. The topic of vegetarianism and the principle of equality among all living beings, as elucidated in the Bhagavad-gita, sometimes prompts the argument that consuming plants, which are also living entities, could be considered an act of violence. The aforementioned passage from the Bhagavad-gita (3.14) illustrates the notion that while the act of devouring plants may be perceived as an act of violence, the moral transgression of taking the lives of plants is mitigated by the fact that the food is being served to Krishna, as explicitly asked by Krishna himself (Bhagavad-gita, 16.3).

In his analysis of the Bhagavad-Gita, Prabhupada provides a strong admonition to readers against the potential karmic consequences linked to the act of murdering animals. He asserts that every living being is considered a progeny of the Supreme Lord, and even the death of an ant is not tolerated by Him. Additionally, Rosen (2004) highlights the financial implications involved in such actions. Furthermore, Smith (2004) asserts that individuals who are involved in the act of animal slaughter bear responsibility, including those who authorize the killing, those who carry out the act, those who assist, those who acquire the meat, those who prepare the flesh, and those who consume it. According to

Rosen (2004), if an animal is prematurely murdered within its designated lifespan, it must undergo another birth within the same species in order to progress towards a higher species, as dictated by the principles of karma and reincarnation. The evolution of life forms is consequently impeded and decelerated. According to Rosen (2004), the act of killing animals for human sustenance can be regarded as a manifestation of both physical and spiritual violence.

According to the teachings of Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, it is recommended that individuals adhere to a vegetarian diet and offer these dietary choices to Him. According to the belief system, it is asserted that the Supreme Lord, Krishna, assumes the role of protector, shielding individuals from potential karmic consequences that may arise as a result of engaging in the act of plant slaughter during the sacrificial procedure. According to Adisasmito-Smith (2008), individuals bear personal responsibility within the framework of karma. As per the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita, individuals who partake in food that has been previously consecrated through sacrificial rituals are believed to attain absolution from all transgressions. According to Adisasmito-Smith (2008), those who prepare meals solely for their personal sensory gratification consume food that is considered sinful. A vegetarian diet facilitates the ease with which an individual can uphold their well-being, efficiency, and concern for the welfare of others.

#### **5.4.4 Lifestyle of Hare Krishna devotees**

The adherents of the Hare Krishna organization in Kisumu engage in the consumption of vegetarian sustenance obtained from non-violent origins, as well as the recitation of the Hare Krishna mantra. Furthermore, they actively incorporate the principles of karma and rebirth into their routine activities. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Sri Krishna provides guidance by stating, "It is essential to constantly engage one's mind in contemplation of Me, adopt a stance of devotion towards Me, express reverence through acts of obeisance, and engage in worship of Me." Once someone has become fully engrossed in my presence, it is highly likely that they will initiate contact with me. The ultimate goal for adherents of the Hare Krishna religion, as outlined by Rochford (1982), is to reside in a state of pure consciousness beside Krishna and engage in eternal service to him.

In order to transit from the physical realm to the spiritual realm, it is imperative for a devotee to actively pursue spiritual guidance from a Guru. The term "guru" often evokes a

stereotypical portrayal characterized by an eccentric elderly individual sporting a lengthy, unkempt beard and adorned in flowing garments, engaged in deep contemplation of obscure, esoteric wisdom. Alternatively, one could envision a hypothetical scenario wherein a deceptive individual of cosmic origin exploits the vulnerable trust and naivety of youthful individuals in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Nevertheless, the precise definition of a guru remains unclear. What is the specific knowledge or awareness that he possesses, which is currently unknown to us? In what manner does he provide enlightenment to us? According to Prabhupada (1973), the guru is an adherent of Krishna and serves as a spiritual instructor, disseminating Krishna's teachings to individual devotees within Hare Krishna communities (Klostermaier, 2007).

Through consistent recitation and adherence to the guidance of their spiritual mentor, a devotee experiences growth in their spiritual journey and cultivates a profound affection for Krishna. According to Hari Nam, a devotee at the Kisumu temple, it is uncommon for the Guru to reside within the same community. The majority of Gurus are affiliated with the renounced order. While it is possible for them to establish a central location in a certain city, their usual practice involves frequent relocation in order to spread spiritual knowledge. The Guru faithfully transmits the words of Krishna without any misinterpretation. The primary duty of the guru is to secure the cessation of suffering in the physical realm, as well as the cessation of phenomena like as birth, death, illness, and aging. Consequently, the Guru has a significant responsibility as he is tasked with guiding his disciples and assisting them in attaining the ultimate goal of immortality (Klostermaier, 2007).

In the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna asserts that surrendering unto Him leads to deliverance from all immoral reactions (18. 66). When commencing the process of disciple initiation, a guru duly recognizes and acknowledges all of their prior actions. Consequently, a devout individual is liberated from their previous karmic consequences through the recognition of the necessity to take caution in their future actions. Upon acceptance as a disciple, the Guru undertakes the responsibility for the individual's spiritual growth and development. Each individual follower will inevitably have their own unique karmic consequences, while the spiritual leader will also face repercussions stemming from the inappropriate behavior exhibited by their disciples. During an interview, a reporter inquired Srila Prabhupada regarding the interpretation of existence as per the Vedanta-

sutra, a scriptural text that systematically presents the philosophical principles. According to the IJCP Group (2021), the individual provided a prompt and swift response, stating that the aim of life is to derive enjoyment.

The devotees at the Kisumu temple engage in the daily practice of chanting Hare Krishna, with the aim of attaining an inexhaustible and everlasting state of bliss. According to their belief, individuals maintain that by the recitation and auditory reception of a sacred utterance known as "The Great Chant for Deliverance," or the Hare Krishna mahamantra, they can achieve a state of unadulterated awareness. The concise mantra consisting of 16 words, namely "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare," possesses auditory vibrations of sufficient potency to rouse the inherent sense of joy within all individuals. According to Black (2008), the phrase "Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare" is a chant commonly used in Hindu religious practices.

The devotees affiliated with the Kisumu temple assert that they have acquired the knowledge of properly reciting the Hare Krishna mantra, which they believe leads to the attainment of authentic spiritual bliss. In the context of India, the home of meditation, the aforementioned mantra holds significant prominence and distinguishes itself from other practices through two distinct characteristics. The repetition of the mantra occurs twice: once in a silent manner and once in its complete form. The individual in question is commonly referred to as "His Divine Grace." The Hare Krishna Chanting was founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the Hare Krishna movement. Prabhupada asserts that the pinnacle of bliss can be achieved just by the act of chanting Hare Krishna, leaving no other experience surpassing it in terms of elevation. As asserted by Klostermaier (2007), the act of chanting is believed to free adherents of any accumulated karma.

At the Kisumu temple, adherents articulated their commitment to mitigating the accumulation of karma, irrespective of its moral valence. The adherents maintain the conviction that the possession of karma necessitates their further reincarnation in the physical realm, hence impeding their pursuit of attaining absolute consciousness and dedicating themselves to the service of Krishna. The principle of karma posits that nature imposes a reciprocal reaction of commensurate value upon the individual who initiates an activity. As stated in the Bhagavad-Gita, the text emphasizes the need of dedicating one's

actions, dietary choices, sacrificial offerings, acts of generosity, and practices of self-discipline as offerings to a higher power, specifically addressing Arjuna (Bhagavad-Gita, 9. 27).

According to Tapa Punja, a Krishna devotee at the Kisumu temple, individuals who adhere to the Hare Krishna faith hold the belief that material pursuits can be metaphorically likened to seeds. The seeds are originally sown or planted, and over a period of time, they gradually develop, leading to the release of their subsequent reactions. According to Swami Prabhupada, individuals find themselves entangled inside a complex network of acts and reactions, compelling them to undergo successive incarnations in order to undergo the consequences of their karmic fate. Furthermore, adherents at the Kisumu temple elucidate that they hold the belief that liberation from the cycle of karma can be attained through sincere recitation of Krishna's transcendental names, in addition to embracing their karmic destiny. The connection between a living being and the sacred sound vibration of Krishna's names liberates the individual from the perpetual cycle of karma, owing to the transcendental energy inherent in these names. Swami Prabhupada, in his analysis of Srimad Bhagavatam, places significant emphasis on the spiritual potency of the holy name. He asserts that via the act of chanting the holy name, individuals can attain liberation from the consequences of all sinful activities.

The principles of karma and reincarnation within the Hare Krishna religion are actively implemented within the temple located in the Kisumu area on a regular basis. Every adherent is committed to leading a karma-free existence with the aim of transcending the cycle of rebirth and ultimately attaining liberation to serve the divine entity, Krishna. The prohibition of positive karma arises from its potential to engender successive births, so compelling the soul to embrace the perpetual cycle of life and death. As a result of these factors, engaging in daily rituals like as recitation, consumption of vegetarian fare, veneration of divine entities, and perusal of sacred scriptures may facilitate devotees in their pursuit of heightened consciousness and liberation from karmic entanglements. When doing an inquiry into the Hare Krishna faith and seeking to grasp the ultimate goal of attaining harmonious coexistence with Krishna, the supreme deity, it becomes imperative to explore the concepts of karma and reincarnation.

During the early morning devotion of the deities, adherents at the Kisumu temple engage in the recitation of Gurvastaka, an eight-verse song authored by Visvanatha Chakravarti. This hymn serves as a means to laud the merits of the spiritual master. According to Bhaktivedanta (2012), the seventh verse of the sutra elucidates the rationale behind the guru's perceived equivalence to God, asserting that the spiritual mentor ought to be revered at the same level as the Supreme Lord due to their role as the Lord's most esteemed and reliable servant. During the commemoration of the birth anniversary of the spiritual master, the disciples partake in a ceremonial observance referred to as vyasa-puja, which serves as a means to pay homage to the spiritual master as the epitome of the wisdom that has been transmitted via a succession of preceding gurus.

This practice is conducted within the context of a closed gathering of individuals who have a common spiritual mentor, referred to as god brothers and god sisters. During this assembly, disciples engage in the recitation of written tributes that praise the spiritual instructor. In instances where the teacher is not physically present, their presence is symbolically represented by an image. After engaging with the assigned text, the disciples proceed to participate in a convivial meal consisting of prasadam, which refers to food that has been sanctified through a religious blessing. In conjunction with the yearly commemoration, the disciples, as well as those aspiring to become disciples, pay homage to the guru on a daily basis through a ritual known as guru puja. During the ceremonial proceedings, the disciple offers a diverse array of materials, including incense, flowers, ghee lamps, water, handkerchiefs, and other miscellaneous objects, in a reverential manner before a picture representing the spiritual master. The act of reciting the song Guru-vandana, which is a form of homage to the spiritual leader, is performed in this manner.

Every morning, the Kisumu temple carries out guru-puja ceremonies to pay homage to Prabhupada (Bhaktivedanta). The Prabhupada guru-puja is performed within the temple room, when devotees show their reverence to a statue representing Prabhupada. In the discourse, King provides an elucidation of the guru-puja ritual.

The deities are greeted at 7:00 a.m. At 7.10 a.m., devotees congregate before the esteemed seat of honor (vyasana) dedicated to Prabhupada, engaging in the ritualistic worship of the guru (guru puja). During this ceremony, one devotee conducts arati, a ritual of waving a lit lamp, towards the sculpted

image of Prabhupada, while others present floral offerings and participate in kirtan, a form of responsive singing. The kirtan involves the rendition of a Bengali song composed by Narottama Das Thakura, a revered Gaudiya Vaishnava saint from the 16th to 17th century. Additionally, the devotees recite Sri Guruvandana (Prayer to the Guru) from *Prema-bhakti-candrika*, a devotional text (King, 2007, 152).

#### **5.4.5 Bhakti /Yoga**

The Hare Krishna religion advocates the utilization of yoga as a means to facilitate spiritual encounters for its followers. Bhakti Yoga encompasses a range of practices encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual activities that trace their origins to ancient India and are designed to regulate the mind. The concept of "bhakti yoga" encompasses a spiritual pathway characterized by unwavering commitment and profound affection. In addition to its physical aspects, Bhakti Yoga places significant emphasis on leading a life devoted to the service of Lord Krishna (Bryant, 2017).

Engaging in the practice of repetitive vocalization, engaging in the study of sacred texts, participating in communal activities with fellow adherents of the Hare Krishna tradition, adhering to the four principles, and adopting a dietary regimen that excludes animal products are all means by which one may cultivate the path of bhakti yoga. There is a perceived connection to the Supreme Being within it. The concept of the Absolute refers to the entity that is considered the highest or ultimate being. The remaining portion is contingent upon many factors. The name "yoga" denotes the interconnection between these two domains. As stated by Vivekananda (1991), the primary aims of yoga encompass the cessation of mental activity, the cultivation of discernment, the attainment of a state of detached awareness, and the liberation from a transformative journey that culminates in the union with the divine, or alternatively, with one's own Self.

There are three distinct styles of yoga that can be identified. Karma yoga, Jnana yoga, and Bhakti yoga. They are all widely observed and embraced throughout various spiritual and philosophical traditions. Karma yoga refers to the practice of yoga being executed in a pragmatic manner. Jnana yoga, also known as knowledge yoga or intellectual yoga, is a practice that emphasizes the cultivation and application of knowledge. The fundamental principle of bhakti yoga lies in the cultivation of profound love and unwavering devotion towards the divine entity. Practitioners of Karma Yoga may engage in acts of sacrifice as

a means to cultivate a deeper spiritual connection with the divine. Individuals relinquish their belongings in order to pursue a more contented spiritual existence. According to Bryant (2017), the magnitude of the scope of jnana yoga is extensive. The objective of an individual who engages in the practice of jnana, commonly referred to as a jnani, is to achieve complete detachment from the material realm. This may potentially serve as a catalyst for an individual to engage in self-inflicted injury and infliction of pain onto their own physical being. The practice of Bhakti yoga does not necessitate the possession of material possessions. Indeed, it is feasible for individuals of any background to participate in this activity. The primary objective of various yoga practices is to establish a deeper connection with the divine. These activities can be conducted at any time and location. According to Bryant (2017), the extent or magnitude of an individual's experience is determined only by their personal beliefs.

According to Rochford (2007), Bhakti-yoga is characterized as a devotional manifestation of Hinduism that places significant emphasis on the concepts of love and devotional service to God as a pathway to attaining spiritual salvation. The Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, a form of devotional practice to Krishna originating in Bengal, posits that engagement in bhakti-yoga leads to liberation from samsara, the perpetual cycle of birth and death, and serves to eliminate the consequences of karma, encompassing both positive and negative effects.

One of the primary theological justifications underlying the purifying effects attributed to the daily ritual practice of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) pertains to the eradication of karma. Nevertheless, the objective of the ritualistic practice does not encompass moksha, which refers to the complete cleansing of the mind from all forms of attachments. According to spiritual teachings, when an individual attains bhakti, which refers to a profound affection for Krishna, it is believed that they have surpassed a developmental phase encompassing absolute emancipation.

Bhaktivedanta placed significant emphasis on the concept of bhakti, defining it as "devotional service" and highlighting its active nature. Goswami (2012) provides a definition of bhakti as the execution of devotional deeds that are conducted with the purpose of cultivating and enhancing the devotee's affectionate attachment to Krishna. According to Rupa Goswami, a direct disciple of Chaitanya, the concept of Bhakti can be

understood as a sort of devotional service that is characterized by its purity, since it is devoid of any inclination towards personal gratification or fulfillment. Furthermore, it is important to note that Bhakti stands in stark contrast to the path of non-dualism. In order for an individual's practice to be deemed as devotion, it is imperative that the practitioner demonstrates a commendable service to Krishna, adhering to Krishna's favored manner.

The central tenet of ISKCON's theology revolves around the concept of God as a Supreme Divine Person possessing personal attributes, serving as a Lord, and serving as the ultimate source of the cosmos. This theological framework further posits that God reveals himself through sacred books, temple deities, incarnations, and spiritual teachers. The central text that is predominantly studied is the Bhagavad Gita, wherein the attributes of the one referred to by different names such as Krishna, Vasudeva, Vishnu, or Bhagavan are unveiled.

Bhaktivedanta's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita places significant emphasis on the notion that the attainment of the Lord is contingent upon the practice of devotion (bhakti) and the bestowal of divine grace (Geravand, 2013). As per Sherbow's (2004) findings, the Gaudiya Vaishnava viewpoint posits that Krishna, as the sole enjoyer (bhokta), necessitates the enjoyment of all other entities. The enduring connection between the metaphysical self and Krishna is characterized as being inherently natural, comparable to the relationship between iron and magnet. This connection is characterized by the roles of enjoyer and the one being enjoyed. Nevertheless, any action undertaken just for personal benefit, while disregarding the principles of devotion to one's master and Krishna, is considered impure and will consequently lead to negative consequences in terms of karma. It is believed that engaging in a daily ritual habit may suppress the individual's inclination towards self-centered gratification.

#### **5.4.6 Chanting**

Beck (1995) asserts that the quest for moksha, also known as freedom, is supported by sacred music among Hindu-related traditions, irrespective of its specific form or nomenclature. The foundational principle of Gaudiya theology is rooted in the Hindu belief that speech holds significant power. This theological perspective places great emphasis on the concept of sound and its role in shaping religious understanding. The fundamental spiritual practice observed within the Hare Krishna movement involves the

recitation of the sacred names attributed to the deity Krishna. The practice is based on the belief that the repetition of divine names, specifically "Hare," "Krishna," and "Rama," has the ability to invoke an inexhaustible spiritual force. This process facilitates the purification of the mind by eliminating various negative qualities such as envy, greed, anger, delusion, insanity, and fear. Additionally, it cultivates a deep sense of devotion. The theological terminology is employed within the tradition to elucidate the cleansing attributes of the mantra.

Individuals are instructed to repeatedly recite this phrase until it becomes deeply embedded in their cognitive processes. The individuals engage in the daily practice of chanting the mantras "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare" and "Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare". It is believed that with the daily recitation of the holy names, specifically the Hare Krishna maha-mantra, individuals can avail themselves of the opportunity to lead a life characterized by both joy and tranquility. However, it is imperative for individuals to initially identify the underlying factors responsible for their unfavorable living circumstances (Beck, 2014).

Throughout the course of history, individuals have found themselves confined inside the realm of material existence, whereby the pursuit of pleasure is transient and illusory. Individuals partake in a diverse range of virtuous and immoral behaviors, which serve to strengthen their connection to the material realm in their quest for personal fulfillment. The individuals' troubles arise as a consequence of their unethical responses, and by adhering to these three principles, they are able to eliminate all transgressions and impurities, thereby reinstating themselves in their inherent state of boundless bliss and contentment (Beck, 2014).

According to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the act of chanting the sacred names of the Lord serves to cleanse the reflective surface of the heart and extinguish the fervent flames of worldly existence. Through regular engagement with the sacred text known as Srimad Bhagavatam, one may effectively eradicate the presence of undesirable thoughts residing within the depths of one's consciousness. As the veil of ignorance recedes, individuals transition into a state of moral excellence and gain the virtues attributed to deities. Observing proper reverence for prasadam, which refers to food offerings offered to the divine, serves as a deterrent against incurring further negative consequences resulting

from wicked conduct. According to the teachings of Krishna, as recorded in the Bhagavad-gita, individuals who partake in food that has been initially offered as a sacrificial offering to the Lord are granted absolution from various forms of transgressions. By following the three fundamental principles outlined by Srila Prabhupada, individuals can cultivate a life characterized by happiness, robust physical well-being, mental serenity, and various other desirable attributes.

According to the Vedas, it is recommended to engage in the continuous act of hearing, thanking, and recollecting the all-beneficent Supreme Lord, who is referred to by several appellations, as the most effective means of attaining self-realization in the current era. The aforementioned titles encompass "Krishna," signifying "the embodiment of irresistible charm," "Rama," indicating "the source of ultimate bliss," and "Hare," symbolizing the indescribable potency of the Lord (McCartney, 2017). The act of chanting the holy names of the Supreme Lord facilitates a profound connection between believers and the divine. This practice has the potential to awaken individuals to their inherent and genuine relationship with God. The primary objective of ISKCON is to advocate for the engagement of individuals within society in the pursuit of acquiring knowledge and engaging in devotional practices centered on the worship and recitation of the divine. According to McCartney (2017), individuals progressively come to comprehend the notion that all living entities are spiritual souls, eternally connected to the Supreme Lord via acts of service and love.

The act of chanting and listening serves to focus the mind during meditation, establishing a connection with the divine. The mantra is regarded as a transcendental sound vibration that embodies the absolute truth, and its significance has been upheld by esteemed sages and Vedic scriptures throughout history. This should not be mistaken for a conventional song or any element imbued with banality. Individuals who are exposed to the act of chanting derive benefits, regardless of whether they appreciate the tonal quality of the chanting or find alternative means to assign value to the sankirtana practice. The sacred appellation is metaphorically likened to a flame; irrespective of an individual's scientific acumen or lack thereof concerning the comprehensive attributes of fire, the act of placing one's hand into a fire will inevitably result in a burn. According to McCartney (2017), engaging in sincere Hare Krishna mantra chanting and attentive listening has the potential

to cleanse the mind and restore individuals to their inherent, unadulterated condition of spiritual essence.

One effective method for rekindling our devotion to Krishna is through the practice of chanting the mantra "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna." The chanting of "Hare Krishna Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare" generates a transcendental resonance. All individuals possess inherent awareness of Krishna, the original spiritual being. However, due to extensive engagement with material entities throughout our existence, our consciousness has become tainted by the material world. The perceptible physical surroundings in which we presently dwell are commonly denoted as maya, or an illusion. The term "Maya" in Sanskrit refers to the concept of "that which is not." What precisely constitutes this particular delusion? The prevailing belief is that despite our inherent subjugation to the rigorous principles of the physical world, there exists a universal inclination among individuals to exert dominion over it (McCartney, 2017).

The act of a servant deliberately imitating the omnipotent master is commonly denoted as an illusion. In our current state of life, we are collectively endeavoring to use the resources provided by the material world. However, our efforts are becoming increasingly entangled in the intricate web of its complexities. Consequently, notwithstanding our earnest endeavors to conquer nature, our dependence on her is progressively increasing. By reawakening our awareness and understanding of Krishna consciousness, we have the potential to promptly cease our perceived struggle against the natural forces (Lowe, 2011).

The knowledge of Krishna is an inherent energy throughout living organisms and is not a product of artificial imposition on the mind. The state of awareness is reactivated upon perceiving the transcendental frequency. Through empirical observation, it becomes evident that the act of reciting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra, commonly referred to as the Great Chanting for Deliverance, elicits an immediate encounter with a state of transcendental pleasure that emanates from the spiritual realm. According to Lowe (2011), an individual achieves a state of transcendence when they objectively attain a level of spiritual comprehension that surpasses the realms of sensory perception, mental faculties, and intellectual capacity.

Bhaktivedanta (2012) posits that the Hare Krishna Maha-Mantra, commonly referred to as the big mantra, is believed to embody the incarnation of Krishna within the context of the Kali era's Iron Age. Through the recitation of this mantra, individuals are able to establish an immediate connection with Krishna, so facilitating the profound experience of liberation. The transformative nature of chanting is contingent upon the conscientious execution of the practice, characterized by meticulousness, humility, and a genuine commitment to selflessness.

Furthermore, it is imperative to adopt preventive measures in order to mitigate the occurrence of recurrent transgressions or detrimental psychological dispositions. Consequently, the successful performance of the chanting ritual is contingent upon not only the precise enunciation of the mantra, but also, and potentially to a greater extent, the maintenance of a suitable demeanor characterized by profound humility, which is believed to be crucial for the efficacy of the ceremony.

The ultimate objective of chanting is to cultivate a deep affection for Krishna. According to the source, the attainment of this objective can only be achieved by the practice of reciting sacred names while in a state of unadulterated awareness. In order to attain a state of consciousness characterized by purity, individuals must undertake the initial step of purging themselves from the accumulated karmic residue acquired across countless lifetimes. In order to engage in chanting with a purified state of consciousness, it is imperative to refrain from committing any transgressions against the sacred name. Goswami (2012) commences his analysis of the origins and meaning of sankirtan, a form of communal chanting, by introducing the initial stanza from a collection of eight believed to be the only written remnants attributed to Chaitanya.

Praise be to the Sri Krishna sankirtan, a sacred practice that serves to cleanse the heart from accumulated impurities and extinguish the cycle of conditioned existence characterized by repeated cycles of birth and death. The sankirtan movement is often regarded as a significant benefit for humanity due to its ability to distribute the rays of the benediction moon. The transcendence of knowledge is inherent to its essence. According to Goswami (2012: 177-183), the expansion of the ocean of transcendental ecstasy allows individuals to experience a heightened sense of pleasure and satisfaction, enabling them to fully indulge in the desired nectar they perpetually yearn for.

Hare Krishna's "theology of the chanting of the holy name" is its foundation. The idea that Krishna and his name are one and the same is the foundation of theology. The following passages from the Padma Purana are frequently cited to illustrate this argument (Vanita, 2000).

The sublime ecstasy of Krishna's holy name. All spiritual blessings are bestowed by it since Krishna Himself is the source of all joy. All transcendental mellows (emotions) exist in the form of Krishna, whose name is complete. Under no circumstances is it a material name, and it has equal potency to Krishna (Vanita, 2000:94).

The revered mantra, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare/Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare, holds significant importance among the followers of Chaitanya. There exist two fundamental categories of chanting. The act of individually reciting the Hare Krishna mantra is commonly referred to as japa, representing the initial form of chanting. In accordance with established customs, the term "man-tra" in Sanskrit is commonly understood to denote a form of prayer that facilitates the liberation of the mind from mundane perspectives.

According to Olivelle (2003), the utilization of mantra as a means of meditation and redemption is discussed. The author presents the subsequent explanation of the term mantra: "According to religious Hindu tradition, it is commonly held that mantras possess the inherent potency of the Sanskrit language..." The concept is commonly characterized as deriving from a lexical root denoting preservation, exemplified by the terms tri (signifying passage or buoyancy) and trai (signifying safeguarding or preservation).

Given that the concept of man is closely associated with the realm of the mind, it may be argued that the man-tra serves as a cognitive instrument mostly utilized for the sake of safeguarding or providing assistance. According to the prescribed practice for initiates, it is necessary to recite the Hare Krishna mantra a minimum of 1,728 times every day. This entails completing 16 circuits on the japamala, a rosary consisting of 108 beads. Beads are employed for the purpose of recitation and are stored within a bag that features a minute aperture designed to accommodate the index finger. In this fashion, the index finger that is not being utilized provides support to the bead-bag. The act of fingering the rosary one hundred and eight times involves the utilization of the middle finger and

thumb. The beads are commonly crafted from neem wood or tulasi (holy basil) plant wood (Olivelle, 2003).

Japa is a meditation practice that involves the recitation of a silent mantra. The mantra is pronounced with a sufficient volume to ensure auditory clarity for the speaker. During the practice of individual mantra meditation, the practitioner directs their focus towards the chosen mantra while concurrently disregarding or suppressing any other cognitive ideas. The practitioner proceeds to move their finger to the subsequent bead of the 108-bead rosary following the recitation of each mantra. As the chanter progresses through their recitation, they increment the position of a distinct "counting rosary" by one bead when they arrive at the 108th bead. The counting rosary is commonly composed of sixteen beads, symbolizing the minimum number of rounds that newly initiated ISKCON adherents commit to recite daily. This is in contrast to the "chanting rosary" which consists of 108 beads (Olivelle, 2003).

The duration of completing sixteen rounds of chanting can typically be less than two hours, provided that the individual has attained proficiency in reciting the mantra at an optimal pace. The practice of japa chanting at the Hari Krishna temple in Kisumu is commonly observed in a collective manner, occurring between the hours of five and seven in the morning. The action of paired japa-chanting results in the production of a sound resembling that of a beehive. The phenomenon generates a distinct ambiance. Some individuals engage in vertical and horizontal movements accompanied by vocalization, while maintaining a seated posture with crossed legs in the yogic lotus pose. During the early hours of the morning, typically between the hours of five and seven, individuals engage in collective recitation of japa at various temple locations. The action of paired japa-chanting results in the production of a sound resembling that of a beehive. The phenomenon generates a distinct ambiance. Some individuals engage in vertical and horizontal movements accompanied by vocalization while maintaining a seated posture with crossed legs, commonly known as the yogic lotus position.

In the city of Kisumu, adherents of the aforementioned movement engage in the act of chanting, either in the presence of a sacred shrine or inside the confines of their own domestic environments. People sometimes engage in the practice of chanting Japa while going outdoors. The practice known as the "japa-walk" was initially introduced by

Bhaktivedanta himself. Wherever he was, he would normally incorporate morning japa walks into his daily training regimen. The practice commonly referred to as "japa-chanting" exhibits a repetitive characteristic and assumes a communal dimension when conducted collectively. Devotees of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) often assert that engaging in the practice of reciting japa collectively within temple premises elicits a greater sense of inspiration compared to the solitary act of chanting. Moreover, this opportunity serves as a means to showcase one's sincere commitment to chanting the maha-mantra a total of sixteen times on a daily basis.

Sankirtan, also known as the communal recital of sacred names, constitutes the second form of chanting. Chaitanya (1486–1534) initiated the practice of sankirtan, sometimes referred to as harinama, by instructing his disciples to collectively vocalize hymns in praise of Krishna while traversing public thoroughfares. During the initial stages of its emergence in the United States, the Hare Krishna organization employed public chanting of the holy names and the distribution of literature, commonly referred to as sankirtan, as its principal methods for disseminating its message (Rochford, 1985). The initial encounter for individuals visiting the ISKCON center in Kisumu often involves the immersive practice of Sankirtan, often referred to as kirtan.

During the practice of kirtan, numerous individuals engage in the vocalization of mantras, often accompanied by traditional Indian musical instruments such as the harmonium, a manually operated organ, and the mridanga, a percussion instrument indigenous to India. A considerable assemblage of individuals engages in the vocalization of sacred appellations. The audience collectively participates by echoing the mantra in synchrony with the primary vocalist, who guides the musical performance with a melodious melody. The aforementioned vocal technique is commonly accompanied by bhajans or devotional songs. The salient characteristics of all temple activities and organized events in Kisumu affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) encompass the practices of kirtan, which refers to the devotional chanting of sacred mantras, and prasadam, which denotes the sanctified vegetarian food offered to deities and afterwards distributed to participants. The fundamental principle of this religion posits that there exists no differentiation between Krishna and his appellation. According to belief, the deity, in its various forms, is believed to purify the individual who recites its names by

eliminating impure thoughts and emotions, including but not limited to desires, rage, and avarice.

#### **5.4.7 The process of chanting Hare Krishna mantra**

The optimal outcome for the recipients occurs when the Hare Krishna mantra is vocalized by an individual who is a sincere and dedicated follower of the Lord, expressing genuine affection. Consequently, to get expeditious outcomes, it is advisable to listen to this chanting from the mouth of a devout adherent of the Lord. It is advisable for individuals who are not devoted to abstain from engaging in chanting to the greatest extent feasible. The terms "Rama" and "Krishna" are utilized as forms of direct communication to the divine being, representing the Lord Himself. Conversely, the term "Hara" is employed as a means of addressing the spiritual essence of the Lord. Both Rama and Krishna are associated with the concept of "the ultimate bliss," whereas Hara represents the Lord's essence with a similar designation, which has been modified to Hare in the vocative form. The ability to establish a connection with the divine is made possible through the utilization of the Lord's ultimate delight energy (Rochford, 1982).

The three words, namely Hare, Krishna, and Rama, can be identified as the transcendental seeds of the maha-mantra. The act of chanting serves as a spiritual entreaty to the divine, beseeching the Lord to bestow upon the mortal being a sense of security by means of His intrinsic power, known as Hara. The act of chanting can be likened to the vocalization of a young organism seeking the comforting presence of its maternal figure within the tangible realm. When an individual sincerely engages in the practice of chanting the Hare Krishna mantra, it is believed that the divine presence of the Lord becomes apparent to them. Additionally, it is believed that Mother Hara, a divine figure, aids in facilitating the devotee's reception of blessings from the supreme parental deities, Hari or Krishna. In the present era and geographical context, the practice of chanting the maha-mantra is regarded as the exclusive means of attaining spiritual realization. Rochford (1982) contends that the utilization of scripture citations serves as a means to promote the practice of Hari Krishna chanting.

i) The vocalization of the divine appellation is not a contrived imposition of cognitive faculties; instead, it is an inherent inclination akin to that of an infant summoning its maternal figure, as humanity universally possesses an innate disposition as

adherents to a higher power. The maha mantra has the potential to be recited in two distinct manners. Both communal kirtan and solitary mantra recitation, known as japa, are considered valid methods of engaging in chanting practices. In the latter case, a series of 108 wooden prayer beads is employed as a means to enhance attention. According to Rochford (1982), there is a lack of strict requirements for any particular technique, hence allowing individuals of any background to effectively engage in chanting. Furthermore, according to theological scriptures,

i) When one worships Lord Hari, the Lord of all lords, and chants the sacred name, the Maha-mantra, all grave sins are forgiven (Padma Purana, 3.50.6).

ii) Krishna dances on one's tongue when the sixteen names and thirty-two syllables of the Hare Krishna mantra are chanted aloud (Gaudiya Kanthahara 17:30)

iii). One who chants the holy name of the Lord is immediately freed from the effects of unlimited sins, even if he does so indirectly (to indicate something else), jokingly, for musical entertainment, or even carelessly. Chanting is accepted by all the learned scholars of the scriptures (Srimad-Bhagavatam, 6.2.14)

iv) The nama sankirtana (public chanting) of Hare Krishna maha-mantra delivers a complete revelation of all of spiritual reality (Brahmanda Purana 6.59-60);

v) Simply by chanting the Hare Krishna maha-mantra, one can become free from material bondage and be promoted to the transcendental kingdom. (Srimad Bhagavatam, 12.3.51)

A participant is granted the opportunity to engage in the practice of japa chanting for a duration ranging from 10 minutes to two hours on a daily basis. A "round" refers to a full revolution of the 108-bead circle, and individuals may engage in chanting sessions ranging from one to sixteen "rounds" per day, based on their personal schedules and inclinations. Chanting is commonly used during the morning hours, either in a seated or walking position. The linguistic characteristics of the mantra may initially appear unconventional, however, once experiencing the profound impact of its sonic vibrations, any sense of discomfort dissipates (Rochford, 1982).

Individuals who engage in serious chanting, characterized by clear enunciation and attentive listening to the spoken words, are likely to experience a state of tranquility and elation. Individuals who demonstrate persistence in engaging in the practice of mantra meditation acquire enhanced talents in this domain and gain firsthand encounters with the intrinsic qualities of eternity, knowledge, and ecstasy that are innate within each individual's soul. The practice of Sankirtan, a form of musical chanting, was originally established by Sri Chaitanya more than five centuries ago. Presently, Krishna devotees in Kisumu continue to engage in this tradition during specific and significant events (Rochford, 1982).

#### **5.4.7 Image Worship**

The deity-form, referred to as archa-vigraha in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), is an established term within this religious organization. Bhaktivedanta provides an elucidation of the aforementioned topic in his commentary on verse 18.42 of the Bhagavad Gita. The deity form, known as archa-vigraha, is considered to be an authorized portrayal of God. The divine deity is manifested within this sacred icon. This type of service is deemed acceptable in the eyes of God. The Lord, being omnipotent and possessing supreme power, is capable of receiving the offerings of the devotee by manifesting in an incarnation, so facilitating the process for those living in a state of conditioned existence (Bhaktivedanta, 2012). Bhaktivedanta's elucidation of deity worship presents the perspective of Chaitanya Vaishnavas, who perceive the deity as a perpetual spiritual embodiment of the divine. The archa-vigraha refers to the anthropomorphic representation of the Unchangeable Truth, typically crafted from materials like stone, wood, or metal.

The concept of "personhood" frequently conflicts with the prevailing values of Western societies. Nevertheless, individuals who become members of ISKCON gradually adopt the belief in the deity as the "Supreme Personality of the Godhead" and comprehend this concept within the framework of the Chaitanya Vaishnava perspective of God by engaging with the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy through the study of literature or participation in educational talks. According to Bhaktivedanta's commentary on the eight mantras of Sri Isopanisad (Bhaktivedanta, 2012), it is expounded that Krishna and other

deities manifest in a tangible manner as images that represent expanded forms of Krishna, hence possessing an inherent unity with him.

The deity is venerated in ISKCON temples at approximately 4:30 AM through a ceremonial practice referred to as mangala arotika. This ritual, also known as the daily auspicious pre-dawn devotion, is conducted to pay homage to the deity. During a period of thirty minutes, devotees engage in the act of singing hymns as a means of paying homage to both the deity and the teacher. Simultaneously, Brahmin priests partake in the ritualistic practice of presenting offerings to the gods, including incense, ghee lamps, water, flowers, and various other objects. The act of ceremonial worship, known as puja, involves engaging in numerous practices to respect and serve the deity's image. These practices include bathing the image, clothing it, offering food, and engaging in devotional activities like singing and dancing in its presence (Lipner, 2006). This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the practice of picture adoring.

There are two permissible forms of god worship, namely temple worship and family worship. The practice of god worship is significantly influenced by the concepts of purity and cleanliness. ISKCON temples prioritize the maintenance of the greatest form of worship. This kind of devotion may involve a daily provision of six to eight food offerings, accompanied by two alterations of the garments adorning the figure. The veneration of the god occupies a central role in all proceedings within the temple, as it is regarded as the possessor and sovereign of the edifice. Deities are also venerated within the private residences of adherents of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). In-home or private worship is often characterized by its simplicity. According to Lipner (2006), there may be a restriction on conducting only one puja per day and offering food.

The practice of ritual worship encompasses a broader scope than just compliance with a prescribed set of regulations. The devotee engages in interactions with the representations of the deity, which are perceived as being indistinguishable from the deity itself, and develops a sense of emotional connection with them. The practice encompasses the act of meditation. The application of mental visualization techniques facilitates the cultivation of contemplation specifically focused on the image (Lipner, 2006). The human intellect serves as the locus for nuanced communication with the divine entity. In accordance with

the prevailing season, devotees attire the deities in garments that are either insulating or breathable, engage in prayerful acts of devotion, and see the manifestation of divine joy via the deities' countenances. The objective of this practice is to facilitate individuals in recollecting Krishna by providing them with an opportunity to experience and perceive the sacred presence of the god.

The act of presenting food to the deity, afterwards distributing it to devotees, and consuming it as prasadam, holds significant importance within the context of image worship rituals. According to Scheifinger's (2009) research, prasadam serves as a symbolic manifestation of the deity's might and elegance. The sustenance presented during the puja ritual is widely held to be consumed by the deity in its manifested form. There is a prevailing belief that the remnants, sometimes referred to as 'leftovers,' underwent a ritualistic transformation into prasadam, thereby acquiring a sacred potency. The prasadam is distributed to the devotees, who partake in the abundance and divine favor of the deity through the consumption of this sustenance.

The prasadam, a revered food offering presented to Krishna by ISKCON, holds significant recognition. The Hare Krishna movement is renowned globally for its lacto-vegetarian cuisine, which is offered in its temples as well as in Govinda's restaurants, present in numerous locations worldwide. The dish is meticulously prepared with a high level of precision and expertise. ISKCON, also known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, implements "Food for Life" initiatives in multiple countries, wherein complimentary meals are distributed. Furthermore, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) acquaints individuals with its principles and practices by means of vegetarian culinary workshops conducted in various centers across the globe.

According to Goswami (2012), Prasadam emerged as a distinctive feature of ISKCON's mission and a strategic tool for its evangelistic efforts. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), commonly referred to as "ISKCON," has demonstrated its ability to adapt to diverse cultural environments. This religious organization has included a range of practices and initiatives, including as the "Love Feasts" inspired by the hippie movement, the programmatic aid provided through Food for Life for the underprivileged, and the establishment of Govinda's restaurants. The author asserts that these adaptations reflect ISKCON's ability to navigate and integrate

into different cultural landscapes. In India, numerous Hindu temples adhere to a customary practice wherein prasadam is distributed on a regular basis. Significant quantities of food are prepared during the midday period, with the purpose of being ceremoniously consecrated to the divine entity, and thereafter distributed as prasadam to all those present (Goswami, 2012). The prepared dish consists of ingredients such as butter, milk, cereals, chickpeas, lentils, beans, fruits, and vegetables. The majority of these foods can be classified as sattvik. The primary objective of all initiatives within the Hare Krishna movement is to cultivate a profound affection for Krishna. Consequently, engaging in activities such as cooking meals specifically for Krishna's gratification, presenting the prepared food to the god, and engaging in the contemplative act of consuming the offered food are all intended to purify the adherents and foster their consciousness of Krishna.

The activities conducted at the ISKCON temple in Kisumu are distinguished by a series of rituals that are guided by rules. These rituals play a crucial role in both attracting individuals who are new to ISKCON and facilitating their integration into the organization's fundamental principles, values, and ways of life. Rituals play a vital role in facilitating the process of newcomers in reframing their perception of reality and adopting different modes of existence and understanding. ISKCON's goals for influencing newcomers to its values and beliefs are reliant upon the indispensability of these individuals.

#### **5.4.8 Marriage, Sexual Relations and Child Rearing Practices**

Marriage, referred to as vivaha, is a sacred union within the Hare Krishna religion that encompasses a spiritual connection between individuals of opposite genders, extending beyond the temporal realm. The act of uniting two individuals' souls with the intention of assisting each other in achieving shared salvation, commonly referred to as Moksha, is sometimes referred to as a matrimonial union of souls.

Based on the philosophical principles of Sanatan Dharma/Hare Krishna, the concept of asramas posits that marriage is both a significant life event and a moral obligation (Jarayam, 2010). The residents of the Kisumu temple are presently engaged in efforts to restore the Varnasramas order within their local community. This technique results in the division of individuals into social (varna) and spiritual (asramas) groupings. The Grhastha

stage, which is the second spiritual stage of the asramas, is one of the four phases as described by Cush, Robinson, and York, 2008).

The Laws of Manu, sometimes referred to as Manusmṛti, is a theological discourse that was authored by Manu, the progenitor of humanity. This discourse was then documented by a collective of seers, commonly referred to as Rishis. According to Cush, Robinson, and York (2008), Manu was bestowed with these laws by the deity Brahma, who directed him to document them in a compendium of principles aimed at guiding individuals towards a virtuous existence (p. 491). The four Vedas, along with the Srimad Bhagavatam and the Manusmṛti, provide adherents with guidance pertaining to courting, marriage proposals, and the performance of marital ceremonies.

Additionally, this study encompasses the suitable methodologies for guiding a purposeful and impactful existence as a follower. Based on an interview conducted with Shankaranand Das, a council member of ISKCON (International Society of Krishna Consciousness) and inhabitant of New Vrindaban, it is asserted that the devotee's style of life is primarily influenced by the three modes of kindness, passion, and ignorance. According to the Vedic scriptures, it is stated that there are a total of 18 Puranas, with each of the aforementioned three categories comprising six Puranas. According to Cush, Robinson, and York (2008), each mode provides principles for individuals to follow in their daily lives.

In the context of courting, adherents of the Hare Krishna movement maintain that men are expected to enter into matrimony unless they want to renounce worldly pursuits and adopt a solitary lifestyle as Sannyasis, or ascetics. In the Hare Krishna religious tradition, women are subject to the same regulations as men. However, it is customary for women to be married, and it is exceedingly rare for a woman to opt for the vocation of a Sannyasi. Within the Hare Krishna community in Kisumu, it is customary for individuals to engage in dating prior to making the decision to enter into matrimony and establish a familial unit. Prior to engaging in courtship, it is imperative to adhere to the appropriate protocols and conduct (Jarayam, 2010).

Prior to initiating a romantic encounter, it is customary for a male individual to construct a multifaceted framework of consents and authorizations while approaching a female

counterpart for the purpose of arranging a social engagement. In the event that a woman is a resident of a temple, it is necessary for a man to secure consent from the temple president, followed by the nearest male relative (preferably the father or eldest brother in the absence of the father), and ultimately the mother. Once consent is obtained from all three parties involved, the pair may proceed with the courtship process. This action enhances group consciousness and functions as a representation of reverence. In the absence of explicit consent, it is prohibited for a pair to engage in romantic involvement. Should they be discovered engaging in extended talks or pursuing any form of connection, they will be denied access to the many rites and services offered by the community or temple (S. Das, personal communication, October 27, 2022).

Prior to entering into matrimony, it is customary to adhere to certain wooing practices. In accordance with the principles of Krishna Consciousness, it is expected that upon marriage, a woman is to transition from her parental household and establish a new residence within her husband's domicile (Jarayam, 2010). Upon entering the marital union, couples commonly proceed to choose a residence situated either on or in proximity to the temple premises (S. Das, personal communication, October 27, 2022).

Prior to entering into matrimony, adherents of Krishna are obligated to partake in the ritual known as Siddhanta, which involves the practice of Vedic astrology. The outcome of a relationship is contingent upon the manifestation of this particular conduct. According to Shankaranand Das, it is of utmost importance for the growth and development of a relationship that there exists astrological compatibility between spouses. In the context of marriage ceremonies, it is within the purview of a Purohit, who is a designated devotee permitted to officiate such ceremonies, to exercise discretion in deciding whether or not to proceed with the marriage if the pair exhibits a lack of compatibility.

The primary objective of matrimony is to fulfill an individual's spiritual requirements, so facilitating the elevation of their awareness. Within the Hare Krishna community, individuals who opt to marry outside of customary norms or partake in activities that are deemed inappropriate for devotees are commonly identified as practicing preya. Preya refers to the practice of permitting one's emotions to shape their decision-making process. While the physical repercussions of immoral conduct may vary across individuals, it is

important to acknowledge the potential adverse effects on one's spiritual growth and hindrance in attaining Moksha (S. Das, personal communication, October 27, 2022).

The Manusmṛti delineates eight distinct forms of marriage that are recognized within the Krishna society, namely Brahma, Daiva, Arsa, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa, and Pishacha (Cush, Robinson, and York, 2008). The New Vrindaban society has historically recognized two distinct types of marriages: Brahma marriages and Daiva marriages. Stephanie Jamison, the author of *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India*, notes that the differentiation between these categories lies in the specific occasions and circumstances surrounding the transfer of the bride to the groom (as cited in Cush, Robinson, & York, 2008).

One of the prominent matrimonial practices within the Sanatan Dharma/Hare Krishna tradition is the Brahma marriage, when the father bestows his daughter to a man who possesses profound understanding of Vedic teachings and exhibits exemplary ethical conduct. The Daiva ritual involves the bestowal of a highly adorned daughter to a clergyman who officiates a conventional matrimonial ceremony, with the mutual consent of the bride and groom to enter into marriage. In the context of arsa marriage, a customary practice that continues to be recognized as a legally valid procedure in contemporary India, the bride is bestowed upon the bridegroom as a reciprocal gesture for the provision of a bull and a cow. The Prajapatya marriage is a ceremonial union in which the groom formally receives the bride from her father, with the understanding that they will cohabit in order to fulfill their religious duties (Twamley, 2014).

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and a majority of nations recognize four marriage rituals as legally permissible activities. However, the latter three of these marriage ceremonies are considered to be illegal, despite the existence of certain religious texts that may suggest otherwise. In the context of the prevalent Sanatan Dharma marriage ritual, often known as the Asura rite, the groom assumes the responsibility of offering the bride's family a substantial contribution as a symbolic gesture. Upon the groom's presentation of a contribution that aligns with his financial capacity, the bride is formally transferred to the groom, signifying the completion of the matrimonial union. In a matrimonial arrangement rooted in carnal desire, commonly referred to as the Gandharva rite, the individuals involved enter into a legal union with the

primary intention of terminating the partnership upon consummation for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity. The act of forcefully relocating a young woman from her residence as she expresses intense sorrow and distress, accompanied by the fracturing, dividing, and devastation of her familial unit and dwelling, is commonly referred to as a rakshasa marriage (Cush, Robinson, York, 2008, p. 211). Lastly, the concept of Pishacha marriage can be described as the act of a man clandestinely seducing a woman who is either asleep, intoxicated, or mentally impaired, resulting in non-consensual sexual intercourse. Subsequently, the male is obligated to marry the lady, as stated in Manusmrti 3:34 (Twamley, 2014).

While Hare Krishna embraces individuals from many racial, religious, and sexual orientation backgrounds, engaging in homosexual interactions is not considered socially acceptable within this community. In an interview, Madhupati Das, a devotee and participant at the Kisumu temple, made a statement regarding the autonomy of individuals in their private lives, emphasizing that their actions are a matter of personal conduct. He further emphasized the absence of any authoritative body monitoring or regulating such behavior, using the term "gay police" to illustrate this point. According to the teachings of Srila Prabhupada, the founder of the Hare Krishna movement in America, it is posited that a man assumes the role of safeguarding his family, community, and personal well-being. Individuals who engage in homosexuality are unable to engage in socially acceptable sexual and relational activity. Consequently, individuals find themselves incapable of fulfilling their spiritual obligations and attaining Moksha (M. Das, personal communication, October 27, 2022).

The Manusmrti delineates guidelines pertaining to divorce and remarriage, elucidating the appropriate procedures for terminating a marital union and subsequently entering into a new spousal relationship. The Vedas emphasize that adherence to appropriate marital protocols, including astrological compatibility, can effectively address any challenges faced by a couple, in contrast to the teachings of the Manusmrti. Marriage holds significant ceremonial importance for the Hare Krishna group located in Kisumu, as it serves as a communal occasion wherein the entire community convenes to commemorate and validate the union. According to M. Das (personal communication, October 27, 2022), the dissolution of a marriage is perceived as a kind of disrespect towards both the community and the deities that were called to bestow blessings upon the union.

Marriage is a sacred union between individuals of opposite genders, serving as a means to elevate awareness and fulfill one's spiritual aspirations. Engaging in sexual activity is only permissible for couples who are legally married. According to the Manusmṛiti (Manusmṛiti 3:46), sexual activity is prohibited for a specific duration of time each month, spanning 16 days and nights. This period includes four distinct days that are considered inauspicious and are commonly referred to as the natural season of women. These guidelines delineate the appropriate timing for engaging in sexual intercourse within a marital context. According to personal correspondence with S. Das on October 27, 2010, it is important to note that sexual activity is prohibited on auspicious days, which are commonly observed as fasting days or the 13th day of each lunar cycle, although the rigorous enforcement of this prohibition may vary. It is generally prohibited for women to engage in sexual activity during their menstrual period.

The perception of sex exhibits variability, as individuals may perceive it as a pathway to attain personal freedom and contentment, whereas others regard it as a significant barrier and a cause of emotional turmoil. Irrespective of the prevailing conditions, it is imperative for an individual to ultimately transcend their personal goals and achieve the state of Moksha. Individuals have the potential to satisfy their needs by choosing to engage in sexual engagement. However, the Bhagavad Gita might function as a potential source of motivation for persons who opt to refrain from participating in sexual behaviors. According to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, particularly in verse 4:26, it is asserted that individuals who possess the ability to perceive the timeless essence inherent in all living beings and comprehend that all actions are executed by the attributes of nature, can be considered truly wise. Furthermore, it is observed that human society as a collective exhibits a proclivity towards engaging in sexual activities. However, a responsible householder adheres to a disciplined approach, refraining from participating in uncontrolled sexual behavior. The individual who resides within the confines of a household willingly relinquishes their innate inclination towards pleasure-seeking in order to pursue a more elevated and transcendent existence. Consequently, this restrained and emotionally detached approach to sexual experiences might be regarded as an additional form of sacrifice. In 1972, Prabhupada made a significant contribution to the field.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, desire breeds delusion and enslavement to the cycle of births and deaths. Hare Krishna views sex as a desire, and desires lead to human misery.

By separating from the senses through activities like yoga and meditation that are regarded as sacrifices to God, one can escape pain. Sex is viewed as materialistic, and having illicit sex results in an extremely unpleasant afterlife. A verse from the Srimad-Bhagavatam states that,

Materialistic life is based on sex life. The existence of all the materialistic people, who are undergoing severe tribulation in the struggle for existence, is based on sex. When sex life is indulged in for sense gratification illegally and illicitly, both the man and the woman await severe punishment in this world or after death. In this world also they are punished by virulent diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea that will follow them into their next life. (Prabhupada, 1972)

Nevertheless, there exists a contradictory book known as the Kama Shastra, which is rooted in the Vedas and authored by ancient sages of India. This particular book is one among the trio of ancient Indian literature that expound on the objectives of human existence. Kama, often known as sensual pleasure, is considered one of the four purusharthas, or fundamental aims of life, within the Sanatana Dharma tradition. The Kama Shastra places emphasis on the enjoyment of sexual activity as a desirable feature of life within the context of marriage, specifically in relation to the desire to procreate (Shusterman, 2007).

Given that self-control is a fundamental aspect, sexual activity is exclusively permissible for married couples. The primary objective of any sexual act is procreation, and the book aims to serve as a comprehensive manual for enhancing intimacy between individuals of both genders, encompassing not just physical connection but also mental, bodily, and spiritual dimensions. During a personal conversation with Shankaranand Das within a temple setting in Kisumu, the assertion was made that the presence of a conditioned mind is necessary.

It was argued that despite the potential existence of impure thoughts and limited intellectual capacity among individuals, this requirement is mostly physiological in nature, comparable to the essential needs for sustenance, rest, and protection. There appears to be a prevailing disregard for the capacity of individuals to resist sexual desires when attempting to understand the role of human existence in reestablishing a connection with a divine entity. According to the Bhagavad Gita, sexual activity is believed to have

the purpose of elevating an individual's consciousness with the aim of serving a divine entity. From this particular standpoint, the primary objective of sexual activity is to procreate, so enabling the subsequent upbringing of offspring who will adhere to religious principles and dutifully serve a higher power. As per the preceding section on marriage, the concept in question is denoted as a conscientious approach towards sexual activity (S. Das, personal communication, October 27, 2022).

Offspring are the outcome of conscientious sexual behavior, and it holds significance to nurture and educate them in accordance with the acceptable Hare Krishna lifestyle. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the upbringing of Hare Krishna youngsters, it is imperative to grasp the educational practices employed for pupils in ancient India. Being a practitioner of Sanatana Dharma requires a significant level of dedication and exertion, encompassing more than mere ritualistic observance (Rochford, 2005).

Although the level of academic rigor in present-day Hare Krishna education may not match that of previous eras, it remains crucial to possess a comprehensive understanding of the conventional methods of teaching. Gaining insight into the conventional and modern methodologies employed in Hare Krishna teaching facilitates an examination of the evolution of these approaches across time. According to Rochford (2005), the Vedas assert that the quality of our intellect and moral inclinations are primarily influenced by the predispositions formed in past lifetimes, rather than the education and conditioning received in the present lifetime.

In ancient India, those who adhered to the Hare Krishna tradition raised their children under the tutelage of a spiritual mentor. The learner was required to reside with their guru and acquire expertise through personalized guidance provided by the guru. According to Rochford (2005), an individual's emotional and intellectual personality was shaped by a guru who had undergone specialized preparation for the challenging task and whose primary life purpose was to provide instruction and training. In contemporary times, parental involvement in their children's education has assumed a significantly greater role.

The initial phase of life was expressly dedicated for the purpose of learning and education. During this period, the student acquired an understanding of the merits associated with leading a modest and uncomplicated lifestyle. According to Rochford (2005), irrespective of the social standing or familial status, the pupils were compelled to adhere to a uniform and disciplined lifestyle within the preceptor's residence.

The student recognized the significant benefits of adhering to their daily regimen. The daily routine of a child encompassed several activities, commencing with rising prior to daybreak, engaging in personal hygiene by taking a bath, reciting morning prayers, engaging in the act of fire worship, and paying respects to the guru. According to Rochford (2005), these actions played a key role in fostering the formation of beneficial habits and the attainment of educational proficiency.

The student received a comprehensive education that encompassed various disciplines, including literature, language, phonetics, etymology, astronomy, and medical science, as well as instruction on adhering to the prescribed way of life according to Sanatan principles. The need of moral education has never been overlooked. According to Rochford (2005), the defining attributes of a man and genuine education encompassed qualities such as good character, which was elucidated as an unwavering commitment to truth and responsibility, personal hygiene both physically and mentally, and complete mastery over one's senses.

The contemporary Hare Krishna Education system exhibits a comparatively lesser degree of stringency in comparison to its ancient Indian counterpart. Hare Krishna believers have incorporated contemporary lifestyles into their approaches to child rearing, while also drawing insights from ancestral practices. In contemporary society, the primary responsibility for the education and guidance of children has shifted towards parents. According to *Hinduism Today Magazine*, parents hold the esteemed position of being regarded as the initial spiritual guides or gurus in the context of Hinduism. The aforementioned actions are employed by individuals in diverse manners, encompassing the establishment of a model, elucidation of concepts, and provision of guidance and advice (*Hinduism Today Magazine*, 2007).

In order to fulfill the role of a dedicated parent, it is imperative to provide a sacred space within the household where morning prayers can be conducted. It is recommended that families engage in weekly temple visits for the purpose of worship. The significance of inculcating in children an understanding of the concept of the soul and the pursuit of Moksha. Contemporary adherents presently observe a stringent vegetarian dietary regimen, abstain from engaging in gambling activities, refrain from consuming substances like as narcotics, alcohol, or caffeine, and practice sexual abstinence until entering into the institution of marriage. Subsequently, it becomes imperative for their offspring to acquire and perpetuate these fundamental principles of existence.

#### **5.4.9 Festivals**

ISKCON festivals are an essential component. The festivals make spiritual development a joyful experience with a wide variety of vibrant décor, multi-course feasts, intricate ceremonies, kirtans, dance, and dramas. Anyone who partakes in them can attest that there is no modern equivalent for these soul-satisfying events, which are thus given their original Vedic flavor. The lunar calendar is used to establish the dates of the Vaishnava festival. In comparison to the Western, or solar calendar, dates will therefore change from year to year (Shinde, 2010).

One of the major occasions of the year is Janmastami, which commemorates the birth of Lord Krishna. Devotees commemorate God's entrance from the spiritual realm into this planet 5,000 years ago, making it the Vaishnava counterpart of Christmas. Krishna's name translates to "All-Attractive." The six opulences of beauty, knowledge, renown, money, strength, and humility are all fully exhibited by Lord Krishna. It follows that He is revered as "The Supreme All-Attractive Personality of Godhead." Today, Janmastami is celebrated with unsurpassed grandeur at all ISKCON centers all over the world. Leading up to the hour at which Lord Krishna appeared, performances of music, theatre, dance, and chanting took place throughout the day in praise of the entrancing pastimes of the Lord. A multi-course vegetarian feast is served after a midnight service that is accompanied by kirtan and dance (Shinde, 2010).

Diwali, also known as the Festival of Lights, is a Hindu holiday that commemorates many of the Supreme Lord's earthly glories. The most well-known of the Vedic holidays, Diwali is currently celebrated with festivities in towns and ISKCON temples alike. This

day is significant to ISKCON members because it commemorates Lord Rama's return to his kingdom of Ayodhya following his victory over the evil monarch Ravana. All the citizens rejoiced at Rama's joyful return and lit lights or dipas to greet him. It also commemorates the day that Lord Krishna banished the demon Narakasura at His advent. Thus, Diwali represents the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. The event also represents a time for spiritual rebirth by inviting the Lord into our lives and lighting a lamp within our own hearts for spiritual illumination. The event is frequently observed with lavish feasts, the lighting of Diwali lamps, and grandiose firework displays (Shinde, 2010).

#### **5.4.10 Gender Roles in Hare Krishna Community**

Despite sharing similar responsibilities and participating in the same religious activities, men and women have different roles among Hare Krishna followers in Kisumu. Men are in charge of running the worship services and serving as the community's ambassadors to the outside world, while women are generally in charge of childcare. Additionally, during worship, men and women stand on different sides of the space. Devotees also engage in intense worship of the gods Krishna and Radha, who serve as a symbol for their relationship with God (Palmer, 1994).

In traditional Hinduism, a woman's job was to bear numerous boys, take care of the home, and receive little formal education. The Dharmashastras explicitly indicate that a woman's rightful function is to live her entire life under the protection and authority of men, Meena Khandelwal adds. Women may be completely excluded from religious activities and duties in traditional Hindu societies, according to Leslie Orr, author of *Women's Lives, Women's Rituals in the Hindu Tradition* (Orr, 2017), with men serving as the primary religious performers. Some rich women, however, were not required to follow the rigid marriage lifestyle and religious seclusion that lower caste women had to. Others were bhakti saints who committed their devotion to God, while some were born into local traditions of "matrilineality" and cross-cousin marriage (vivha) (Orr, 2017).

A worshipper at the Kisumu temple, Ananda Vidya das, observed, "The roles [of women and men] are not so definite. Since Krishna is at the core, all other functions are secondary. We are all slaves of the Lord. The most important goal is to know Krishna, which is recommended in the Vedas, according to the "r" opaniad, authored by A.C.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupda, the head of the Krishna movement in the United States. Ananda Vidya also noted that married people work together; any money they make goes to Krishna, and any food they prepare is first given to him. According to Shankarand Dasi, the most qualified devotee, whether a male or a woman, is always assigned administrative posts in the community. He added that he has noticed that women are typically happier raising children and managing domestic duties, but men's egoistic tendency makes them yearn for a more dominating position in community management.

The modern or contemporary environment has had an impact on the Hare Krishna community today. As a result, women are no longer treated as the servants of their husbands as they were in early Hinduism, but rather as equal partners in marriage and Krishna's servants. In their devotional rituals, men and women of all ages can easily relate to Krishna since he is a beautiful figure. Even though he is referred to as a male character in the old scriptures, Radha can be worshipped alongside him as a feminine. People who practice devotion revere the union of Krishna and Radha as a representation of their relationship with God. Devotees strive for a relationship with God that embodies all the beauty and longing seen in romantic relationships marked by passionate affairs.

Modern Hinduism has adopted new or less stringent regulations, despite the fact that ancient Hindu texts emphasize distinct and restrictive gender roles for men and women. It aims for equality in worship and communal life overall. Whether married or single, men and women at the Kisumu temple engage in fundamentally the same forms of worship and are both considered to be serving Krishna. Despite the fact that men dominate the leadership positions at the Kisumu temple, women exhibit confidence and contribute their knowledge during sessions. Despite the Kisumu temple's lack of female swamis, notable female swamis have served in and had an impact on the ISKCON movement. In the Hare Krishna temple in Kisumu, women can take on the role of gurus or teachers. Our research into the Hare Krishna way of life and our observations at the Kisumu temple demonstrate how gender roles have changed to have more equal responsibilities and hold comparable positions.

## **5.5 Summary**

From a variety of perspectives, it is remarkable that the Krishna consciousness movement has been able to win over the citizens of the newly independent African countries. First, it provides convincing proof of Lord Sri Krishna's genuine universality as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Bhagavad-gita (14.4) declares that Lord Krishna is the father-seed of all living things. It's not true that Krishna is just a Hindu deity. Geographic or religious borders cannot encircle Krishna. All living things have dormant Krishna consciousness within their hearts, which comes to life when they hear the Hare Krishna mantra being chanted. Therefore, everybody can benefit from the singing of the Hare Krishna mantra and make progress toward spiritual perfection regardless of their transient bodily designations, whether they are African, Indian, or European, Christian, Hindu, or Jewish, white, black, or yellow.

ISKCON Kenya's initiatives have also shown how useful Indians may be in promoting the global dissemination of the scientific study of God. Anyone who has the good fortune to be born in India, the land of religion where both Lord Krishna and Lord Ramacandra have previously manifested, is obligated to propagate Krishna consciousness for the good of others, according to Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Unfortunately, Indians have overlooked this crucial duty, and as a result, there is violence and tension throughout the entire world as a result of a lack of basic spiritual awareness. In Kenya, however, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness members' collaboration with members of the Indian community has allowed the science of Krishna consciousness to quickly gain universal recognition in Kenya and other parts of Africa.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**INTERFAITH DIALOGUE INITIATIVES USED BY HARE KRISHNA ON**  
**PEACE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN KISUMU COUNTY.**

**6.1 Introduction**

This objective aimed at examining how inter-faith dialogue initiative has been used by the Hare Krishna community in Kisumu County. It aimed at exploring the lived experiences of individuals participating in interfaith dialogue at the Hare Krishna temple in Kisumu, Kenya. The lived-experiences of the participants were explored through the following research questions: (1) How do participants define interfaith dialogue in their own words? (2) How do participants experience interfaith dialogue? (3) What do participants perceive that they learn or gain through participation in interfaith dialogue? A purposive sample of participants was developed by the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews. Data was analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological approach, inductively looking for themes to emerge.

Results demonstrated that the lived-experience of interfaith dialogue was characterized by: (1) the role of the environment, (2) the value of individual relationships through sharing and storytelling, (3) holding an ecumenical worldview, which led to the (4) strengthening of the individual's faith or non-faith tradition. The results of this study support past research on curricular intergroup dialogue and serve as a vehicle to translate similar outcomes to a co-curricular format. Recommendations include: intentionally creating environments to foster interfaith dialogue, expanding formats of interfaith dialogue to include co-curricular options and experiential opportunities, and increasing religious literacy through education and training. In addition, expanding the faith discussion to include the secular and others that do not fit with the current paradigm of religion had to be explored.

Interfaith dialogue is defined here as a dialogue between different religions targeting the grassroots level, creating mutual understanding between two religions aiming to contribute to the development of the society through resolving conflicts and initiating development projects. Discussions on issues around peace and development captured the following themes: interpretations and meaning of peace from Hindu, Christian and secular world views; interfaith dialogue; core teaching for doing inter-faith dialogue;

Interfaith peace programs at Hare Krishna community and the application of peace models in simplifying understanding of the concept of peace and development.

## **6.2 Strategies Used by Hare Krishna community to promote peace**

### **6.2.1 Interfaith workshop for peace**

The Inter-Faith Dialogues in Kisumu on March 3, 2020, brought together representatives from county governments from the counties, religious leaders and institutions, CSOs working on peace and security, YWCA Interfaith Working Group Committee members, NCKK young mediators and catalysts. The forum's topic aimed to convey our steadfast determination to combine the environment and peace as the key ties that bind Kenyan youth from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Several leaders from various religious backgrounds, including those from Islam, Hare Krishna, the Anglican Church, and the Catholic Church, were present to share their religions' perspectives on the environment and inspiration for peace. The forum included a number of activities, such as keynote addresses by various speakers. 13 young people from different backgrounds participated in the conversation, and everyone took an active part in it.

Different thematic frameworks served as the foundation for discussions on peace and development-related topics. These philosophic underpinnings of interreligious dialogue, the definition of interfaith dialogue, core religious teachings from the Christian, Bahai, and Hare Krishna communities for engaging in interreligious dialogue, interreligious programs at the Hare Krishna community, and the use of peace models to simplify understanding of the concept of peace and development are all captured.

Participants were able to identify the main causes of conflicts in society, opportunities for youth to resolve conflicts, the role that religious institutions play in managing conflicts in the region, ways to increase the involvement of women and young people in conflict resolution, strategies and recommendations for interfaith dialogue in resolving conflicts, and initiatives to address conflict drivers in the area through the dialogue. The event's conclusion was that in order to sustain peaceful coexistence moving ahead, there needs to be constant communication between religious leaders, young people, women, and the government.

The religious organizations' prayers always began each session. Hindu prayer is followed by a prayer from Christianity. An individual prepares for his interactions with people of different religions by engaging in this act of prayer, which is known as intra faith or the inner peace. During the prayer, everyone stood and maintained a serious demeanor out of respect for various faiths. The dialogue's "Kamustahan" portion was started by the facilitator immediately following the prayer (Canete & del Castillo, 2022). Even though they had known each other for a long time, participants sat in a circle, facing each other during the session to get to know one another. Everybody is asked, "How are you?" (Kamusta ka? ), and the respondent is required to describe any positive or negative events that have occurred over the previous days. After a person presented his or her tale, the facilitators and other participants offered their own pieces of advice. It took everyone a good hour to complete this phase of the conversation and express their unique stories.

After "Kamustahan," the facilitator—also known as the temple's Guru—started the day's activity. These initiatives centered on fostering community growth and peace. Discussions on the topic of peace and development opened the program. What actions have the Hari Krishna community taken to promote harmonious coexistence across other faith groupings in the country?

The ongoing political disputes in Kisumu County, which have significantly impacted nationhood, influenced the choice of this topic. Given the split between the government and opposition leaders in the region, there hasn't been much peace in the region since the return to democracy. The main causes of conflict in Kisumu County, according to Oyoo & Matanga (2019), are socioeconomic issues (51%), political and institutional factors (39%), and resource and environmental factors (11%). Accordingly, the study demonstrates that socio-economic dynamics are the primary cause of conflicts because most people are impoverished and jobless, making them susceptible to manipulation. The two main causes of conflict, according to the majority of respondents (67%) were electoral difficulties and historical injustices.

According to Oyoo & Matanga (2019), political disagreements only arise during election campaigns because voters have a winning mentality and tend to favor the most powerful political party. The study also discovered that conflicts were a result of the community's political culture. The majority of respondents implied that the order of political squabbles

in Kenya was influenced by culture, which was cited as a source of conflict. As a result, candidates for leadership positions are chosen based on their background and culture. An interview with a former South West Nyakach MCA, who said the following:

For instance, Kikuyu political leaders can barely be voted for in this region that Luos occupy, dominant and so on. We only elect our members of the Luo community. (Interview with MCA Nyakach held at Travellers Hotel, Katito. 7/04/2019).

Representatives from county governments from the counties, religious leaders and institutions, CSOs working on peace and security, members of the YWCA Interfaith Working Group Committee, and NCKK young mediators and catalysts participated in the Inter-Faith Dialogues in Kisumu on March 3, 2020. The forum's theme was intended to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to using the environment and peace as the vital threads that connect Kenyan youngsters from all socioeconomic backgrounds. There were a number of religious leaders present to express their viewpoints on the environment and sources of inspiration for peace, including representatives from Islam, Hare Krishna, the Anglican Church, and the Catholic Church. The forum featured a variety of events, like keynote speeches by different speakers. The discussion included 13 young individuals from various backgrounds, and each one actively participated.

Discussions on issues pertaining to peace and development were built upon many thematic frameworks. The philosophical foundation for interreligious dialogue, the definition of interfaith dialogue, fundamental religious teachings from the Christian, Baha'i, and Hare Krishna communities for participating in interreligious dialogue, interreligious initiatives at the Hare Krishna community, and the use of peace models for understanding the concept of peace and development more understandable were all covered.

The main causes of conflicts in society, conflict resolution opportunities for youth, the role that religious institutions play in managing conflicts in the region, methods to increase the involvement of women and young people in conflict resolution, strategies and recommendations for interfaith dialogue in resolving conflicts, and initiatives to address conflict drivers in the region through the dialogue were all discussed by the participants. The event's conclusion was that there must be ongoing contact between

religious leaders, young people, women, and the government in order to maintain peaceful cohabitation in the future.

According to an interview with a former South West Nyakach MCA,

Political conflicts in Nyanza started way back in the 1970s when Jaramogi Oginga differed and drifted with Kenyatta. When Kenyatta came to Kisumu to open Nyanza General Hospital and a rotten egg was thrown to him, this led to shooting and killing of many people (Interview with Luo council of Elders held at Kabondo on 4/04/2019).

A large portion of the population still lives in poverty, which makes the research area crucial. The four main religions in Kisumu are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and African Traditional Religions. The city is home to many different ethnic groups. Therefore, it is inevitable in this type of society for people of many faiths to interact on a daily basis. There is an inescapable risk of violent conflict in this setting, and shifting from a culture of violence to one of peace demands turning issues into innovative, helpful solutions that meet the interests of individuals involved.

In his introductory note, the chief priest of the temple noted that,

When we consider violence, bigotry, and exclusion, the problems could appear insurmountable. These difficulties are, nevertheless, essentially linked. Discrimination and violence are fueled by ignorance, miscommunication, and preconceptions that are built on mistrust. There may be similar causes for violence, prejudice, and exclusion, just as there may be similar fixes. A shift in thought, attitude, and action is necessary to successfully address these three humanitarian concerns (Chief priest, Kisumu, 14/5/2019).

He then urged Kisumu-based organizations to get active in peace- and reconciliation-related projects. The media, religious institutions, women's groups, and youth organizations are also among them. Political parties ought to contribute positively to peacebuilding as well. Meetings on peace and security ought to be held with participation from all of these organizations, the security services, and the county administration. The many organizations listed should try to relay early warning to security apparatus by collaborating with security agencies or developing suitable answers to match emerging

problems. These include elder interventions and community dialogue, as well as police interventions to protect places where violent conflict has broken out or when tensions are high. However, one of the biggest problems has been coordinating the many peacebuilding actors in the nation. This has been linked to the large number of groups operating in the area that are involved in peace and reconciliation efforts.

### **6.2.2. Religious and Philosophical basis of Interreligious Dialogue**

The word "dialogue" is a combination of the Greek words *dia*, which means "through," and *logos*, which is translated as "word or meaning." Making meaning through spoken or written language is what dialogue is all about. Interreligious conversation, to put it simply, entails "meeting people directly and learning about their religious traditions." According to the official definition, it entails "discussions for mutual understanding held among different religious bodies; the interaction of mutual presence... speaking and listening...witnessing the commitments, the values, and the rituals of others." (Cornille, 2013:12).

Dialogue, in the words of the Presbyterian Church (USA), is "witnessing to our deepest convictions and listening to those of our neighbors." (Cornille, 2013:12). When two people, whether they are friends, neighbors, or acquaintances, talk about their religious convictions informally, it is the simplest kind of interreligious discussion. For instance, a Muslim child's birthday party might include a Christian teenager, and a Baha'i neighbor might talk to a Hindu across the backyard fence (Cornille, 2013). These dialogues are vital in this casual context because they foster better understanding amongst the participants from the various religions that make up our multicultural society. Such conversations, however, do not qualify as official interreligious dialogue. Some fundamental components must be present for actual, effective IRD to take place (Cornille, 2013).

An IRD encounter must take into account the diversity of the various religions and the various perspectives, suppositions, and viewpoints that are presented to any given problem. It is vital to develop group standards or ground rules, and these rules must include respecting everyone's viewpoint. Everybody has a voice, and all voices are valued equally:

In an interreligious setting, top-down interpersonal and communication structures that exist between group members should be avoided. No one's opinion "trumps" another's, and no one is permitted to use threats of retaliation, judgment, or coercion: Position and title shouldn't be allowed to affect the way that different suggestions and solutions are made and accepted.

No prior conclusion: The group is not being directed or coerced toward any predetermined conclusions or outcomes. Open agenda: There is no secret agenda. The sole reason the group is meeting is to discuss thoughts and information in an open and sincere manner. It would be more beneficial to describe communication as a search for understanding rather than as a search for agreement. The participants in the dialogue are not to agree with one another's precepts and are not required to grasp another's tradition. They don't even have to find "common ground" in terms of religious beliefs in order to go forward.

A more comprehensive description would describe interreligious dialogue as a cooperative, constructive, and positive contact between individuals and institutions holding various religious traditions, religions, and/or spiritual or humanistic ideas. It must be distinguished from syncretism or alternative religion in that conversation focuses on fostering mutual understanding across many religions to foster acceptance of others rather than on the creation of novel beliefs (Moyaert, 2013). The structure and procedures for conducting discourse are laid down in the Qur'an. It implies that Muslim interactions with adherents of other faiths should go beyond information sharing. Additionally, it must exhibit an appropriate attitude and conduct. And converse with them in the finest way, the Qur'an says. Additionally, it says in verse 46, "Do not discuss with the people of the book except in the best of ways, except those who are unjust among themselves," which is another instruction.

Interfaith dialogue, in Leonard Swidler's words, (Swidler, 2013;42) "operates in three areas: the practical, where we collaborate to help humanity; the depth or "spiritual" dimension, where we attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within"; and the cognitive, where we seek understanding of the truth," (Swidler, 2013;43) . In order to foster collaboration among believers for a compassionate and understanding

society, IRD considers a greater understanding of contemporary faiths, their beliefs, perspectives, and levels of sensitivity (Swidler, 2013;43).

Finding common ground and stating that all religions share responsibility for the welfare of humanity and the preservation of the Earth are two things that can be found in discussion. Above all, it promotes a respect for those who hold diverse opinions. There are many different ways to interpret dialogue. Three connotations are outlined in the Vatican document Dialogue and Proclamation. On the one hand, dialogue might be defined as "reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or... to interpersonal communion" at the most basic human level. In contrast, it can also refer to "an attitude of respect and friendship" that, in an ideal world, permeates all activities with "the spirit of dialogue" (Swidler, 2013).

As a last point, it refers to "all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom." (Swidler, 2013).

This final definition highlights several dialogue qualities, including the fact that it is constructive and beneficial and encompasses "relations" in general as opposed to being limited to conversation. Truth and respect are involved, and its goal is mutual understanding and enrichment (Swidler, 2013).

Thus, dialogue can be defined as direct, forthright, and active communication that assumes respect for one another, generosity of spirit, and the potential for change brought about by the truth of the other. Effective discussion makes it possible for participants (and later non-participants) to accurately pinpoint areas of actual religious conflict as well as misperceptions about the doctrines and practices of various religions. IRD demonstrates respect for others by accepting them into your "world" but allowing no room for exclusion or absorption in a world where individuals of different faith communities live adjacent to each other but distant from each other's worlds. IRD can manifest in a variety of ways that are all interconnected (Swidler, 2013). At the interfaith conversation event in Kisumu, the four main styles of dialogue were covered.

### **6.2.3 Christian Perspective of Dialogue**

The only people who are unaware that Jesus was nonviolent are Christians. Jesus was the most vocal proponent of nonviolence in recorded history. Jesus demonstrated creative nonviolence in public. He urged us to throw down our swords, pick up our crosses, and devote our lives in the service of mankind (van Prinsterer, 2015: 56). He also urged us to love our neighbors, have compassion for everyone, seek justice for the poor, and forgive those who have wronged us. He delivered the most important, ground-breaking remarks ever spoken at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5-7). "You have heard the saying, 'Love your countrymen and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your heavenly God for God makes the sun rise on the wicked and the good and the causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust,' so that you may be children of your heavenly God. Be kind as God is kind, advises Van Prinsterer (2015:56).

Jesus is said to have questioned the religious leaders on several topics in Matthew 5:43–48, startling each one of them with his answers. Although this is an example of interfaith rather than interreligious debate, it very probably included teachings from Jesus that the teachers would have perceived as going beyond the confines of modern Judaism. Similar openness to IRD can be seen in St. Paul's speech on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts of the Apostles chapter 17).

St. Paul debated with the Jews and the "devout" by merely "beholding" the customs of those outside his religious community rather than avoiding any contact with the idolatrous practices of the Athenians. He used these customs as a springboard for presenting his beliefs. This implies that he gave their method of worship some thought and reflection. In order to assess the spiritual condition of the Athenians and to conduct discussions in a manner that would be most understandable to them, St. Paul studied their religious practices. St. Paul could only have learned the information he did by talking to people who actually practiced the Athenian beliefs and faiths.

St. Paul demonstrates another way in which Christians might embrace the truth of other religions while rejecting them as a whole. A prime example of his approvingly identifying a truth in the Athenians' ideas is his affirmative quotation from the Cretan poet

Epimenides (whom he also references in Titus 1:12). St. Paul is able to communicate his beliefs in a way that is clear to individuals of various religions and cultures, thanks to the improved understanding of other religions that comes from interreligious dialogue. This can only happen if, to borrow a tired cliché, we put ourselves in others' shoes. For example, despite the fact that I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to everyone in order to maximize my gains. And in order to win the Jews, I adopted their identity; in order to win those who are subject to the law, I assumed their status as such. To those who are without law, as though they were without law (albeit they were not without law before God and were thus subject to Christ's law), so that I might win them over. I became weak to the weak so that I might get the weak. I became everything to everyone so that I might, by any means, save some (Revelation 9:19–22). Dialogue should be seen from a Christian perspective as a tool to comprehend how non-Christians see Christianity.

#### **6.2.4 Ahimsa: Core Teaching for doing Inter-Religious Dialogue**

The eight verses, known as Sikshastak, that Lord Chaitanya gave for the common populace as instructions are a definition of the Hare Krishna peace ideals. Glory is given to Sri Krishna Sankirtan in the opening stanza, which purifies the heart of all the dirt that has gathered over many years. As a result, the fire of conditional life, or continuous birth and death, is put out. Because it disperses the rays of the benediction Moon, the Sankirtan Movement is the greatest blessing for all of humanity. It gives all transcendental knowledge life, expands the ocean of transcendental happiness, and enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are perpetually waiting.

The Lord is praised in the second verse

Oh, my God! You have countless names because only Your Holy Name may bestow all benediction onto all living things. There is no set way to recite these Holy Names; you have given all of your transcendental energy to it. Oh, my God! You've made it so simple to approach you by using Your Holy Names, but I'm sorry to say that I don't find them alluring (Sharma, 1965, p. 336)

When chanting the third verse, one should be in a modest frame of mind, thinking of themselves as lower than the straw in the street, more tolerant than the tree, free from any

sense of false prestige, and prepared to show every deference to others. One can continuously chant the Holy Name of the Lord in such a condition of mind.

The fourth verse states,

Oh powerful Lord! I don't want to get rich, I don't want to enjoy beautiful women, and I don't want a lot of people to follow me. I merely desire your pointless devotional service throughout my life, birth after birth (Srimad-Bhagavatam, SB Canto 4).

The fifth verse states,

O Son of Maharaja Nanda, despite the fact that I am your eternal servant, I have nonetheless managed to sink into the sea of birth and death. Therefore, I beg You to rescue me from this sea of death and fix me as one of Your Lotus Feet's atoms (Srimad-Bhagavatam, SB Canto 5).

The sixth verse reads

Oh, Lord! When will my eyes be adorned with love-filled tears that never stop streaming as I invoke Your Sacred Name? When will speaking the Holy Name cause me to choke up? And when will the mention of your name cause breakouts from every hair pore on my body? (Srimad-Bhagavatam, SB Canto 6).

The seventh verse reads,

O Godwin! Tears are streaming from my eyes like torrential rain as I feel your isolation and consider a minute to be like twelve years or more. In your absence, the world feels utterly empty to me (Srimad-Bhagavatam, SB Canto 7).

Finally, the eighth verse reads,

I have never known anybody other than Krishna to be my Lord, and He will continue to be so no matter how roughly He embraces me or how heartbroken I become when He is absent. He is totally free to do whatever He wants, but He will always be my worshipable Lord, without exception (Srimad-Bhagavatam, SB Canto 8).

The Hare Krishna group in Kisumu is cognizant of the heterogeneous environment of Kisumu County as a result of its practice, which is based on the eight slokas or verses left by Lord Chaitanya. As a result, the community places a strong emphasis on respect for others' lives. Its members' grasp of how to treat one another with love and respect is clear

evidence of this admiration. The community is aware that the famed Hindu teaching of Ahimsa serves as the foundation for treating people with respect.

According to Judy Pearsall (1999), ahimsa refers to the respect for all living beings and the abstinence from aggression toward others. Hindus live by this fundamental idea in all aspects of daily life. It is also used as the fundamental tenet or strategy when engaging in conversation with others. In fact, the Hare Krishna community makes an effort to put this philosophy into practice and to embody it as the fundamental teaching and as the fundamental guide for improving one's understanding of Krishna, on daily social life, as well as a fundamental response for fostering relationships with others (Banawiratma, 2009).

Being kind to people is important. It represents a harmony of love for God. If a Hindu couldn't establish peaceful relationships with others, how could they ever demonstrate their devotion for God? According to the majority of informants, this statement implies that true love for God can only be demonstrated via positive interactions with other people and other living things. The discussion prompted the attendees to wonder how someone could claim to love God while harboring hatred or irrational rage toward their siblings. How can he/she profess to love God while harming the environment and abdicating responsibility for his/her actions? The priest of Hare Krishna stressed that

The secret to comprehending the idea of God's love is to treat people and the environment with respect. God's love for us entails not endangering the lives of others. Additionally, it entails avoiding making other people feel bad. Hindus owe it to all living creatures to spread love and happiness (Hare Krishna priest, Kisumu, 23/3/2020).

He went on to underline how relative human understanding of God is. Since there is no such thing as absolute truth, no one can assert to possess it. All faiths are thought to be equally valid. None is better than the other, and none is worse. When blind people touch an elephant, some of them can only touch one portion of the animal while others can only touch another. This suggests that because we can only have a limited understanding of the world in which we live, our faiths cannot give an absolute and full description of the world.

Furthermore, the Bhagavad-Gita, a Hindu scripture, states that "by whatever means one worships Me, I approach them and fulfill their aspirations through that particular method. Be aware that individuals approach me in different ways. These two texts—the Bhagavad-Gita and the Rigveda—demonstrate how Hinduism views the distinction between God and the naming of the same God (Robinson, 2014). In this sense, God is the same whether it be called differently by a Muslim, Christian, Jew, or a Buddha. As a result, a Hare Krishna missionary just seeks to spread good, not to win many converts, and to promote the idea that all religions are equal and that we should all be open to learning from one another.

Responding to other ideas and religions, particularly those that disagree with the idea of God, is crucial to the theological and historical worldview of the Hare Krishna movement. There are many parallels between Hare Krishna and indigenous beliefs. For instance, indigenous people worship ancestral spirits whereas Hindus worship Brahman and other gods. Similarly, Hindu ceremonies are led by Brahmins while indigenous ceremonies are led by dukun (shamans). Thus, the arrival of Hare Krishna in Kenya does not suppress local beliefs but rather exploits them to build a foundation for discourse (Robinson, 2014).

The priest of Hare Krishna gave a lesson on inner dialogue. Instead of emphasizing comparative religion or theology, this model places more emphasis on spirituality. The goal of this conversation is to attempt to deeply experience the spiritual convergence of various faiths and groups. The inner man, or his spirituality, would experience a meeting of various faiths and communities. For example, it is expected of the Christian to read the Upanishads and discover Christ there in a manner similar to how Christ discovered himself in the Old Testament. Communication, which took place during silent meditation, was the meeting's most significant epiphany (Ole & Polak, 2020).

The priest also gave a seminar on engaging conversation. He pointed out that this type of conversation involves interactions between Hare Krishners at all levels and members of other denominations. It is less systematized, less theological, and considerably more difficult on a personal level. Christians are welcome to participate in many Hare Krishna events where various topics, including Sufism, Christian yoga, and methods of salvation, are supposed to be discussed. By engaging in this type of discussion, the chance is offered

to compare and contrast the beliefs of Hare Krishnas, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians with those of members of traditional African civilizations. The many sectoral schools of thought within religious organizations, which have differing views on specific theological topics, made him realize that it might be difficult to carry this sort of discussion (Saunders, 2003).

### **6.2.5 Role of Bhagavad Gita in Promoting Peace**

Gita is being enforced primarily because it not only raises people to a spiritual level but also educates regular people how to deal with life on a material level. Therefore, the Bhagavad Gita's precepts apply to everyone in the globe. According to Kaur and Gupta (2013), the Bhagavad Gita opposes needless violence. This is clear from Chapter 2, which poses the following query:

How can someone kill someone or cause someone else to kill when they are aware that the soul is unbreakable, eternal, unborn, and unchangeable? Everything has its proper use, and a person with comprehensive knowledge knows how and where to apply a thing for that use, the Lord retorted. Similar to how violence has its uses, knowing when to use it depends on the individual (Bg. 10.4-5).

The Manu-sahit, the human law book, supports the death penalty for murderers in order to spare them from suffering in the afterlife as a result of their enormous sin. Different parties may have access to information, allowing them to critically evaluate their own attitudes and behaviors, as a result of including the spiritual dimension into the peace-making process. People's conflict behavior is frequently based on more emotional factors, therefore rational negotiation methods and subsequent agreements may not be enough to modify it. Goswami, (2021) contends that sentiments and actions are not always a direct result of cognitive commitments and decisions

A Hare Krishna Guru claims:

Religion has a crucial role to play in bringing about world peace. The ethical values and principles that spiritual leaders teach are crucial for reducing the evil roots of greed, hatred, and delusion that cause mental unrest and delusion, which result in physical outbursts of violence that end in global war (Hare Krishna Guru, 23/3/2020).

As a result, the aforementioned component is seen as the basis for many conflicts and wars. The priest made it clear that the origin of violence lies in people's minds. A member of the civil society group quoted the UNESCO constitution's preamble and said,

Because battles start in men's brains, the building blocks for peace must also be developed there. In other words, if one wants to be at peace, they must likewise build their own mental fortifications for tranquility (CSO rep, 23/3/2020).

The Gita's teachings can be connected to this in the same way. One could consider the book to be a form of atheism. In his lecture, Swami Vivekananda stresses the importance of putting different forms of yoga into practice rather than just studying them. We must first hear about them before we can begin to consider them. In order for the thoughts to eventually become our entire existence, we must first reason them out, imprint them on our minds, and then reflect on and realize them (Tirtha, 2007). Religion will begin to permeate our very selves rather than remaining a collection of concepts or theories or an academic affirmation. We can subscribe to many erroneous ideas today through intellectual consent and change our minds tomorrow as a group. True faith, however, does not alter. Religion is realization, not ideology, talk, or wonderful as they may be, theories. Not hearing or acknowledging, it is being and becoming; the entire soul is being transformed into what it thinks. Religion is that (Tirtha, 2007).

Because it contains universal codes, the Gita is a text that applies to everyone in this universe, not only Hindus and Hare Krishna. The dual nature of the world, which consists of both bliss and suffering, was highlighted by the head priest. The contrast between good and evil creates the world.

“Do not think that good and evil are two separate essences, for they are one and the same thing, appearing in different degrees, feeling in the same mind” (181). An individual exists in this universe of optimism and pessimism like a bubble in an ocean. We are all human beings, however we are all unique from one another (Hare Krishna chief priest, 24th March, 2020). "Unity in variety is the plan of the universe."

He went on to say that the Bhagavad Gita is full of principles and that people should adopt them, not as a religious text but rather as a work that promotes culture and understanding of human values. Therefore, the text is not exclusive to Hindus. Shri Bhaktivedanta Swami Prapupada claims,

Man is not designed to work like a pig. He must be intelligent if he respects human life and doesn't behave like a typical animal. A human being should be aware of his life's purpose, and this instruction is provided in all Vedic literature, with the Bhagavad Gita providing the essence. Vedic literature is intended for people, not animals. There is no question of sin on the part of animals when they feed on other animals, but a man must be held accountable for violating the rules of nature if he kills an animal to satiate his greed or appetite (Goswami, 2012: 123).

The Bhagavad Gita verses mentioned above can be used to instill ethical ideals in young learners, along with pertinent examples from everyday events. Additionally, by teaching kids these values, they will become morally upright people who are well-equipped to face any difficulties and who have a firm belief in God.

#### **6.2.6 Baha'i Faith Teachings on Dialogue**

The Baha'i faith was also represented at the session. A spokesman of this religion stated that the Baha'i Faith's main doctrine on unity of religion asserts that many of the world's religions share a fundamental unity. According to the guiding concept, all major faiths' teachings are a part of a single, overarching scheme created by the same God. Along with the unity of God and humanity, it is one of the central tenets of the Baha'i faith. According to the teachings of the Baha'i Faith, there is only one religion that is gradually revealed to people by God, through prophets and messengers, as humanity develops and its ability for understanding likewise increases (Fazel, 2007).

According to the literature of the Baha'i Faith, the external distinctions amongst religions are a result of the pressures of the historical context in which each one was revealed. According to the scriptures of the Baha'i Faith, the messengers have a dual essence because they are both human and divine. They are divine in that they all emanate from the same God and communicate His teachings, making it possible to view them all in the same light. However, they are also distinct beings recognized by different names, each of whom carries out a certain task and is given a specific revelation. The founder of the Baha'i Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, asserted that he was only the most recent in a line of heavenly teachers that also included Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, and others (Fazel, 2007).

Responding to the teachings of Bahai faith, the Hare Krishna priest explained that,

"Unfortunately, in this contemporary world, people never pause to consider who or what they are. They are merely working extremely hard in an office or factory all day while believing that "I am this body." And when we ask them to identify themselves, they say things like, "I'm a Hindu, I'm a Muslim, I'm Swedish, I'm American, I'm Christian, etc." Although the body has been given many other names or titles, the truth is that we are not these bodies. Priest Hare Krishna, March 24, 2020.

This clarified the rationale behind the Hare Krishna community's initiative to start interfaith discussion with religious authorities of other faiths. The Hare Krishna community supports positive peace, which they see as a holistic framework a state attained when the "attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies" [attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies] are in place.

The UN's "Global Goals for sustainable Development," which, if implemented in a given society, can be considered an ideal representation of positive peace, are said to resonate with the Hare Krishna expression, according to a member of a CSO participant. A culture of peace is, in the words of the United Nations, "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior, and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups, and nations" (CSO participant, personal interview, 25th March, 2020).

A spokesman of NCKK cited Hans Küng (2012) as saying that a culture of peace is an alternative to a culture of war and violence and an essential strategy for reducing violence and violent conflicts. Without religious harmony, there can be no peace between the nations. Without interreligious communication, there cannot be religious harmony. A lecturer from Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology emphasized that Dr. Hans Küng's words perfectly encapsulated the significance and mindset required for interreligious dialogue: an attitude that is ready to leave the security and comfort of what is familiar and enter an uncharted world of possibility for the sake of peace. He highlighted that taking part in IRD requires us to face our own fears and biases, risk included, and venture out into the world in order to both discover and be discovered. This may be explained by the fact that religion has had a huge impact on human history, with skewed interpretations of religious history and scripture frequently being incomplete

and subjective. This has frequently resulted in animosity and fanaticism, some of which still have an impact on society today.

Likewise, a minister from St. Paul Cathedral's Anglican Church said:

History and the benefit of hindsight continue to be sources from which we can learn, comprehend past errors, and avoid making new ones. Understanding historical events and how they might lead to cleavages that limit the possibilities for cooperation between and among different religious communities is essential (Anglican Church. Pastor, March 24, 2020).

However, there are a lot of successful historical instances of civil discourse that might serve as models for us today. In the integrated communities, we are all required to live in, it is not unusual for people from various religious communities to experience living next to one another but being far removed from one another's realities. Observed by a secretariat member of the NCKK,

The lives of believers and practitioners of many faiths, as well as their well-being in society, are nonetheless impacted by difficulties resulting from the presence of variety. However, while IRD is primarily utilized for promoting peace and justice, regular interactions between people of different faiths are still worthwhile but not equivalent to them. IRD refers to facilitated talks on certain issues undertaken amongst members of various faith groups with an expressed objective or objectives when used as a tool or strategic practice (NCKK, participant, 24th March, 2020).

During the discussion, a religion lecturer from Maseno University highlighted the work of Martin Luther King Jr. as a benchmark for understanding the role that religious institutions play in preserving peace. Martin Luther King Jr., according to the professor, personified the modern Christian calling of active nonviolence. Through his sermons, talks, and, most importantly, his fight against racism and segregation, he spread the message of nonviolence across the country. But on April 4, 1967, a year and a day before he was killed, this great prophet of nonviolence made history by tying the fight for civil rights and equality to peace and the end of the Vietnam War.

King linked every problem to the interconnected web of life and urged us to defend everyone's rights, especially the suffering Vietnamese people's right to live in peace and security. In his notable speech delivered at the Riverside Church in New York City, he stated:

This madness must end in some way, and we need to do it now. I address the poor and suffering people of Vietnam as a child of God and a brother. I speak for those whose houses are being demolished, whose land is being ravaged, and whose culture is being distorted. I am speaking on behalf of the poor in America who are suffering from a double cost of dashed dreams at home and violence and corruption abroad. I speak for the entire globe, which is horrified by the direction we have gone in. I am a global citizen. I address the authorities of my own country as an American. In this fight, we have taken the major initiative. We must take the initiative to put a stop to it. America can effectively lead as the world's richest and most powerful country (Budiarto, 2017:13).

Participants agreed that IRD was necessary and pointed out that, given the current political atmosphere in Kenya as a result of the contentious elections, it is wise for religious organizations to support community engagement in order to help achieve this goal. Religious organizations would be wise to take advantage of this opportunity to become involved in interreligious learning and conversation and to promote it in many contexts and settings. IRD has the potential to and must accept the duty to bridge this gap where individual religious beliefs fall short of offering diverse religious education for the matters that are important for integration and peaceful coexistence. Every person on this world has the intrinsic right to live in peace, according to the Chief Priest of the Mlimani Temple.

Every person on this world has the intrinsic right to live in peace, according to the Chief Priest of the Mlimani Temple. Mahatma Gandhi was quoted as saying,

The only way the human race had any chance of achieving this fundamental human right was if we all learned nonviolence. Being human is being nonviolent because we were intended to live in peace with one another.

The high priest emphasized the importance of teaching children the discipline of nonviolence in every Kisumu County School, religious institution, and community organization. In Kisumu County, all communities and religious institutions must reject violence and embrace the knowledge and methods of active nonviolence. He came to the conclusion that the only path to a future of justice and peace is nonviolence. Therefore, nonviolence is the first and most crucial component if every citizen of Kisumu County is to have access to all of their human rights.

The strategy of nonviolent language can be applied to interreligious discussion in the modern world. Interreligious dialogue has been used as a modern strategy to not only resolve problems but also, and perhaps more crucially, to foster tolerance and deter future conflicts. Inter-religious communication can be a crucial tool to combat this rise in religious-based violence given the religious discourse that extremist groups frequently abuse in the name of political gain. Communities and religious groups in Kisumu must now create a platform within and among the various faiths that speaks a common language and promotes a common cause for the welfare of humanity in order to counterbalance the militancy. Faith-based discussions and communication, where religious leaders minimize the difference, which is merely a modality, and pursue the fundamental belief in the Creator and love for mankind, are the essential words for combating violence that has been supported in the name of religion.

The Chief Priest observed that,

Undoubtedly the oldest and most diverse of all the world's great religions is the one that has come to be known as Hinduism. Because it is founded on the cumulative knowledge and inspiration of great seers and sages from the very beginning of Indian civilisation, Hinduism refers to itself as the Sanatana Dharma, or the eternal faith. According to the chief priest of the Hare Krishna temple on March 24, 2020, a variety of beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and philosophies have occasionally converged here.

He continued by stating that Dharma is the first of the four aims in Hinduism because it is the most comprehensive and relevant to a person's entire existence. It implies a comprehensive worldview, including a code of conduct for appropriate behavior in diverse situations, in addition to the theological and philosophical framework. Hinduism strives to protect the welfare of all people. The ancient teachings and practices of Hinduism widely affirm the principles of peace and nonviolence.

Peace is referred to as shanti in Sanskrit. The phrase literally means something that is tranquil, peaceful, or undisturbed. It means staying away from violence and disturbances of the mind and body. It is a virtue that requires some sentiment to be eliminated from the mind rather than being created there. It aims to eliminate violent thoughts, feelings, and

behaviors from daily life. In Hinduism, the concepts of peace are described in a variety of ways (Cardona & Luraghi, 2018).

Spiritualists were the Vedic rishis. They imparted a non-difference between oneself and others' philosophy. Hinduism holds that God (Ishvar) is an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness that exists everywhere. This fundamental conviction fosters an attitude of unwavering acceptance and tolerance of others. Since all living things are equal and descended from the same God, everyone should treat others with respect and no one should cause them harm. The fundamental ideas of synthesis and balance are depicted in the Vedas as necessary for harmonious cohabitation. These precepts form the foundation of the shanti idea. As the most important human virtue, peace is connected to others like truth, nonviolence, purity, friendship, forgiveness, and tolerance. The basis of all morals is thought to be a peaceful mindset (Cardona & Luraghi, 2018).

Shri Krishna took on the role of Shantiduta, or the messenger of peace, in the Mahabharata to persuade the foe to live in peace, but ultimately helped Arjun defeat the evil foe. Therefore, shanti is not necessary for nonviolence to exist. In reality, maintaining harmony requires effort on three levels: the thought, speech, and body (manasa, vaca, karmana). Collective peace or wellbeing does not just apply to humans but it also include animals and plants. In the well-known Shanti-Mantras from the Vedas, it goes much farther and emphasizes the wellbeing of everyone. As a result, shanti is an equilibrium that is necessary for the healthy life of everyone and everything in this universe. Hinduism defines peace as moral, nonviolent, tranquil, or undisturbed. We should not damage or hurt any species; instead, we should coexist peacefully because God (Ishvar) is present in all sentient beings. Nonviolence in deed is simply one aspect of peace; speech and thought must also be peaceful.

For Christians, the Hebrew root *slm*, which means "to be complete" or "to be sound," plays a significant role in the biblical concept of peace. The verb means "to be complete or whole" or "to live well" both dynamically and statically.

Despite having many variations, the word can be divided into four categories:

- 1) Shalom, or peace, is the completeness of life or the body (i.e., health).
- 2) When referring to Yahweh, peace (shalom) refers to a proper relationship or

harmony between two parties or individuals that is frequently created through a covenant. The covenant was renewed or upheld by a "peace offering"

- 3) Shalom can refer to wealth, achievement, or contentment.
- 4) Shalom is the conquest of one's enemies or the absence of conflict. In both greetings and farewells, shalom was utilized. The words "May your life be filled with health, prosperity, and victory" were intended to serve as a blessing on the person who spoke them. It conveyed wholeness and safety when used as an adjective.
- 5) The word "peace" is most frequently translated from the Greek word *eirene* (εἰρήνη) in the New Testament. The Hebrew term *shalom* has a wider range of applications than does the English word *eirene* (εἰρήνη), despite certain similarities in their meanings.

Christians believe that since God is "Jehovah shalom- the Lord send Peace," he is the only one who can bring about peace. In order to establish a relationship with sinful humanity, the Lord traveled to them, historically speaking first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. He made a peace treaty with them, which he then sealed in person. As long as participants kept a healthy connection with the Lord, they were given perfect peace (*shalom shalom*).

God's peace would be carried out through a Messiah, as both the Old Testament and the New Testament predicted and verified. Jesus Christ's death and resurrection brought about peace with God. "The word that God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all," Peter said to Cornelius.

### **6.3 Interreligious Programs at Hare Krishna Community**

This community occasionally tries to adapt and develop its curriculum and program to be acceptable not only for insiders but also for outsiders as a response to the multicultural backdrop of Kisumu County and their thinking on the concept of love to God above. Being a good Hare Krishna requires not only having solid personal knowledge and spirituality of the movement, but also having a deeper grasp of the teachings of other religions. In order to teach pupils their courses, this community creates an interreligious teaching technique (personal conversation with chief priest, 15 May 2022).

A topic is first explored from a Hindu perspective, and then other perspectives from other religions are incorporated. A Pujari, or Hindu priest, named Kade Ariasah stated that the paradigm of teaching can actually be used by the internal community of one religion to initiate interreligious communication. The point of view from one's own religion should not be the only one from which a person educates students or others. According to a personal interview with the chief priest conducted on May 15, 2022, he or she should also comprehend this idea from a different religion and explain it with a thorough knowledge.

By doing this, he/she will help pupils and devotees develop a new sense of empathy for others. It will also assist the members in moving away from such a pathetic and restrictive mindset and toward one that is open-minded and inclusive. Starting from a place of solidarity with others is the best way to see others. We are similar. Hinduism, Islam, and other religions are unimportant. The most crucial thing is to serve God out of love. In other words, rather than forcing someone to become a Hindu, Hindus should help them understand and identify Krishna more clearly (personal interview with top priest, 15 May 2022).

The neighborhood creates the Sunday Face, an interreligious discussion initiative, as a follow-up to that strategy. It is a forum for open discussion between members of the Hare Krishna movement and individuals of other faiths. According to a personal interview with the chief priest conducted on May 15, 2022, the program's objectives are to deepen and improve the HK community's understanding of other religious people and their religions as well as to strengthen the community's existence as both a Hindu-belonging community and a cross-religious community.

It typically takes place every Sunday at 13:00. Numerous people of various religions are involved. Participants in this discourse from Kisumu town's indigenous religious branches, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and others, are invited. Participants in this discourse range in educational background, from the uninitiated to academics, and come from a variety of professions, including economists, socialists, theologians, anthropologists, farmers, and traders, among others. It is frequently set up in casual settings to prevent stalled dialogue. Before beginning the sharing process in any activity, each participant is asked to hug the others. Without interruption from others, one should be able to directly present themselves and speak for themselves. In order to have a

deeper conversation about various subjects, it is necessary that all participants first establish pleasant relationships with one another (personal interview with chief priest, May 15, 2022).

Theology, personal problems, social difficulties, and even ecological challenges are shared within the group. Participants from many religions are given opportunities to express their own opinions, as well as hear those of others. Following the exercise, the participants are able to suggest some recommendations or fixes for prevalent problems.

Sunday Face becomes a crucial opportunity for the HK community to learn more about different religions, enhance their understanding of them, and discuss some pressing concerns that have recently arisen in Kisumu County. They can gain firsthand knowledge of faiths, their doctrines, practices, and even some pleasant experiences from their devotees through this discourse. In addition, they are given the chance to collaborate with others and deal with some major issues that are currently plaguing the many communities in Kisumu County.

One of the participants expressed her happiness with the program because it improves Hindus' relationships with other religious people in Kisumu County by lowering stereotypes, stigma, and prejudices held by others toward Hindus and vice versa. Additionally, it lessens the likelihood that people would collide, create fresh tension, or engage in new conflict. The participants interact with one another more frequently, talk to one another, and listen to one another in order to develop better perspectives and attitudes toward other people.

Additionally, the majority of the members are convinced that interreligious communication is crucial since it is their responsibility as humans to forge peaceful connections with others. A harmonious relationship can only be achieved through getting to know someone better. They assert that interreligious dialogue embodies both Sri Krishna's teachings on the four different forms of yoga namely karma yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti yoga and Raja yoga. All of them place a strong emphasis on the maturation of bhakti, love, and submission as prerequisites for men to approach and obtain God's grace.

Bhakti Yoga includes discussions across different religions. The group also organizes conferences, seminars, and discussions on social and environmental issues. These activities are carried out in consultation and collaboration with people of various faiths. In addition, they frequently take part in kerja bakti with other residents of Kisumu as a way of showing their appreciation for the community surrounding them. They have more time to socialize, converse, and get to know one another thanks to kerja bakti. They believe that if they can connect with and help others, they would be happy.

Diverse encounters with the Divine are unavoidable in a multicultural world. It is impossible to claim to have had a true encounter with the Divine or to have knowledge of it solely through a particular religious tradition. Religion is a link with humanity, as well as a private relationship with the Divine. These two dimensions have for a very long time drawn people of various religious backgrounds into conflicts and wars fought for the sake of various religions. Despite religions, relations have historically been characterized by conflict, rivalry, and bloodshed, but in the last 20 years, there have been numerous attempts to foster new levels of mutual understanding.

The religious encounter between adherents of other religions postulates the necessity of getting to know, comprehending, and respecting one another in order to avoid future conflict and violence. For religious people to better understand one another as human beings, breaking the silence and engaging in discussion is both a wise thought and deed. Discussion is required. It is essentially a communication act, with sporadic occurrences of two processes. Through discourse, the speaker and the listener decode information, encode a response, switch roles, and experience linearity (Sugunasiri, 1996).

Undoubtedly, today's religious conversation may be a highly successful means of fostering and strengthening people's understanding of others. Everyone has the opportunity to communicate their values through this type of discussion, as well as to listen to and learn from those of others, and it can occur on several levels. Two worldviews interact in interreligious dialogue. However, it plays a significant part in promoting interreligious action, as well as interreligious tolerance. Interreligious discussion addresses both the capacity for coexistence and the capacity for cooperation (Swidler and Mojlez, 2000). This expression implies that one always gets along with

others or does not interact with them in daily activities. We converse with one another and engage in interaction.

Real interreligious communication is difficult in a country like Kenya where individuals come from various racial and religious backgrounds. But bringing individuals together and making them a part of the same nation has always been a crucial aspect. On the one hand, regular interactions between Kenyans of various races, religions, cultures, and countries may give rise to tension, clashes, and conflicts between various groups and people. As a result, these terms must be carefully negotiated through some measures that allow people to voice their concerns.

Knitter said that genuine interreligious communication goes beyond simple small talk, in which people converse primarily to be polite to one another. It involves more than just sharing facts to improve mutual understanding (Knitter, 2010). Because it is a genuine discussion in which people speak and listen to one another and open their minds to others. It transcends the boundaries of a covert relationship. It is also a place where people argue with each other about what they hold to be true and important while also being open to being persuaded by what their partners hold or believe to be true and useful.

### **6.3.1 Conceptual Models of Peace Building**

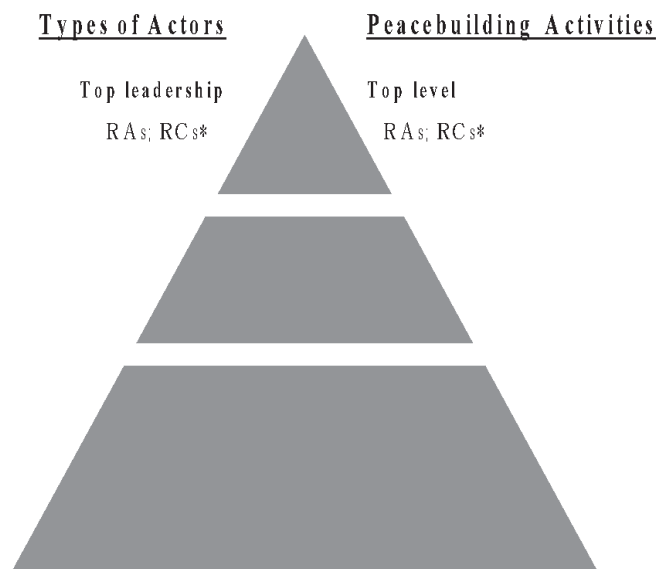
On several tools created by the facilitators that theoretically described the conflict environment in Kisumu, discussions amongst the religious groups were built. Dr. John Paul Lederach's triangle was employed in one session. It led to the creation of a model of the Kisumu society's users of peace-making techniques. In this concept, the imaginary society or group is split horizontally into the top, medium, and grassroots levels of leadership. The number of people declines from vast numbers at the base or grassroots to relatively few toward the peak of the triangle as one climbs up the triangle vertically from the base.

The existence of separate strata of peacemakers was revealed to the leaders. The same individuals at a certain leadership stratum can act as a peacemaker. It is suggested that the top leadership in a peacebuilding project is either most crucial or inconsequential. Participation in the peace endeavor depends on how a person responds in a particular

circumstance. Leaders at the top of the triangle have a broad perspective and an expansive understanding of the social environment. However, they are frequently far away from the local tangible events that most people experience every day.

Individuals near the bottom of the social scale are more likely to add a nuanced grasp of their immediate surroundings. They, in turn, frequently lack the "written large" perspective of what is happening in the group or society. Merdjanova contends that the most successful peacebuilding takes place when leaders from different groups transcend the borders of their stratum and cooperate with those from other strata.

Middle-level leadership is frequently positioned to serve as a bridge between top-level and grassroots leadership. The participants were informed that in cultures where significant religious groups are at odds with one another or with the government, is this situation also true? Minority religious organizations can occasionally act as constructive mediators, or a single person or a small group can change positions of authority.



Church leaders in Kisumu were cited as an example who helped to broker peace during the unrest following the 2007–2008 elections. Such exclusive contacts may provide top leadership and grassroots viewpoints on a particular issue during crises. Zacheus Okoth (Catholic Diocese of Kisumu) and Archbishop Ogunyo Ngede (Power of Jesus over the world) from Kisumu County appear to fill this duty.

The Lederach Triangle is further improved by the Head of Hare Krishna community Temple in Mlimani. He observes that internal groupings with a shared (religious) orientation toward a conflict scenario can be found inside the various strata. Youth, a gender group, ties to an ethnic group, individual religious actors (RAs), or religious clusters (RC) of such actors might make up these clusters.

This final category is obviously very important to how we view interreligious dialogue as a means of fostering peace. The religious organizations can be a strong force for peace building depending on their influence in a community and their capacity for cooperation. This provides the crucial foundation for interreligious communication. The fundamental lesson Lederach and Merdjanova impart to us is that cooperation between and within a society's/group's social levels facilitates a society's/group's progress toward peace (Headley, 2020).

#### **6.4 Summary**

Religious individuals will be helped and inspired to change inaccurate perceptions, stereotypes, stigmas, prejudices, and even incorrect pictures of others through interreligious conversation and cooperation amongst religious communities. In order to achieve harmony and balance in life, the ideals of Ahimsa in Hinduism and love in Christianity can be used as entry points for discourse. In order to develop a better mind and attitude toward others, one could contribute their capacity for self-dialogue, or the ability and willingness to engage in discussion with themselves. The foundation for creating dialogical thought also requires us to develop our capacity for self-dialogue. We can learn how interreligious dialogue can be developed as a way of life for religious people in Kisumu County from the Hare Krishna group. We can build good, original, and helpful understanding between ourselves and others through interreligious discourse that is founded on transparency, honesty, and sincerity.

It's also critical to remember that the Krishna consciousness movement may promote peaceful coexistence and harmony in Africa, preventing racial or territorial disputes brought on by a lack of true spiritual awareness. A society based on peace and fraternity can only be realized if Krishna is acknowledged as the creator of all living things. A Krishna conscious individual regards all living beings as equals by virtue of his spiritual

education, as stated in the Bhagavad-gita, panditah sama-darsinah. He is able to comprehend that the physical body is just the spirit soul's transitory outer covering.

An individual who has attained spiritual enlightenment is therefore immune to hostility and conflict caused by transient racial, national, tribal, or other corporeal distinctions. One who is unable to look beyond the body would inevitably think in terms of the body and be swayed by corporeal prejudices. The actual spiritual brotherhood of all people, on the other hand, is spontaneously acknowledged by one who has been taught to regard Krishna as the father of all living things. Without this Krishna consciousness, all discussions of brotherhood are merely hypothetical and conditional, or, to put it another way, utopian. However, brotherhood is achieved just by recognizing Krishna as the greatest Father, which happens immediately. The Krishna consciousness movement is extending this straightforward and organic approach to universal brotherhood to the African people.

The Krishna consciousness movement is giving Africa the chance to build a society based on concurrent economic, technological, and spiritual growth by disseminating the Hare Krishna mantra and the understanding of the Vedic literature throughout that continent. The only way the people of Africa and the rest of the globe can create a prosperous society for a life of peace and prosperity is on the foundation of such a balanced agenda of material and spiritual advancement.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The methods by which ISKCON arrived in Kenya and the types of activities that went along with the initial sowing of Hare Krishna consciousness in Mombasa and Nairobi were covered in earlier chapters. They have also looked at ISKCON's doctrines, beliefs, and practices, as well as the admissions procedure, noting that admittance is a progressive process controlled by ritualization techniques. The last chapter covered the methods ISKCON used to promote peace through interreligious dialogue.

In this last chapter, we review some of the most important findings and arguments from the study and reevaluate the movement's applicability in Kenya.

#### **7.2 Summary of Findings**

##### **7.2.1 Spread and Establishment of Hare Krishna movement in Kenya and Kisumu**

Gaudiya Vaishnavism, a branch of Hinduism, is the official name of the Hare Krishna movement. Its mantra, Hare Krishna, which followers repeatedly recite, gave rise to the organization's name. Sri Chaitanya of Bengal (1486–1533) founded it in the sixteenth century. He placed a strong emphasis on Krishna worship and held that the recitation of God's name was so potent that it should be done publicly as well as privately for the benefit of mankind. The movement, technically known as the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, was introduced to the United States by Swami Prabhupada in 1966, from which point it expanded to the rest of Africa.

Mombasa was the first port of entry into Kenya from Bombay, and His Holiness Brahmananda Svami, who was in charge of the Lord Siva temple in Mombasa, welcomed the community there. They first only preached to Indian nationals in Kenya. They would travel from house to house while staying at various Indians' homes in Nairobi, strictly adhering to the Vedic prohibition against sannyasis staying in one spot for longer than three days.

His Divineness at Nairobi's Kamakunji Park, Brahmananda Svami and his group of followers staged their first outdoor kirtana concert where they sang and distributed bundi, a sweet dish that the crowd really enjoyed. They conducted sankirtana processions and

handed out literature right in the middle of Nairobi's business district. The popular national dish of Kenya, maize, meal, and cabbage, might be distributed as prasada in the nearby villages. In 1969, the first ISKCON temples founded by Srila Prabhupada were built in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya. They held a full schedule of events, including kirtana, film screenings, lectures, life membership enrollments, and the distribution of literature and prasada.

### **7.2.2 Hare Krishna's beliefs and practices.**

The Hare Krishna movement adherents consider themselves to be monotheistic. Krishna is the highest God, according to the holy books Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavat Purana, who is in charge of millions of demigods who are regarded as in charge of managing the affairs of the universe. To manage creation, these demigods are required. They play specific roles, yet these demigods work at Krishna's pleasure, much as the secretary of state answers to the president. Radharani, Krishna's female counterpart or aspect, frequently travels with him.

Krishna is everlasting, all-wise, always present, supremely strong, and alluring. All living things owe their existence to Him, and He also serves as the universe's main source of energy. He is the same God as Jehovah, Buddha, and The Father of Allah.

The mantra's sound vibration, according to Hare Krishnas, has a direct effect on the soul. Ancient Indian philosophy holds that the soul remains spiritually dormant. The Hare Krishna mantra awakens the soul to its spiritual reality, allowing it to realize its eternal connection with Krishna or God, just like an alarm clock awakens a sleeping person. Because the sound vibration of the mantra transcends the sensual, cerebral, and intellectual levels of consciousness and puts one in direct contact with the spiritual, believers hold that one need not grasp the language of the mantra.

The movement follows and holds to the principles of reincarnation and karma. Karma is the punishment a person receives for their past deeds, and it is derived both from the present life and previous lifetimes. The Hare Krishna doctrine holds that humans do not necessarily reincarnate as humans. Some are, but others are elevated to even higher forms, beyond what we currently understand, and still others are demoted to lesser

species. Whether or not one lives in accordance with nature's laws will determine one's future status. Only humans are able to break free from the endless cycle of birth and death. We are immortal spirit souls, not our physical bodies, and we are all a part of God (Krishna). Therefore, we are all brothers, and our common father is Krishna. We acknowledge the process of the soul's reincarnation.

Animals are considered to be children of Krishna, created by God with a soul, according to Hare Krishnas. Thus, eating an animal is a sin against God. Additionally, eating meat, fish, or poultry is detrimental for your consciousness since it exposes you to more violent ideas and possibly violent behavior since the slaughter of animals is violent.

A sincere spiritual teacher, one who has no ulterior intentions and whose mind is set firmly on Krishna, is the best source from whom one can gain the Vedic wisdom. Chanting the holy names of the Lord is advised in order to reach the mature stage of God's love in this Kali, or conflict, era. Most individuals find that reciting the Hare Krishna mantra, Hare Krishna, is the simplest strategy. Pranam Krishna Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare Krishna Hare Hare.

### **7.2.3 Teachings on peace and interfaith dialogue strategy in Kisumu County**

Participants discussed the "reciprocal nature" and the need to let go of preconceived notions and judgments in order to forge relationships, as described by Gurin et al. (2001). This supports the findings of Ziga et al. (2007) that developing friendships with people who think differently is a prerequisite for fruitful discussion. Small (2009) placed equal emphasis on the capacity for conversation over difference through storytelling as Ziga et al. What each participant meant when they used the term relationship was explained by their personal narratives. The ideology of Hare Krishna, which "mutually inspires relationships between people of different backgrounds," was reflected in their descriptions.

The relationship's context was significant to the participants and facilitated their ability to freely express their experiences. According to participant accounts, Taylor (2004) stressed that "relationship is sometimes the context for the ideas people hold" (p. 18). In Flores' (2006) dissertation on seeing the religious other through interfaith discussion and

how this connects to religion and peace promotion, the theme of stressing individuals rather than ideas was woven throughout.

Participants described relationships as the center of the communication process, which was consistent with Taylor's (2004) result that the emphasis on relationships is the communication process' anchor in intergroup interaction. Building ties with people and exchanging tales, according to the participants, helped them to lessen their own intergroup prejudice. This concurs with past research suggesting that intergroup bias is decreased when people interact with those who are different from them (see Viera's (2012)

Participants in the study tried to comprehend other people's worldviews and utilized interfaith conversation as a way to learn more about themselves. This supported one of Beversluis' (2000) guidelines for interfaith conversation, which reads, "Dialogue to seek understanding of other persons' beliefs" (p. 127). As Swindler (2002) noted, "In dialogue each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as possible in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within as possible" (p. 9), the participants repeatedly emphasized the significance of listening in the pursuit of understanding.

Empathetic listening was discussed by several people. One of the eight pillars of pluralistic conversation, the letting go of judgments in order to remain open to the experience of the religious other, was illustrated through instances woven throughout the narratives (Keaten & Soukup, 129 2009). Participants realized that in order to reach this understanding, they had to embrace their own religious or nonreligious traditions. Interfaith discussion entails clinging to our own beliefs while also attempting to comprehend those of others. For both people to honestly convey their religions, it demands sincerity and respect from its participants.

**Increasing Personal Faith** Each person brought a distinct history to the interfaith discourse. It became clear from the participants' stories and definitions of interfaith discussion that involvement had enriched each person's sense of self, whether they identified as religious or not. Participants felt stronger and more rooted in their unique

heritage as a result of widening their upbringing and confronting their personal faith or non-faith tradition.

Participants were able to articulate how their own religious identities had become clearer as a result of their involvement in interfaith discourse, which supported Viera's (2012) finding that "interfaith dialogue increased participants' clarity about their religious identity" (p. i). This was a reiteration of Perry's (1968) idea of plurality and growth through comprehension and many viewpoints.

Participants in the study progressed past an exclusivist perspective on religion that was reflected in Rine's (2012) analysis of a Christian spirituality theory. Rine discovered that upholding one's own faith and encouraging diverse debate were not mutually exclusive. Interfaith communication has the potential to "empower people to remain committed to their personal faith traditions while at the same time exhibiting openness toward pluralism." (Rine, 2012, p. 827). The results of Rine's research supported earlier studies on moral commitment by Perry (1998), communal faith by Park (1986), and conjunctive faith by Fowler (1981).

### **7.3 Conclusions**

Religions are always being negotiated, and they change over time. An appropriate illustration of a religion that has dramatically changed in reaction to multiple dynamic internal and external circumstances is the ISKCON movement. Religions are dynamic, which is clearly demonstrated by interreligious dialogue. Religion scholars should recognize the dynamism present in religion and how it is malleable and adaptable as new situations arise that are pertinent to it. The ISKCON movement has endured despite the passing of its founder; other NRMs have not been as fortunate. However, in other instances, especially in some NRMs, religions die out as a result of difficulties and situations they are unable to overcome.

In Kenya, multiculturalism is a reality, but rather than resolving disputes or acting as a unifying force, it frequently fuels them. Lack of insight and information about others frequently fuels people's willingness to respect and accept others. The Kisumu County Hare Krishna group works to improve the aforementioned conditions in Kenya and also teaches people how to manage variety as a strength to create a better society. The

ISKCON community and its grassroots interreligious dialogue initiatives have some beneficial effects. Interreligious discussion helps to lessen preconceptions and misconceptions that have undoubtedly always existed between communities. The dialogue process helps people grow and change in their ability to perceive and understand others. Naturally, these circumstances have a positive impact on Kisumu's communities' social lives.

By encouraging a peaceful way of life, Hare Krishna activities have, in a larger context, promoted constructive respect between Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists in Kisumu. Religious ideas and doctrines offered by Hare Krishna have been utilized to build trust amongst individuals and are also founded on an attitude of honesty and sincerity to listen to and learn from others. Furthermore, Hare Krishna teachings encourage Kisumu's religious communities to uphold better religious bonds. Indeed, in order to prevent religious extremism and egotism in this heterogeneous culture, more amicable connections are crucial.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

The findings of this study have a number of social ramifications. The results show that the participants' lived experiences are influenced by their surroundings, their concentration on relationships, and their ecumenical worldview, which strengthened their religious or nonreligious traditions. The findings of this study can provide stakeholders with information about the advantages that society recognizes and can act as a catalyst for the creation of programs in this field. Educational institutions must commit staff, physical resources, and financial resources to creating and maintaining interfaith dialogue programs in order for students to have the chance to participate in these high-quality discussions. Only by fostering an environment that values and encourages interfaith discourse can this be possible.

The development and maintenance of volunteer opportunities and religious immersion programs must be funded in order to provide a forum for interfaith discussion. Communities must be provided with educational and training opportunities if they are to become more religiously literate. Anyone who traditionally does not fit into the current paradigm of religion must be included in the topic of who is included in the faith conversation.

The creation of intentional interfaith discussion-fostering environments and the expansion of interfaith dialogue forms to incorporate experiential learning opportunities are both recommended. Education and training should be used to raise religious literacy. Additionally, the subject of faith needs to be broadened to include the secular and other perspectives that do not conform to the dominant religious paradigm.

### **7.5 Future Research**

Numerous research areas are suggested to further investigate the study's findings and give educators more information about how to get institutional backing, resources, space, and staffing for interfaith discourse. Future investigation should focus on the role that the environment, experience opportunities, and secular population have in interfaith interaction. Additionally, investigating these core areas through long-term research that track behavior change would advance the body of knowledge on interfaith communication.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Title of Study:** Planting the seed of Hare Krishna consciousness in Kenya: the activities and beliefs of Hare Krishna in Kisumu County, Kenya

Name: Carolyne Achieng Asiyo

#### Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study examining the activities and beliefs of Hare Krishna in Kisumu county, Kenya.
- You were selected as a possible participant because we are interested in activities and beliefs of Hare Krishna in Kisumu county, Kenya.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### Purpose of Study

- The main purpose of this thesis is to analyse the activities and beliefs of Hare Krishna in Kisumu county, Kenya. The thesis therefore aims to investigate the change in intergroup relations in Kisumu as a result of the activities of Hare Krishna movement.

#### Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: conduct a recorded interview; possibly be asked to supplement answers through email.

#### Confidentiality

- The full names and respective responses from the interviews will only be available to Carolyne Asiyo. If we refer to a participant in this study, we will only use sex and sectarian affiliation. We will try to summarize responses as much as possible, for example, more than half of the participant ... The responses to the interviews of this study will be kept strictly confidential. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

#### Payments

- There will be no reimbursement for participating in this study.

#### Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study, or the local government. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the study at any point during the process.

#### Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by Carolyne Asiyo before, during or after the research. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you

## Appendix II: Permission to Conduct Study and Confidentiality Statement

ISKCON RESIDENT DEVOTEES

Dear Respondent,

**Carolyné Asiyo Z4552/2014**

1. I am currently registered for my Master of Arts Degree in Religion at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology
2. The names of my supervisors are:  
Dr Hezekiah Obuoge of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology  
Dr .Napoo Naila of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology
3. The title of my thesis is: Planting the seed of Hare Krishna consciousness in Kenya: the activities and beliefs of Hare Krishna in Kisumu County, Kenya
4. The aim of the study is to explore some of the possible lifestyle and value changes devotees undergo, and how the context in which they live helps to construct their identities as devotees.
5. I have explained the study to, obtained permission from the Spiritual Head of ISKCON Kisumu to approach devotees of this Temple to conduct my study. I have expressed to them that I wished to interview devotees with more than five years residency at the Temple. This is why you have been identified and approached as a potential respondent to the interview.
6. Through a comprehensive series of interviews I wish to elicit information about your personal experiences that made you devotee and as well as your experiences in the Krishna Consciousness Movement, particularly those that have to do with how you develop your identity as a devotee.
7. The process will be a semi-structured, semi-formal interview situation, where I ask you to respond verbally to a series of questions from an interview schedule that I have already drawn up. Our interview will be recorded to enable me to transcribe and analyze the information later. Please be assured that all information gathered from the interview, its recording and interpretation thereof will be treated with the strictest confidence and used for study purposes only. Your names will not be used in the study.
9. I would like to interview you at least twice, each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes, and then meet with you once again(or forward you a copy of the transcript) so that you can verify the transcript of our interview.
10. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any stage for any reason without explanation to me.

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Carolyné Asiyo

Date.....

## **Appendix III: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: Resident Devotees**

### **History**

1. When did you first come into contact with the Hare Krishna movement?
2. What was your first impression of that encounter? What did you initially find most attractive in ISKCON?
3. What did you do prior to joining the Temple? (Why did you give that up?)
4. Describe some of your personal thoughts about life and its purpose prior to you becoming a devotee?
5. Was there any crisis in your life preceding your decision to join the Temple?
6. How did ISKCON spread into Kenya
7. What are the memorable activities conducted by ISKCON on its introduction in Kenya
7. Explain how the religion came to Kisumu

### **Temple**

1. What are the symbolic features of the temple?
2. What meanings do they hold?
3. Which deity is worshipped at the ISKCON temple in Kisumu?
4. Which cultural programmes are conducted in the temple?.

### **Culture**

1. Are there any similarities to the religion you were practising prior to becoming a devotee and Krishna consciousness? Are there any differences? Please tell me about these also.
2. Do you still practice your traditional cultural activities now that you are a devotee?
3. If yes, what are they? How do you reconcile them with Krishna consciousness?
4. If no, why did you give them up?
5. Are your family members devotees?
6. How do you family members regard your practice of Krishna Consciousness?
7. What is your relationship with them like?
8. How do you regard what they do?
9. The dress of a devotee - sari or dhoti and kurta - is peculiar to an Indian culture. Why do you adopt this type of dressing? Did you ever feel that Krishna

consciousness has an Indian identity?

10. How do you relate to that since you are from a different population group/cultural background? (Note: use if relevant)

11. Did you accept the teachings of Krishna consciousness immediately or was it gradual?

### **Identity**

1. Prior to becoming a devotee, what were your thoughts about who you really were?
2. What do you understand to be your "true self"?
3. What do you understand to be the real identity of a person?
4. In what ways do you think society / education helped or interfered with your understanding of your true self?
5. What are some of the activities or behaviour that you would regard as being consistent with the true self?
6. Do you feel your behaviour as a devotee is actually in concordance with your true self, or are you simply doing what is expected of you to please others.

### **Lifestyle**

1. Who is a guru? What is the need for guru?
2. Is there any place for one's individuality in a spiritual movement? How does that individuality express itself? Is the need for a guru and the idea of one's individual self-contradictory? How is that resolved?
3. Would you marry? Would you marry a devotee from a different population group? Why/ Why not?
4. Describe some of the changes you have personally undergone since you became a devotee?

### **Food, clothing, attitudes, values)**

1. What are some of the religious practices you are now engaged in as a devotee?
2. Please describe your typical daily devotee schedule?
3. How do you feel these have contributed to your identity as a devotee?
4. What are the other factors in your environment that help you identify yourself as a devotee?
5. Do you think that the devotee identity is imposed upon the devotee by external factors just as much as one would develop the identity of another culture by growing up in that culture?

6. If you were to choose one activity/experience within ISKCON that has a deep spiritual significance for you, what would it be? Please describe your feelings/emotions associated with that.
7. What are some of your any doubts at times about being a devotee? Describe your self-doubts or any regrets about joining.
8. Describe some of your anxieties as a devotee.
9. Have you ever felt any tensions because of factors of race or language or culture within the Organization? Or gender?
10. Does Krishna consciousness allow you to truly experience your own feelings about issues? Are your opinions accepted?
11. What happens when you have some crisis in your life in ISKCON? How would you resolve it?
12. Have you considered that you could leave the temple in the future? What would you be able to do in such a situation? What would be the impact of that on your identity?
13. What do you see yourself doing with your life from now onwards?

### **Conclusion**

14. What do you think are the reasons why people from different cultures, languages or religions can come together to practice Krishna Consciousness?

### **Interfaith dialogue**

What are the objectives of ISKCON'S interfaith dialogue?

Why do you think it is a good activity for Kisumu County?

Which groups are involved in the activities in Kisumu?

How relevant are the philosophical and religious teachings on peace?

## Appendix IV: NACOSTI Letter



REPUBLIC OF KENYA



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR  
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Ref No: **165810**

Date of Issue: **25/February/2022**

### RESEARCH LICENSE



**This is to Certify that Ms.. Carolyne Achieng Asiyo of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, has been licensed to conduct research in Kisumu on the topic: PLANTING THE SEED OF HARE KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS IN KENYA: THE ACTIVITIES AND BELIEFS OF HARE KRISHNA IN KISUMU COUNTY, KENYA for the period ending : 25/February/2023.**

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## **GLOSSARY**

**Acharya:** an individual who consistently adheres to the teachings of Krishna in both their personal life and their instructional practices.

**Aratik :** a form of religious devotion wherein individuals present offerings, such as lamps, to deities or spiritual teachers.

**Asana:** In the old Indian social classes of brahmachari, grihastha, vanaprastha, and sannyasi

**Ashram:** is a stage of life.

**Atma :** Self or soul,

**Krishna:** God

**Bhajan:** a song that is typically more contemplative than kirtan.

**Bhakti:** a form of devotion to God marked by passionate love

**Bhakti-yoga:** connecting with God via acts of devotion.

**Brahma:** According to ISKCON doctrine, he is Krishna's chosen agent for creating the universe.

**Brahma:** The devotees undergoing Brahmin (second) initiation are given the mantra Gayatri.

**ISKCON:** stems from the Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya sampradaya, a Vaisnava tradition that dates back to Caitanya. Mahaprabhu

**Brahmachari:** a student who is celibate

**Brahman:** the unchanging absolute..

**Brahmanas or Brahmins:** Members of the priestly caste in traditional Hindu society

**Dasa or dasi:** used as a suffix in the names of devotees to denote their status as a "servant" of the deity;

**Dharma:** One's primary obligation. Also alludes to spiritual principles and religion

**Dhoti :** is a basic cloth that men wear as part of their traditional attire in India.

**Diksha :** is an official initiation.

**Diksha-guru:** a guru who initiates.

**Gaudiya Vaisnavism:** is a branch of Vaisnavism that is particularly prevalent in Bengal and is derived from Gauda, another name for Bengal.

**Grihastha:** domestic life and marriage

**Guru:** a teacher, particularly a spiritual mentor or guide. This term is used in ISKCON to describe the spiritual leader.

**Guru-puja:** is the act of offering worship to a guru or Bhaktivedanta Swami's murti.

**Hare Hare/Hare Hare Rama Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare** Congregational chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra is known as harinam sankirtan.

**Janmashtami:** Aday of celebrating Krishna's birthday

**Japa:** rosary recital with a personal mantra

**Jiva:** the soul or a living being

**Jnana:** Knowledge or enlightenment

**Karratalas:** Hand cymbals

**Karma:** Material action and its effects

**Krishna:** is referred to in ISKCON theology as the "Supreme Lord" and is chanted **in**

**Kirtan:** a raucous form of bhajan that uses musical instruments to proclaim the sacred names of God.

**Madhyama-adhikari:** a beginner in the path of devotion.

**Mangala-aratik :** as a daily service before dawn.

**Mantra:** a chant with great spiritual force

**Maya:** According to ISKCON doctrine, the energy of Krishna that rules the material world

**Mayavadi:** adherent to a doctrine of God that is impersonal.

**Moksa.** Liberation from the endless cycle of life

**Mirdanga:** A two-headed drum originally fashioned of clay

**Murti:** divinity, a recognized deity that is revered in temples

**Nama hatta:** a congregation of worshippers who meet to debate the scriptures

**Nitya-baddha:** a constantly evolving soul the series of disciplics, referring to the ultimate, fundamental truth.

**Puja:** prayer.

**Pujari:** a priest in a temple.

**Radha:** The spouse of Krishna.

**The Jagannath:** Deity of Krishna is carried in a joyful procession during the Ratha-y cart festival.

**Sampradaya:** a custom, institution, movement, or lineage.

**Sankirtana:** is the collective recitation of God's name.

**Sannyasi:** Member of the renounced order of life.

**Swami :** A member of the renounced order of life.

**Tilak:** clay inscriptions made by devotees on the forehead and other body areas.

**Tulasi:** a sacred basil plant that worshippers believe is beloved to Krishna.

**Uttama-adhikari:** a follower reaching the pinnacle of devotion.

**Vishnu, or vaisnava :** devotee of Krishna.

**Vyasa :** was a Vedic sage who is credited with compiling the Vedanta-sutra and the Mahabharata, two of the four Vedas Puranas.

**Vyavaharika:** everyday occurrences In ISKCON temples.

**Vyasaana :** Seat of honor granted to the lecturer.

**Yoga:** various ascetic or religious practices for "linking with God".