



**SURRENDER TO KRISHNA : RELIGIOUS
CONVERSION AND CULTURAL CHANGE.**

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ABSTRACT.

The major purpose of this dissertation is to examine core ideas relating to theories of conversion into New Religious Movements and assess whether such can be broadened in respect of issues of individual and wider cultural change, and in doing so consider the connections between religious experience as a cultural expression and other patterns of belief and meaning within the total human experience. This is realised through the use of qualitative conversion narratives of four Hare Krishna devotees obtained in unstructured 'free attitude' interviews (conversations), and participational observations of that movement geared towards gaining an explorative, and where possible an indigenous picture of the life-world of Hare Krishna and assessing whether considerations of conversion, identity, meaning and belief evident in popular theory have any hold on that reality. On this basis it is suggested that conversion models do not adequately deal with questions of meaning and present a one dimensional picture of passive individuals being 'pushed' into conversion by social-psychological 'predispositions' or situational organisational and interactive forces, outside their control. It is argued that more emphasis needs to be paid to the specific belief systems and general 'ideological positioning' of both group and individual during conversion, in terms of the causal dynamics behind individual life-choices and the negotiated relationship between both parties over time, and that, if one employs such a shift, conversion becomes more recognisable as a site of self-transformation, and can accordingly be linked to micro as well as macro cultural change in modernity.

CHAPTER ONE.

UNDERLYING ISSUES.

Literature rarely problematises sufficiently questions as to the cultural significance of conversion experiences into religious ideologies in relation to the changing nature of social life in 'modernity'. Can we even entertain such questions, considering the rather vague handle we have on what it means for individuals to be in a 'state of conversion' in the first place? Can we pin-point when an individual can be said to 'have been converted' in terms of a qualitative 'state', or in comparison to a wider population or to individuals who may only claim to be converts? Traditionally conversion theory has not adequately dealt with these questions of meaning, presenting a one dimensional picture of passive individuals being 'pushed' into conversion by forces outside their control. Causal weight as to the reasons behind conversion into New Religious Movements (NRMs) has usually concentrated on social-psychological 'predispositions' acting on individuals or, more recently, the situational organisational and interactive dynamics of the movements, as core to conversion.

This dissertation suggests that not enough emphasis is paid to the specific belief systems and general 'ideological positioning' of both group and individual at the time of contact and subsequent conversion, in terms of the causal dynamics behind individual life-choices and the negotiated relationship between both parties over time. It is argued that if one employs such a shift, conversion becomes more recognisable as a site of individual power and self-transformation, and can accordingly be linked to micro as well as macro cultural change in modernity. There is reason and need for such an emphasis, both in terms of locating the broader significance of conversion as a type of social action that is related to a wider set of relations pertaining to the shifting grounds of modern meaning and identity, and also in terms of the stigmas attached to many of these movements concerning issues of personal autonomy and social control. The purpose of this dissertation is to debate core ideas relating to conversion theory, and through the use of conversion narratives of Hare Krishna devotees and participational observations, to assess whether existing theory can be broadened in respect of these issues of individual and wider cultural change.

Before moving on to these concerns it is necessary to discuss some underlying issues relating to religious experience in order to locate the necessity for a reconsideration of conversion theory. What is the sociological purpose behind researching religious conversion into 'new' belief systems and ways of life? What exactly constitutes 'the sacred' and what methodological orientation should one employ? Differing methodologies, behavioural assumptions, initial premises and paradigm preferences have contributed to the conceptual confusion afflicting studies of religion, limiting empirical comparisons and

cumulative knowledge within religious research (Robbins:1988:14,64-66). This possibly accounts for the fact that conversion studies have in the past not centralised emergent developments within social theory around ideas of individual identity, subjective cultural meaning and power, and wider structural and cultural change. This is an unsatisfactory situation as religious experience and particularly conversion, has much to offer in our broader understanding of modern social life.

The tendency of humans to find and construct meaning in and of their life-worlds and to believe, (never fully or indefinitely?) in a central idea, rejecting competing world-views, offers rich opportunity to scholars of human behaviour and cultural form. Is this a specifically modern trend? In times past, individuals held particular beliefs simply because they had no access to alternative world-views, having neither choice nor need to challenge a dominant world-view or choose a different life-style. Crude though such an assertion may be, it brings to mind that humans existing in a 'modern' western capitalist urban world, are enabled with an rich array of world building frameworks, while simultaneously living within a cultural fabric that, although containing a dominant 'moral economy' is also flux and uncertain, and individuals have both need and opportunity to search out 'new ways of being'. Why and how people come to internalise particular belief systems is the broad preoccupation here.

It seems obvious that the idea of conversion as representing some sort of personal change or reorientation in an individual, should be a concept naturally linked to the range of ideas in social theory about subjective meaning and cultural change and the relation of such to identity. However, despite a legacy of ideas that suggests links between religious experience as the social construction of cosmology's within the subjective 'meaning' dimension of social life and the 'make-up' of the modern human form within the changing conditions of modernity, and despite an earlier emphasis in the 1970s on the motivational facets of individual conversions, these connections between conversion, identity and wider change have not been incorporated systematically into conversion theory. Indeed recent trends have been to reject the relevance of individual 'motivational' factors as pivotal to conversion.

Robertson (1979:190), considers the type of connections that one would imagine to be manifest: "The thrust of the present discussion consists in sifting and distilling the idea of conversion and themes that bear a family resemblance to it, with an eye to their relationship to culture. The initial motivation to undertake a reconnaissance of 'the conversion area' derived from sensing the seeming irony of there being, on the one hand widespread concern with issues such as paradigm switches, cognitive revolutions, modernization, identity changes, Becoming Deviant, Becoming Modern, etc., and, on the other hand, a lack of direct concern with conversion among sociologists of religion. Further consideration leads to the belief that issues which have been dealt with under

many rubrics suggesting very significant changes in and of social entities (particularly, but not only, individuals) might well be enhanced by injecting considerations derived from a sociology-of-religion focus on conversion ... But it is more recently dwelled-upon phenomena which primarily interests us in their proximity to matters often dealt with - certainly in everyday discourse - in relation to the idea of conversion. We think of such motifs as 'identity voyages', 'consciousness raising', 'trans-sexual journeys', 'life-style changes', altered states of consciousness', and so on (as well as more obvious phenomena of religious and ideological change)."

Here Robertson links the idea of conversion as a type of individual transformation to wider cultural change, suggesting that conversion as an idea and a field of enquiry, should be linked to micro-cultural occurrences of individual change in belief and meaning orientation, and how such relate to macro-cultural change in modern society, and that scholars studying religion in the context of wider society would do well to look at conversion in relation to this parcel of phenomena. This intuitive leap is still embryonic and although sociologists of religion have followed their noses and begun to unravel the complexities of conversion, resulting in a prolific amount of empirical and theoretical work focusing directly on this subject in last few decades, much of this work has not been linked to issues of individual and wider cultural change.

One imagines that the modern experience of conversion would have causal connections to shifting modern identities, the cultural fabric such identities are embedded within, and change. In the last century a large body of work has concentrated on changing identities in a modernising world, much of which is yet to be directly linked to conversion, and, although work pertaining to the emergence and proliferation of NRMs has indirectly contextualised such in terms of individual conversion and wider change (for example, to name a few, Bird's (1978) typological examination of NRMs as a responses to moral ambiguity, Beckford's (1984) equation of NRMs as transformative in terms of 'healing' issues, Wallis's (1978) understanding of NRMs as groups that are ideologically positioned in the world in terms of cultural values, Hannigan's (1991) suggestion for a link between new social movement theory and NRM theory in terms of the process of 'individuation'), few have been linked directly to or challenged existing theories of conversion. In consequence the development of conversion theory has remained arguably static and models have in general disregarded the causal and active role of individual identity and meaning construction within the process of conversion.

In terms of the core objectives of a sociology-of-religion (to understand the general significance of religion in history and society, and to understand the social forces shaping it (1)), the place and significance of individual religiosity in terms of meaning, power and agency in relation to wider social forces has not been given enough emphasis. Sociology has itself not always considered the

place of the individual in terms of wider forces; in many ways - although there is a rich history of exceptions to this - it was assumed by traditional theory that individuals were shaped by social forces such as class, and were not, at least in part, active agents in this process. Tied to this, religious behaviour and belief has generally been considered to be irrational in the eyes of the dominant scientific discourse that has shaped most of Sociology. Hence, religiosity has been predominantly explained in terms of class, economics, socialisation, gender, age, secularisation, deviance, social control, and as mental pathologies induced by stress or psychological dysfunction. Religion is the opiate of the masses, a coerced form of brain-washing, a pathological response to alienation, purely a consequence of role-playing and socialisation, a throw-back to superstition that progressive rationalisation and secularisation will eradicate from society, etc. Religion should be more often considered as something that demands an enquiry into how individuals, in part, shape the world and utilise components of social life for their own reasons.

Another factor explaining why the role of the individual in religious behaviour has not been closely examined, lies in the fact that modern society has itself transformed, and exhibits tendencies and trends that have created the space for individual agency that was perhaps not as open before. If we are to examine what religious action and beliefs can tell us about these changes and the cultural society we live in, and what that in turn can inform as to the general significance of NRMs and the meaning configurations they reflect within modern society, we need to examine more closely the role of individuals and identity. Religiosity does not occur in a social vacuum or in linearly determined relationships, but within a multidetermined causal, interactive and dialectical relationship to the cultural fabric it is set within. Explorations into that relationship can thus birth insight into 'the cultural', and the relationship between religious individuals, groups, and broader facets making up society. The interest here in religion then stems from a broader interest in cultural change, meaning and identity.

Conversion into meaning systems reflect the process of individual narratives and biographies that have or are in process of internalising a given 'universe of discourse' and thus provide insight into why and how individuals take on different discourses, which in turn provides insight and issues for research into how identities develop, fragment, dissolve, and reintegrate over time. Further, conversion provides clues as to the significance of and connections between, these narratives and the social movements that are in one sense the conduits of individual life trajectories. Such can unearth insight into the wider tripartite relationship between individuals, groups, and the cultural fabric such are embedded within, in terms of structural changes occurring within urban capitalist culture in late modernity. The study of conversion should thus be a study into the cultural dynamics and boundaries of society itself, and issues such as alleged control mechanisms, organisational dynamics of NRMs as bodies that actively and sometimes aggressively recruit members over time, legal rights, personal

freedom and 'deviance' etc, are important but should not be parochial in overlooking the specifically sociological questions of shifting social and individual identities and relationships (2).

There are of course many 'entry points' into approaching religion, conversion and NRMs. The methodological and theoretical orientation here is at a micro-social individual level and through a qualitative as opposed to quantitative lens. This is arguably a choice that empowers one to consider the relation between micro and macro-cultural, an objective not as easily attainable with a purely macro and quantitative focus. Sociological endeavour should strive to understand the connections between the individual and social relations and structures individuals are interdependent with, and thus must examine the social circumstance and the social groupings involved within the ambit of, and from a perspective driven by, individual conversions.

In one sense then we must begin to understand what religion does for people in order to assess why certain individuals and groupings of individuals act on religious belief systems rather than 'rational scientific' world-views or any other of the vast array of belief systems on offer in the modern world; we need to employ in this way a rationalistic view of humans in the sense that they act on something/believe in something because it tangibly does something for them as opposed to an image of individuals as being inactive in this process and not motivated by self-interest.

Why do individuals convert into different ways of life and meaning systems? Meaning, belief and changes in identity are obviously bound together. But what of our understanding of what identity or 'self' actually means? How people are understood to perceive meaning and self is related to constructed 'generalised' conceptions of supposedly real identity or self. The conceptual history of the idea of identity can be said to have gone through three basic paradigm shifts, Cartesian, Sociological, and Post-modern. These ideas of 'subject', identity, and 'self' are causally related to structural and cultural changes taking and that have taken place within the history of the western world; they reflect both the perceptions of those defining self in a particular way and also reflecting wider cultural change that has shaped changes in the self (3). The Cartesian concept of self (4), although contradictory to more recent definitions is arguably the most dominant conception of self in the perceptions of 'most' individuals. This is so for it conceptualises a separation between private and public worlds, both singular and unchanging, and not effectual on each other, and thus allows us to narrate a past that is coherent and understandable.

Do narratives reflect reality though? Are we separate as individuals from the world, or does it in part shape and change us? If one accepts a sociological definition of self (5), one accepts the idea that we are separate from a world that however shapes us in fundamental ways 'we' (non-academics) are not aware of.

If we accept a post-modern definition of self (6), as a de-centered subject rather than a Cartesian or sociological subject, we accept the idea that humans are unfixed and fluid in terms of self and identity. The idea of a self that is separate from the world around it, and the idea of a self as something that developed over time coherently into a recognisable and unified whole, is illusory. Of course this statement is highly contestable in that identities are not completely fluid, but fixed along self-made trajectories as well as life cycle patterns. Yet this logic, as most post-modernist thinking does, urges us to understand our place in the world as one of a fleeting nature. This is a salient point for although we may employ a Cartesian understanding of our self as unified and following a 'path', and as having developed a lineage and pattern of sorts, in the main this is ephemeral. In a sense we are in false consciousness, not in the classic sense that Marx spoke of, but in a sense that relates to everything in our lives;" If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves" (Hall:1992:277).

One can argue that although individuals selves are fluid, they nevertheless search for closure and meaning; indeed the more fluid and unfixed the world and individuals are, the more persistent this search may be. It is arguably in that act of searching and 'finding', that we construct narratives of our quests. Irrespective of whether one agrees with these different definitions of the modern subject, one cannot dispute the fact that humans make narratives all the time. These biographies are by definition retrospective and ever-changing. It is in this area of narratives that the above notions of the self, identity, cultural and structural change, and conversion into NRMs can be seen to converge. Conversion is perhaps part of the wider process of constructing self-narratives in the search for closure and identity, and thus NRMs can be seen as conduits of this modern search and transformative process, and are part of the range of 'new social movements' that facilitate this trend (Hannigan:1991).

The essential purpose of this work is an attempt to 'get inside' the world of the Hare Krishna movement and assess whether these considerations of conversion, identity, meaning and belief have any hold on that reality. Thus, it is critical to reflect a sense of what it is like to be a Hare Krishna from the inside, and then to assess the links between that world and the paths of different individuals to Krishna. This is not to say one can truly 'understand' that reality as an outsider, but to construct a flavoured vision of that reality in terms of those on the inside. Indeed, the 'otherness' of the researcher allows for perceptions that would not obviously come to those on the inside, perceptions that have academic value in creating a sense of this reconstructed world.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the multiplicity of reasons leading to the conversion and continued commitment of individuals to the Hare Krishna faith. This would not be credible without building a picture of the world inside. In this regard the selftold stories of individuals and analytical comments generated

from such, are obviously paramount. From this basis one can begin to make exploratory comments as to the considerations above and enquire into the nature of religious conversion, beliefs and practices in the hope of gaining insight into what motivates and causes individuals to construct or convert into particular meaning systems. This one hopes will shed some light on what are some of the core dynamics - in terms of power, sense of space and place, connections to structural and cultural institutions and form, socio-psychological motivations - of meaning configurations.

This is an important pursuit in terms of religion for historically, social science discourse has been suspicious of treating religious belief as similar to other secular meaning systems and actions, not always accrediting such with neutral status as social phenomenon, viewing religious beliefs and behaviour as irrational or driven by deprivation and psychological abnormalities as opposed to expressions of action and belief that require explanation. Arguably, a general secular perception of religion has dominated social theory, and viewed religious conversion, behaviour and beliefs as something outside of 'normal' human expression, a type of experience that people are manipulated into, or fall into as a type of stress valve or crux, and a phenomena that is a backwater reflex of a superstitious past that will die out in the face of the progressive secularisation of society.

This dissertation seeks in part to establish the relevance of the religious experience as central to, and closely related to other cultural forms of human life, arguing that insight into religious conversion can inform us about patterns of belief and meaning in other forms within the total human experience. There are arguably many forms of conversion, not all religious; all are based on some underlying ideology, rather than objective fact. In this sense religious experience is not that dissimilar to patterns of other meaning system, and can inform us as to how and to some extent why, people come to believe, or convert into the multiplicity of world-views in society.

Further, religious conversions, particularly of the 'new' variety, hold the opportunity of analysing social life in a 'raw' form, in that such belief systems are often held and lived with an intensity and vigour that seems substantially different to more nominally held beliefs. In other words, although extremely subjective, they appear to be representative of a sincere expression of 'ways of being', and in this sense allow an almost anthropological opportunity to researchers to examine 'life-building' in an elementary fashion, opportunities that are not so transparent in a condensed, pluralistic, complicated, and shifting secular world. They are sites therefore of cultural formation that possibly hold clues to the ways in which social actors internalise the world around them, and the relation of this to social action. Because they are so obviously related to a change in belief, rather than a long term socialised and nominal type belief, they allow us to enter this picture at the level of 'first instance' to a degree, and thus

allow us to examine the underlying factors in the generation of particular beliefs, and how such may motivate action. In this way such religious beliefs are similar possibly to conversion into 'new' beliefs concerning politics, gender, sexuality etc. They allow us therefore an investigation into contemporary 'rites de passage'.

Such an examination in relation to religion though is difficult to pursue in terms of basic starting points. It has been said that the sociology of religion faces a methodological and conceptual crisis (7), through its inability to investigate its own subject matter; what constitutes belief, how is belief related to religious action and ritual, are all beliefs and ritualistic action (sacred and secular) similar or are religious beliefs intrinsically irreducible to explanation and as such need to be investigated only through understanding an insiders perspective? Does religious meaning demand a new methodological orientation? I believe that one needs to challenge the basic assumption that religion is indivisibly unique, irreducible to normal explanation. This creates a block to what is the most useful component of studying religion, that of its proximity to other social life. The question becomes which 'type' of methodology to employ as facets of sociology have struggled in the past in coming to terms in general with meaning and motivations, reducing such to total explanations of wider structural form.

The assumption that a wide range of beliefs are simply created and internalised through socialisation or derivative of structural forces shaping individuals, rather than something that is self-willed and motivates volitional action to a degree, is perhaps too deterministic an image. Investigating conversion, where there is a transparent change in belief, allows us to investigate how the 'maps of meaning' that we carry in our minds, materialise into social action, and allows us enrich our knowledge as to what motivates people; what their 'root senses of reality' (Heirich:1977) may be. The details of this facet of human experience and consciousness is of significance to a better understanding of cultural society, in that modernity dialectically represents an eclectic variety of 'methodologies of being' while alienating scores of individuals through its dominant discourses, thus providing opportunity and need for individuals to search for and construct meaning within their lives, and create narratives of that life. Conversion is one of the cultural locations in which we can begin to understand how and why people go about this business of constructing meaning, and why they may be motivated to so.

The comments above suggest that conversion and religion need to be viewed as important cultural experiences related possibly to wider processes of cultural dynamics and change. Such a conception has not been widespread in sociological circles. Indeed the secularisation thesis, that has allegedly shaped many of the central ideas in the sociology of religion, including popular conceptions of conversion, (Richardson:1985) suggests that religion in essence is an irrelevant force in modern society, a force that has progressively declined

in the face of the progressive secularisation and rationalisation of society. An understanding of conversion as a cultural item needs to locate conversion in relation to modern cultural change, and decipher whether it is such an innocuous force. To do so we must build a framework based on why individuals are motivated to take up a religious world-view in terms of the generalised conditions of the rise of NRMs and their connections to contemporary trends in society. A refocus on the question of conversion in this fashion generates an understanding of religious action as connected to notions of individual transformation and NRMs as facilitators of this modern form of change.

Secularisation theorists do not in general consider NRMs or conversion to have this type of cultural significance. The thesis that society has become increasingly secularised is complicated; much of what comes under the banner of secularisation theory is related to modernisation and globalisation theories and represents a broad range of ideas that are by no means straightforward. We are concerned here with those facets that have implications for the study of conversion. The debate as to whether the rise of NRMs suggest a reversal or weakening of secularisation or instead indicate yet more proof of the inevitable forward surge of secularisation is central to the possibilities of locating conversion as potentially related to considerations of power. Some suggest that NRMs are an indication that religion has not lost its essential significance in human society (Robbins et al.:1978:95), and although secularisation is a major trend, it is not a modern development and therefore does not presage the decline of religion (Robbins:1988:57-8), as opposed to the ideas of Wilson (1975,1976,1985) that religion and particularly new religious innovations are a by-product of secularisation and cement the irrelevance of religion in the face of increasing secularisation.

Are NRMs part of the wider process of secularisation in modern society and if so what is the place of individual conversion within such wider change? Secularisation refers to the process whereby religion has declined in the sense that previously accepted religious symbols, doctrines and institutions have lost their prestige and significance in society to such an extent that we for all intents and purposes, live in a society without religion, a secular age (Hamilton:1995:166). This indicates massive complicated changes that are not easily distinguishable precisely because they infer such widespread and deeply set change. These shifts are widespread and ingrained at almost all levels of society in the sense of change from one epoch to the next. Religion permeated and inserted itself at all levels of life traditionally and the reverse has been, according to some, as complete (8). These changes all indicate a central loss of functionality and significance of religion in modern life in economic, political and cultural structures. This change has occurred extensively over a long historical period, and despite the emergence of revivalist religions, and the unevenness of these transformations, secularisation can be said to be a total and manifest change from religious to secular (Wilson:1985:11-14).

Secularisation refers to a process whereby there is generally greater conformity with 'this world' and attention is turned away from the supernatural towards the necessities of modern life and its problems (Hamilton:1990:166-7). There is no doubt that this is a contestable position, as the pure numbers of individuals involved in modern forms of religion attest. For Wilson though, this is irrelevant as religion per se no longer plays the pivotal role it used to. For Wilson secularisation is total in a sense in that it pervades all levels in society. However secularisation does not embrace all aspects of change, but viewed historically in respect of long term change, it is undoubtedly centrally significant (Wilson:1985:14). However this is not to say that this change is relatively fast or linear for " religious dispositions are deep - set in man's essential irrationality, which resists the rationalization of the external social order" (Wilson:1985:18). It is the system that becomes secularised and humans are dragged along.

Wilson comments are relevant in terms of NRMs for they provides a clear (not necessarily correct) analysis of the emergence of these movements at this particular point in space and time historically. For Wilson NRMs are evidences of secularisation rather than examples of the continuance or revival of religion. Secularisation " implies the privatization of religion; its continuing operation in the public domain becomes confined to a lingering rhetorical invocation in support of conventional morality and human decency and dignity-as a cry of despair in the face of moral panic ... Conceptions of the supernatural may not disappear either as rhetorical public expressions or as private predilections but they cease to be determinants of social action. The system no longer functions, even notionally, to fulfil the word of God. Neither institutions nor individuals operate primarily to attain supernatural ends " (Wilson:1985:19).

In this fashion Wilson sees the rise of NRMs to be essentially unimportant blips on the screen of the wider process of increasing rationalisation and secularisation. Further, the rise of new religious innovations such as NRMs are directly linked to the wider process of secularisation in that secularisation does not predict the total eclipse of all religion for in the private sphere religion not only continues but gains new expressions as a form of response to increasing rationalisation: " Yet, the very rationalization of societies operation and its desiccating effect on everyday life may provide their own inducement for individuals privately to take up the vestiges of ancient myths and arcane lore and ceremonies, in the search for authentic fantasy , power, possibilities of manipulation, and alternative sources of private gratification. In this sense, religion remains an alternative culture, observed as unthreatening to the modern social system, in much the way entertainment is seen as unthreatening. It offers another world to explore as an escape from the rigours of technological order and the ennui that is the incidental by-product of an increasingly programmed world " (Wilson:1985:20).

For Wilson then, these new expressions or continued religious sentiments in the private sphere are just that, no more than sentiments or reflective responses to an increasing technocratic world. They have no cultural or general importance and are less related to other aspects of culture than were the religions of the past (Wilson:1985:20). Thus the new sects are part and parcel of societies experiencing secularisation and can be " ... seen as a response to a situation in which religious values have lost pre-eminence " (Wilson, 1969:207). Wilson has argued that the present upsurge of novel groups should be viewed " as a confirmation of the process of secularisation. They indicate the extent to which religion has become inconsequential for modern society" (Wilson, 1976:96). Modern society is dominated by impersonal beauracatic modes of social control; consequentially " charismatic leadership persists only in the interstices between institutional order, in the narrow social space that remains for collective behaviour, spontaneous faith, and unconstrained obedience and adulation" (Wilson, 1975:125).

Religion, according to this perspective, has been reduced to an exotic consumer item and an adornment of personal style. Spiritual shoppers choose from a diverse and exotically packaged choice of products and personal consumption choices have " no real consequence for other social institutions, for political power structures, for technological constraints and controls." The new movements thus, " add nothing to any prospective reintegration of society, and contributes nothing towards the culture by which a society might live" (Wilson:1976:96). The modern world has spawned "a supermarket of faiths;received,jazzed-up,homespun,restored,imported and exotic. But all of them co-exist only because the wider society is so secular, because they are relatively unimportant consumer items" (Wilson, 1976:80).

Wilson's views, provocative, partly valid, and often misunderstood, will be commentated on later in terms the conception of conversion that shall be emergent in this dissertation. It is important to note here that such ideas as to the place of religion in modern society have been said to " ... trivialise the new religions both in terms of their personal meaning for participants and in their implications for cultural change " (Richardson:1985:104). The thesis has been said to have contributed to a similar determinism in conversion theories, which in general have tended to ignore both the cultural and individual dimensions of conversion.

Conversion and NRMs.

The emergence of numerous exotic religious movements in North America and elsewhere has generated a large body of work examining conversion as well as research into the underlying conditions of their emergence and their general nature and importance amidst issues such as secularisation and the changing nature of modernity. These two areas of research have not been frequently

connected, though surely hang from the same umbilical cord. To understand the significance and emergent conditions of NRMs one needs in part to understand why and how individuals and groupings of individuals join and become committed to such movements. In turn, to grasp why and how conversion occurs, one needs to understand the particular historical-cultural-social-psychological juncture such movements are born out of. The cord that ties them is a wider set of ideas relating to the massive changes that have taken and are still taking place in terms of cultural and structural modernity. Surprisingly then, considering the mass of work done, theories as to the significance, nature and emergence of NRMs connected to the broader debates of secularisation and the general conditions of modernity, and theories as to the reasons behind and processes involved within conversion into NRMs, have not produced enough cross pollination, except arguably in the case of the social-psychological motivational perspective, that will be discussed shortly. In consequence theory has not always been accountable to empirical cases of individual conversion, in relation to these changes. This dissertation attempts to problematise the major models of conversion in terms of qualitative data on the Hare Krishna movement and in terms of broader ideas relating to NRMs, in order to assess whether they aid an understanding of what conversion is and can point to what a conversion theory should be seeking to explain, and whether a different set of problems and research questions are needed.

There seems little consensus as to what a conversion theory should seek to examine and explain in the first place : " One result of the obsession with cultist conversion and commitment processes is the wealth of empirical research in this area. Unfortunately the research and theory in the area of conversion is redolent of multiple confusions related to divergent premises, conceptual frameworks, nomenclature and behavioural referents which different researchers have employed. In consequence many studies are not strictly comparable. The mountain of research and analysis has produced rather little by way of cumulative knowledge " (Robbins.T:1988:64). Not surprisingly, considering conceptual difficulties, research into the causes of conversion has taken different points of departure with differing and often contradictory 'results' as to causal conversion dynamics. It is difficult even to group these differing interpretations, although review papers have been successful in summarising conceptual and analytical similarities and links embedded in conversion research. For two excellent reviews see Robbins (1988) and Robbins et al. (1978).

Earlier research on conversion into the NRMs focused on the dynamics between the development of counter cultural activity amongst youth in the post war years and the conversions of masses into various NRMs, and emphasised pre-dispositional motivations as centrally causal in conversion. More recent research suggests that such do not play crucial roles, in respect of the fact that it is more the specific interactions around conversion that explain why people

convert. The major areas of conflict arising from these different orientations relate to different implications as to what exactly conversion is, and depending on how one defines it, what the process of conversion entails, and depending on a definition utilised and an assumption as to the processual details, who specifically can be identified as a convert in the first place.

Is conversion a change involving a radical reorientation of identity and world-view and how does one pin down the process that an individual goes through when converting. Is it possible to quantify this process in terms of origin, conception, and end, and in terms of the players involved? Conversion has generally been seen as a total, radical and sudden change as opposed to recent suggestions of conversion as a gradual, precarious and potentially never complete change. Most theory has conceptualised conversion as something that occurs to 'passive and neutral' individuals who are pushed towards conversion through psychological motivations or situational variables or directly brain-washed into conversion, while more recently theory has suggested that conversion is enacted by choice making individuals. There is confusion in identifying individuals as converts when they are possibly 'members in name' only which relates to confusion as to when the process of conversion may be seen to have originated and when it can be seen as 'complete' as well as to the problems involved with accepting at face value, anecdotal claims of conversion, while in fact individuals may simply be 'trying out' a world-view and life-style, or regurgitating facets of a group's ideology. The issue as to who can be seen to be a convert, whether they are actively involved in the conversion process or not, and what the status of conversion narratives are, will constitute central concerns later.

Two opposing perspective's, predisposing motivational versus situational interactive orientations, are the dominant models as to the causes of conversion. The former stress the relevance of converts pre-conversion social-psychological make-up in terms of motivations for conversion (thus identifying converts as uniquely positioned to be converted) and the latter assert that situational variables such as interactive socialisation and organisational dynamics are causal (converts are uniquely positioned only in terms of their structural availability). Interactionists are sceptical of anecdotal accounts as converts pre-conversion feelings are reconstructed as part and parcel of the conversion experience itself and cannot be seen to reflect accurate testimonies of past motivational 'states'; conversion occurs rather because converts are prey to successful recruitment strategies and the interactive socialisation methods employed.

Based on these conflictual assessments there are different idiosyncrasies of converts and the conversion process put forward or implied. Those that stress situational factors imply that converts are neutral mediums through which other social forces work on in inducing them to embrace a converts role or inculcate a

new universe of discourse. There is a stress on behaviour first and cognition later, and a negation of the relevance of possible pre-conversion cognitive alignment or circumstance. Similar to this inference are coercion theories that suggest that converts are not only 'a clean slate' to be worked on, but are entirely passive individuals that are coerced and manipulated into a state of conversion. Social-Psychological motivational perspective's, although stressing pre-conversion variables, fail to problematise the relationship between cultural dislocation and transformative meaning seeking behaviour and end up also inferring converts to be inactive.

Conversion theories.

The Brain washing or 'induced coercion' model of conversion into NRMs brings to the surface many of the basic issues that need to be discussed regarding conversion. Sociologists of Religion have been critical of this approach, though in some cases can be seen to share its general assumptions. This model generated prolific support and credibility in both public and academic circles in the wake the mass conversion of American youth into various NRMs (9). Outside of sociological circles, coercive-persuasive models are the most utilised and popular explanations given for conversion (Snow and Machalek:1984:178). Broadly the reasoning behind this approach relies on the assertion that involvement in non-traditional religious movements derives from such movements using techniques of mind control on hapless converts; unsuspecting individuals are subject to manipulative psychological practices that create their conversion.

According to these theorists indoctrination practices are akin to those used on American POW's by Chinese communists whereby prisoners became receptive to new ideas through isolationist practices. Converts 'take on' a movements aims and ideologies due to an induced loss of critical capacity and a psychological dysfunctioning of the brain which is fostered through a controlled environment and forms of social and sensory deprivation. These techniques such as guilt manipulation, emotional blackmail, spiritual and physical threats, forced confessions, food deprivation and unbalanced diets, repetitive chanting, self-denigration and information control via concealment of movements real practices and teachings, and relations of dependency on existing members. These methods are supplemented by the deliberate shielding of converts from influences outside the movement (Wright:1991:126, Beckford:1985:95-6, Shinn:1987:127-9).

For example it has been suggested by brain-washing theorists such as Conway and Siegelman that the rituals of dance, singing and chanting in the Hare

Krishna's are essentially methods of inducing 'snapping' which refers to a sudden radical personality change; that is achieved by overloading the sensory system with information and emotional experience, and when coupled with the isolationist and deprivation tactics used by movements, induce a radical reorientation (Shinn:1987:127-30). Isolationist practices then have the desired effect of destroying an individual's ego and overstimulating the nervous system creating a loss of capacity for rational decision making and a loss of free will (Wright:1991:126). A process of deconstructing (breaking down existing beliefs) and restructuring (inculcating a new set of beliefs) is achieved via these methods (Nelson 1993:136). It is claimed that in groups like the Hare Krishna, the Moonies and others, the regimented and controlled nature of communal existence leads to an eventual breakdown of natural choice making ability, and this coupled with ideological indoctrination and the conscious isolation of the convert which is fostered by the group, leads eventually to glassy-eyed disciples. Incidents such as the Jonestown massacre have fostered a belief that such practices must be at play in order to create such 'mindless' devotion and sacrifice (Hall:1987). Converts are thus perceived as passive victims, and conversion as a sudden, radical and total event, only arrested through 'de-programming'.

A more sociological approach is the causal-process model (Lofland and Stark:1965) of conversion. Based on a study of the 'Divine Precept' movement, it has been the most influential sociological model on conversion (Robbins:1988:79). Many have applied it empirically and it has been critiqued by numerous writers. This model raised various questions and problems in respect of conversion that were later taken to be 'obvious' and given, and thus provided the original lineage for theories on conversion that followed. The influence of this model is due to the fact that it encompasses so many factors, and taken together these represent a detailed picture of one possible conversion process. Lofland and Stark found that there were seven stages of conversion their respondents went through to achieve 'total' (defined as qualitatively different to a self asserted 'verbal' conversion) conversion and commitment. These stages are seen to be part of two general categories that relate to conversion, that of 'predisposing conditions' (the background factors that make individuals potential converts) and 'situational contingencies' (the conditions that lead to the successful conversion and recruitment of those persons predisposed to join the Divine Precepts) (Lofland and Stark:1965:864-5). They found that there were many people predisposed who did not end up converting, thus Lofland and Stark suggest that although the predisposing conditions are important, without the situational factors, individuals do not move onto total conversion.

The factors that needed to be in place to ensure conversion were 1): acutely felt enduring 'tensions' about life situations and circumstance, 2): tensions that are felt and responded to, by the individual within a religious solving perspective, 3): a perspective that leads the individual to define themselves as religious seekers;

4): seekers that encounter the group during a turning point in their lives, 5): at which stage an affective bond is formed or pre-exists with one or more converts from that movement, 6): a stage when extra-cult attachments are neutralised or absent, 7): and a stage where the individual becomes an employable agent through exposure to intensive interaction to the group. Without this last stage, a person may remain a verbal rather than becoming, a total convert (1965:864-874).

This model of conversion has been in part, and in some cases, in total, used by other researchers to explain empirical cases of conversion in diverse groups. The generalisability, as well as particular stages of the conversion process, have been questioned, even though Lofland and Stark never intended this as a universally applicable general model of conversion (Robbins:1988:80), rather as a case of speculative 'qualitative process theorising' that was intended to be descriptive rather than causal (Lofland:1977:816). The model usefully describes a wide range of variables. Derivative theories have tended to stress the causal primacy of either predisposing factors or situational determinants. Lofland and Stark themselves stressed the emergent interaction side of the equation, and are seen as front-runners of the popular trend of 'interactionist' theories that will be described shortly.

Those stressing the motivational pre-disposition side have made up a core of arguments that combine macro-structural and social- psychological factors. It is important to note that most of these theories are not conversion theories as such but are more concerned about how and why NRMs emerge in general, and as such can be seen as modernisation or crisis theories, and are not mentioned as conversion theories in review articles on NRMs. They do however infer causal arguments as to conversion, as do those that have stressed the 'predisposing characteristic' side of the Lofland-Stark model, to explain empirical cases of conversion. In general one the image produced here is of conversion as a response to social-psychological impulses that drive particular people or groups of individuals towards conversion. This orientation, although suggestive of a volitional 'searching' side to conversion, also tends to suggest individuals are pushed towards conversion through forces out of their control and unbeknown to them.

It is unlikely that the emergence and sustained popularity of NRMs is explicable without looking at the fabric of the particular society such arise out of, and the historical trajectory such a society exists/ed in. One needs a perspective that assimilates the experience of conversion to the specific emergence of NRMs within the wider occurrence of social change and conflict. Some of these theories go some way in achieving this. NRMs are said to emerge primarily through 'structural strains' existing in a particular society at a specific historical point. When such strains become internalised at an individual level, creating a strong sense of injustice, discontent, even alienation, they constitute an

explanatory framework for individual motivations and factors in joining collective actions or groups seeking social change. When such contradictory strains develop into conditions affecting an increasing number of people within a particular society, the potential of collective action increases as such discontents become generally recognised and resisted among specific 'groupings'; the most obvious example in terms of NRMs being that of 'the youth' and the counter-culture. The reasons for individuals converting is explained in terms of the relationship between cognitive states motivating behaviour, and specific practices and ideologies of particular groups. Individuals are predisposed to joining a particular group depending on the actual perceived source of their alienation, marginality from society and which movement is likely to alleviate such or change the structures creating such.

It is within such a theoretical framework that NRMs are said to be causally tied to the emergence of the 'counter culture', which is located as being part of a wider crisis of western 'modernity'. This crisis is seen as a crisis of values and of deepening normative ambiguity; the slow erosion of the cultural tradition of moral absolutism and its replacement by a moral pluralism with the development of a plurality of contradictory meaning systems, have led to an alleged perplexing relativism, creating widespread cultural disenchantment. The advance of secularisation, technocratic and materialistic 'individualism' and increasing fragmentation and impersonalised bureaucratisation of mass urbanised society is seen as causal to such alienation and aggravated feelings of moral accountability, and instils in the youth a quest for community and other 'new age' values that respond positively to the culture crisis (Robbins and Anthony:1975:76, Bird:1979:335, Robbins.T:1988:26-7, Robbins et al.:1978:95-99, Beckford:1984:270-72).

These theories then suggest that NRMs are part of a fundamental transformation and or break-down in modern western society in which one of the major sites of conflict lies between the 'dominant culture' and the 'counter-culture' (10). American youth, alienated from the dominant value systems of modern capitalism in a variety of ways begin in large numbers to question and challenge traditional value systems and lifestyles, becoming searchers or 'seekers' for new identities and meaning, and therefore, alternative 'worlds' to live in (Rochford:1985:60-62, Robbins et al.:1978). These 'seekers' thus are more likely to undergo religious conversions, precisely because they are in active pursuit of such self-transformations (Snow & Machalek:1984:180). Societally, such youth are 'threshold people', neither in or completely out of traditional cultural space, and as such are 'ripe' for change and conversion into various anti establishment movements on offer during the counter-culture years. An extension of this theme is the suggestion that individuals do not go through one fundamental conversion, but in the 'seekership' mould, go through possibly many conversions in a 'conversion career'. This argument suggests that

cognitive motivations are secondary to behavioural socialisation (Richardson:1985).

Other theories suggest that NRMs emerge in fact in response to the inability of the counter-culture to produce meaningful values and vehicles of transformation (Robbins:1988:32-36, Hamilton:1995:210-11). Some of these theories have been seen to equate mysticism too easily with self-transformation. Another angle on this is the suggestion that NRMs serve as integrative forces, reconciling and adapting alienated youth back to dominant values and institutions, or enclosing deviant youths away from society. (Robbins, Anthony and Curtis:1975:48-64, Robbins and Anthony:1978:1-27). Others see NRMs as differential in terms of what they offer such youth, from world rejecting, world accommodating to world affirming discourse and ideologies (Wallis:1979:191-210). Still others argue that these movements act as either monistic or dualistic moral ideologies that cater differentially for emotional and experiential needs of the disenchanting (Robbins, Anthony and Richardson:1978:98-108).

The Hare Krishna movement provides a fertile site in assessing the strength of this 'type' of argument in that it reflects close ties to this particular period of North American cultural history, as well as in ideology exhibiting definitive world-rejecting elements. Studies of the Hare Krishna movement stressed the importance of converts pre-conversion feelings of alienation and marginality within middle class American culture and their perception that Krishna consciousness could, as an ideology and lifestyle, transform both their lives and the environment they came from. Findings also seem to significantly support a close link between the growth of the movement and the counter culture, in respect of macro structural strains and consequent social psychological cognitive dynamics, predisposing individuals into conversion into the movement. Converts had prior to joining, been involved in other forms of counter cultural activity, from drug taking to political movements, both individually and in more collective processes, suggesting a commonly felt search for social, spiritual or interpersonal change and meaning. Devotees anecdotal accounts of their motivations for joining the movement similarly emphasise a strongly felt sense of alienation prior to converting and a realisation that it was within Krishna that their own values could become realisable (Rochford:1985:65-75, Daner:1976:77-101, Richardson:1983:96). □

In contrast to the above orientations, interactionist models of conversion stress situational and interactive variables as causal. They are critical of traditional motivational approaches in terms of their reliance on anecdotal accounts and a mistaken focus on psychological motivations, and claim that far more important to conversion than pre-dispositional motivations are the interactive processes of coming into contact with a group and living with them. Interactionist perspective's stress four interrelated critical areas to whether a person becomes a convert or not; contact through social network ties, intensive interaction between members

(which is the most important and ties together the other factors), the structural availability of converts, and the lack of counter-veiling ties. The actual strategies of recruitment of the group and their organisational structures designed to ensure such factors, are the essential issues in whether an individual becomes a convert. Snow et al. (1980:792) suggest that individuals rarely simply join movements, but participate on request in movement activities, and within the process of doing so are converted. Thus the motives spoken of by traditional approaches for joining and for continued participation are emergent and interactional rather than prestructured; they lie within the process of conversion not pre-conversion.

Interactionists suggest one should not overlook how actual contact is made, which is important to the eventual success of conversion. Following the assertion in the Lofland and Stark model (1965:871) that " ... conversions frequently moved through pre-existing friendship pairs or nets ", Snow et al. (1980) try to develop connections between the qualitative significance of the different ways of contact. The most frequent method of contact is through social network ties with significant others who belong to the movement, or network ties with 'sympathisers' to the movement, whereas self-initiated contacts or chance contact in public places are far less prevalent. In the case of network ties, where most recruitment is generally through friends and relatives, there is a 'face-to-face' interaction and recruitment versus a more mediated contact in public places and self-initiated contacts (11).

The importance of network ties has been illustrated by many other empirical studies, some of which support Snow et al's link between success and recruitment strategy (Robbins:1988:86). The essential importance of recruiting through network ties versus other means in terms of conversion, lies in the fact that bonds between a potential convert and other members and the movement, are already established, are pre-existing, and thus individuals are already tied to or have affinity for members or those closely connected to the movement, and set in motion the most critical factor of conversion, intensive inter-member interaction. Thus social ties to group members have importance beyond simply facilitating initial contact and are crucial to the early phases of being socialised and assimilated into the group, both socially and ideologically, and the decision of a person to remain in the group often hinges on such integration being successful (Rochford:1985:77-80).

According to these approaches, interaction between participants is the crux of the matter that decides whether individuals become converts or not, and relates to all the other points made by interactionists. Lofland and Stark (1968) stressed that conversion overall was about coming to accept the opinions of one's friends. Snow and Phillips (1980:444) concur that intensive interaction is the most important factor in explaining conversion, as do Griel and Rudy's (1984:262-63). The list of research that supports the essential role one's 'reference others' play

in adopting a particular viewpoint is extensive, both in reference to religious commitment and in the area of general socialisation. What the interactionists attempt to illustrate is that such interaction is the core reason behind conversion, and other processual factors are related to this, or designed to ensure this.

Critical here is that interaction has to be free of any competing interference. Even if the factors mentioned above are in evidence, they do not automatically ensure conversion. Interactionist approaches suggest that the 'structural availability' of the potential member is a decisive factor in this regard. The real possibility of pursuing an alternative depends on a person being free of other roles, obligations and social relationships. Research on the Hare Krishna and other groups show that the majority of converts who end up staying, are at the time of joining, single, young, unemployed or at school. Many are in fact relatively free of social ties like family that could counteract the possibilities of prolonged membership (Lofland:1977, Rochford:1985, Snow and Phillips, 1980). Rochford shows the relevance of this factor in terms of the Hare Krishna (1985:77-79). Thus the lack of counter-veiling ties is crucial, (12) and where converts have such ties, they are encouraged to minimise the importance of their involvement to such outsiders and thus minimise the threat posed to them (Lofland:1977:221). Movements actively attempt to limit contact with significant others who are a danger to conversion. This process has been called 'encapsulation' and is seen as crucial to conversion for it allows a isolated setting wherein individuals can be subsumed in and with the groups activities and ideology, thereby facilitating the conversion process (13).

According to Griel and Rudy (14), (1984:263-68), encapsulation takes three forms, ideological, social, and physical, all of which create and maintain boundary controls between members and competing influences and world-views, thus enabling Identity Transformation Organisations to create a social and physical cocoon and contribute to the isolation of the individual and their initial and continued conversion and commitment (15). Daner argues a similar line in her study on the Hare Krishna's. She utilises Goffmann's concept of a total institution and Erikson's notions of identity to show the variety of ways that devotees are isolated physically and 'fitted' with a new identity (1976:9-12).

The above factors describe a situation in which people come to believe in a movements ideology. How in essence does this cognitive alignment take place besides coming to accept the views held by your new friends? Factors such as Structural Availability and the lack of countervailing ties do not assure continued membership unless a persons cognitive orientation becomes aligned with the world-view of the group. Through the process of encapsulation, recruits are vulnerable to an interactionist and socialisation process wherein they come to believe in the movements beliefs in a total fashion. This complex 'alignment' process involves a process of radical personal change, a radical break where in the converts previous identity, values and beliefs under-go crucial and

sometimes absolute changes during and after the conversion process. This transformation is more than simply a change in identity and values, but fundamentally a change of one's 'Universe of Discourse'. Either one universe of discourse is displaced by a new one (in other words previous values etc are replaced totally by different ones which suggests an absolute change in the convert's outlook) or one finds the ascendancy of a previously peripheral universe of discourse to the status of prime authority; in this regard a convert may come to hold old but not particularly salient ideas with a new intensity and clarity of vision. Nominal beliefs become 'true' ones, and what was peripheral to consciousness becomes central, in such a way that the corresponding change in the convert will be as radical in its affects as if the Universe were entirely new (Snow and Machalek:1984:169-74).

Closely tied to this is the adoption by the convert of a 'Master Attributional schema' which "...occurs when a new or formerly peripheral causal schema ... or vocabulary of motives authoritatively informs all causal attribution's about self, others and events in the world " (Snow and Machalek:1984:173). Similarly to a change in one's Universe of discourse then, this means that the convert interprets all feelings and events in the world in terms of one pervasive schema. Finally, conversion also involves the 'embrace of the convert's role' which means the convert "not only introjects the convert role and sees himself or herself in terms of that role, but that it influences the convert's orientations in all situations. Daily activities and routines that were formerly taken for granted or interpreted from the standpoint of various situationally specific roles, are now understood from the standpoint of the convert role " (Snow and Machalek:1984:174).

These comments point to another theory that seems indivisible from the general orientation of this interactionist outlook, that of conversion as role theory which argues that motivational pre-disposition theories wrongly place a cognitive alignment before a behavioural role. Role theory suggests that such an orientation puts the cart before the horse in that conversion is essentially about how not why, and a convert role in fact precedes any belief in ideology. Individuals perform a role due to the interactive process between themselves and the group, and this role does not necessarily signify any change in a general cognitive outlook (Robbins:1988). Another theory that is similar here is the social drift model (this model is described in more depth in chapter four), that sees conversion as open and precarious to social affiliation, a situation where social actors learn conversion gradually through the influence of social relationships, and hence conversion is often transitory, a drifting in and out of various groups (Robbins:1988:75). Conversion is related more to 'trying out' various roles rather than predisposing ideological consideration, but it is self-willed rather than imposed through other forces, and of a serial nature, rather than a once off radical nature (Richardson:1985:108-9).

The levels of structural availability and the lack of countervailing ties and the fact that the group discourages the influence of such ties, combined with the internal socialisation processes of interaction and integration, such as role play and encapsulation, offer, in the views of some, an exhaustive explanation as to why and how individuals may come to be converted. In essence individuals are converted through the process of interaction with the group, and behaviour precedes any sense of a cognitive change. Such cognitive change is achieved through the roles converts take on, and other organisational dynamics. Research on the Hare Krishna movement suggests that these interactive alignment processes are crucial both in terms of a persons initial conversion and their continued commitment to the group (Rochford:1985).

It will be argued that these theories, in differing degrees, are all useful but also inadequate explanative frameworks for understanding the individual cases of conversion to be discussed in this dissertation in relation to meaning, change and ideology. Issues such as pre-dispositional versus situational causes, individual motivations versus emergent socialisation, volition versus control and coercion, sudden radical transformation versus gradual precarious change, searchers versus victims, as well as the relations of such to issues of ideology, meaning and power, relationships between individual and religious group, and society, will be employed to argue this case, and to determine whether there are grounds on which to build a relationship between religious conversion and the wider cultural transformations of modernity.

CHAPTER TWO.

CONVERTS AND CONVERSION.

In looking for answers to the conversion question it would seem obvious to centralise an investigation at the level of those who have experienced conversion, and in terms of the specifics of host group and society. How does the world of Krishna in terms of its ideology and organisational dynamics materialise itself to those entering its boundaries? What is the relationship between these individuals in terms of their cultural and ideological make-up, the ideology and internal dynamics of the group, and their conversion? Do these relationships provide motivational basis for their conversion? Do these questions bring us closer to understanding the significance and relationship of conversion to wider cultural change in modernity?

In trying to understand conversion in relation to the devotees I had met and in terms of the nature and dynamics of life in the movement itself, a central dilemma continually surfaced in the face of dominant theoretical perspectives of conversion. In contrast to implications that converts are brain-washed and coerced into conversion, or 'pushed' towards conversion through situational factors or psychological states, and the related implication that the ideology of the would be converts and that of the movement is irrelevant to the process of conversion, my experience suggested that it seemed more accurate and useful to consider the plausibility of the movement and its ideology to would be converts who were in a compatible space in terms of that ideology, as pivotal to the event of conversion taking place. Hence, to view the movement, the individuals involved, and the nature of conversion through the lens of 'a lived ideology' that stressed the significance of the emotive side of ritualistic action as sustaining that plausibility and religious life-style as something that is tangibly 'lived' and 'chosen' rather than a one-dimensional notion of coerced belief as separate from action and choice. In terms of this perspective it seemed that converts should be seen as active shapers of the conversion process, enacting life-style choices that are understandable in terms of their life-trajectories and that of the ideological content of the movement, as opposed to an image of linear encapsulated socialisation and passive victimisation.

In general the opportunity of living with devotees afforded me a richer understanding of their lives compared to some of the preconceived ideas I had before, and more of a grip on ideas in related research. However the process of doing active research also demonstrated the huge chasm that separates theoretical speculations and instances of real life, the difficulties involved in trying to negotiate a constructed bridge between the two, and the danger in developing sweeping statements that often fail to do justice to individuals root senses of reality and motivations for action (1). One conclusion though seemed

to me undeniable; that the ideological belief system of the Hare Krishna movement is seen as plausible, exotic and alternative to the dominant moral and cultural ethos of the western secular system by those entering that world, and it is this fact that is crucial to understanding the duality of self-will versus interactive control as different ways of conceiving the conversion process. As will be illustrated, the movement does encapsulate and socialise its members effectively, in physical, social and ideological forms. However this does not automatically mean that conversion is only about organisational dynamics and mechanisms of boundary control. Whether encapsulation can be seen as a form of social control creating the necessary conditions for conversion or whether it is a by-product of the ideological position of a group and thus is conversion itself seems tied to both individual and group ideological content. If we are to challenge the assertion that conversion is only about manipulation and social control rather than volitional life-style choices and continuums of life trajectories that are related and similar to wider social trends in modernity, it is necessary to try and decipher the differential potency of these claims in relation to instances of conversion.

Methodological Issues.

How then do we approach analysing this hard-to-grasp, hard-to-quantify, phenomena? Where should one begin in understanding conversion into non-traditional religions as a process related to wider cultural form and change as opposed to viewing it only as youthful deviance or manipulative coercion? A first step is to consider how we go about gathering 'objective' data about conversion and religious life-styles, particularly in light of the fact that this area of social life is permeated with subjective levels of meaning and 'hard to gage' instances of individual motivation.

It is an obvious fact that the style in which we approach any given social behaviour premeditates to some degree, or at least, is woven together with, the outcomes of our deliberations. It is in this sense that methodology itself is a form of active and hopefully transparent discourse. Interpreting religious discourse is enacted within our own analytical and cultural boundaries and as such, these boundaries need to as transparent as possible when explaining any given act (2). This seems especially necessary as in general religious behaviour creates problems for traditional methods of sociological enquiry (3).

This dissertation, based on an exploration of the Hare Krishna Consciousness Movement in South Africa (4), is for a number of reasons, explorative and qualitative. There is an absence of relevant comparative material (5), without which research needs to be of a explorative and qualitative nature, in order to reach some depth of speculative reasoning and content with the possibility of broadening and deepening such in further research with a more quantitative orientation. Further, a qualitative approach is compelled by the fact that we are

dealing with a field of discourse that relies on and is evidenced essentially by meaning; meaning in terms of claimed faith in certain beliefs, meaning in terms of what such beliefs may mean to an individual, and meaning in the sense that ritualistic action is only important in that it is endowed with some sort of meaning or endows some sort of meaning to another action or larger event, or a collectivity of actors and events. In reference to these overlapping tides of meaning, it seems important to centralise a methodology that listens closely to what is said about religious meaning by those actors involved (Wuthrow:1993), as opposed to labelling all religious discourse as reconstruction, and dismissing what it can reveal to us, in relation to inner motivational states as well its relation to observable social practice.

When researchers make comments on the causal and processual dynamics of a conversion experience, or any experience based on subjective expressive data, these amount to interpretations as to why individuals do things, and what those things may 'mean' to an individual; research in this regard ultimately rests on behavioural assumptions. It is impossible to avoid making such, however we need to be self-reflective of this fact and attempt to present our work transparently to allow others to verify or contradict its accuracy. This is a basic of worthwhile research; arguably research with a quantitative basis cannot be transparent enough to fulfil this obligation.

If religious converts are prone to making narratives that fit a present rather than accurately reflecting a past, then one needs surely a method that allows such reconstruction to surface spontaneously in order to assess its significance in terms of the causes and nature of the conversion process. Premeditated survey type questions aimed at quantitative generalisability can lead to dictated and prompted responses that cloud further the uncertain status of converts anecdotal accounts, and indeed at times set up reconstructed responses (6). If for example a series of questions relating to prior activity in terms of 'deviant' and meaning seeking behaviour are asked about, or a series of questions in terms of personal reasons for joining, such are normally set out sequentially and choices of answer-types are given; converts have the opportunity to stress factors over and above others not asked about or grade answers, both which lead potentially to biased answers, or indeed allow converts to filter their answers in terms of their present ideological disposition. Specific questions dictate a sequence of response; for example, if one is enquiring after motivations of conversion, and list a particular number of alternatives, then respondents may grade their responses accordingly to the alternatives given, and indeed omit potentially important responses they have not been asked about, or not have the space to explain such responses in the organic realism they are recollected (7).

This bias occurs in structured type interviews as well as specific questions are an opportunity for respondents to latch on to a particular area that would not necessarily have come up spontaneously, particularly if one uses 'catch

phrases' or asks the 'wrong' questions. In order to not undermine the analytical status of biographies, a judicious amount of effort needs to be spent on not encouraging premeditated emphasis. The researcher is as much involved in the outcome of this as is the respondent. Asking direct questions and using particular phrases and content related questions can inspire common types of answers. This does not mean one can forgo searching for presumed relevant details, but such a search should be based on the spontaneous text, rather than probed for in a structured interview situation. Particular care needs to be employed in bringing what is relevant to the surface without premeditation as the dangers are very real of inadvertently using phrases or setting up questions generated from reading about NRMs, alienation, meaning-seeking, drug cultures etc. that encourage respondents to highlight particular areas at the expense of unknown factors.

For these reasons quantitative studies end up sometimes being off track in terms of the very issues they are exploring, and thus although allowing us to see responses of a large number of individuals, they cannot always claim to be necessarily representative of even one of those individuals (8). Can we achieve the right degree of spontaneity and elicit the right kind of information through a quantitative orientation in order to assess the significance and nature of anecdotal accounts? We need at least to have in-depth text to engage in to understand the complex and subtle processes at work (9).

The approach taken here hopefully avoids some of these pitfalls; a 'free attitude' style or an 'interview as conversation', which concentrates on creating an atmosphere where converts feel they are telling their stories, and necessitates asking no or very little in the way of specific questions, besides a generalised one at the beginning (10). At all costs one needs to avoid redirecting converts and avoid the respondent coming up with just what the researcher is looking for or what they think the researcher is looking for, or creating the sort of bias described above. There are more subtle ways of keeping the conversation going or pushing for more information, beside asking specific questions. In the 'stories' that are presented in Appendix A, there is thus an unevenness in quantity and quality of data and one finds a variety of themes that arose spontaneously in the act of telling the stories. So if for example all of the respondents seem particularly lucid about their life and emotive states just prior to joining, this comes out naturally. To reflect their telling of their stories is crucial otherwise it seems easy to indicate a sense of continuity that is not necessarily there, or to highlight themes that are not necessarily seen by them to be that important.

One can easily lead a respondent to give you what you want in terms of their motivation to present a past congruous with religious or other ideology, one that puts such ideology and their life, in good standing. Of course by just letting interviews flow, the same thing can and does happen; however in an unstructured interview, when this occurs it is there as spontaneous part of a

self-generated and self-referenced 'discursive whole', and thus hopefully transparent enough to critically assess.

These biographies come from once off conversations rather than being ethnographic and longitudinal narratives, and are thus a reflection of respondents thoughts in 'one space and point in time'. This avoids the tendency of informants to reinterpret previous discussions or to place more importance on something initially considered not important or reconsider something they think the researcher may be interested in (11). There is of course a severe limitation here in that there was no attempt to check the content of the stories through follow-up interviews or through checking other sources, and as such these stories cannot be seen as complete oral histories.

There are many ways to gather and to approach qualitative information. For example Rochford (1985) includes a life-history of one Hare Krishna devotee but does not critically engage with it. Daner (1976) does not link the content of biographies of devotees to her general comments as to conversion processes in the movement. My strategy here is for conversion narratives to be on the one hand reflections of how individuals subjectively view their lives, and on the other narratives that contain clues as to the potency of our theoretical speculations as to those lives. This research thus is not looking for example to claim that there are general pre-disposing elements that apply to individuals converting into NRMs - it would be impossible to do so with an orientation towards micro-qualitative research - rather to assess the accountability of conversion theory to narratives and the experience and identities such contain.

Conversion stories are life-worlds that provide not only discourse to be analysed and used as reference points for speculative theory building, but stand as testimonies that gauge the validity of such analysis to a degree. Of course as mentioned these stories cannot be seen as complete life-histories or oral histories as they are from once-off interviews and are not substantiated by follow up interviews or other sources of information. They are self-contained in that there are no competing interpretations in reference to them, 'unfinished', and certainly not longitudinal or ethnographic. Yet they are a starting point in terms of assessing the relevance of converts in the conversion experience and hopefully transparent enough and rich enough to stand as watchdog to the accuracy of an analytical engagement, or to allow further debates and further contradictory or supportive research and data as to the potency of such interpretations. They are one vehicle into exploring the processes, dimensions and images of meaning and power and change relating to conversion, which are often contradictory and hidden and thus not easily unearthed through quantitative method.

Thus although the stories presented in this dissertation cannot be said to be complete oral histories, they need to be seen at least as 'whole' conversations

and representations of a recollected narrative in one point in space and time. As such their worth is arguably that one avoids discarding or 'missing' text that cannot be easily fitted into a wider interpretation. Analysing conversion through a methodological process of accepting accounts as natural part-histories allows us to look for recurrent similarities and see how these motivate a particular analytical interpretation; the interpretation is shaped by the stories rather than taking selected parts of narratives to fit an interpretation, or by setting up particular questions that are aimed at eliciting information that relates to premeditated themes. The latter approach tends to target specific areas before establishing the relevance of such areas, and thus is prey to misrepresenting real circumstance, especially in the case where individuals may be prone to reconstruction.

Although I am in no way claiming that this dissertation resolves the problems surrounding the analytical status of converts anecdotal accounts, I hope to be engaging in a process that is more useful than simply dismissing the relevance of such accounts. This tendency is highly problematic especially in light of the fact that such assessments are often made without producing tangible 'proof' as to claims that anecdotal accounts are by and large reconstructed material such as bringing forward relevant data that contradicts converts statements in the appropriate time frame, or devising discursive analysis that will provide a method of checking the 'before and after' of conversion. Although this research does not resolve these issues, it attempts to illustrate the relevance of converts stories, and in light of the interpretation of conversion that such stories bring forth, speculates as to whether these stories can be viewed as purely reconstructed.

The central problem is how do we remain transparent in our interpretations of religious life-world narratives in light of their alleged reconstructed nature? How do we try to make sense of narratives while simultaneously attempting to stay true to their essence in terms of how the individuals involved recount and view their lives? Of course technical considerations such as space constraints do not always allow one the leeway to make a totally satisfactory attempt. Nevertheless, the stories are presented hopefully in the a tone that does justice to how these individuals perceived them; the narratives roughly follow the organic time sequence in which the interview unfolded, and all include the bulk of the data provided, with bridging comments made to situate what these individuals seem to be saying. It is obviously vital to read the stories before considering my interpretation and referencing of them.

The narratives are thus to be seen in one sense as 'untouched' instances of how these people recollect and understand their life trajectories. I think it necessary to reiterate that the bulk of content in these accounts is retrospective and thus contestable (not unusable) as analytical information and thus it seems imperative to 'listen' textually, or 'read' in detail what these people are saying, in order for the reader to assess the validity of the accounts and interpretations of

them. They reflect how these people see and recollect their journey to, and their lives in Krishna and to some extent stand on their own and not solely as an exercise in finding underlying reasons for conversion, but also presenting how some devotees recount, in the here and now, what to them seemed important influences and memories. It seems critical, if one wants to develop some sort of feel for other peoples experiences, without immediately subjecting such to academic scrutiny and bias, to listen to what they say.

Limitations.

There is a strong gender 'bias' by nature of the fact that only men make up those interviewed formally and the researcher is a man. My decision to allow this bias was motivated by the fact that I spent nearly all my time with the men devotees due to the controlled gendered relations in the movement. This bias is in many ways problematic for obvious reasons; however in terms of time constraints it needs to be remembered that a gendered analysis would require an almost entirely separate basis and orientation of research (12).

There is also a bias in terms of the fact that only long term members were interviewed. As will become evident in the course of this paper, exactly who can be said to have converted is neither well documented nor debated. It was on this basis that I decided to interview people who on a common sense level could be considered as converts, those who had been in the movement for a substantial time (the least is four years). There were other advantages to this targeting (13), although of course this decision had the consequences of making stark the need for a control group of more recent members, which was not in the scope of this dissertation. There are of course a number of other research related problems and considerations in terms of the dynamics and nature of active field research and participant observation that cannot be commented on here as this dissertation is not primarily orientated as a discourse in methodological issues (14).

A 'different' take on 'conversion'?

As opposed to methodological orientations that search for generalisability but end up not being accountable to individuals, particularly in this contested area of subjective meaning and narrative reconstruction, it is perhaps more essential to analyse detailed accounts of how devotees themselves see their conversion in a search for more clarity. In investigating what converts say about their lives and their conversions, and considering the underlying social conditions of the such stories in tandem with participant observation, I found that conversion is better understood, not as a unusual occurrence that details a loss of control or as a occurrence driven by imposed conditions, but as an understandable and perhaps even likely event in terms of the compatibility of individual 'ideological

positioning' and that of the Hare Krishna and an event that is self-willed to a degree and motivated by a pursuit of transformation and empowerment rather than an event compelled through situational forces or victimisation.

To investigate such a claim we need obviously to deal with the assertion that converts anecdotal accounts are inadmissible and the related claim that motivational factors embedded in the social conditions of converts pre-conversion lives have no real causal relevance or at best play second fiddle, to the 'real' causal dynamics of conversion such as the situational and interactive factors of coming into contact with a group, or the mechanisms of indoctrination and control allegedly used by such groups.

Central to a sociologically driven perspective should be the issue of the actual identity and role of convert and group in relation to conversion, both which lie at the core of understanding conversion in the sense of changing social relations within society. Assessments of reconstruction and of volition or social control, and the related dualism's of free-will versus brain-washing, searchers versus victims, predisposing versus situational contingencies, interaction versus motivation etc, can only begin to make sense when we unpack them from the standpoint of those experiencing conversion. This would ultimately set up a situation wherein one can use both quantitative and broader qualitative analysis.

Converts as uniform in cultural location and experience?

Conversion models in general, to differing degrees and for different reasons, imply converts to be uniform in experience and outlook; indeed anecdotal conversion accounts often have a uniformity to them. This is possibly so because of the reconstructed nature of accounts, but it is also so because converts are questioned as to their past and experience in ways that tend to make commonalities stand out. However it stands to reason that no two life narratives should be too similar. The stories here represent a rich diversity in terms of life experience, circumstance and self-perceived understandings of such recollected experiences. In turn, it seems unlikely that any two conversions would be the same, and a singular theory of conversion as a generalisable framework is unlikely to be accurate. There is a danger in lumping all ideologies, internal dynamics, and life-styles of particular NRMs together. Similarly one should avoid amalgamating all conversion experiences and all converts together. Conversion stories reflect a theme of diversity, in respect of the individuals who participate in such life-styles and how such individuals view their life and, what they see as, their decision to join the Hare Krishna movement.

Even though narratives are distinctive, in deciphering them in terms of the experience of conversion and its relation to wider cultural fabric and change, we are of course interested in commonalities. Whether we are concerned with assessing the argument that there are predisposing elements in pre-conversion

lives that may have led to conversion or looking for instances of interactive processes and social networks as crucial to conversion, or looking for elements of social control as pivotal to conversion, or searching for dynamics that suggest conversion is about individuals making life-style choices that empower them, we are looking for discourse that may suggest a recurrent or dominant theme. However, it is wise to remember that analysis itself employs a methodology of reconstruction to some degree, thus one must avoid misinterpreting peoples experiences or losing the distinctive flavour of each individual's life experience for the sake of a coherent analysis. The potency of conversion theory is related to its ability to make sense in terms of individual experience as well as common themes.

It is imperative to keep the fact that we manipulate data in mind when exploring an area such as religious belief and conversion for it is easy to inadvertently misuse the testimonials of converts or reject their use as indices of experience because of their temporal and retrospective nature. Yet who is doing the reconstruction? Individuals to some extent reconstruct their past in terms of their present, yet researchers to some extent manipulate data rather than 'objectively' explain experience and thus reconstruct that experience. By searching out commonalities we are to some extent manipulating data; if however stories can stand as watchdog of this process and further if we take the issue of reconstruction 'on board' and validate and assess its significance, we are perhaps moving towards transparency (15). This dissertation only achieves these objectives in a limited fashion.

The biographies of the four devotees suggest a picture of evolution; how individuals evolved up to that point in time when their lives were altered substantially by joining the Hare Krishna movement, and how they evolved past that point to become committed devotees. Although these stories are brief, skewed and by definition 'unfinished', they contain embryonic themes of distinct as well as similar pre-conversion experiences, perceptions, and identities. There are also glimpses into the cultural form within which these stories take place. They also at times present a well orchestrated continuity to some degree that allows us to illustrate how they are in a fashion created and reconstructed to suit the converts present ideological 'universe of discourse'. In attempting to explain and interpret conversions one obviously needs to flesh out these themes and gauge how such have causal relations with the process and dynamics of conversion into Hare Krishna. I try to generate an explanatory framework directly from the content of the stories, following their internal logic, and then consider the implications this framework has for conversion models in terms of their potency of explaining the motivations and mechanisms behind the conversion of these four individuals into the Hare Krishna movement.

There is no way of knowing how such self-told biographies would change over time in re-interpretation of content and inclusion of new content, besides indepth

longitudinal ethnographic study. Even then we would need a variety of control groups to allow us the ability to generalise successfully. However one needs to begin somewhere and to my mind the narratives of four individuals who certainly fit the description of being 'converts'- in the sense of having given a large part of their lives to the movement - allow us a tentative start. One needs to remember that much of what is said here is speculative, and at times a rather crude amalgamation of real life. Many of the statements made are done with the purpose of developing 'bubbles' that can be contrasted to the stories, and on such a basis, refined and inserted into a possible explanatory framework, and importantly set up foundations for further research.

The role of 'converts' in conversion?

For some commentators, converts simply do not play an active role in their own conversion. They are passive things manipulated into conversion, or are pushed towards conversion through forces beyond their control or awareness. Their testimonies as to their conversion tell a very different story. However these accounts are apparently unreliable in that they are a product of the conversion process itself rather than accurate histories, and claims as to previous meaning seeking behaviour, cultural dislocation, 'emotive states' of alienation and claims of self willed quests for transformation are by and large discountable. Although such claims have some validity, it is the purpose here to illustrate that first hand accounts need to be seen in part as accurate histories of individual motivations, as well as societal-cultural-psychological locations and as such need to be used as foundations of explanatory frameworks of conversion. Such testimonies encompass not only self-perceived reasons for conversions, but hold vital information as to the relevant embedded social structure within the conversion experience, and above all suggest that converts are active participators in their own conversion.

Not everyone or even a large number of people will convert into a NRM while it is as obvious that not just anyone will convert. These two common sense notions seem to have been overlooked by most conversion models and reading over relevant literature, one would be at something of a loss to explain why, of the almost countless number of individuals who come into contact with a NRM, or interact with a NRM for a short while, all do not end up converting. In reality only a very small percentage of those coming into contact with a group remain and become committed members for a substantial duration (Barker:1985,Beckford:1984). In general conversion theory does not supply us with the information to distinguish these converts from either a general wider population, nor from those who claim to be converts yet remain for only a short while. This weakness applies in different ways to both motivational and interactionist type theories, as well more obviously to brain-washing models.

Conversion theory has in general been inconsistent and at times weak in its methodological usage of both qualitative and quantitative conversion data that relates to the role of converts. The issue of reconstruction is used by commentators to box and label accounts of experience; each treat the issue of the character of converts accounts in a particular fashion which at times seems too conveniently useful to their underlying analytical orientation (16). In general conversion is seen as a radical, total and sudden experience that happens to individuals through coercion or pre-dispositional or situational variables that affect this radical change.

Brain-washing models imply that all converts (and NRMs) are uniform (17). Converts are seen as passive forces that are manipulated and forced into conversion (18); such a perspective rejects converts testimonies as to volition and transformation on the basis that converts have been 'made into' mindless robots. There is very little data to support these claims as to indoctrination techniques, or methods of direct control (19), and the metaphor of brain-washing is seen to foster a 'medicalisation of deviance' (20), and make use exclusively of ex-converts testimonies who have generally been through de-programming and whose testimonies can be said to at least as suspect as those of converts (21). Further the high defection rates in NRMs are suggestive of volition, as well as creating doubt as to the likelihood of manipulative techniques in the sense that if such were in evidence they would ensure a higher conversion ratio (22).

Social-psychological motivational theories have generally utilised quantitatively oriented data and attributed the causes of conversion to generalised psychological motivations such as alienation and 'deviant' meaning-seeking in terms of a 'quest for community' etc, and thus while implying converts to be self-willed actors, have not really tied such motivations to cultural structural considerations except in a generalised fashion, failing to show empirically the validity of these considerations in reference to the textual accounts of individuals who have converted into NRMs, and thus have ended up implying converts to be non-actors who are controlled by these alleged impulses towards conversion. In stressing motivational pre-dispositional factors connected to wider structural societal changes they have implied a de facto relationship between alienation and conversion, whereas it is necessary and more useful to problematise such a relationship. Why do individuals, who are similarly disenchanted and have equal initial contact with a group, not convert? These arguments hence also do not successfully differentiate converts from non-converts, taking alignment as a given and membership as conversion. Mere presence in a group does not prove that a persons values and beliefs are similar to a movements. As will be argued, such an orientation is on the right track but is weakly formulated rather than being completely misguided as interactionist arguments suggest.

According to the interactionist perspective, traditional motivational theories neglect the fact that conversion alignment is in fact born out of the process of

interaction and socialisation within the group itself. Interactionist explanations argue that pre-dispositional states are more related to the actual event of conversion and hence cannot be accredited with analytical status; more important to conversion are the interactive situational dynamics of conversion. One cannot accept anecdotal accounts as to conversion motivations at face value, for in many cases, such are no more than 'motive talk', or 'biographical reconstruction', which refers to the process whereby converts reconstruct their previous lives in light of values and ideologies of the group they have joined (Snow & Machalek:1984:173-178). In other words all previous memories are reinterpreted within a new 'universe of discourse', that " serves as an interpretative screen used by members to reconstruct their own life stories to bring them into line with the movements theories and to find a trajectory for their own lives which leads clearly to their present positions " (Rochford:1985:73). As such, converts' accounts cannot be taken as hard 'fact', due to their temporal variability and retrospective character. Anecdotal accounts of motivational factors are seen thus an indice of conversion rather than accurate testimony of pre-conversion states, and situational factors that are internal to the conversion process, such as recruitment strategy, social networks, interaction, encapsulation and structural availability, are the real causal factors involved in conversion as opposed to motivational impulses due to cultural dislocation. Traditional models take as given that individuals seek out groups that will match their levels of social discontent and ideological positioning and thus fail to see the real factors at work.

Lofland and Stark's (1965) pre-dispositional variables of perceived tensions, religious seekership, and turning point are said to be of this reconstructed matter. Snow and Phillips (1980) on testing their empirical data on the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement against the Lofland Stark model, take issue with the need for any of the predisposing characteristics of this model, and the notion of a turning point. Similarly, Griel and Rudy (Robbins:1988) suggest that all these variables - which have been stressed as important to conversion in many empirical case studies - are more about reconstruction and products of the actual conversion transformation process and the new identity instilled thereby, than accurate causative factors.

It is suggested that motivational theories may have gone some way in explaining the reasons why some people in general might convert into NRMs, but fail to explain much in terms of the actual dynamics of such conversions or why some individuals convert and not others who are in a similar position. Converts are not therefore in any way uniquely positioned to take up conversion; they can not be said to be different to the many who experience disenchantment in some form, and seekership behaviour refers not to people intensively seeking out meaning and answers, but to people who are mildly interested in occult and other matters (Robbins:1988:81-2), and empirical studies emphasising the primacy of connections between converts past of disenchantment and meaning-seeking

behaviour within the counter-culture, in terms of those conversions, are on the wrong track. Thus though some people may be predisposed towards conversion, it is within the dynamics of actually coming into contact with the group, and the interactional processes generated, both initially and throughout a convert's life, that dictate and explain the nature of particular conversions. Previous approaches were guilty of neglecting the actual process whereby a person becomes a functioning member within a collective; they assume that simple membership 'in name' implies conversion, and in doing so gloss over many complex dynamics of the conversion process (Rochford:1985:74-77, Gerlach and Hine:1968:38, Lofland:1965,1977, Snow and Phillips,1980).

It is argued here that even if it can be proven - which it is not - that anecdotal accounts may contain elements of reconstruction, does not constitute a sufficient basis on which to dismiss the relevance of such accounts or the social data they contain; it is somewhat tautological without illustration of tangibly reconstructed text or independent data to dispute the relevance of possible conversion factors by showing converts to be in a 'state' of conversion, in terms of internalising a movements ideology, particularly if such an assessment is made on quantitative or quasi-quantitative data. The tendency to reconstruct biographies in the light of new experiences is hardly a tendency limited to religious converts, although it does possibly occur with a greater degree of intensity (Snow & Machalek:1984:177); does one reject in general all personalised accounts of the past? Or can one utilise personal accounts in an 'objective' fashion and bring to light insight related to individual life-trajectories and circumstance causal to the conversion experience.

Interactionist critiques are provided with the 'space' to attack motivational theories in that the latter do not problematise their own premises adequately; it is not the general perspective of relating conversion causally to pre-conversion variables that is necessarily flawed but the weak application of personal accounts to wider structure within such a perspective that is flawed. In a sense it is easy to see historically how this came about as the counter cultural activity that characterised American youth culture in the late 1960s and 1970s no longer reflected the same activism or general penetration in terms of American youth culture in the late 1970s and 1980s. Scholars were therefore motivated to re-evaluate the connections ascribed by previous literature between counter culture and conversion into groups such as the Hare Krishna in terms of the continued success of such groups in attracting members (Rochford:1985:62-3). In light of this one can understand the impression of 'interactionists' that somehow conversion was more related to the situational dynamics surrounding conversion. However in their haste to justify an alternative perspective they too readily dismissed the usefulness of the underlying logic of traditional models, and as will be argued in the course of this dissertation, fail to offer a satisfactory alternative.

Understandably, to earlier theorists the counter-culture and the rise of NRMs seemed instrumentally connected; researchers were provided with a large amount of overt instances of counter-cultural activity that seemed transparently connected to the rise of NRMs and individual conversions. Perhaps therefore they failed to problematise these connections sufficiently and assumed that alienation was necessarily connected to transformation, which is obviously not so or all similarly alienated individuals would seek and actualise such. One cannot assume an a priori relation between alienation and conversion; many individuals are alienated yet do not seek a religious resolution or even seek any resolution at all. Even during historical periods where a significant portion of individuals are marginalised within society, and counter-cultural activity abounds, all do not convert into forms of collective action, even though many may have similar cognitive states predisposing them towards such action. Yet this does not mean that such factors and relationships are not centrally relevant to transformative action. When there are not such obvious instances of disenchantment and meaning seeking to be found, such as in post counter-culture America, or for example in the history of 'white' South Africa, it becomes both a more difficult task to find the relevance of such factors, and also easier for one is forced to problematise the connections and make them accountable to individual conversions. Even though no overt or mass instances of disenchantment and counter-cultural activity are so immediately discernible, this is not to say that they are not there in more hidden and subtle forms.

Such meaning seeking behaviour needs to be located and connected to levels of disenchantment in terms of motivational factors in respect of conversion and other life-choices. Earlier studies that emphasised these connections did so without exploring such relations sufficiently, and took anecdotal accounts and 'membership in name' as evidence of conversion and 'matched' cognitive states between individual and group, in other words assuming conversion rather than exploring it. The major flaw of these approaches lies not in the fact that they posit irrelevant factors as causal to conversion or search in the wrong area for the root causes of conversion (actually this is their strength as they provide a cultural and social location in which to understand conversion). Rather, their weakness is that their analysis of these areas is too general. By tending to assume an unproblematic relationship between dislocation and conversion, between the counter-culture and NRMs, they end up failing to tell us specifically enough who are the people converting into NRMs and why they may be motivated to do so.

In being too general motivational type theories come close to being deprivation and 'psychological dysfunctioning' type arguments that have generally characterised most explanations of religion, placing religious behaviour in 'deviant' perspectives that often stigmatise religious behaviour rather than explaining it, implying that converts are pushed into conversion and are therefore not actively involved in such a process.

Thus pre-dispositional motivational theories are in the 'right place' in terms of understanding conversion, but do not go far enough in terms of connecting the formation over time of individual self-identities, instances of alienation and dislocation within a dominant culture, and generalised ideological positioning, with conversion. This does not prove such an orientation is unfounded but simply weakly formulated. If one explores pre-conversion stories it becomes clear that alienation, meaning seeking, identity and ideology play a crucial role in the conversion experience. In dismissing converts accounts entirely, interactionist perspectives, although never suggesting that conversion is about coercion per se, imply that converts play no active role in their own conversion nor do their previous lives have any causal role in their conversion. Although such approaches may go some way in differentiating converts from non-converts with concepts such as structural availability, they end up implying that anyone will be converted if the correct situational variables are present. Again, we are left asking, why more people do not convert in either the short or long-term into NRMs. Why do some people defect and others stay, when situational variables are equally in attendance. In much the same way as brain-washing models imply, these arguments necessitate us to conceptualise conversion as a process devoid of individual differentiation; by negating the individual specifics and general histories of converts pre-conversion lives, interactionist theories cannot explain actual cases of conversion fully either.

Moreover, the alternative causal framework suggested by interactionist arguments proves to be irresolute in light of the importance of pre-conversion variables and also weak as a causal theory on its own terms. A more thorough critique of the nuts and bolts of interactionist theories will be developed at the end of this paper, after problematising the relationship between conversion and specific individuals and specific groups as the foundation of an alternative explanation.

Conversion, meaning seeking, and alienation?

Lofland and Stark (1965:864) who were predominantly interactionist theorists, felt that although preconditions for conversion were important, conversion could ultimately not take place, as a total event without the correct situational variants being in place. This reluctance to see peoples pre-conversion life circumstances as predominantly causal possibly explains the inadequacy of their analysis when it comes to connecting respondents circumstances, beliefs and feelings, to wider instances of social structure and change, or to general concerns of ideology. Their first variable is that converts experienced acute feelings of tension and frustration. This variable has been reported as important in most empirical studies that have used the causal process model to evaluate a particular movement (Robbins:1988:81). Obviously many people experience tensions in modern life; how are these tension any different to other's perceived

tensions, or put differently, why should these tensions transform into a religious resolution? That felt tensions are a precondition for religious conversion is perhaps correct, yet unhelpful in targeting those who may resolve such tension in a religious way, for tensions or generalised dissatisfaction with 'your lot' is a precondition for a wide range life-style and ideological changes, from political persuasion to a change in diet. Lofland and Stark (1965:867) suggest that pre-converts are different in that they experience such tensions in a more acute fashion and over longer periods than most other people. However they do not test this generalisation nor do they debate the implications if it were to be valid. How do such tensions relate to more generalised tension felt in society and why do some individuals transform tensions into transformative resolutions of a religious nature?

Lofland and Stark second and third stages do separate their pre-converts from the wider population, yet do not really resolve the issues mentioned above. The next required stage of conversion was that individuals perceived their tensions to be only resolvable through a religious perspective rather than a psychiatric or political one. Some people had tried to resolve their issues through other channels yet the majority of pre-converts were 'unaware' of other avenues such as political ones. Of those who had tried alternatives and more conventional religious mediums, had found such to be unsatisfactory. (1965:867-8). Pre-converts are thus separated from the general population at large as being individuals who have acute and recurring tensions that are seen ultimately as only resolvable through a religious perspective. Although these individuals were dissatisfied by conventional religious institutions as a medium of resolution, they were still looking for a suitable alternative religious perspective. Hence pre-converts were specifically religious seekers; they had tried both conventional religious avenues and more unconventional religious avenues without reward.

What is the significance of such variables to a general theory of religious conversion? One needs to enrich these predisposing variables by locating them within specific stories and within wider structures, in particular the broader structural reasons for the emergence of NRMs in general. There are two questions that the precondition (cause) side of the causal process model fails to explore adequately. 1): Why are pre-converts 'seekers' in general; where do the roots and specifics of these 'tensions' lie? If one is to make a case that felt tensions are causally important to conversion then one needs to concretely relate the emergence of religious groupings with the instances of such tensions within individuals and society. One needs to make a case of tension transforming into action. 2): Why are they religious seekers specifically; one needs to equate their tensions with a specific religious ideology. In other words why are they dissatisfied with normal religious channels, or with other alternative religious channels, and how does this relate to their perceived alienation? Lofland and Stark do not tie up their respondents accounts of perceived tensions with how they saw the 'Divine Precepts' ideology of being able to uniquely

resolve this. Why do they go for one type of religious movement on offer rather than another. Both the causal-process model and the brain washing model are inadequate in terms of addressing this.

Perhaps there is no real connection. In other words perhaps people just need to have generalised tensions, and it is a case of simply coming into contact with a group at a particular time, and being adequately socialised, that best describes conversion. This is the basis of an interactionist argument. This argument, as will be demonstrated later is as deterministic and irresolute as an unjustified mechanistic psychological-motivational view; to counteract both arguments, one needs to concretely tie specific tensions and alienation with 'transformative' action.

If conversion is a process whereby one gives up a particular 'perspective or ordered view of the world' for another (Lofland and Stark:1965), or a change in one's universe of discourse (Snow and Machalek:1980), then an explanation needs initially to ask why people engage in such change, and related to that, what the underlying societal causal determinants of such motivation, which one imagines would be related to why these meaning systems emerge in the first place. It is around these issues of meaning seeking, alienation and motivations for transformation that conversion stories have much to tell us.

CHAPTER THREE.

CONVERSION INTO THE HARE KRISHNA MOVEMENT.

This chapter takes up the issues mentioned above in terms of the conversion narratives of four devotees who had at that time each been in the movement for four years or more, and in terms of my experiences (conversation and observations) of staying at the movement and 'participating' in that life-style. Relevant issues in the biographies (Appendix A), in terms of seeking, meaning, alienation, and individual trajectories in terms of identity and ideological positioning, are highlighted through bridging comments between quotes, and are in a way presented as interpretation already. The presentation of the stories taken together, act as biographies therefore to be contrasted to the following 'findings'/interpretations, many of which are at times arguably over-generalised in terms of specific anecdotal accounts. It is imperative then to read these first in order to get a feel of whether the generalisations made in this chapter hold water in terms of specific stories, in terms of the of the interpretations of what is said, and to assess whether the general 'feel and tone' of the following analysis has value. Also crucial in this respect is the participant observations (Appendices B and C) made in reference to the daily life, ideology, and dynamics of the movement itself, in relation to these stories of conversion.

Common trajectories to Krishna?

Lofland and Stark (1965) suggest that 'felt tensions' come before, or rather create a seekership orientation, in the sequence of predisposing variables for conversion. To these individuals, to differing degrees, it is seekership that lies at the origin of all their other circumstances, behaviour and beliefs, and in the perceived picture of the trajectory of their lives, seekership that explains and defines their experience of conversion. What is the relationship between felt tensions, seekership and conversion? Are these individuals alienated and therefore seek alternatives, converting into an alternative life-style due to their persistent felt tensions and dislocation within a dominant culture, or are they intrinsically seekers, and thus become alienated by clashing with a dominant culture that sanctions alternatives and sanctions the very process of seeking for alternatives? Alternatively, do these individuals, having converted, due to whatever reason, reconstruct a history of seekership to explain their decision and past in a favourable way to both their sense of self, and to the group's ideology that they have been inculcated in?

Lofland and Stark's linear 'state-sequence' approach that sets necessary stages in order to explain conversion seems perhaps too elementary to explain what is, if one considers these narratives, a dialectic, diverse, complex and bumpy

trajectory towards conversion. Although diverse and complex, these stories do provide common themes as to the causes behind these conversions. The stories tell us that these individuals believed they were seekers intrinsically and this put them in disjuncture with the world and created increasing 'tensions', and ultimately a 'crisis of meaning'. Seekership is the perceived 'quality' that is seen as separating them from a 'generalised other' in terms of being uniquely positioned to take up conversion. The similarities in the way the devotee's describe themselves and their lives arguably intimate a particular 'predisposition'. The most persistent and powerful site of similarity is located in the manner in which the converts perceive their pre-conversion identities. The content of the narratives, as well as the language it is couched in and its general 'style' and 'pitch', exhibit how all of them, in some way or another, visualise themselves as having being intrinsically unique.

All humans view their past as distinctive, yet these stories allude to a rather intense and unusual example of this. These individuals see themselves as being distinctive and rare in origin (predestined by past-life to be different), in background (social outcast with deeper spiritual knowledge), in purpose (loner on a spiritual quest), and in destination (Godhead). They possess a belief that they are deeply spiritual by nature (religious, truth seeking, consider themselves to have an above average 'knowledge' of the concealed deeper affairs of human life and existence) and deeply spiritual by need (having an above average hunger for spiritual knowledge, a desire for absolute understanding). Tied to this self-definition and belief is their consequential perception that they 'always' knew they were destined to lead a spiritual life and gain spiritual knowledge, and the cognition (some cases this is arguably an 'after the fact' understanding although claimed as perceived then) that all their activities were geared towards and motivated by this fact. It is on the basis of these factors that they visualise themselves as being atypical. This spiritual 'knowledge' and nature separates/ed them, or makes them unique and 'apart from' their peers and the 'general other'.

The labelling of this predispositional orientation as one of 'seekership' appears provisionally to be an accurate and useful description of their anecdotal perceptions, and one possible location in which to describe their underlying conversion motifs. Their seekership is understood by them to have 'placed' them in a particular social space in life, that of being outside of and in conflict with 'normal' cultural space. Their disenchantment with the world, and the alienation this brings, is perceived as originating from their unique nature. They remember being at odds with the cultural system around them in different ways, and their consequent 'felt tensions' were undoubtedly for them a real sense of alienation. If we accept their stories, they were 'available' for some kind of self-transformation by being on a quest for exactly that.

These individuals remember themselves as looking for truth, meaning and self-transformation prior to their conversion. Many of the other facets of their narratives follow on from this perception. This seekership appears predominantly religious. There is a common perception, more vivid and intense in certain cases, they somehow were always religious and spiritual by nature, and the connected idea that they always knew they were therefore destined or predestined even, in some way to lead a spiritual life. This 'knowledge' and essential and unique nature separates them from their peers and friends, and they see themselves as 'loners'. These themes of spiritual distinctiveness and being seekers goes beyond, again more so in some cases, simply a facet of self-image, but defines a general core identity.

These individuals were arguably in reality, beyond simply saying they were, all 'outside of the system', and at odds to 'it' in what they perceived as fundamental ways. Thus their self-image seems connected to various instances of disenchantment with a 'dominant culture' and various levels and occurrences of alienation and tensions stemming from this contradictory space in the world. This self-image of spirituality and general self-identity of being outside to regular life, yet of being somehow predestined or on course for greater things, comes to the fore when individuals are at points of tension within their cultural space. This is evidenced with various entanglements with the cultural system. This leads for them to a questioning of significant others as well as a questioning of general cultural norms and philosophies. In some cases there is evidence of extreme disenchantment with the world outside, even an alienation from that world. This seems to solidify a general 'searching' outlook and significantly a strengthening of this self-perceived outsider image. Relations with significant others become difficult in a way that at times seem more endemic than 'growing pains'. They speak often of how their general social relations were perceived by themselves to be empty of real significance in terms of this perceived inner core. A common theme relates to the fact that their friends were not people who shared their inner feelings of spirituality, or their feelings about the cultural system around them, in terms of how they saw that system as unjust or themselves as not fitting into that system.

These devotees, notably Paul, and to a lesser extent Abe and Tom (who both describe their mother and girl-friend as the only significant friendships in terms of 'spirituality') do develop significant friends and relationships that share this inner self, and their statements about such relationships reveal again something of this identity and perception of being and feeling different and alone in the world of the generalised other. There is a feel in the stories that these identities - again more evident in some cases - become not only more estranged from general cultural space, but more self contained in a burgeoning spiritual and other 'knowledge'. All the above elements come to some sort of crisis and turning point in these stories that is seen by converts to have been a watershed moment in their lives where they 'chanced' - in fact they do not view it as chance

at all but destiny - on the movement at just the right time. The movements ideology makes sense to them and explains previously perplexing questions, thus broadening their own spiritual knowledge. They all recall being immediately attracted to the devotees, the philosophy (which some mention being familiar with already or familiar with similar ideas), and the life-style. This immediacy also applies to their perception that their attraction to the movement a natural and irresistible event, a culmination of all that comes before. They thus found it relatively easy to give up facets of their previous life in lieu of a 'higher taste' and to naturally follow their destinies.

Their conversion into Krishna is however not immediate even though their narratives suggest many points of immediate understanding and attraction. They all speak of the difficulties of accepting Krishna, of the process being hard and austere. Their commitment to Krishna arguably comes over time, and is seems cemented to their past life in the sense of their previous identity and ideology. It is in Krishna that they find many of their previous levels of disenchantment overcome, and they speak of Krishna answering the exact questions and problems that had been plaguing them for so long. Their ideological outlook on the world has thus in their eyes been 'completed' in the sense of finding closure, surety, and the answers and life-style they have sought for. This however is not a total change in the sense it is intimately related to what they were before; in this sense they have not entered a magical place that presents an entirely original and new perspective to them, but have entered a world that almost seems familiar (John's comments that the devotees did not seem at all 'weird' to him).

Various facets of their experience of entering the world of Krishna, such as the austerity of that life-style, and the communal and unconditional friendliness of that world and the intoxicating alieness of the philosophy and daily life, are recalled as new and revolutionary to them at that time. These elements, combined with their partial congruity to other factors, such as the many new age ideas expressed in the movement, such as vegetarianism, eastern philosophy, and desires for a better society and an alternative to that society, as well as their deep need for spiritual input, seem to go some way in making their conversion to Hare Krishna understandable.

A 'loner on a quest', an outsider to the system, was the symbolic image that permeated a general self-identity, and is arguably the defining element of their pre-conversion 'ideological positioning'. This cultural location can be said to be the single most critical fact of the conversion of these four individuals, for the social space they were in - of being spiritual seekers, and of being consequential and continually frustrated by prior attempts to transcend the normal and realise their 'true' position in life, of being general seekers as well at odds to an outside world -, made their decision to join the Hare Krishna movement a natural, logical, inevitable, and irresistible event. If we take their

perception of conversion to be accurate, it is a act of self-empowerment, and a life-style choice that is understandable in terms of their general life-trajectory up to that point. Conversion understood in this fashion is inconceivable, an unlikely event, without the necessary 'correct' ideological positioning. It cannot be understood without looking at such in the sense that it is this individual make-up that created the initial impetus for conversion as well as the impetus for a longer term sustained belief and commitment.

This in turn suggests we need look at the connections between such make-up and the specificities of Krishna ideology and life-style as being in essence compatible in the sense of reinforcing each other. These individuals initially join, and over time become converted, because of this compatibility; it is in Krishna they find their alternative, their questions answered, their disenchantment overcome and their transformation realised in a fashion that maintains and extends the texture and purpose their pre-conversion quest. It is therefore the nature and content of their past that houses the origin and texture of their conversion, and it is in the relation of these life-worlds to the nature and content of the Hare Krishna movement itself, that we need to look at to find the social facts and analytical logic to build an explanatory framework of conversion.

How does one illustrate that these individuals were meaning seekers, and if one does so, does this indicate that they were in this way, different to others and therefore more likely to undergo or opt for conversion? In the narratives there are numerous statements wherein individuals claim they were seeking alternatives and disenchanted with 'traditional' values and ways of living. Are such statements of meaning seeking enough to illustrate the occurrence and significance of meaning seeking? Perhaps meaning seeking statements are over-emphasised and cannot by themselves provide a strong enough feel that these individuals were seeking self-transformation and rejecting the cultural values and life-styles offered to them. To assume a linear connection between meaning-seeking statements, behaviour and alienation, and assume that alienation necessarily implied a desire for self-transformation is problematic. One needs to show evidence of meaning-seeking behaviour or orientation that was intense and pivotal to their lives rather than simply being instances of adolescent and youthful rebellion, or instances of reconstruction.

We need therefore to tie such statements up with the social structure of their lives and show how these individuals were who they say they were, in terms of consistently and intensely seeking transformation, and assess whether their claimed disenchantment was substantially related to this. In some cases in the narratives, meaning seeking elements are obvious, whereas in others, it is more hidden; we should not be too deterministic in suggesting it was not there or relevant. The methodology employed in this research was always bound to bring out uneven information, and further, we have little to go on in the South African case in terms of perceived levels of alienation as this small piece of South

African cultural past (white middle class in terms of Abe, Tom and Paul) is under-studied, and it is tricky to make a comparative basis to other reported experiences.

We can however make a speculative case based on whether their general life-trajectories suggest meaning seeking was pivotal to their general orientation? I have tried to highlight the connections in the presentation of the stories; based on these stories, it seems clear that to some degree, and to differing degrees these individuals were all to a large extent persistently engaged in a quest for more satisfactory meaning. In terms of this we are tentatively in a position to suggest that ideological positioning and compatibility are indeed factors relevant to the conversion experience. We need to develop this theme by understanding how alienation and meaning seeking possibly transformed into religious action in the cases of these individuals.

Converts as Seekers?

To some degree then all the respondents convey the self-perception of searching for self-transformation in their lives prior to Krishna. All experience levels of disenchantment with the dominant culture. All reflect an understanding of their self-identities as based in part on finding alternatives to a dominant culture. All reflect an isolation in terms of peers and family in regards of this deeper identity. All of them report that these matters reached epic and crisis proportions prior to their conversion. All say that it is in Krishna that these levels of dislocation are resolved, and accredit this as their major reason for joining and staying. In short, all fit descriptions given to converts in many other empirical studies. In what follows, we attempt deciphering whether this general picture is justified and what the relevance of this is in terms of conversion.

To differing degrees these individuals can be viewed in broad terms as 'threshold people' and 'products' of cultural alienation, at disjuncture within traditional cultural space - betwixt and between. This notion is rather vague and it would be a mistake to make too many generalisations in reference to it without a representative number of respondents. It is useful though as a broad description of these individuals; all come from middle class backgrounds, youth who have been alienated from the dominant structural and cultural institutions of modern capitalism, and representative meaning systems, and who have in consequence, distanced themselves from such a system and searched out alternatives. This discontent and/or alienation is both reflected and voiced through attempts to find alternative meaning in 'counter cultural' activity. This alienation, as well as the attempts to find alternatives, are thus causal to convert's developing 'seekership' characteristics, and perhaps causal to their conversion.

What are these instances of alienation and meaning seeking behaviour? The convert's vision of themselves as being unique and apart is not only a restructured narrative but indicative of an evolution of self identity that can be located culturally as 'outside' of the dominant secular culture. It is relevant that all the converts bar John display high levels of spiritual interests in their pre-conversion lives. Abe and Tom have Christian and Jewish backgrounds respectively and both seemed to be sincere in their beliefs at one time or another, a seriousness that suggests more than a nominal belief, or an internalisation simply due to background. Their thoughts on this theme display an interest in matters beyond the physical and secular realm of life which, however unfashionable, need to be considered as internally meaningful. The notion of them as religious seekers, beyond socialisation is concretised by the fact that they took their spirituality seriously enough to pursue alternatives. Their beliefs in conventional religion were never sustained and their reasons for this entrench the idea of people searching for something intrinsically meaningful, which they discovered traditional religion could not provide.

The case of Paul is more complex in terms of conventional religion and spirituality in that he never directly mentions a previous interest, although it is perhaps significant that each time he is in serious crisis he tells his mother he is a Christian. Beyond this though there are many statements that reflect a deeper spiritual desire such as his thoughts as to going to all the temples in the world and taking the best out of them and 'giving it to humanity', and his equation of Rastafarianism to religion and sainthood. In general then it would be justifiable to classify respondents - bar possibly John - as religious seekers.

However they were also importantly seekers in general. These narratives show that these individuals can be 'labelled' as individuals who were generally discontented with their life, and were searching for alternatives in areas that were 'counter-cultural' as well as specifically spiritually. This seems to apply to Paul and to a lesser extent to John. It also in a way can be said to reflect certain statements in the testimonies of Abe and Tom, although they both highlight a religious and spiritual search over and above any other medium of perceived locations of transformation. Interesting in this respect is a study by Kox et al. (1991) who apply the Causal Process model to Dutch adolescents, and find that enduring tensions and seekership are centrally important but specific religious seekership is not. Their study highlights the fact that there are no necessary orders or sequence to the stages of predispositions to religious conversion, and that some factors may be important while others not, but not all necessarily play a role.

It does seem in the cases of these individuals though that spiritual seekership did play a pivotal part of identity, and that perhaps was to them, interlinked with a general seekership orientation that provided a basic outlook to life. This 'seekership grounding' was never random though, but constituted a

`counter-cultural' nature; there are in the stories many areas of seekership, none more important than reported interests in new-age and eastern ideas. Shinn (1987) found that in eighty percent of his indepth interviews, respondents had been interested in eastern ideas of spirituality before conversion. All the individuals here mention reading alternative literature which is an important theme; in modernity we are bombarded by thousands of new age perspectives, populist books about eastern thoughts and meditative practice, countless books on self-improvement and transformation etc. However not everyone reads such literature or gets interested in such ideas, and these individuals to differing degrees genuinely seemed to have a strong interest in new age spiritual and eastern ideas in their pre-conversion lives, and thus can be arguably seen to have been, in comparison to `a wider population', individuals who would of seriously considered taking such ideas further than just curiosity.

This idea of seekership is further entrenched if one considers other issues besides spirituality and new age ideas. Important in the South African context is Paul's and Tom's political `awareness'; although their views oppose, Tom leaning towards an apolitical stance although not agreeing with dominant South African politics of the day, Paul being actively opposed to racism and apartheid, their views both fit into their particular world-view of being different to others. Beside reflecting a possibly important indigenous theme that needs more empirical investigation, this also reflects how particular ideas are interrelated within a specific wider identity. One example of this is Paul's connections between Rastafarianism, oppression, spirituality, being `anti-system' etc. There are many examples of the interconnection between particular ideas and a `general positioning' or general identity of being outside of the normal spaces of `conventional culture'.

Alienation and Seekership.

There are obvious and less obvious instances where individuals recollect feeling alienated in terms of the moral economy of their society, and feeling further disenchanted through their inability to find alternatives. They do not verbalise such disenchantment in these words, yet their statements as to alienation and seekership are more credible when one consider the fact that all of them were at odds with structural institutions of the dominant culture, experiencing phases of struggling to adapt and integrate into the working world of the dominant culture or conflicting with educational institutions that would lead them to the working world. Their anecdotal comments are connected to real cultural spaces of dislocation in that they were in different ways outside and arguably, opposed to the dominant system in perceived fundamental ways.

Dislocation prompted them to move through periods of trying to create alternative meaning systems through counter-cultural activity. Many people do this in their youth though and one needs to establish whether these seekership

qualities made individuals differently placed to others, in terms of their later conversions. Their lives arguably manifest a greater intensity and persistence concerning alienation and meaning-seeking behaviour. This is illustrated by the fact that - this is most clear in the cases of Paul and Tom, and to a lesser tangible extent in Abe's cases, and not often evident in John's story - although their searches for alternatives created a stronger sense of integration and meaning, such activity was never viewed as ultimately transformative. There are many statements of how these individuals failed to find both normal and unconventional avenues satisfactory. In a common sense fashion, one can say that at various stages they all had the opportunity to insert themselves into contemporary cultural locations, but did not do so, and seemed genuinely to be on a path towards some sort of alternative.

Their continued attempts to find 'real' transformation, seems to present a real point of distinctiveness in terms of the 'norm'; many individuals go through periods of disenchantment and 'searching' in life in a 'rites de passage' fashion. However 'most' do not sustain this over a long period and conform into adopting one or other contemporary roles. It seems evident that these individuals - again one can argue this more convincingly in certain cases - for whatever reason, were atypical of such trajectories. This point can be argued especially strongly in terms of their religious seekership; individuals separated general rebellious behaviour that can in terms of the above be seen as meaning seeking, from their spiritual feelings. They saw their seekership as essentially a solitary and spiritual affair; these self-perceptions of uniqueness, apart from the generalised other are related to their general dislocated space, yet is seen by them as their 'real' core. In other words although 'deviant' behaviour can generally be an expression of alienation and transformative behaviour, it is seen in the eyes of the converts as symptomatic of their dislocation, while their more spiritually related behaviour is seen by them as their true transformative behaviour.

Thus, it is as searchers for meaning in life generally that these devotees saw themselves as being different and apart from the generalised other. In some of the stories it is notable that this self-definition was seemingly closely connected to a deeper sense of being loners in the world generally, of being somehow chosen or imbued with qualities that made them different in having a higher purpose and fate than the generalised other. In some of the stories this perception of being atypical goes beyond only a self-view of spirituality, extending to dominate their essential core self-image, particularly in the cases of Paul, Tom and Abe, where this idea of being a spiritual loner, an outsider to the system, dominated a general self-identity.

These comments are backed by the fact that all the devotees saw their friendships that were based on rebellious behaviour, as essentially superficial while their closer friendships were based on 'deeper' issues. Many statements illustrated this as I tried to indicate while presenting the narratives. The forms of

disenchantment of these individuals are related then to cultural locations in the modern world; one can tentatively place these four individuals as being outside of the status quo, and further, as uniquely so in their qualitative degree of such disenchantment. Dominant cultural values and the moral economy of the modern western world - individualism, rationalism, pluralistic moral directives, loss of community, etc - need be incorporated into a wider understanding of such individual disenchantment.

In an important way then the meaning seeking behaviour and attitudes referred to in the accounts need to be seen as counter-cultural activity, in that such behaviour stems from a perceived lack of something in the respondents mind within a dominant culture. Whether this activity took place within a religious framework, or frameworks more popularly considered to be counter-cultural, such as drug sub-cultures etc, all entrench an idea of these people as not having found meaning within normal avenues, and searching for them elsewhere. Arguably, they do so in a more intense and sustained manner than a wider reference group, and thus their disenchantment and seekership behaviour defines a life-trajectory that places them in an ideological position and cultural space, that is in essence 'receptive' to certain opportunities rather than others. Before debating such a claim further, we need to discern how perceived levels of alienation relate as motivators to seeking transformation.

Dialectics of Alienation, Seekership and Identity Formation.

What is the relationship between alienation and seekership? It is clear that alienation is linked to a tendency toward meaning seeking behaviour and to self perceived identities of being seekers; the respondents reflect both a need for answers and a deep frustration in terms of not being able to find such. In a way then seekership is synonymous with alienation? They are seekers because of their alienation, but they are alienated because of their seekership? One needs to work out primary causes here or become reductionist and circular. It is a mistake to equate these two as one and the same, or as necessarily exhibiting a sequential order as Lofland and Stark (1965) do, for it is in the dialectical relationship between the two that we find relevant dynamics in terms of conversion.

These individuals see their seekership nature as causal to their cultural location and identity and thus as the central catalyst in conversion in the sense that it is seekership that leads to the existential crisis they all speak of, and see as pivotal to conversion. They perceive seekership to be intense, creating within them extremely felt frustrations, that led them to a crisis of meaning. Their spiritual uniqueness and seekership is seen by themselves as a predispositional characteristic of their conversion which is in turn viewed by them as the culmination of a process of the natural evolution of seekership. Conversion is the major watershed in their lives, one that is easily understood by them for all

their previous beliefs and activities and general seekership nature lead naturally up to such a point. It is thus an evolution and a turning point that is not related to chance, but something that has occurred due to their overriding concern with spiritual matters and their unquenchable spiritual hunger and need; their dismissal of conventional truths and notions of spirituality, their desire to find alternative meaning, their general religiosity, their frustrations of not being able to so, and so forth. They are Hare Krishna devotees because they were predestined to become something of that nature, and in their minds this is clearly revealed and explained by their seekership nature and their self definition and perception of being spiritually unique, and hence disenchanted, prior to their conversion.

This conviction is tied to a belief that they were predestined by past life affiliations and activities to become spiritual persons and in particular Hare Krishna devotees. This belief is related to their general perception that their previous behaviour and meaning-seeking is 'now' understandable, not only in terms of the fact and occurrence of their conversion, but in terms of Krishna philosophy itself. It is because of their predestination to become devotees, that they were different from the start. This of course can be said to explain the interactive and mental ways they come to reinterpret their past, in the ideological jargon of the Hare Krishna philosophy. An undeniable similarity lies in their descriptions of being attracted to the movement, as a natural and irresistible process. Related to this is their perception of the process of joining as a turning point in their lives and an unsurprising evolution. Also closely related to this is the idea that they were predestined to join such a movement. This idea is backed up by them in Hare Krishna philosophical terms often with the idea of reincarnation and past lives, preparing them for this event and life, relating to their identity perceptions of being spiritually unique.

In their terms, seekership creates alienation. However many of their comments, and common sense, implies that it is alienation that creates a quality of seekership. There is a grey area here not because tension precedes meaning-seeking or because converts are seekers by nature as they believe, but because there is a dialectic rather than a linear relation between the two. Alienation refers to their real state of cultural dislocation while seekership refers to a type of self-identity that grows out of that location, a self-identity that becomes instrumental in motivating action. Although one's 'cultural location' may create a particular response and identity trend, such as being a seeker, the development of that identity can lead to further alienation, and thus be seen to causal to a new or deepening cultural location or in these cases, dislocation. The relationship is dialectical and it within this ever moving space of cultural dislocation-alienation-seekership that self-identity and the development of individual consciousness that dictates a life-trajectory, is to be found, always forming, breaking down and reforming, never static until - in the anecdotal perceptions of these individuals - the event of conversion.

The fact that this relationship should be seen as dialectical is crucial in allowing us to locate individuals in terms of a trajectory, and assess a particular ideological position in terms of life-choices made. Identity is formed and shaped within the tension of the dialectic of alienation perceived and overcome. Core to these individuals is that although they have to some degree developed a holistic identity that overcomes some degree of perceived alienation, their cultural location due to this has placed them in a space wherein alienation is more intensely perceived than overcome; the dialectic at the time they encounter the movement is seen to be open rather than closed in terms of transformative desire, and thus is open in terms of being receptive to transformative possibilities. However owing to the qualitative dimensions of the identities that had developed prior to conversion, those identities/individuals were not open to just any transformation; there is a receptivity to a range of perceived transformative ideas rather than just 'any old idea', and conversion occurs because of that compatibility. This becomes feasible when we examine the 'moments' of conversion in these narratives, as well as the way in which the movement itself can be seen as an ideological complex that was perceived as plausible in terms of the nature of particular identities.

Crisis and Conversion; sudden and 'imposed' radical transformation?

The ideological positioning of these individuals prior to conversion is a reflection then of their general life-trajectories and circumstance, which in retrospect can arguably be seen to be dominated by an inevitable move towards some sort of transformative change. Their general dislocation became increasingly an intense and endemic part of their lives, leaning more to a alienation perceived rather than alienation overcome slant; this trajectory can be seen to be peaking at the very point in time they meet the devotees and join Hare Krishna.

In all the narratives this period of conversion is one described as the turning point of their lives, one that is perceived now to have seemed natural, irresistible and inevitable. This can be construed as reconstruction, for they would be inclined in terms of Krishna ideology to emphasise this period as a watershed in their lives, and place the movement itself, and thus their belief in the movement, as understandable, congruous, and self-edifying. Taking this line, their narratives perhaps illustrate the validity of popular theories that stress religious conversion as a sudden, dramatic, radical experience induced by extreme personal crisis, psychological impulses, dysfunctional development, unconscious regression, or situational variables.

The obvious references to severe crisis points in these stories are suggestive that conversion may be an escape where there seemed few other possibilities or where life had become so intense that a radical reorientation or solution seemed feasible? I have met a number of individuals not long in the movement who

have, in their comments to me, intimated that they had arrived on the doorstep of the movement in a 'bit of a mess'. There is no doubt that there are a number of people who come to Krishna in this fashion. Yet do they become devotees or do they move on shortly after recovering from their dilemmas? My experience tells me that there needs to be more of a solid foundation and ideological compatibility for individuals to become 'truly' converted. As well as showing points of crisis, the narratives suggest conversion is far more complex and volitional than a mechanistic interpretation of individuals being induced into conversion through crisis. It represents a coming together of two worlds, a meeting of identities that are seeking closure to a large degree and a philosophy that offers closure. In terms of the dialectic of their identity development, this meeting offers them a way forward. This period then can be seen to reflect the 'coming together' of the content and texture of their life trajectory, and thus is accurately a turning point. Of course this is not to say that such crisis periods have not been present before, and are unvoiced in the emphasis on their present standpoint, (life is perhaps a series of choices and conversion, religious or otherwise, all seeming as intense as the one before) yet this does not take anything away, I feel, from speculations regarding this particular image of conversion.

The popular ideas that conversion is a by-product of situational socialisation and encapsulated control, specific crisis or tension inducing situations or pathological disfunctioning of personality implies that certain individuals are prone to 'turn to' a religious orientation when such factors are in evidence; in such situations individuals lose some form of 'normal' rational thinking and their irrational behaviour is explainable in these terms. This is akin in a fundamental way to the brain-washing logic in that individuals are seen to be 'outside of their own experience', they do not exert any normal volitional behaviour in terms of it. Although, as will be discussed shortly, one can discern specific situational variables that may be related to conversion, and evidence of tension inducing crisis in these narratives, taking these exclusively as the reason would be wrong for they avoid understanding conversion as a continuum of a - partly - self-generated, action orientated resolution to the tensions inherent between alienation perceived and overcome. These narratives and the interpretation of conversion they generate challenge the logic of a one way process. It is important to consider the possibility that these individuals were in search for a crisis, intuitively 'knowing' that the event of crisis usually brings about some form of transformation. The objective social facts of their lives suggest that their crisis at this point was precipitated by their cultural location as outsiders, it is a point in space and time that their accumulated past of alienation and disenchantment meet. In this sense we need to see them as creating and sustaining this crisis, as much as it being due to situational variables.

It is not surprising then that they view their conversion as a natural evolution of their lives; the most persistent similarity in the accounts lie in their descriptions

of being attracted to the movement, as a natural and irresistible process and the idea of a turning point. This has relevance beyond simply being a reflection of a reconstructed past in the light of a new world-view.

These individuals mention uniformly an immediate attraction for, and sense of congruency with, Prabhupada's books and ideas expressed in the movement. They differentially also mention an immediate sense of attraction to the devotees themselves and the type of lifestyle they are perceived to represent. These two factors are uniformly given the most causal potency by them in terms of their attraction to the movement and their decision to join. In some of the narratives, first reading of Hare Krishna literature is described as revelatory, as immediately making sense and dealing with issues recurrent in their thoughts, answering all the questions they had been searching for, while some mention that it was the attraction of the actual devotees and their life-style that seemed immediately congruent. In the case of Tom the former is particularly strong. He read his first Krishna book at one sitting, and recalls that the ideas expressed therein, and in books read later, hit issues 'straight on the nose', and explained various issues that were central to his already existing 'framework of questions', with clarity and certainty. In the case of Abe, he remembers showing real interest in the philosophy only after meeting the devotees, but nevertheless as soon as he saw 'the practical side' of the life-style, he recalls an irresistible congruity. Similarly, John reveals that he felt it was more the devotees and the lifestyle they represented (he recalls that the more exotic aspects of the devotees did not appear 'weird' to him at all), than the philosophy that attracted him; however while laid up he reads many of the books and begins chanting at home, and expresses an affinity to the philosophy.

Paul's case also reveals both factors; he saw many of Prabhupada books at WITS and was impressed by the prolific nature of the man's writing, but did not at that stage go into them. However later he mentions the congruency between his deeper ideas and those he found in the movement. His descriptions of the philosophy to friends while 'stoned', reveal a deeper, partially formed alignment to such ideas. In the time sequence of his narrative he clearly places meeting the devotees with his prior feelings as to wishing to find authentic saints; the devotees seemed to him to fit this category.

Again, these recollections are perhaps more accurately seen as reconstruction or the importance now signified to the event as an indicator of reconstruction. However at the same time it also needs to be taken on face value for all respondents were in fact looking for those very type of answers, or at least dealing with a similar range of questions and dealing with those very levels of angst that appeared to be answered in Prabhupada's book and represented in the lifestyles of the devotees they met. These factors are as well explained by their cultural location and their ideological positioning as by evidence of a skewed version of the past. Their immediate and natural attraction to the devotees and

the embodied life-style is one of the most important perceived reasons of joining. In one way this suggests that conversion may be about finding new friends and then coming to believe in a referenced ideology. However it is relevant to remember that if we see their attraction to the devotees as pivotal to conversion we need to ask why they were so attracted; this once again comes down to ideological positioning in the sense that this was an important facet of their cultural dislocation, not having deeper friends who shared their spiritual basis.

This 'moment' of conversion then, is for them, viably seen as connected to their specific pasts. All the respondents seem to view their conversion as a re-born type of experience, but not re-born totally in Krishna's arms, completely new, rather re-born out of the materials of their past, and the new world offered by Krishna. This is most vividly illustrated in Paul's narrative about going to the Transkei, where his description portrays 'a meeting of worlds', and a life decision negotiated between the tension imbued spaces of these two worlds. It is relevant in Paul's case that his decision to join comes after a number of discussions with a particular devotee, whose arguments were seen by Paul to make sense in terms of views he already held. Thus the process of conversion is one of a negotiated space between present cultural location and that of the location of the movement.

In terms of this Lofland and Stark's (1965) notion of a world saver does not incorporate the importance of this process as one where the individuals are going about not only saving the world at large, but saving themselves. Conversion in this sense has to be seen as a matter of choice to some degree; their particular conversion is a self generated and self-referenced case of 'getting it together'. Conversion is the social form in which they achieve - perhaps only partially and temporarily - such actualisation. This is viable when we consider their conversion in terms of a negotiated, painful and significantly lengthy process rather than an imposed and sudden change.

The process of Conversion.

There are many facets in the narratives that suggest that conversion is far from being a sudden radical change imposed on converts or a pathological response to inner mechanisms. All four of the converts recount as important the austere and difficult nature of becoming a practising devotee, beyond only a professed belief in the philosophy of the movement. Another strong similarity regarding recollections about being and becoming a devotee focuses around their feelings that despite hardships and setbacks, they find that the whole process has been intensely worthwhile; in different ways they all speak about the movement bringing clarity, meaning, a sense of contentment and fulfillment to their lives and see the austerity of the process as pivotal in doing that. In other words they 'accept' the methodology of the Hare Krishna movement as prescribed in the notion of Bhakti yoga, rather than simply internalising it.

This seems to be a process that takes place over quite a lengthy period of time, and is always open and precarious, rather than total and complete. This is evidenced by their acceptance that they are in process of change rather than 'have changed', as well as evidenced by cases of temporary defections and comments reflecting recurring self-doubt rather than complete passive acceptance. One finds in this sense a far more thinking and self-controlled individual than the image implied by much of the literature on conversion. These four stories reflect more than just individuals repeating an internalised ideology. This relates to both the initial phases of their conversion which are negotiated and thought out, as well as the fact that after such a long time in the movement they still reflect individuals who are developing, who have doubts etc. rather than an indoctrinated or fanatical follower. Theories suggesting conversion occurs within the initial stages of contact, or even after a few months in the movement seem off the mark. Shinn reports a similar trend (1987). Perhaps conversion never occurs in the full and total sense suggested by some of the literature.

One comes to the speculative conclusion that the overall causal dynamic of conversion in these lifestories is centrally tied to the specific content and form of pre-conversion cultural formation and dynamics in the years building up to conversion; it may be wrong to speak too specifically or generally about various predisposing make-ups in terms of conversion, yet, this is not to say that the past does not meet the present in terms of the continually enacted negotiation between social actors and structural levels of cultural fabric. As will be discussed presently, it is because the Hare Krishna movement deals directly with specific forms of alienation, and thus represent a holistic ideological position containing a 'world-rejecting ethos' as well as 'world-affirming' alternative, that makes conversion into their belief system understandable. Conversion thus would be unlikely if it concerned individual who were not in a general receptive state in terms of that particular ideology; hence conversion is essentially understandable in the light of pre-conversion factors. This suggests we need to look to the distinctive nature and circumstance of both individuals and the group; it points to the relevance of intrinsic differences between a particular movement and other NRMs in terms the possibilities perceived by certain individuals, amongst the ambit of competing 'methodologies of being' in the modern world.

The narratives of these individuals suggests that conversion does in fact have a lot to do with the specifics of pre-conversion lives and that there is a case for pointing out certain pre-conversion disposition that 'made' these individuals more likely than others to undergo conversion into the Hare Krishna movement specifically. Thus, these pre-conversion variables can be seen to be one of the core causal elements in conversion. Perhaps though it is misleading to use the term pre-disposition for the variables are specific to these individuals; we cannot claim they reflect a general make-up of a wider population, but do seem to be important to the particular identity and ideology of these individuals. This type of

skeleton as a complete theory explaining conversion as the predispositional effects of personality traits is unhelpful though without locating social-psychological origins of predispositional characteristics and their relevance to specific conversions. It is problematic to simply imply on mass that certain people are predisposed towards a specific behavioural pattern or response in that it is difficult to show that on a large scale empirically, and also it implies a one-dimensional flatness to human consciousness. Thus if we move away from an orientation of considering social facts in the accounts as generalised pre-disposing variables, but rather factors that make up particular 'ideological positionings' that are related causally to the experience and process of conversion of particular individuals, we can begin to create a general explanatory framework. The core of this framework lies in the fact that it is the internal identity and consciousness of the devotee's as well as that of the groups that caused and sustained their particular conversion to Krishna.

The most obvious example of this is found in the narrative of Paul; the sense of being a loner, an outcast, against the world, and the alienation that stems from this position, is arguably undeniable. This may be due to the fact that he was more open and expressive about his past life than the other respondents, yet, he does seem to have been - although this is a very difficult thing to show in the sense of proof - concretely what he says he was. He reveals an amazing continuity in terms of his previous life, from an early age in terms of these themes. He speaks continually about being 'anti-system', and being into counter-cultural things that supported his views. His words are backed by his action in terms of his affinity with alternative individuals and cultural spaces such as Rastafarianism, music, drugs and politics, and his self-perceived identity of being on a spiritual quest and being different to others in this respect. Perhaps the most illuminating example of this lies in his perception of cultural symbols such as Reggae, dope and wearing dreadlocks and what that signified within a anti-system self-identity that included beliefs about the political nature of South Africa and its general oppressive culture. These feelings are clearly tied - in Paul's recollection of the past - to his general feelings about the world he lives in and the obvious angst that his place in this world generates. It is hard not to view his conversion in the light of these factors.

The dominant causes of conversion?

What then do these stories imply in terms of those stressing the centrality of pre-disposing variables to a wider frame-work explaining conversion, and those stressing the centrality of situational factors over individual circumstance and ideological make-up? At the very least, these narratives suggest that we must challenge the basic assertion that pre-conversion lives have no relation to conversion, and that conversion is only about imposed situational factors working on passive individuals. If conversion is not predominantly about individuals 'choosing' a particular life-style that empowers them in terms of their

previous disenchantments and ideological framework, then conversion must be about coercion. Although this dualism is simplistic, it illustrates the strength of the motivational ideological argument in light of a plausible alternative. This can, as shall be argued later, be maintained in the face of the likelihood of a reconstructed hue in testimonies, and in light of the fact that interactional and situational factors are causal to some elements of conversion.

The narratives of Abe, John, Tom and Paul all point to specific life-trajectories that were moving along a continuum that made conversion a likely, or at least, an unsurprising event. The modern world reveals a seemingly infinite variety of opportunities and choice in terms of life-styles and belief systems, yet people do not simply choose one over another as one may choose different brands in a supermarket. Religious choices cannot be understood qualitatively by consumerist analogies such as the one Wilson (1976) employs to illustrate his belief that religion is so irrelevant in the modern secularised world that it can be likened to choosing, almost at random, items in a supermarket. Although this line of reasoning has validity in terms of understanding the changing face of religion in the modern world and in that it reflects an important facet of our shifting, in-flux, highly pluralised world, it mistakes a cultural aspect of society for the way in which individuals utilise and interact with particular cultural form. If the modern world can be seen as defined essentially by its transitory and ever-changing character, can we then simply presume individuals amount to the same? De-centered means un-centered? Post-modernists apply this sort of logic at times, as do conversion theories that neglect the primacy of individual ideological make-up, or overstress the significance of situational or group determinants on human outlook and behaviour.

My point here is that it is a mistake to take indices of cultural form as one and the same as social actors. This is the assumption made by those espousing no causal connection between individual identities and life trajectories and life-styles entered into. Individuals are, at that 'moment in time' when they come to be converted, *tabula rasa* and manipulatable; conversion is something imposed on individuals by social forces and can be quantified to a specified moment in time that involves a radical change rather than a continuum. This is an assumption that 'non-volitional' theories need to make in order to provide legitimacy to an argument that relies on an image of individual actors as passive things that are inculcated with a new world-view through manipulative practice, encapsulationist strategies that engineer conditions perfect for inculcation, or through interactionist dynamics of learned behaviour and behavioural patterns of coming to accept 'new friends points of view'. Although I hardly want to suggest that all these theories share the same potency or features, they do share this trait of assuming or implying that social actors are neutral mediums through which other forces operate.

The narratives above not only suggest a likelihood of some sort of life-style change, but suggest strongly that this change was likely to be one of a particular religious or fundamentalist nature that presented a 'real' alternative. It seems likely that these individuals were going to join specifically a group that could, in a very real sense to them, provide an extension of their quasi-formed, holistic self-identities and ideological framework and provide closure/meaning/significance to the 'questions asked' and the perceived levels of alienation felt, by that individual ideological skeleton. In this sense these individuals become converted - conversion in this sense refers to the alignment of their beliefs with that of the movements, an alignment that there exists a already sound foundation for - because the Hare Krishna movement, in practice and ideology, provides an enrichment, a realization, whether this is temporary or more long-lived, of a life trajectory already in motion. Their conversion then is not necessarily or only related to the particular groups strategies in recruiting converts, or its behavioural interactive dynamics whereby individuals learn roles, or its levels of social control and ability to encapsulate would-be converts, but related causally, directly and specifically to the relationship between individual ideology and the specific ideology of the movement. This in turn suggests that conversion relates to a process where beliefs and cognitive make-up are to an extent, the first instance as cause rather than a case where people take part in behaviour, and then take up belief simply through their interaction or encapsulation within a particular belief system.

The core problem with emphasising behaviour over cognition is that it necessitates a particular visualisation of the separation of individuals from other structural social form, a separation that places individuals as subordinate in terms of their ability to control their surroundings or social form. In other words, if we see conversion purely as brain-washing, or as something people learn from role playing, or as something inculcated due to their vulnerability to intense interaction and ideological conditioning in an encapsulated environment, then we are in effect saying that 'the past' brings nothing to the party. In turn we are saying that individuals are empty glasses to be filled up, in this case with the ideologue of a particular movement. These narratives challenge this assumption. If they do not, then we are left to summarise that these individuals are no longer the individuals they were before, they have become something totally new, something that has been 're-born' in the fashion of a new God, not contributing anything significant to the process of their own conversion? Brain-washing models create this image well, an innocent passive victim rather than a active shaper of life-paths; these narratives suggest conversely that we look at conversion as part and parcel of the contemporary experience of 'rites de passage' which arguably has become increasing volitional in character. It is in Krishna that these individuals find closure and instead of conversion reflecting a circumstance where individuals lose autonomy, or the power to employ critical choice, conversion is about asserting and using power in the sense of making

choices of life-style are perceived as empowering. Perhaps conversion is a process of 'taking' power rather than losing it.

The fact that the lives of these individuals are grounded in 'religious' and/or 'non-traditional' problem solving perspectives becomes crucial to understanding their conversion for it is this facet that explains why they become converted in a real sense and not in name only. This in turn shows that the thesis of conversion as radical change needs to be challenged. Conversion is a difficult decision and not made lightly or without negotiation. All respondents speak of the process as a long and difficult one, as one that requires self-sacrifice. They are convinced initially and after time for a number of reasons, all which relate directly or indirectly to their previous ideological positions. Their temporary defections reflect a process of a struggle towards long term commitment and thus even though conversion is a likely event, commitment to the movement does not happen overnight or without adversity as many comments allude to. The fact that conversion is portrayed at times as an fluid, natural, inevitable and irresistible event is in one sense a case of individuals presenting their lives as homogeneous and meaningful as well as presenting the movement and their alignment to it, in positive light. However, it is perhaps viewed as such a natural and immediate event also because the ideological make-up of the converts is already partly aligned with those of the movement. This is in essence the most original causal reason for their initial conversion, and the reason for that conversion becoming successful and long-term in terms of real commitment. In this way conversion can be seen as an individual life-style choice that happens for it empowers these individuals, created for them a real alternative in a juggernaught modern world. The fact that Hare Krishna provided, or at least appeared to provide initially in the minds of the respondents, - and there is enough evidence in the narratives to suggest that the longer a person stayed in the movement, the more they became enmeshed in this holistic alternative world - a total, holistic alternative is thus crucial in the sense of their conversion being something more than a passing fad. Again here, their previous ideological make-up is seen to be crucial to the process.

The movement as life-world.

Individual backgrounds and individual choice thus may play more of a role in conversion than some standpoints accredit. With this comes the suggestion that perhaps the crucial factor in dictating whether conversion occurs or not is the compatibility of group and individual ideology, and hence conversion is about individualised self-willed transformative relations of power as opposed to situational forces acting on individuals. In order to validate and extend the general thrust of a volitional empowerment type argument, we need to show how the movements ideology can be seen to be compatible and plausible as an alternative to individuals, and further to show how the movements ideology and life-style in terms of creating conversion, can not only be seen in terms of social

control and encapsulation. We need then to look at conversion in relation to the specificities of the movement, the links between the ideology and the organisational structure and internal interactive socialisation dynamics of the movement in terms how such may tangibly materialise to someone entering that world of Krishna, how these may be seen to be attractive, ideologically compatible and in general plausible to these individuals and other entering the world of Krishna, and how such are 'lived' daily.

My experiences with the movement and devotees suggested that one needs centrally to understand the 'lived' philosophy of a particular group, and its plausibility in terms of content and style to those entering that world and those in it, in relation to levels of commitment. For many differing commentators of the NRMs, the philosophy and practices of a particular movement are unimportant or of secondary importance in respect of conversion. The most extreme example of this is in the discourse of the anti-cult movement, who, with their assessments of conversion as the result exclusively of manipulative guru/group directed brain-washing, lump all cults and NRMs together. There are also sociological assessments which exclude specific ideologies as relevant to conversion into specific groups, or equate recruitment strategies as synonymous with ideology, or suggest that interactive behaviour accounts wholly for conversion rather than individual cognitive pre-affinity with a particular ideology. My experiences have led me to challenge all these assumptions and interpretations to an extent, and to the understanding that religious ideology as a lived practice needs to be a central facet to any interpretation of conversion in the Hare Krishna.

The ideology of the Hare Krishna movement is based on a interpretation of an ancient text, the Bhagavad-Gita, that offers a rejection of and a alternative world-view to, both the dominant belief systems and life-styles of the modern secular world, as well as to dominant western traditions of religion. The philosophy is a thorough, exhaustive, logical and justified universe of discourse that operates centrally as an alternative and independent self-defining world-view. These alternative and independent natures of the ideology are arguably what define the movement at its core, in terms of beliefs and practices and general life-style, (rather than the groups recruitment strategies or its 'organisational encapsulation'). Further, these independent and alternative natures need possibly to be seen as the essential attraction to many of those who eventually become committed to that philosophy. To take up such an argument, one needs to present the basics of how such a philosophy can be seen as holistically alternative and independent in terms of the actualities of the ideology and how it is lived.

With a cursory glance one may consider the Hare Krishna movement as one of the many exotic quasi-Asian imports that have sprung up in the West. People who have little understanding of the complex history of Hinduism, see the Krishna movement as a odd movement based vaguely on the herd-boy, butter

stealing deity Krishna, and another example of a watered down Asian religious import. Many NRMs have been seen as bogus in terms of their 'guru', who often claims a spiritual lineage that he does not have, and drives around in flashy cars etc. from the proceeds of his 'takings', and bogus in terms of their actual teachings which often seem invented rather than ground in a tradition as they are claimed to be. I do not know whether such assessments are accurate in terms of various movements, but I do know that it is a mistake to attribute such an interpretation to ISCON, for, in terms of its teachings, the life-styles of its followers, and in respect of its founder member/guru, A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the movement is unquestionably authentic in terms of its claimed heritage and its stated purposes, philosophy and life-style.

Most religious ideologies, indeed most political and other ideologies, are a fusion of myth, reconstruction, interpretation and in some cases historical and present social 'reality'. Hare Krishna ideology is no different, yet, appears qualitatively different to some of the other exotic cults in terms of its authenticity. This fact - that the movement is in many ways an authentic representation of a long held living tradition, is important to the ability of the movement to generate a fusion of myth and tradition that is a holistic alternative life-style in the eyes of the westerners who join it. In this way the ideology and lifestyle of the particular movement is potentially crucial to assessments on particular NRMs and to the conversion of individuals into those movements.

In Appendix B, I briefly give a history of the movement and their founder Prabhupada, the historical teachings on which he formed the movement, how such make up the internal world of Krishna and then in what follows, show how such are seen and 'lived' by the devotees, and the relation of conversion dynamics to the ideology, life-style, and socialisation embedded within the organisational dynamics of the movement. All the while I attempt to illustrate how these facets make up a holistic alternative and independent 'life-world'.

The beliefs, traditions, taboos, and methods of devotional practice discussed in Appendix B are constructed in Hare Krishna into a distinctive and thoroughly 'complete' lifestyle and cosmology with an almost singular purpose. This life-style and ideology has been documented in Daner (1976), Shinn (1987), and Rochford (1985), but not always linked to conversion dynamics and causes. To fail to represent how a philosophical system is distinctive and how it is translated into a 'lived ideology', is to fail to navigate a path to the inner core of the experience of conversion. From my encounters with the Hare Krishna devotees, it became clear that any analysis of ISCON that does not centralise an understanding of life-style is deceptive, for such is tangibly alien, exotic and unique to those entering it, in comparison to conventional religions, other NRMs and other life-styles in a secular world, and in many ways crucial to conversion both initially and long-term.

Often, reading over fieldnotes, I realised that this alienness is almost something one tangibly 'feels' when entering the 'world of Krishna'. This feeling of exotic difference continues as one stays there and resonates in the in the daily activities, the rituals ceremonies, the colours, smells and sounds. During the daily ceremonies and other activities (observations and comments on such are made in Appendix C) from private chanting, cooking, eating, going out to preach and collect funds, there is a spirit of ritual and myth that emotionalises and makes the proceedings, lifestyle and philosophy real for the devotees. It is hard to describe the reality, the textures, hues and tones of this world as an outsider, and even harder to appreciate such if one has never spent some time there. The observations in Appendix B and C are an outsider's crude and minuscule representation of the complexity of the Hare Krishna belief system, and facets of their life-style. Its purpose is to show that it is a mistake to characterise the Krishna movement as a watered down eastern religion with a suspect heritage and leader. It is the movements links to an authentic and historically mass based religious movement that provides its legitimacy and status in the eyes of many. Most importantly though in the eyes of westerners who are potential converts it is a legitimate, plausible and attractive option. We turn now to consider how this may be so by looking at how central ideological concepts and practices, many alien and exotic to westerners, are rendered plausible and attractive as a alternative way of seeing the world and of being in the world.

A Philosophy designed with 'universal mass appeal'.

The ideology of ISCON represents, in the fusion of ancient Hinduism and reformist reinterpretations of Vedic scripts, and a brand of modernist religious logic, and the inculcation of that into a rigorous monkish life-style, a philosophy that can be seen as appealing to the mass - both in terms of appealing to those not only of Indian ethnicity, and appealing to all 'classes' of humans in all societies - of humanity rather than a predestined elite or those of a certain caste. This is taken further in Krishna consciousness through a direct emphasis on a universalistic non-sectarian appeal basis and plausibility structure. This is achieved in two primary ways. Firstly, by dissolving the discursive antagonisms between Hinduism and other world religions and faiths into 'one spiritual realm' thus still emphasising the primacy of Krishna and the spiritual realm and the necessary methodology and life-style to achieve that primacy, and secondly, by addressing specifically philosophical questions that are claimed to plague especially the modern human in this age of Kalil, the age of quarrel and the domination of material over spiritual senses.

Prabhupada sets this dual but complementary tone in the introductions and content of many of his books. He stresses the compatibility and similarity of other faiths and Krishna as well as contextualising the teachings of the movement in terms of 'modern problems' and does so in modernist logic, for example the 'the science of self-realisation'. The word science is used

repetitively to describe the process of reaching the divine. Although the use of the word is understandable in the sense that the devotees see the process as a logical and systematic methodology, the uses of such modern words can be seen as a strategy to make the movement's teachings understandable in a westerners' eyes. 'Coming back: The science of Reincarnation', is another representation of this theme. It quotes various western intellectuals to forward the theory of karma, and often does so in terms that relate specifically to western interests in eastern ideas and angst related western 'problems' and issues of dislocation and anomie. Another example of this is the way in which the movement used central notions in the counter-culture in America, and terminologies used within general 'new age' contexts to make themselves contemporary and attractive. The use of the word 'self-realisation' of course aptly describes the way and purpose of Bhakti devotional service in the eyes of a believer, but again illustrates the use of modernist discourse to create plausibility. Another example of the merger of an 'alien' world-view and western practice and discourse can be found in the movement's strategy in the early days of the counter-culture to publicly represent Krishna consciousness as similar to the 'high' achieved through drugs, but a healthier more naturalistic alternative; devotees used to walk the streets with placards stating 'get a natural high from Krishna and never come down'.

A Plausible Philosophy?

Shinn (1987:87) reports that the majority of his respondents saw the philosophy taught by the movement as the critical factor in their conversion, as does Rochford (1985:70). Shinn is convinced of the authenticity of this from his in-depth observations of life in the movement over a period of four years, and by the fact that most devotees had not only had been interested in eastern literature for some time, but had considered Prabhupada's literature in the six month period before joining the movement after first contact. Shinn goes on to assert that most devotees had thus joined because they found ISCON's ideas of spiritual advancement to be plausible. This is a possible distinction between those who end up ultimately being converted and those who just pass through. If we accept the premise that most converts are indeed individuals that are disenchanted with a 'western way of life', and not just individuals who are having 'teething' problems, and if we accept that most converts educate themselves on the movement's philosophy before joining, the appeal of what Hare Krishna appears to represent, is understandably plausible and attractive to such individuals. A communal life-style stressing love and bonding over individualism and selfishness, the distinction between body and spirit, the fervent anti-materialism, the respect of other creatures, and so forth, all are possibly concepts that fit into an already existing world-view of these would-be converts and thus appear to them as understandable and revelatory in context of their previous lives.

One should not discount the fact that a groups particular teaching may appear plausible in reference to competing world-views to particular individuals. The central concepts of the separation of material and spiritual world, of karma and rebirth, we are in this body though we are not of this body, and so forth seem more authentic and attractive to some individuals who have challenged more scientific understandings of the world, as well as appearing to have a long historical lineage. The philosophies described in Appendix A explain the world in terms of human suffering, tragedy etc. in potentially more tangible and realistic ways than conventional religion or secular theories; like many might hang onto Marxism, relative matter, evolution, so the devotees hang onto these concepts. Further these ideas of rebirth create in a real fashion a reduction or a settling of moral accountability and ambiguity in terms of modern alienation. In these senses it is important to consider the modern state of angst, guilt, alienation and disenchantment seriously as related to the motivational reasons why people may be attracted to this philosophy. The age of the machine, of technology and information, the depersonalisation of the individual through individuation and the break up of community etc. have in many ways created the gaps for mystical pseudo scientific world-views. I was startled as to how deeply devotees saw their philosophy as scientific and more authentic, plausible, and attractive than other world-views such as hedonism, individualism, and Christianity that they had become disenchanted with. In more practical ways one can see this same theme at work; the philosophy explains evolution, and thus our understanding of ourselves as humans in the history of the world, in a more satisfactory and organic way to those predisposed to wanting to understand these questions in a different way.

Another consideration was the general alleviation of social guilt with these philosophies; karma in an uncritical sense explains away social injustice and poverty, and places the believer on a platform where they have moved away from bothering with such concerns. However the devotees feel they deal with such issues in a real way in the sense of being charitable to the less fortunate in terms of their food for life programme; it was decreed by Prabhupada that no-one within a ten mile radius of any temple should go hungry.

Related to the issues of modern angst is the fact that in the modern world we are bombarded with concerns and methodologies in respect of self-transformation. There is a generalised tendency in the modern world to solve problems of life through an internalisation of issues and harnessing inner power; whether one sees this as a escapism or illusion is not the point. For would be devotees, fed this diet of 'new age' ideas, Krishna and its claims to a 'science of self-realisation', a fusion thus of contemporary concerns in a modernist discourse yet an exotic and seemingly ancient tradition, appears to some to be 'the real thing'.

Another indirect issue here is the millennial aspects of the philosophy; although not as apocalyptic as say forms of Christianity, it does share common themes. In Krishna beliefs, it is taught that all of material matter and creation has a life span of four billion, three hundred million years, after which all will be drawn back into Godhead; after this period everything will resume again and souls will restart their rounds of rebirth through another cosmic cycle, all except those who have achieved the status of pure devotee, who will pass into pure eternal bliss. Thus, devotees see themselves on a platform that will ensure their ultimate salvation as opposed to others. Some beliefs also promote the idea of predestination, yet the huge time-spans spoken of and the fact that no spirit is ultimately denied the chance of liberation, makes one reluctant to call this qualitatively similar to millennial prophecies. This said, there seems little doubt that devotees themselves see their lives on a path to salvation as opposed to before.

Krishna as a tangible and personal God.

These considerations become enriched in the minds of the devotees when they begin to live the life of a devotee, primarily because Krishna represents in many ways a personal God that is materialised in a colourful and tangible fashion. A devotee told me that he liked living the movement because he could 'taste, see, feel, smell and touch God'. One facet not easily understood by western outsiders is the ritualistic and tactile elements of Krishna religious life, that create in the devotee's mind, a guise of Krishna as a personal, reachable and tangible God, as opposed to the more drier and distanced deities of the western religions.

What many westerners view rather suspiciously as 'idol' worship (although many pay homage to Christ through worshipping his image on a cross), the devotees see simply as reverence paid to the incarnations of the deities; the reverence of images, called deva-puja is seen as an authentic style of devotion in that devotees are taught in line with traditional Scriptures that deities take worldly human, animal and material forms to be in the presence of their committed followers. There is no doubt that a serious devotee genuinely believes they are worshipping or clothing or feeding something imbued with the real form and essence of Krishna, in as far as they in their imperfect state can perceive Krishna. Adding to this feeling of exotic ritualism is the variety of colours and forms of the deity incarnations or arcas. These beautifully made and dressed incarnations give Hare Krishna ceremonies a real sense of other-worldliness in the eyes of those who have not experienced that sort of thing. Combined with the rhythmic Vedic chanting and singing and precise offerings and motions, one can understand that these elements create a general feeling of exotic authenticity to those entering the temple. There is further a type of subliminal ecstasy and collective emotional sharing and outpouring that organically generates at the morning aratrikas. One devotee commented that it was his first and best 'kick' of the day, and that somehow it got his 'mind right' for Bhakti. I

witnessed that devotees that had been in the movement for years seemed still to fervently enjoy the morning and other rituals. The ceremonies seemed then to instil the correct 'mood' for devotional service (see Appendix C for more detailed descriptions and also Shinn:1987 for similar comments).

This life-style, from my vantage point, seemed to promote a living emotional experience through these communal daily rituals and activities. In comparison to the rather formal and dry religious backgrounds that many devotees come from, or the individualist materialist cut-throat secular background, (I use such airy words with caution and only because some people genuinely see the modern western capitalist world in such a fashion), or the non-communal background of the nuclear family, this world does seem enticing. Whereas most western traditional religions are formalistic and lack any sense of ritual or collective expressions of 'feeling in the presence of God', Krishna enacts these ritualistic elements, and the spin-offs of such, every day. I was candidly amazed how enthusiastically devotees danced and sung, infecting each other and often outsiders looking in. It was as if there was a real tangible energy in the air during such rituals; this 'feeling' is at the level of subliminal as well as conscious awareness, taken by the devotees as the presence of their God. This entrenches the general feel of a personal and tangible God. The devotees' actions of prostrating themselves to the deities, enacting a celestial connectiveness countless times throughout the day by chanting the Mahamantra with their beads, eating holy prasada, etc, is viewed by this writer as qualitatively something more than average nominal religious behaviour in terms of potential affects on individual orientations.

There are similar themes in Christianity, just less communally and ritualistically employed. The image of Catholic private prayer (such a common theme in movies) comes to mind; a moment in time, where you reflect or make hard decision and are inspired to make a choice or to carry on, through divine guidance. This type of theme is there consistently in the daily life of Krishna, and further in a more concrete fashion, both on a personal one-on-one basis with God, and on a communal appreciation and experience of the divine. One can understand why the devotees say Krishna is a continuous high, without the drugs. Life in Krishna can be seen to revitalise the ritualistic elements of religion in contrast to traditional alternatives, or the rationalistic, materialistic, and, to some, mundane and depersonalised cultural values of modern secular life. Krishna adds colour, touch, smell, texture, sound and action to the experience of personal faith and to living a life. In a sense modern religions such as Christianity and Judaism have been secularised in terms of outlook, political orientation, emotive content; in this regard, Krishna can be seen as potentially offering a faith to those disenchanted by the modern world, a faith that resacralises these spaces of human life.

Even more regular and mundane activities like eating and distributing books are imbued with this sense of joy and purpose. The basic act of eating is extremely ritualised and sacralised; to eat is not to fill the belly or to eat out of necessity, but rather viewed as a pure and meaningful extension of devotional practice. Only initiated devotees are allowed to cook or touch kitchen implements as this is seen as sacred ground for they feed Krishna. One devotee told me of a common joke amongst devotees; its not that 'we' are in a process of going back to Godhood, but more like 'we' are eating our way to Godhead. Although this comment was made tongue in cheek, and in reference to the undeniable exquisite food, it intimates a serious issue. On every occasion after visiting a temple, devotees urged me to take prasada to my friends; they saw it as a way of spreading the word of Krishna. The food for life programme is not seen only as an act of mercy or social conscience, but of one of, in simple terms, getting as many individuals as possible to eat holy food. Or for example, book distribution, although palpably a process wherein agents are deployed to recruit more members and to generate funds for the movement, are seen by the devotees themselves, not as a survival and expansionist strategy, but as part and parcel of the process of purification which includes the duty of spreading the faith in this age of Kalil.

Another facet that seemed important in creating plausibility and was tied to this theme of a personal God was the centrality of the concept of a spiritual master in the movements teachings. If one comes to believe in other general tenants of the movements preachings, then the concept of a spiritual master becomes easy and even attractive to believe. Krishna is ultimately seen the master of all his devotees. His representatives on this earth, (who are not to be seen as the same as Krishna; they are 'pure' devotees and thus in the position to be a correct representative) are almost as revered as Krishna. This issue has two important points in terms of the discussion. Firstly, the concept of a spiritual master seems far more active and dense than similar notions such as a local priest or a confessional; it enriches the quality and importance of the theme of Krishna as a personal God and the attractiveness of this to would be believers. For example, compared to Christianity and Judaism which have a removed, sometimes seemingly uncaring God, Krishna is always there as the supreme spiritual master, but further his pure direct representative is also, thus entrenching the feelings of authenticity and personability to newcomers. Devotees really believe Prabhupada or their own spiritual master, to have been or be the 'most purest devotee', and thus, although, nor an living incarnation of Krishna, that individual is placed on a higher plane than a local priest, a kind of living Jesus. Spiritual Masters such as Prabhupada are rare, yet they do not come around only every few thousand years. There is no prescription as to the next Prabhupada, but many devotees seem to think such a person will appear again in their present life-times. I remember at the Muldersdrift farm on one occasion there was a young Indian boy who the other devotees were very exited

about in terms of his similar appearance to the image of Krishna as a herd-boy and his alleged depth of spiritual knowledge.

Secondly the practical concept of a spiritual master instils a sense of humility and devotion in devotees that is not naturally forthcoming in their previous backgrounds. The notion lies at the core of devotees accepting as authentic the idea that they must engage in a total methodology and ideology to enact self-realisation. The importance of this idea of a spiritual master became clear to me when observing the real reverence of which individuals spoke of their master, and how enthusiastic they were to follow him. There was always a general buzz in the temple if a well renowned guru was coming from the States. In terms of Prabhupada and present gurus, it would be a mistake to discount the affects of charismatic authority in terms of individuals finding a particular movement plausible and authentic. There are comments in the narratives that suggest this influence as important. For example Paul describes the devotee who initially convinced him to stay and later became his spiritual master in fond and revered tones.

In terms of the comments made above it seems an absolute necessity to understand how an ideological base is relevant to the allure of a particular movement and to particular people. Theories that stress coercion and situational variables as total explanations of conversion are not in a position to do so and tend to homogenise both the movement and the individuals converting. The specific ideological positioning of a group is also important to the socialisation and organisational dynamics within the conversion process.

Processes of recruitment, socialisation and emersion.

Although I was never really privy to information pertaining to organisational strategy, and the lack of a quantitative orientation in this research limits any in-depth understanding of how individuals are recruited, a few comments can be made here. It has been said that the Hare Krishnas rely predominantly on a recruitment strategy based on initiating contact in public places (Snow et al.:1980, using data of Judah:1976). Rochford (1985) suggests though that such strategies depend on geographical locations in terms of opportunity, and therefore temples are diverse in this respect. The movements strategies regarding recruitment of new members are in my experience fairly eclectic. Certainly, they do not exclusively rely on 'pick-ups' from their public forays, in fact these are rare. Some skilled distributors develop regular clientele who eventually come and pay a visit, and in some cases join the movement, but only after having established a relationship with particular devotees over a significant time period.

It is important to view recruitment and fundraising dynamics as not only practical strategy, for such are intimately linked to their ideological basis. Speaking to

devotees who regularly went out to distribute literature, it is clear that they do not view this activity as primarily economic or expansionist. Similarly, public festivals need also to be understood in this light as well as strategies of gaining resources, notoriety and new members. The primary understanding of devotees in relation to outside discourse and interaction, is related to their brief and duty to spread the word of Krishna to anyone who will listen. This does not entail necessarily getting someone to join the movement or to even pay a visit, for they believe that just engaging in discourse with others, mentioning the name of Krishna, promotes this goal. I found that the devotees were never overly persistent if people indicated no interest or were hostile to their advances. One devotee told me that he saw his attempts of discourse with non-devotees as a case of 'doing them a favour', and if they were not interested, that was their problem. He did not believe he had failed in his duty in any way if they rejected his advances. Certainly, I got the feeling that devotees (particularly devotees that had been there a long time) saw peoples' fate as in their own hands and generally did not reflect any great degree of over zealousness as regards to preaching to others. In general their approach (in terms of outside discourse as well interactions with new members) seems unlike say the persistence of Jehovah's Witnesses or the 'heavy' direct approach of the Moonies (Lofland:1977), and is more accurately described as a low-key intellectual approach (Shinn:1987). The term 'deployable agent', although useful in alerting us to the more survivalist dynamics of groups, seems at times too linear and economist to describe these issues in respect of the Hare Krishna. I think this is important, for the attitude of a low-key type approach has relevance also to the experience of initial socialisation into the groups and thus has relevance in terms of assessing conversion.

Some devotees do not enjoy going 'out' and if they are in a senior enough position, they simply do not. Other devotees genuinely enjoy engaging with a wider public. There certainly did not seem to be the kind of competition in terms of raising funds and bringing in new members as described by Rochford (1985) or indeed, any real premeditated drive to generate new members. This is not to say the movement does not have well orchestrated organisational plans. In terms of targeting recruits and generating human and financial resources, the Hare Krishna's exhibit good business sense. Where they can, they insert themselves into existing social networks. Interesting in this regard are their connections in South Africa to a University culture, to the Indian community, to various new age clubs, to various networks of intellectuals and networks of friends, and in more recent times, their connection to the sub-culture of music festivals, 'raves' and art and craft events. An interesting unexplored dimension here is the way the leadership of the Hare Krishna seek cultural locations that are generally perceived to be 'new age' or potentially counter-cultural; there is a predominant financial motivation here, yet it also indicates how strategies of recruitment are shaped by a movements general - world rejecting, affirming or accommodating - self reference system. I have been told that the movement,

beside generating considerable financial resources at Rustlers Valley and Grahamstown, have also generated a lot of human resources and interest. Targeted areas and networks are dictated by their positioning in the world and networks 'suitable' and possible in this regard in terms of their ideological stances in relation to who they think they should target. Although this research is limited in presenting a representative picture, a few comments can be made. The geographical location of their temples and the public events they target, are never ad hoc. In America groups have often chosen inner city locations in terms of a connection to pockets of the counter-culture. In South Africa, they moved into the Rondebosch temple (originally in Cape Town their temple was in Claremont) in terms of a historical connection to networks associated with the University culture. In Gauteng their original location was in Melville (as well as farm in Muldersdrift) close to the inner city but still suburbia. The decision was then made to have a temple in Hillbrow but this later was closed. They moved to Lenexia in terms of an expanding network connection with the Indian community. In Durban temples are situated in Caterham and Coatesville.

The process of recruitment of any individual takes a significant time and in general is a two way process and is better described as a period of negotiation than a one sided affair or strategy. Rarely do individuals simply move in. Dancer (1976:64) reports that devotees are usually encouraged to visit the temple before joining. I was told by a temple president that they were instructed by the Governing Body Commission that as a loose rule generally to encourage individuals to regularly visit the temple for half a year before actually moving in. This directive was taken because so many devotee were defecting after very brief stays in the movement. Individuals themselves prefer generally to 'check-out' the movement before making any drastic move. In my conversations with devotees, and my observations while staying at temples, and from the four biographies, the occurrence of an individual getting picked up or initiating contact themselves, or coming to visit out of contact that generated from networks, only rarely leads to a situation where that person moves in immediately. There are cases of this where individuals need a place of refuge desperately for differing reasons (earlier studies reported individuals strung out on drugs or experiencing massive personal crisis) but in the majority such people tend to 'blood' after a short period. I have witnessed only a few such cases. More typically there is a long process whereby an individual scrutinises the movement.

Further, although there is a lot of data from other studies that devotees at the time of joining are relatively free of other social ties (are uniformly young, single, not in the jobmarket etc) and are thus structurally available for conversion, one cannot take this angle too deterministically. As is evident in the narratives, although in many senses being available, converts invariably have a number of serious 'ties' to the world such as relationships etc. and thus to simply give that up was a difficult decision and not one entered into lightly. This serves to

entrench the notion that the decision to even stay at the temple initially, let alone to join on a permanent basis is a complicated and often lengthy process. Recruitment and initial contact thus needs to be seen as negotiation, as a two way process, not just something describing unilateral differential recruitment strategy on the part of a movement.

Devotees who do decide to stay with the movement are slowly instructed in all the ways of Krishna religious life. This generally is a gradual unrated process, and the devotees seem to use common sense in not pushing new members to fast. Initially in the earlier years devotees could be initiated almost immediately on moving into the temple. This is no longer the case, and generally devotees are expected to have a six month trial period of living in the temple before initiation. I met a number of devotees who had been living in the temple for nearly a year, and who were not initiated. When asked why they were not yet initiated, they uniformly answered that they 'were not ready yet', even though they had been living there for quite some time and were obviously seriously contemplating this as a life-style. The senior devotees also thought they were not ready. Such trial periods often include short periods where a devotee will return to their family or friends with the complete acceptance by senior devotees. I found thus a genuine desire on the part of the movement for individuals to be absolutely serious and resolute in their decision before being formally incorporated. This situation seems very unlike those described by studies pushing a brain-washing model of conversion, or by Lowland and Stark in their work on the Moonies for instance, or Grill and Ruby's assertions of encapsulation and boundary control. That is not to say that these factors are not relevant of course, but it does mean that the movement practises an intelligent common sense low-key approach that ultimately for them bears better results.

From my encounters with individual devotees both in interviews and in casual conversations, and from the insights generated from spending time in the movement, the conclusion that seemed unshakeable to me was that devotees go through a thought-out, often painstaking, process of negotiation with themselves and with the group, before deciding to joining. They typically visit the temple for a couple of months before moving in, and then spend six months of acclimatising before choosing to and being given permission to, be formally initiated into the movement. This initiation is viewed as provisional; it is followed by a second initiation that again requires a six month trial period and the devotee concerned has to show they are sincerely ready to submit completely to a full time life of Bhakti and the responsibilities that may go with it. Thus by the time of the second initiation devotees are likely to have spent a number of months investigating and visiting the movement, six months of living there, and six months after their first initiation before finally being regarded as formally on the road to spiritual enlightenment; a period of nearly or sometimes more than, eighteen months.

When a devotee moves into the temple, he/she must first have an interview with the president of the temple, where the individual is told about the four unbreakable taboos and on the basis of this interaction, it is decided whether the individual seems serious enough to warrant their inclusion, although it seems unlikely that they will be refused. After this the individual is assigned to a couple of senior devotees to learn the basics and the more intricate and subtle elements and rituals of Krishna life. When that individual has proven sincere, they enter their first initiation, the Hare Namma Disk ceremony (the transference of the Sacred Name), which involves a sombre sacrosanct moment whereby they are seen to move from the outer material world of body and matter, to the inner spiritual world of Krishna consciousness. They become born again through the passing of their religious name, which always has specific meanings. The presiding guru and the initiate drink holy water thrice, whereafter the initiate is lectured on central tenets of the faith. The initiate then receives their new name and a bead necklace which is tied around their neck. This is followed by the building of a symbolic fire to represent the original creation of the world and the commencement of the initiate's place in that world. The guru decorates the sand with appropriate dyes and starts the fire with a candle that has been dipped in ghee and pours a mixture of ghee and barley and sesame seeds on the fire every few minutes, causing sparks; the guru chants mantras all the while and other devotees respond excitedly with the word *shave*. The ceremony ends with dancing and songs.

The second initiation ceremony, called Brahminical Dichasia, follows along the same lines. It is an initiation to represent the formal inauguration of the devotee as a priest or Brahman. During this devotees receive their secret gayer mantra they listen to on a taperecorder, and men receive a sacred thread worn over the left shoulder. Once initiated, the devotee can now perform certain ceremonies as a priest. On the passing of this initiation, a devotee is considered to be on an irreversible path to Krishna consciousness.

This is however only the start of four stages that the devotee is supposed to move through during their spiritual tenure. The celibate student stage where you are a Brahmacari or a Brahmacarini, which commences after initiation, and is a period in which you follow a celibate spiritual life under the guidance of your spiritual master. If you chose to get married then you enter a stage called Grhastha, which indicates a householder or married man. After this period, if you have been married, you leave home life to prepare for spiritual detachment, a stage called Vanaprastha, and finally you enter into the 'renounced order' and are called a Sanies (if you have been married but have become detached and then renounced) or a Swami (one who controls the senses) if you have moved straight through to this period, in which you spend your remaining years.

In general then this process is thought of by devotees as legitimate as well as extremely difficult and precarious at stages, a process that above all, is not

lightly taken on. My experiences of living with the group backed up what was said in the narratives in terms of the self-willed, sacrificial and adversarial nature of conversion. This does not seem to tie up easily with accounts that speak too slickly about brain-washing, or group strategies of seduction. The volitional nature of conversion simply appears too obvious to speak in such overly deterministic terms. In my experience of the movement, I never once witnessed any evidence of direct control or coercion. The process whereby one decides to stay with the movement is almost certainly better described as a negotiated one rather than a linear group dominated one. This is not to say that social control is not in evidence, nor is it to say that the interactive processes of creating reference others and encapsulating an individual in a receptive environment does not play a pivotal role in initial emersion and the decision on behalf of an individual to remain in the group. The process is subtle and nuance rather than linear and one dimensional. It takes a significant amount of time, much of which takes place before an individual actually moves into the temple. Information on that 'half-state' period is difficult to obtain in general, and pretty much non-existent in most studies of conversion. This research is similarly limited as to this pre-conversion period with the exception of the retrospective accounts discussed earlier.

Overall - a fact that seems neglected in many studies of Norms - it needs to be remembered that if an individual does not like what he/she experiences, they are free to walk out at any time, and often do, even though a significant amount of subtle pressure is exerted on them not to. If they live at the temple and decide to stay on, then they become obliged to follow the movements rigorous and routines practises and rituals. Most individuals have already read a fair amount of the groups literature and begun to chant at home, practice vegetarianism, and in general contemplate the movements teachings. So, in a sense, moving in seems quite straight forward and natural, although many mention that when they actually started living the life of a devotee, it was quite a shock to the system, particularly the austerity required. If devotees fail regularly to engage in the practicalities required of them, then a certain amount of pressure is brought to bear on them by their peers and senior devotees. If they break any of the taboos of illicit sex etc, then they can and likely will be expelled (for examples of this see Shinn:1987). If an individual is regularly not in keeping with the general routine, which is at times intensely austere and hardy, (sleeping late is a regular digression for new devotees), then the other devotees will all admonish the particular individual, but in a very subtle fashion, for the devotees as mentioned are not supposed to exhibit any characteristics such as anger. This is not to say conflict and control do not exist, they just seemed, in my experience, very low key. Ultimately the devotees seem to genuinely to believe in the adage that people's fates are in their own hands, and there is no overt or even indirect use of manipulation in terms of bringing people into line.

Generally most devotees seem to embrace the austere and authoritative nature of Hare Krishna life. This seems related to the fact that if they (even partly) believe the general ideology of the movement, they in turn accept the necessary austerity of devotional practice. They seem to genuinely believe that they are 'fallen' and thus must engage in the necessary steps of resuscitation of their spiritual appetite. New devotees who often 'lap up' the doctrines are understandably resolute in their approach to this. Over time, if they remain, the life-style becomes easier and habitual to them, and their belief in the practises of the movement become deeply embedded; this is described in the religious literature of the movement as the 'correct' process of devotional progression. The latter is not to say that devotees simply accept every aspect of the ideology. They are in fact encouraged to dialogue with others and ask pertinent questions; this is taken as a sign of the process of acceptance, rather than a heretical attitude. In the lectures and classes there is often lively debate, rather than a picture of passive indoctrination described at times in other literature (for example at times in Daner:1976), although such debate rarely challenges the dominant discourse of the ideology.

There is no doubt that the movement, in many ways, is managed along strong lines of authority and stratified social relations in terms of levels of priestly status and gender relations and the ideological philosophies of the movement are in many ways authoritative and patriarchal. The same applies to life within the temple. The most obvious example of the authoritative nature seemed to me to be the almost complete lack of autonomy of individuals who had chosen to live at the temple as Brahmacharies and Brahmacharinis, rather than being 'live-out members'. If you had been a devotee for some time and achieved a status beyond being simply a devotee then you had a degree of freedom of movement and choice. If however you were new in the movement, generally speaking your every move was dictated to by those in senior positions to you, and your daily movements closely orchestrated and monitored. Although some devotees have a hard time accepting the strict lines of authority in the movement, many who are serious do so for it is prescribed in the ideology they are coming to believe in. The concept of complete submission to firstly Krishna, secondly to his representatives on earth (Prabhupada, and after his death, the GBC), then your spiritual master and finally your temple president, is a line of authority, that if believed and given credit as an unquestionable divinely ordained power of authority, becomes internalised and followed without doubt.

The daily activities of an average member, the ideology of the group, and the organisational patterns of the group thus co-exist along a number of space-time lines within the totality that is the life-world of a Krishna devotee. There are a number of affects of this in terms of the socialisation of devotees, and although one should not consider such situational factors as overly determining (or indeed, as shall be argued later, ultimately causal to conversion) commitment

levels, they are important in inculcating the right attitude demanded of a 'pure' devotee.

Encapsulation and interaction in a total environment?

According to interactionists, particularly Griel and Rudy (1984:264-8) physical (1), social and ideological encapsulation (2), and the interaction such fosters are crucial to conversion. If one is isolated within a particular setting, one will inevitably take up the belief systems of the setting, and of those around you. A cocoon of this nature is then instrumental to individual transformed identities, to the conversion of individuals. Many works on NRMs stress this factor as singularly crucial to the success of a particular movement in retaining a respectable number of devotees. The fact that one will become to some extent converted if isolated effectively, is by and large true, however this logic cannot explain why some converts remain in the cocoon while others do not, if there are no forms of direct coercion. Encapsulation is a useful concept if not used in a deterministically causal fashion.

There are three discernible facets of being wrapped in a social cocoon in relation to taking on a new belief system. Firstly, individuals generate 'reference others' who share their emerging beliefs; secondly there exists an invisible yet tightly woven boundary between members and non-reference others and thus competing world-views, and thirdly, intimately related to the first two, the real but hard to describe affects of living in a separate universe that has a time-space continuum that is self directive and self generative.

One cannot underestimate the effectual strength of being cut off from a 'normal' variety of information sources, and the tendency in such situations to internalise 'your world' as the core of the seeable universe, and to compare such to other worlds only in self-referral points of that universe. I think it is a myth that converts are 'mindless' in their beliefs or totally conceivable as being in a cocoon, or in such a world do not think about other ways of being or their own past in terms of competing ideas on life; yet the strength of reinforcement and self-reference is such that if one remains within the confines of a world, then there is significantly less basis for self-doubt or change than in the 'normal' world.

On a personal note, I found the 'separateness' of Krishna life extremely hard to bear in the sense of not being interested in the ontological reality of Krishna. If one has not the levels of enthusiasm for reliving the pastimes of Krishna, or debating the finer points of the scriptures, it takes some degree of skill and control not to offend. The devotees are in fact very unpushy to newcomers, yet at some point will feel inclined to talk shop. I at one point tried to imagine myself as a newcomer rather than a researcher; it came to mind that if I had come into the movement with no real propensity towards or knowledge of it, then after

awhile I would go mad listening to the constant barrage of religious discourse. At the same time I imagined that I would become attached to the individual devotees as friends - one should not discount the very real closeness and sense of community that the collective life-style generates for some - and in the process would start either believing in the rhetoric or joining in the faking. The point is that either I would have to begin to see that world as my significant others did, or it would feel pointless being there. This serves as a deceptive example, for perhaps people arrive in the movement with more propensity or solid reasons in terms of a religious disposition and religious 'knowledge' than my own scepticism; nevertheless, it perhaps illustrates that one facet of conversion lies in these interactive processes.

Another point in terms of these dimensions lies in the space-time consequences of this type of life-style; the daily activities of single men and women leaves no literal time to be self absorbed or reflective of your ambivalent feelings as to being there, or the 'space' to do it in. All activities are directed communally enacting and furthering the goals and ideologies of the movement. Generally speaking, all devotees, new and old, are left with little time to themselves, and when they do have such, these are meant to be taken up with private chanting or studying Khrisna philosophy. Many devotees have described to me the austere, difficult and particularly the exhausting nature of the process of being purified, but all have also highlighted the ultimate worthwhileness of it.

What seemed another vital, possible unconscious element, is the weaving together of elements of this rigorous life-style into a receptive state of belief. The life-style initially creates extreme physical exhaustion, which in turn engineers a deeply relaxed yet often euphoric mindset, and this coupled with isolation from the 'world outside', and the demand of total belief, generates a 'state' of internalisation that seems fairly unique; the modern world allows little time or space for retrospection, and this coupled with the radical doubt generated from our information culture, makes unlikely musings of a 'divine' nature. In a sense it is hardly surprising that one comes to believe deeply in Krishna; the state of internalisation and almost continual meditative 'quiet' joy that is possible in such a life-style, should not be underestimated as a core motivation to maintain such a life-style.

Another important dimension of encapsulation is at a social level in terms of image the devotees present to the outside world. Their distinct dress and hair style, their facial paint, their hair, and chanting behaviour are rules for interaction with outsiders that channels their contact with outsiders in a manner that allows them out in the world, but 'not of it' in the sense of not being affected by disruptive elements. This in a way a social cocoon created by the style of the movement, a way the devotees can present an image to the world without feeling naked and vulnerable in their identity. There is no doubt at some level this shields them and makes them self-contained when in daily contact with others

and the sectarian world. This type of boundary control is perhaps instrumental in terms of maintaining commitment if such is fragile.

Similarly, if they are versed in the philosophy of the movement, and believe in it, their 'ideological encapsulation' arms them with a particular version of reality which is to them as plausible to everyday conceptions of the world and as such they are encapsulated in a 'mental space' that allows them to venture beyond the group without the danger of damage to their identity and self-belief. This ideology is certainly to some extent impervious to competing versions of the world; the Hare Krishna belief system is built upon the denial/rejection/condemnation of many western core values and obviously if a convert has come to believe in such a world view, he/she has the tools to ward off countervailing views and happenings that may in normal circumstances challenge and a belief system.

These facets are perhaps crucial in fostering a belief in new converts, particularly if they are not already susceptible (they do not necessarily find it plausible) to these ideas. Encapsulation and the type of interaction it creates is in terms of the above a very real dynamic in terms of a conversion process. However belief is not something that is fostered by the group only, or something that develops out of simple isolation. For all the reasons mentioned thus far, belief in an ideology has to be seen in pre-conversion ideological compatibility and thus in volitional terms. If this alignment is not present for whatever reason, then individuals will leave the movement and cannot be seen to have been converts in the first place.

It is a problematic to equate completely a movements ideology and their alleged encapsulation strategies as Identity Transformation Organisations as synonymous as the organisational interactionist approach of Griel and Rudy implies. In the case of the Hare Krishna the process of the historically mandated Bhakti process, necessitates a withdrawal from contemporary life. It seems unlikely that the encapsulation that such a withdrawal brings about, is a conscious premeditative design of a life-style that fosters inculcation. The philosophy of the movement fits into this organisational structure in that to become purified you need to give yourself up totally to Krishna and the goals and processes of the movement who allow this possibility. This purifying process thus requires your every energy to achieve a state wherein you begin to lose your material trappings and habits, and begin to achieve Krishna consciousness. The purpose of this is of course ambiguous. If one takes the approach that this organisational structure is designed to encapsulate members and facilitate their conversion, then the totalised nature of the movement's communal life becomes clear. However the philosophy of the movement is aimed to 'purify' individuals thoroughly in order to achieve self-realisation. If those inside the movement, leaders as well as rank and file, believe this goal on a personal level, then it

becomes difficult simply to suggest that encapsulation structures are 'designed' simply to exert social control and facilitate conversion.

Orientations that over stress the idea of isolation and encapsulation fail to pick up on the diversity, mobility, organic conflict and individualism in some religious life-styles. The idea of being 'fitted' with a total new ideological, social and psychological identity did not always compare well with the reality of individual life that I witnessed in the movement, or the actual process of contact and emersion. A description of devotees as being physically cocoonised from the outside world, protected from potentially damaging influences, seemed only partly accurate. Individuals were free and even encouraged to move outside the group during their initial trial period. One conversation I overheard entrenched the validity of this for me. A 'new' devotee (he had been associated with the movement for about seven months) was asking a senior devotee (he was essentially the second in charge at Rondebosch) if he could go home for a couple of days. Apparently this conversion had been recurrent for awhile. The senior devotee asked him why he wanted to and he replied that he was missing his mother and his friends, and that seeing them on the occasions they came to visit at the temple was not enough. The senior devotee replied 'By all means, if that's the reason then go. Remember, you must decide if you want to give up your worldly life for the pursuit of Krishna consciousness. You won't be much good to us if you always want to go home'. The movement stresses that individuals need to be diligent and serious about any decision to join. Further, this idea of total physical isolation does not account for the constant mobility of devotees. As devotees become entrenched in the movement, their freedom of movement increases in terms of moving from temple to temple, and in terms of utilising their particular skills. I was in fact surprised to find that the movement in many ways stresses individuality in a fashion, and values individual skills and resources.

CHAPTER FOUR.

CONVERSION CULTURALLY: AN ISSUE OF POWER.

In many ways the Hare Krishna movement then, is usefully understood as an ideology and life-style that is initially and over time, something tangibly plausible and attractive to potential converts and to devotees. Themes in the narratives alluding to the ideological compatibility between individual and group as important to conversion become perhaps more understandable in terms of the comments made above in reference to life within the movement. These considerations lead one to consider conversion as an issue of self-willed empowerment as opposed to only being determined by forces beyond the control of these individuals. The following speculative framework that centralises conversion as an event related to transformative relations of change and power, arguably captures core facets of the anecdotal accounts of 'real' conversion.

A:Predisposing elements: Converts perceive themselves to have been 'Seekers', with a strong religious bent: a) converts saw themselves as spiritually unique with innate knowledge; b) they saw themselves as somehow destined for greater things; c) they saw themselves as individuals who have always been looking for answers and 'true' meaning and knowledge; d) they saw this uniqueness as setting them apart from others in general, and in that they perceived themselves to have always rejected conventional 'paths' and roles; e) such conventional paths included initial interest and involvement in traditional religions; f) Seekership was not confined only to religious questioning - in some cases converts search elsewhere for meaning - seekership was a generalised phenomena thus; g) however, although they have at times looked for answers and comfort in secular and psuedo-religious mediums, these, as have conventional religious mediums, proved for them to be unsatisfactory; h) in sum of all these regards, respondents perceived their pre-conversion life to be one of continual, intense and fruitless searching for a - predominantly - religious and spiritual medium in which their true self would be realisable.

B:General ideological positioning prior to conversion: This intrinsic quality of seekership and self-perceptions of uniqueness is seen by them to have lead them to be individuals who were often at odds with 'normal' life and they recollect acute tensions that developed over time because of this: a) in many ways they view themselves as 'threshold people', neither in nor completely out of traditional cultural space. b) tensions generated from this contradictory space of being outsiders, are perceived to have been 'felt' intensely and over a long period of time. c) this is illustrated by the 'fact' that these tensions are seen as related to a generalised self-perception, rather than random instances of adolescence or growing pains; such tensions form an important part of self-perception, a part that is tied intimately with a generalised self-identity of

being a 'seeker'. d): This alienation and seekership leads to exponential accumulating points of crisis and development of an 'outsider' status; they all experience clashes with facets of the dominant culture. e): Alienation and Seekership lead then to a more defined and holistic identity that is based on a 'anti-system' type ideology. e): there is a dialectic thus between alienation felt and alienation overcome which gives impulse to the development of a general identity of being a seeker and a outsider, a 'loner on a quest'; f) these identities can be seen to be partly holistic in that they are based on a never diminishing desire to find answers and a 'niche': they were unsure and strung out about not knowing what they believed in or what they were, yet increasingly they knew what they 'were not' and what they did not believe in, that being facets of a 'dominant culture'; g) also, they continued to feel that they were looking for something spiritual; a 'rebel with a cause' image rather than aimless defiance against an unknown.

C:Conversion 'Moments': Points A and B are seen to be still in flux though prior to conversion; despite this development of identity and pursuit of alternatives, and instances where individuals achieve a degree of closure: a) alienation is never perceived to have been fully overcome, disenchantment still lies at the core of self-perception and is evidenced in various continued attempts at finding alternatives. b): seekership is then still vigorous at the moment of conversion and a sought after life-style and identity is never self-perceived to be fully achieved c) In lieu of the above, their life-trajectories should not be seen as unproblematic cases of particular pre-disposition (there is simply too much variety present to speak in such terms), but rather a case where these individuals can be seen to be in a particular ideological space that promotes a receptivity and a compatibility to the Hare Krishna philosophy, and makes their conversion an understandable event in terms of life-style choice in this regard. d): Accumulated crisis and burgeoning identity come together in a point in space and time that converts perceive to have been a natural culmination of all that came before and the major turning point of their lives.

D:Conversion actualised: This image of natural evolution and progression that the narratives reflect is understandable as both reconstruction and an accurate reflection of their life trajectory. a) Conversion in this sense is neither a sudden nor easy immediate event, but a negotiated space and ultimately a contract between two parties. b) This negotiation takes place over an extended period of time and is perhaps permanently precarious to other transformations. In an important sense then conversion is 'a never complete process'. c) In reference to this the conversion process cannot be seen as a one-off or linearly imposed event. There are links between pre-conversion, conversion and post-conversion that need be seen in a three tiered negotiating and competing frame of reference. d) Conversion is about the attempt to bring closure to the tensions induced through these negotiating and conflictual references and conversion is therefore about the temporary actualisation of that closure, and is well described

as finding a 'space in the world', or a location wherein an individual touches a root sense of self-referenced reality, bringing about a 'change of heart'. e) Conversion then needs to be seen as contemporary self-transformation and self-empowerment rather than as purely a conditioned and shaped response to social environmental or inner psychological factors. f) If we are to look at conversion as negotiated space we need to begin to separate not only converts from non-converts but converts from 'nearly-converts'; those that end up choosing this as a life-style, as opposed to those that pass through or were never in the general area of ideological positioning to be considered as likely contenders for such a type of transformation. g) Once we begin to separate 'converts' from non-converts in this manner, it will possibly become easier to understand conversion in the respect of a normal social phenomena; one that, as with most social phenomena, relates centrally to issues of power within competing ambits of social structure. Conversion can be seen as a process whereby individuals gain power or control rather than lose it; generally most conversion models have presented or implied religious converts as individuals who lose some sort of control over their lives. We need to begin to understand the ways in which these individuals can be said to empower themselves. h) On this level we may begin to understand conversion as a contemporary social issue related to cultural change; conversion can be seen as a distinctive methodology of gaining power, that although distinctive, is indicative of the wider process in modernity whereby individuals lose power in an increasing rationalised and state-controlled world, but dialectically, are given the tools of individuation to resist such a loss. It is to this last issue that we now turn.

We have mentioned factors such as meaning seeking behaviour and attitudes as central to the ideological-cultural location of these individuals in relation to conversion. It is critical that these positions can roughly be described as 'world-rejecting' in reference to point D: g) and h) above; it is in the understanding of conversion as a self-referenced location in which social actors negotiate a space in life with a compatible social body, that conveys conversion as an act of power. The nature of the ideological positioning of both group and individual is thus central to any understanding of conversion as an act of power. What we need to ask centrally in terms of this, is, what substantially do individuals get out of becoming devotees or conversely what does the Hare Krishna movement do for these individuals; how can these 'exchanges' be seen as an act of transformative power by and for the individuals concerned as well as for the social body concerned?

If we ask these questions we begin to conceive of conversion as something to do with modern forms of individual power. The instances of this power are dialectical and ambiguous; where one person may see power, another may see a loss of power. This depends on how we view power; it is perhaps correct to say that sociology in general has had a fairly closed and linear view of power in that it is normally seen as something related to overt tangible observable

'expressions' of power. Whether an individual or a group can be seen to be 'in power' or can be seen to 'take power'. There is sometimes an assumption that there is either no power or complete power. However there are far more subtle and hidden forms of power, that have elements of both an observable lack of control as well as a less covert and expressionist form of 'being in control'; these forms of power may accurately be said to describe some modern forms of 'subjective power', which although less directly observable and relate arguably more to 'feeling in control' than 'having control' in an orthodox sense, are no less 'real' in the sense of control over something. Some instances of religious conversion are located within particular modern instances and sites of power.

The complex, ambiguous and dialectical relationship between discursively self-constituted individual sites of power, and other more observable forms of power, - also of course discursive - and the connections of such sites to wider relationship between ideology, meaning, knowledge and issues of control and volition, has of course a long lineage of intellectual conflictual discourse that cannot be entered into here. Suffice to say that this is one of the most important current debates within social theory. A few generalised points - while recognising that these points are hotly debated and neither empirically or consequently theoretically transparent - are taken here as given to forward a particular argument. Reality - as an image in the 'maps of meaning' inside our heads - is socially constructed as a discursive process that relates to competing sites of power in the modern world. As such individuals are both discursively constituted and shaped through these sites of power as well as actively constructing reality as an a process of defining themselves in relation to those sites, and thereby creating self-referenced images of their own reality/meaning, images which can be said to produce 'feelings' of power. Power is seen as therefore as omnipresent in a Foucaultian (1980) sense; power is not tangible only in the orthodox sense, as something imposed on elements of a super-structure by a base-structure, or something independent that is wholly seized or acquired, but something that is omnipresent in the fact that it is in all social relations because it stems from all social locations, rather than being primarily defined by any one given level of location. Power can therefore be seen to relate to the levels of subjective feeling as a real entity, rather than a 'state'; it is as much a cultural construct as a political-economic manipulable resource and is then tangible in its affect and effects.

Power is achieved over individuals through various means of state control and other apparatuses of the dominant culture; power is actualised and maintained in this way, not only through direct forms of control, but also through the socialisation of dominant cultural values and behaviour that maintain such a power base. However such dominant cultural values that are embedded within a rationalistic and secular discourse, are resisted and reconstituted and not only accepted and internalised. Thus perceived 'external power' is actively resisted and within that process is 'claimed' - whether this is an illusory process is

irrelevant as long as power is perceived to be owned; the issue of false consciousness is neither here nor there in terms of 'attitude' - for one's own. Individuals are seen thus necessarily as constituted and constitutors and 'discursive totalities' in their own right; the fact that individuals are discursively constituted in these contested spaces of power - rather than being linearly imposed on - means that conversion is a process of essentially of self-referenced transformation made within the process of a constitution of reality.

Many of the 'real' rewards of conversion for individuals only become realised after a significant amount of time spent in the movement. These are thus not always apparent to researchers looking at conversion as a short lived and sudden/total event. Indeed many of these rewards are hidden within a generalised self-referenced and self-claimed actualisation, and are not easily identified as expressions of power. Of course, religious beliefs and actions are not readily considered as expressions of power. This is intertwined with the dominant view of religion as a pathological experience of false consciousness, psychological disfunctioning, or deviant behaviour. In my experiences of the devotees and their life-style, one makes a grave error in excluding issues of power for the life-style of a Hare Krishna devotee offers a substantial 'world-rejecting' alternative to those who can be seen to be looking for such in a existential and sustained manner. The world of Krishna needs to be seen as a self-referenced holistic alternative within its world-rejecting ethos that offers not only a 'refuge' to modern trends of alienation but also a 'vehicle' to overcome such and foster a regeneration of self-perceived power and control in individual lives.

The movement is a refuge and vehicle in that it is a site that is 'safe' and isolated from contemporary moral angst as well holding an alternative way of seeing and being in the world that concretely works to transform such angst into power. This is however dependent on the individual involved; if they have no need for such transformation, and no ideological compatibility with the type of transformation on offer, then it is likely they may leave, as the life-style is not without cost.

Through its inaction of a all defining 'universe of discourse' and a 'master attributional scheme', the movement offers essentially a redefinition of reality for converts, one that creates a sense of a definitive moral order and a unambiguous place in that order for those engaging in Krishna consciousness. The movement thus enacts the possibility for reduced feelings of moral accountability in the face of a pluralistic culture that supplies arguably little in the sense of prescribed moral orders, beside that of a materialistic, bureaucratised, rationalistic scientific culture based on the depersonalisation of the human form and a disruption of various communal legacies, and a world that simultaneously engineers a confusing array of diverse methodologies of 'being'. This reduction

of moral angst is achieved not only through a redefinition of reality, but through the inaction of unambiguous stratified social relations, (issues of gender are resolved for some through this(Rochford 1985)) and living conditions prescribed by a strict 'methodology of living' perceived as authentic and transformative by those following its procedural laws.

Essentially devotees do not have to deal with previous levels of moral confusion because their reality base is no longer the same and they are supplied with an exhaustive framework of references to decipher competing versions to that new and internally self-referenced and therefore unconflicting reality. Believing in the laws of Karma is interesting in this respect for they indirectly circumnavigate issues of social inequality and social justice that may plague certain individuals. Related to this redefinition of reality, and the methodological laws pertaining to spiritual realisation and karma and reincarnation, is that devotees have 'booked' their place in the after-life; this is not as directly millennial as say the predestination of Jehovah Witnesses (no-one is doomed in Krishna consciousness, and there are no direct images of impending apocalyptic cataclysms), but nevertheless can be seen to play a role for individuals who are concerned about such matters in the first place.

However it is a mistake to view this as synonymous with a loss of control in the sense of 'running away from the real world' for the life-style arguable enacts a moralistic realm that is perceived to 'deal' with the real world, not only by redefining what is real, but by engaging real social issues in a pragmatic, as well as philosophical manner, for the individuals involved. Thus although there is a reduction of feelings of moral accountability, there is also simultaneously a self-belief of an expansion of moral responsibility (Bird:1979:335-6). In some cases this is tied to direct examples of devotees not only saving the world in the sense by spreading the word of Krishna but in a more practical orientation; the example of the food for life programme that all devotees expend energy towards can be seen in this light.

Thus for example in Paul's view, the movement provides a pragmatic formula for a perfect society as well as philosophical basis for that society. It provides for him a vehicle to conceptualise the possibilities of a perfect society, and deal with his previously perceived angst in terms of the oppression of others, the routinised life of his parents, and so forth. He sees the movement as holding this possibility for it allows him to become the individual he had always wanted to become; a person who is 'anti' the system but also anti everything the system represents or brings about. In this sense conversion is an enactment of power, an example of modern forms of 'taking control of ones life' where there was a perception that such control was non-evident. The movement is the vehicle of this enactment of perceived power. Devotees consider themselves to have regained a sense of primary control over their lives even though they are

adhering to a prescribed total way of life; they see themselves as being in control of their destinies.

However this not is a case where devotees are completely subsumed in an new discourse. Approaches that stress conversion as a coerced, or as completely defined by situation variables such as interaction and encapsulation, or conversion as a disfunctional response to stress, imply at times that the adoption of a new discourse is entirely radical and sudden, a 'complete socialisation', cannot entertain the possibility that conversion is about power. The transformation imbues power because devotees grappled with these problems before, and did so unsuccessfully, but nevertheless have the ideological base and need to continue to resolve such issues. Thus the success or failure of the empowerment depends on whether this connection between past and present is there; if not then there lies arguably no real rewards within conversion for individuals. In other words there is in these individuals a significant receptivity to ideas found in this world rejecting ethos, in terms of previous interests in various new age ideas and so forth. One will not find these connections by assuming conversion is simply about taking on a role. In this sense it is understandable that these individuals joined the Hare Krishna movement and not some other NRM or any other social body.

To extend the example of Paul; the passage in his narrative about him sitting around the fire in Transkei 'smoking it up' and chanting etc., conveys this idea well. Paul in general seemed to join the Hare Krishna because he cottoned onto the idea of it being something that showed the world a different reality. Not only did this fit in with his identity of being a rebel and being against society, but it was congruent with his desire to find and show others an alternative reality. On the level of his personal identity, it represented for him, arguably for the first time in his life - in his self-perception that is - something that was practical, real and holistic in its rejection of society. He particularly liked the idea of rebelling against the whole material existence, rebelling against the life that comes with the modern world. In a way he has been looking for this type of absolute rebellion his whole life. He really seemed to have felt that the movement was showing how this could be done, but at this particular time, this half-state period between old and new, where he is still strongly into his present beliefs and identity, the above statements reveal how he is slowly coming to a realisation that the movement - its ideas and the life-style it offers - has something else to offer him. But not something that is incongruous with his, up to now, ideas and life-style, rather something that seems to fit in with them and improve on them; now he would not just be rebelling against society, but rebelling against material existence, and the life that comes with it. His thoughts on what the movement has to offer as an alternative confirm the usefulness of this point.

This 'transformation' within Paul cannot be taken as - if we accept his testimony at face-value - simply a movement from one world-view to another, or the

submittance of one world-view with another. He realises he must change facets in his previous life-style, and seems prepared to do this, evidenced by the fact that he leaves for a short period of time because he feels he is too young to give up everything precious, but then he realises his previous existence was becoming too difficult to live, impossible to live. However he is only prepared to make the changes for the alternative represents an extension on what he has already. Thus his previous ideological position and self-identity are not simply enveloped in a new world-view, but to some extent dictate that change. His description of being in the Transkei, the way particular words are put together, 'take my robes, grow my dreadlocks', smoke it up and also sing and chant, and have Krishna books with him, have special significance here for they represent the meeting of these two worlds, the old and the new, and what the combination, for Paul, signified. They also represent that in his mind their combination, subsumed under a new world-view, was indeed becoming a possibility. We cannot say when Paul converted, indeed much of these narratives illustrate that conversion is not an instant event, yet this particular passage where he remembers sitting around the fire, thinking about being both a 'jahman', a Rastafarian religious preacher (smoking, thinking of growing his dreadlocks again, his image as anti-society and capitalism etc.) and a Hare Krishna devotee/preacher (taking his robes, chanting, taking 'holy' books with him) allows a glimpse of a window in time, when worlds meet, and a decision is made. There is a dialectic here rather than an instant, radical break from the past into the future. Thus ideas held within a particular 'universe of discourse' do become more salient under a new 'Master Attributional Schema', but they also dictate, and are thus causal to, that change. Because of this connection they empower people in the real sense of growth in terms of the past. Although these examples may be reconstructive in conveying a sense of crisis that was not necessarily as endemic or intense at the time, these examples do serve to illustrate the dangers of discounting religious anecdotes, and thereby missing out this important element of self-empowerment.

Conversion: transformative or conformist?

The movement through its 'world-rejecting' ethos and lifestyle provides for some individuals a vehicle of transformation. It can also be seen to offer a 'world-affirming' and 'world-accommodating' function for some in the sense of creating a 'space' in the world for individuals who arguably were unable to actualise such prior to conversion. In a way then perhaps this is not an issue of power after all but just another example of the 'dominant culture' finding novel means of managing the inherent tensions within its walls. It has been said that NRMs perform an integrative function for society by resocialising individuals into conventional roles or relocating individuals to a less directly combative role to the dominant culture, (Robbins and Anthony:1978). This points to the fact that there is a danger of equating mysticism and conversion with transformation too easily, as perhaps NRMs perform conformist rather than revolutionary roles.

Certain brands of the secularisation thesis argue similar points relating to the cultural insignificance of NRMs. Although this is a useful argument in many respects, it should not be considered reductively in terms of individual motivations to join a movement or in terms of the transformative effect of such movements on both society and individual (Robbins.T, Anthony.D and Curtis.T:197795:59-61).

This last point as to the debatable transformative effects of religion brings us finally to the issue of how conversion may be related to wider instances of changing cultural form in society. How is this question of power relevant in our search to understand the relevance of conversion in terms of modern change? The issue of whether NRMs and conversion should be seen as essentially reformist or revolutionary leads us to ask how and where, and if at all, instances of religious conversion can be linked to 'sites' of power? Or said differently, where do we locate religious spaces, and can this space be seen to be linked to wider relations of power and change. Considering the modern experience of conversion as an issue of 'taking power' or contesting disempowerment, arguably allows us to link conversion directly to cultural change. It is argued here that conversion is a direct instance of the many and diverse forms of resistance to the dominant discourse of modernity. To entertain such an argument we need to consider the relation between NRMs and supposed changes in modernity, and contest interpretations of the secularisation thesis that are overdeterministic in claiming that society is becoming inevitably secularised, meaning that religion can no longer be seen as a active force in either individual or wider social relations.

Wilson's views, discussed in chapter one, on the process of secularisation and its implications for the role and significance of NRMs and religion in general are in many ways valid. However, in respect of the narratives of conversion that we have discussed and in light of the implications these generate, the idea that religious beliefs and behaviour, NRMs and conversion into religious meaning systems have no real cultural significance needs to be contested. If not, we may as well adhere to the view that religion is a case of reflexive responses to an ever increasing programmed world, or to the view that any individuals or collectivities who 'live' their religions in a fundamental rather than nominal fashion, do so as a vestige of consumerist fashion.

The secularisation thesis has been critiqued by some as lacking the ability to conceptually explain cases of modern religion. Yet this is a theory that is based on central ideas that have been accepted in other disciplines and other branches of sociology, not without contest, but in general one feels that the central tenets (increasing rationalisation etc) are undeniable or have not been shown to be otherwise yet. This said, there are a number of theorists who disagree with certain of the tenets of the secularisation thesis, and considering whether these have substance will enable us to come more directly to a point

where we can consider what the thesis implies for conversion, NRMs and cultural change.

critiques of Wilson's brand of secularisation, although not providing convincing cases against the thesis itself, do suggest more useful ways to locate conversion within the context of wider cultural change.

Conversion: Secularisation or re-enchantment?

Richardson (1985:104-117), who critiques traditional models of conversion in tandem with a general critique on the secularisation thesis provides a number of ideas that, although unconvincing in regard to the core tenets of secularisation, do provide an alternative approach to conversion that points to a way forward in this debate. He suggests that a partial paradigm shift has occurred within research on conversion, one that has occurred due to the inability of the secularisation thesis to explain the rise of NRMs, a 'religious quickening', and a shift that shows up central weaknesses in the thesis that has been the dominant force in the sociology of religion until recently. He takes issue with Wilson for trivialising NRMs and their significance in terms of personal meaning and cultural change (Richardson:1985:104).

The traditional approach to conversion is based on the Christian notion of the 'Pauline conversion' which interpreted Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus " ... as sudden and dramatic, and caused by some powerful external agent. This singular event was individual in its focus, and assumed the total negation of the old self and the implantation of a new self. Emphasis was on the cognitive, assuming that when beliefs changed, behavioural changes would follow. Most applications of this view of conversion were typically applicable to predispositions, and thus were psychological in orientation but, even when applications were more sociological, they were still deterministic, with an emphasis on situational determinants of conversion (affective ties, "networks", or intensive interaction, etc)" (Richardson:1985:105).

These views of conversion have been largely addressed here, and the arguments generated have in the large concurred with Richardson's comments as to the limitations of viewing conversion as a process devoid of individual agency and the event of conversion as sudden and total. We need to ascertain whether Richardson's alternative remedies this situation, as well assessing his view of secularisation, which has been called elsewhere, an example of the mood of 'triumphalism' that some sociologists of religion have enacted in claiming that the rise of NRMs illustrates the weakness of the secularisation thesis (Robbins:1988:53). Although it is true that the secularisation thesis has contributed to these traditional views of conversion by entrenching the interpretation of humans as passive mediums through which social forces operate, in this case the forces of secularisation, Richardson's new paradigm of

conversion, which emphasises the importance of viewing conversion as a process controlled and determined by active choice making individuals, goes too far in rejecting the secularisations thesis in its entirety.

Richardson, although providing a more activist agency type approach to religious conversion, does not go on to provide a platform to tie up conversion with wider social structure and cultural change. This becomes clear when one evaluates whether his comments provide a convincing argument against the secularisation thesis for ironically, it is when one begins to connect the core ideas of increasing secularisation and rationalisation within modern society to experiences of conversion, that a more harvestable theoretical perspective becomes attainable. These ideas provide a wider framework, in terms of cultural ideological factors related to motivations for transformation, to go with a general individualist orientation, in the search for an alternative view of conversion.

Richardson suggests that individuals converting into the NRMs are "active human beings seeking meaning and appropriate life-styles" (Richardson:1985:107), and are involved in rational decision making, that occurs in a negotiated space, wherein individuals 'try out' groups without necessarily making definite or long term commitment. Individuals thus exploit the groups (converse to the view that it is only the group doing the exploiting) with the self conscious aim of self-affirmation. Individuals deciding to join often do so hesitantly, and over time through a series of experiments and thus conversion is not necessarily a sudden dramatic all encompassing event that simply happens to the individual, but rather a process that is calculated by the individual in a process wherein the individual is testing and exploiting the group as much as the other way around. Over time a mutual decision is made. During this process a person may join the group and then later come to accept the beliefs of 'their new friends' - they are thus 'playing the role' while gathering information that will aid their self abetted decision to leave or stay.

This orientation thus suggests thus that a persons belief system may in fact not change until later, it is not really necessary that an individual believes in a movements ideology before joining, and it is possible that individuals never come to accept the beliefs fully, or at least without some scepticism. This view of conversion, as 'social drift' is generally congruous with many of the points made thus far in terms of conversion into the Hare Krishna movement. The narratives of Abe, Tom, John and Paul were above all narratives about thinking, seeking, and active persons. However these narratives suggest one major departure from Richardson's conception of conversion, a departure that illustrates the weakness of his critique of secularisation.

The suggestion that belief and cognitive changes come later and more gradually, and behaviour first, within the framework of a process negotiated between individuals and the group is similar to role play and some parts of

interactionist perspectives. What is different and specific about this approach is that it suggests NRMs are about self affirmation, a process possibly occurring throughout an individual's life; conversion is seldom a once in a lifetime event. Rather, it is a process, a career of converting and deconverting, trying out serial alternatives on offer. This view of conversion as 'social drifting' brings forth a welcome dimension in comparison to the models discussed before in that we can begin to understand conversion as a self-willed event, and make sense of the comments and empirical examples discussed in this paper. It also paves the way to understand conversion as a negotiated space in which more than one party are in consultation, and further is a more sophisticated and possibly accurate argument as to the behavioural aspects of conversion. The idea of a conversion career is one that points the way forward in understanding religious action in terms of life-trajectories and cycles.

However, is conversion as behavioural and precarious as this approach implies? Richardson in his emphasis on behaviour rather than ideological cognition, fails to give us a real basis on which to understand why conversion may be a self-willed process; if individuals go through life - in America that is - trying out various religious options, why would they be motivated to do this in the first place. What are the cultural reasons behind this modern trend, and what does this trend tell us about modern society? Although alerting us to a new paradigm of conversion, Richardson fails to anchor this new conception of conversion in society itself. He at various times seems to attack Wilson as a writer who has a disdain for mysticism or religion of any kind, which appears misguided as Wilson is merely illustrating the very real consequences of increasing rationalisation and social control. Wilson is not saying that religion has no meaning to individuals, he is saying that religion does not play a significant role in society and does little to halt the tide of rationalisation. Modern forms of religion are shaped by these trends in society; thus the trends of secularisation, increasing rationalisation, individualism, instrumentalist scientific value orientations, bureaucratisation and increasing state control, pluralistic moralism, the wide variety of 'methodologies of being', increasing privatisation of religious and other moral systems, and so forth, are imperative to understand in terms of the emergence of NRMs and critically, aids us in understanding the potential general ideological (as opposed to just social-psychological) motivations of an activist choice making religious individual.

It is in this area of ideology that Richardson's critique against the thesis of secularisation is weak, and further his conception of conversion seems possibly flawed. In essence he suggests that the mere fact that there is a religious quickening is proof against secularisation; however it is the core tenets of secularisation that may explain this resurgence of religious activity, especially in its modern 'privatised' forms. The fact that people actively seek out the conversion experience is somehow related to an increased rationalised, scientific and technocratic world. If we accept that conversion is primarily about

individuals and that a viable approach would centralise the conversion process around actively searching people negotiating and trying out new ways of being, then we need also to provide a grounding framework as to why they are doing this, and as to the social space, and its connection to the wider fabric of society, this negotiation takes place in.

If we cannot locate the cultural space of conversion, then, notwithstanding the fact that secularisation theorists such as Wilson and traditional theories of conversion cannot account for the individual content within these experiences and in that are overly deterministic, we will be unable to provide an real alternative, and must consequently concur that although religion may be volitional, Wilson says as much, and is correct in stating that in modernity, religious conviction is no more than consumerism and shopping fashions, and is evidence of the increasing 'privatisation' of religion that is directly attributable to trends of increasing rationalisation, secularisation and increased social control.

Does it mean that religious activity has no broader cultural significance simply because it fails to reverse or affect these broader trends? If we are to understand conversion as a self-willed experience and thereby illustrate the cultural import of this, we need to ascertain 'where' religious action takes place in terms of a cultural location, and why it should occur specifically here. This will allow us to understand better how and why individuals may take up religious action and further, allow us to assess whether such action has wider significance beyond being an indice of the private realm of individualist responses to increasing social control. One direction that holds promise in this regard, is to look at secularisation as contested space, and conversion as one of the ways in which individuals contest increasing rationalisation in the world.

Conversion as contested space.

Although Wilson is wrongly critiqued for presenting a linear and deterministic picture of secularisation and its affect on religion, he does claim that where and when religion takes place, it is in an insignificant social space. If we accept the general tenets of secularisation, but challenge the idea that it is inevitable, inexorable, and all permeating, then a specific and relevant social space emerges that is clearly religious and related to the general characteristics of secularisation. This space is in a way obvious and inferred by research pertaining to conversion and religion, yet it is not made a central feature of explanations. If we are to connect conversion, individual identity and wider cultural process and change, we are investigating relations of power; in other words how such relations between individual, social agency, and their place in society, is contested, negotiated and redefined, around axes of power and the interpretations of power. Religious conversion is essentially in this perspective, a matter of contested space, but one that is intrinsically connected to the wider processes of modernisation, including secularisation, and as such, can be seen

as a form of social matter that is both culturally important and culturally related to other forms of counter-cultural resistance.

The secularisation thesis is inaccurate in one fundamental way; that of suggesting that the advance of rationalisation and the generalised secularisation of society is so 'total' and linear, it presages the ultimate demise of religion, and, in cases of religious instance, renders such culturally impotent. Stark and Bainbridge argue that one should not see the rise of NRMs as an indicator of the demise or unimportance of religion, but as an indicator that secularisation, although being a major trend in modern times, is in fact a 'self-limiting' process in that it produces countervailing forces. Dominant traditions are secularised and eroded, yet new movements and faiths generate in this space to take their place. Secularisation has occurred throughout history and is not a modern development and as such does not indicate or create the decline of religion and one cannot suggest that there exists in modern times a situation wherein there has been a generalised transformation of diminished religious importance. This is so because the counter-veiling forces created through secularisation create constant religious revival (new sects form around secularised decaying religious traditions) and religious innovation (new religions constantly appear). This argument suggests that 'religion' is by no means in decline nor unimportant, but rather widespread and in general goes on and on through stages of perpetual revival and innovation (2) (Bainbridge:1997:404-5, Robbins:1988:53,57-8).

Bainbridge (1985:21-33) has made another (related) argument as to the likely continuance of religion in the face of secularisation that suggests the rise of NRMs can be seen as a proliferation of intentional utopian communities based in a strong religious faith. Their existence challenges the secularisation thesis as utopian communities or experiments with religious grounding have a greater chance of success than secular experimental communities and thus, it is speculated, that if indeed it can be shown that religion gave strength to utopian communities in the past and present, then it may be that contemporary and future utopian movements will secure the continuance of religion in society as natural selection will favour the sacred over the secular. Thus the future may see, instead of ever increasing secularisation, an abundance of new religious communes with longevity. What is interesting is the reason put forward for this claim that religious orientation provides stability; citing views that suggest communes cannot exist long without religious grounding, he suggests that "Religion transcends the mundane concerns of ordinary life and thus supports the transcendent goals of utopianism, offering both general and specific compensators in promise of a sublime future. It can thus support self-sacrifice and altruism essential to communal society. The hope it offers can preserve members' commitment during rough times that might bring a secular experimental community to ruin" (Bainbridge:1985:22).

Stark and Bainbridge's work suggests two crucial points about religion in modern times, points that have a bearing on locating individual conversions into NRMs to wider cultural change. Firstly they show that the thesis is inaccurate in presenting such a linear picture of rationalisation and social control and possibly it is a self limiting process in that it brings forth countervailing forces (in other words modernity creates spaces that resist modernity), and secondly, they suggest that religious action may be particularly successful at occupying that space. In this light the debate as to whether secularisation is inevitable, seems to me to be of less importance than the idea of the unevenness of change, in terms of locating religious spaces. The critical points are that secularisation is an uneven contested process and religious convictions arise within this contested space. Time will tell us whether secularisation is an irreversible trend; it seems unlikely that anything is totally immutable, and change necessitates reaction and yet more change.

It is interesting in this respect that in fact religion in the past was arguably more secularised than in modernity. In other words, religion was an institution of power and control in terms of political relations and bureaucratised control. Wilson is correct in saying that religion permeated all areas of traditional life; ironically this suggests religion had been secularised already, and its privatised nature in modernity suggests a reversal of this trend, or a continuous cycle of secularisation and sacralisation. It is the dialect of this unevenness of change, that we need to locate religious spaces.

In some ways religion has become a privatised 'methodology of being' located at the level of personalised meaning and ambition; yet, it still remains a collective communal event in expressions. In both locations religion is potentially transformative and it is the 'event' of secularisation that has created this form and cultural location of religion. Because secularisation is insidious, it is also uneven, and creates and 'forces' gaps of resistance. This logic is similar to Foucault's complex thesis as to the genealogies of power; increased rationalisation creates increased individuation, which dialectical opens up the cultural spaces for resistance to individualisation through the increased power given to individuals who have decreased power through depersonalisation and increased levels of social control. Religious action can be located in a similar cultural dialectic.

Whatever long term changes can be said to be occurring in modernity, such, although creating greater rationalisation and control over individuals, simultaneously open gaps for humans to resist that change. This is partly what Laclau and Mouffe (1987) mean by the exponential yet precarious nature of 'discursive totalities'. If the process of rationalisation can be seen to be inevitable and exponential, so then can its reverse process, its antithesis, that of resistance to generalised rationalisation; there is in this view no final outcome, but rather an increasing tendency towards both. Pockets of resistance to

enlightenment goals are in evidence all over the globe exactly because the process of modern change has been so wide spread and far reaching, and critically, ever continuing. The two exist as opposites yet are dialectically symbiotic in reinforcing each other. Mol (1985) speaks of the dialectic of secularisation and sacralisation, a dialect that in essence describes a cultural location that is created through opposites. It is in this location that we begin to understand religious beliefs and conversion as fundamentally individualist behaviour connected to the politics of modern resistance and transformation.

Religion props up conventional beliefs of modernity in many ways and thus exists at the level of the politics of conformity and co-operation to the world order. However by its very nature, in its modern form, it stresses transformation and in doing so enters the politics of conflict in terms of that world order. NRMs, or some of them at least, particularly those of a world-rejecting non-western ethos, offer, vis a vi such resistance, a real alternative, at least in the minds of their followers; an alternative that is based on a challenge to a scientific technocratic depersonalised world. Thus if it is true that the advance of rationalisation brings about points and locations of counter-culture, then it would make sense that those points of resistance would be based on an oppositional alternative to the generalised alienation of rationalisation, science and an ever increasing technocratic world. In other words secularisation, if seen as a process of increasing rationalisation, lays fertile grounds for among other things, innovative religious responses. Campbell (1972), suggests that the 'cultic milieu' is characterised by its antithetical stance to cultural orthodoxy, and emerges in the dialectic ground laid by increasing rationalisation and a scientific view over a previously dominant religious orthodoxy. The "imputed process of secularization may be creating circumstances favourable to the growth of the milieu and the further expansion of cultic beliefs throughout society. The changeover from a dominant religious orthodoxy to a dominant scientific orthodoxy does not seem to correspond to any greater control over heterodox societal beliefs, for while the decline in power of organized ethical religion appears to have removed the most effective control over heretical religious beliefs, a growth in the prestige of science results in the absence of control of the beliefs of non-scientist, in an increase in quasi-scientific beliefs" (Campbell:1972:74). Secularisation ironically allows the flourishing of non secular scientific society, a blend of secular-sacular beliefs.

In this sense new movements can be seen to have significant cultural import in that they are related to the wider process that reflects modernity, not as a irresistible forward moving machine, but a process whereby the internal mechanisms of modernity itself, inadvertently and simultaneously create 'new religious spaces' as well as eroding traditional ones.

In many ways the dominant values of advanced capitalism are synonymous with those of secularisation in terms of increased rationalisation, individualisation,

privatisation, the work ethic etc. Secularisation in a way can be seen as 'the dominant culture', and therefore is a religion in a sense, much as traditional religions were in the past, or as much as traditional religions housed the dominant culture in the past. This is in a way a pattern of reversal, where religion plays the role of a minority, and the role, in some cases of a resisting minority. NRMs in many ways are counter-cultural to the institutions that are the bastions of the basic principles of modern society; this point seems to escape some writers who too readily dismiss the secularisation thesis out of hand. New forms of religious belief need to be seen as competition to this dominant culture, and as transformative means for resisting the disenchantment brought about through modern dominant discourses.

This is ironically, what Wilson is trying to argue in terms of the structural irrelevance of religion; he is well aware that secularisation is not a linear process or uncontested but wishes to show that overall secularisation is on-going and not necessarily irreversible. Rationalisation and its host, capitalism are such strong and complicated systems, that they allow, even generate, competition, yet this competition does not threaten the overall system, and NRMs are seen therefore, to be part of the process, rather than a challenge to it. Irrespective of these speculations, one can claim there seems to be an increase rather than a decrease of religious or pseudo-religious behaviour in the world, and culturally, such combines into a significant present and possible future societal trend. In order to make a claim as to the importance of religious action, we need to stop viewing religion as an irrational act, or one solely determined by outside forces, but an act that is related to issues of power; to do this, in turn, we need to look at the specific ideologies of movements and connect them to individual ideologies of perceived power.

Conversion, ideology and counter-cultural values.

If one cautiously asserts that the space that conversion and NRMs may be found in, is one of contestation and resistance to the trends of rationalisation, then, to make an individual agency approach credible, we have to show more directly why people are motivated to enter into such resistance. The motivational theories discussed earlier can be seen to as moving towards such a direction. As discussed, an inherent weakness of motivational theories is that they are perhaps too broad and vague and hence are in danger of polarising conversion as an exclusively deviant activity as opposed to other forms of social behaviour considered to be within the parameters of a normal status quo. The considerations we have discussed above suggest in fact that perhaps conversion should be viewed as more a normal phenomena or reaction in terms of dominant cultural trends of modernity. We need to view conversion as a response to a generalised normative breakdown as such theories imply, but not only in terms of a social-psychological process, but as a content specific event in

terms of individual and group positioning within social life per se, in terms of these changing cultural values.

In other words we need to shift our focus to a generalised ideological understanding of conversion; by this I mean we need to understand conversion essentially as one of a number of life-choice options available to individuals within society, and as with other life-choices taken, one that brings a sense of coherency and self-defined reality to an individual. This would relate an individuals general ideological positioning - including a social-psychological make-up - at the 'moment' of conversion, and the interaction of that 'positioning' with which ever group he/she is 'in negotiation' with in terms of a desired choice or transformation. This in turn would also include a consideration of the interactionist processes involved in such a meeting, but not in a way that necessitates their - or any other 'single' factor - exclusive causal predetermination. Further, this would potentially allow us to 'backtrack' in terms of how such interactional processes and ideological change converge with this previous ideological positioning, in terms of conversion as a re-ordering of the past, a reconstruction, that brings about a new transformative 'sense of reality'.

Conversion and ideology.

The concept of 'ideological positioning' was one that organically emerged in my attempts to understand the lives of the individuals I met in the Hare Krishna movement. It is a term that seems to encompass a broader array of factors than the narrowly focused ones discussed thus far. It conveys the discursive ability to fathom what I see as the essence of conversion, that of, in the words of Heirich (1977), 'a root sense of reality'. It describes this 'state' - not a classic understanding of state as something imposed, internally inherent in the subconscious, genetically ingrained, immutable or one dimensional (not that these concepts are 'wrong', but they are hard to test) but something 'achieved' and thus precarious and open to further transformation in terms of the ever changing cultural locations of social actors. It describes conversion in a more accurate way than say 'embracing a converts role' or 'internalisation of a master attribution schema' in that it 'brings it to life' the process in a reachable and tangible way. These concepts are useful yet they seem too deterministic and linear in suggesting a role that is 'taken on', rather than experienced at a deeper sense of reality in terms of self-perception, self-identity and self-actualisation.

Heirich (1977:677), in an intuitive paper, suggests that " Religious conversion holds far more interest than most social scientists have allowed themselves to pursue. By treating it as an odd experience (rather than as one form of a fundamental human encounter) and attempting to explain it in social-psychological terms that ignore how its content relates to the structure of larger patterns of social interaction, we have neglected much of its potential for enriching our understanding of social life more generally ... it may free us to

formulate alternative questions that touch experience at a more basic level ". He sees conversion as a 'sense of ultimate grounding' (1977:653,674-6). I believe this type of orientation will lead us to look directly at conversion in terms of wider micro and macro ideological change. Conversion theory needs to be broadened if we are to understand it culturally and assess its significance in a complex of multiple changes. Some examples of just such 'deeper' and broader studies are Wallis's (1978) typology of NRMs as world rejecting, world affirming and world accommodating, Robbins and Anthony's (1982) distinction between monistic versus dualistic groups, Birds's (1979) typology of groups into differing hosts of moral accountability, and Robertson's (1979) general speculation as to conversion and culture.

The concern here with ideology - understood as a set of beliefs that define the world in a particular way in relation to other ways of defining the world, and a set of beliefs that motivate individuals and groups to act in a certain way as opposed to other instances of behaviour; thus relating to a broad range of 'things' that situate an individual in the world, from abstract notions to emotive states - necessitates that we pit a groups ideological content against an individuals ideological content rather than lumping both categories into two masses, as most conversion theory has tended to do. For example, orientations that consider conversion to be a by-product of a groups 'commitment mechanisms', in transforming individual identities along their axis of thinking, do not need to deal with specific ideologies of either kind, for individual accounts, past and present, are simply a manifestation of the groups belief system, and a groups ideology is in effect synonymous with the general strategy of transformation; the specificities are irrelevant. In the case of the Hare Krishna, we have illustrated the very clear relation between a groups specific ideology and the plausibility and compatibility of that to particular individuals, as instrumental to conversion.

An interesting (in respect of the ideology/purposes of a group and its connections to individual conversion) analysis is that of Wallis (1979) for it considers NRMs, and differentiates NRMs in terms of how movements orientate\position themselves to the world. In a sense this analysis looks at what a collective identity may be and provides inferences as to the connections between a group identity and an individuals identity in respect of the causal dynamics behind both individual conversion and the emergence of the movement. According to Wallis (1979:191-210), movements either accommodate, reject or affirm the world outside, orientations which are related to the overarching reasons of the emergence of the movements in the first instance. For Wallis, NRMs emerged when they did due to the pressures created through increasing rationalisation in the modern world: "The new religious movements have developed in response to, and as attempts to grapple with the consequences of, rationalisation" (1979:198). This analysis goes beyond typologising groups as different in terms of their ideological systems or explaining their emergence in the first instance in terms of such typologies in

that Wallis goes onto suggest that persons in particular social circumstances will be more disposed to join one or other of the three basic 'types' (Robbins:1988:147, Beckford:1985:70) in terms of their operationalising ideologies. In other words individuals are directly in this analysis empowered with choice making ability, and they do not just join any group on offer but join on the basis of what suits their particular beliefs and background versus what does not. In light of the points made thus far, one can extend this type of logic to understand conversion as related to perceived opportunities of transformation.

Wallis three types, world-accommodating, rejecting or affirming, are seen to be three ways in which groups may orient themselves to the social world when they first emerge; these are ideal types yet cover the broad range of NRMs, who may have differing elements of the three types in them, which over time creates strains and tensions which account for changes in groups over time. Irrespective of this, one can still locate groups within one or other framework, and further one can locate individuals who join, on a similar basis in terms of their motivations, and the ideology of the group. In terms of this analysis the Hare Krishna fall into a world-rejecting ethos (movements based on an orientation that, as its basic manifesto, rejects the existing social order, and does so in a fashion based on a spiritual analysis of the material world that offers an all encompassing alternative in challenge to that world) and individual conversions are understandable in that they find compatibility with their own ideological positioning.

Linking a movements ideology and the motivation of those individual joining that movement gives content as to why people would join one movement over another. If we see conversion as a connection between ideologies and 'cultural-motivational' locations, and take the Wallis typology a few steps further, connecting it to what we have understood of secularisation thesis and the critiques discussed, there is an initial imperative to connect three social entities in the act of conversion. The social individual-subject-agent which is seen to be a problematic entity, rather than one taken as 'given' in the sense of having some vague predisposition to religious action, or as passive, but as an empowered entity, with choice making ability and representative of a complex psychological-cultural-ideological make-up that creates impulses to make or at least 'entertain' certain choices rather than others. The social group-subject-agent which is also a problematic entity in its own right but not one with absolute power bequeathed it by some outlooks, an entity thus that is also contesting for social space and power through mechanisms, not only of social control but ideology, and an entity that negotiates then with the individual agent in terms of its own agendas for power in terms of expansion and change. Finally in this triad, the wider host society which as an entity can be seen to contain certain cultural-structural changes and trends that encompasses and affect the individual and the group, in reciprocal dialectical fashion. All three act on each other and thus create and change each other exponentially.

Conversion is one phenomenon amidst these ambits and relations of power, and is used, as all social 'things' are, to negotiate power and forge open cultural spaces to further goals and relations of power, by both groups and individuals. On an individual level, conversion becomes seen as an issue of power, one of the many ways individuals construct and act out their own sense of power and self-transformation; as such, conversion can be said to have significance as regards to both micro and macro cultural change.

What are the concrete ways in which we can connect religious conversion to cultural change and power? First and foremost is the need to consider conversion as part of a wider group of individual actions that make up a distinctive modern form and expression of self-transformation, rather than a vague idea of social-psychological states that are at work in orthodox perceptions of religious belief. Robertson (1979:212-213) suggests: "... we have in effect drawn attention to a mode of shift in 'Archimedean points' which is not necessarily intra-psychic and which suggests a wider frame for the use of the term 'conversion'... some of the basic ideas about conversion having to do with radical change are retained but the term is expanded to cope with modes of self-transformation which are not duplicates of the fundamentalist conversionist type". In other words we need to relate conversion to the many other examples of individual conversion-type changes in modern life. To do this we need to begin to consider the generalised background of individuals in terms of ideological-social-psychological-biological 'states' in reference to the structural world outside. In other words we need to begin tracing the genealogies of the 'ideological positioning' of a given individual at a given 'time' in terms of a multiplicity of factors and social-structural relations around power and meaning. In doing this we may find that religious conversion is a contemporary instance of 'culture in the making' similar to other 'rites de passage' and individuated-cultured voyages of consciousness from body-piercing to sexuality.

In general the relevance of studying people's belief systems has become increasingly apparent in sociology. This has happened due to a dawning awareness that we have a lot still to learn about the ways in which people experience and interpret social life, and how they mould such experience into their ideological world-views and lifestyles. Debates such as those between modernist and post-modernist, relativists and positivist, Marxists and post-marxists, structuralists and meaning theorists and so forth, have illustrated the multitude of ways that people interpret their experiences. This stems in part from the fact that there are a multiplicity of previously unrecognised forms in which a variety of people and groups of people have been excluded and marginalised from the dominant culture since the beginning of the enlightenment. In consequence of these developments, the most striking feature of academic discourse in recent times has been the import given to matters pertaining to the so called cultural dimensions of social form. There has on a vast array of levels been serious deliberation concerning the content and

meaning of people's lives in the modern urban industrial milieu; much of this has occurred within a generalised realisation of the limits of most classical/modernist social theory in the neglect of the import of individuals as complex shapers as well as simple reflectors, of society, and their (not simply the accounts of 'impartial' observers) testimony as to such roles, in constructing a richer detail and account of social life.

Conversion needs to take its place in these concerns. In a way conversion allows us a window to the complex tapestries of consciousness, to individual interaction with the 'world outside', to the precarious and complex formation of identity. I doubt life is as ephemeral as some modern theory seems to believe, and instead of the death of ideology and theory, we are poised at a time where we can build solid discursive methods of improving our understanding of life and people's root senses of reality. Attempting to engage with the conversion question, should have a distinctive and important role to play in this regard.

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CHAPTER FIVE.

THE CONVERSION QUESTION REVISITED.

In conclusion I would like to re-examine conversion models and in particular the interactionist perspective, in light of the explorative framework suggested by this dissertation. The problems related to viewing conversion as not in some way related to ideology and pre-conversion identities is illustrated by the fact that empirical studies on the Hare Krishna have been devoid of considerations as to the transformative capacities in Krishna, and arguably this makes their assessments of the movement itself problematic, particularly with regards to conversion and their assessment of the individuals on which the studies are empirically based (1). The causal potency of the arguments developed here are limited also, in that they do not conclusively challenge the notion that anecdotal accounts are reconstructed and thus inadmissible as empirical data. This issue cannot be resolved fully here due a lack of longitudinal discourse and competing reference points, as well as a methodology oriented towards linguistic psycho-analysis, all which would pin-point tangible contradictory text in terms of the before and after of conversion. In striving to partly resolve this deficiency it is useful to briefly assess whether these narratives potentially reflect a general feel of reconstruction or not, and on such a basis consider in conclusion the causal potency of different models and in particular the interactionist model of conversion which provides the most potentially damaging alternative to the volitional-empowerment perspective presented here. Although the bulk of what has been said before has indirectly challenged interactionist logic, it needs to be viewed as a causal theory that either falls or stands on its own internal concepts rather than on the strength of any other suggested interpretation.

The alleged reconstructed nature of convert's accounts.

The following points are made to highlight the difficulties related to the status and nature of anecdotal accounts, not to suggest they are inevitably reconstructed. Indeed the bulk of what has been discussed so far has relied on the general accurateness of these accounts. I have tried to show how the narratives organically generate a particular visualisation of conversion. This framework in turn understandably thus seems to 'fit' their stories. However this is arguably deceptive in the sense that perhaps these accounts themselves are suspect, and thus the theoretical speculations they generate will necessarily be so too. One does get a feeling when speaking to devotees that they want to give out the impression that they had being moving inevitably in their life to a point of higher consciousness; Krishna consciousness. Hence there is a possibility that their anecdotal accounts as to behaviour and attitudes of meaning-seeking, are emphasised or highlighted over and above other attitudes and activities that

would suggest that they were not necessarily so distinctively different. Information pertaining to past counter-cultural behaviour and reported emotional states, and the presentation of such as exponentially developing to a inherent crisis of meaning, is perhaps motivated by a desire to depict a picture of their natural and progressive evolvement towards Krishna as one that substantiates their belief that Krishna is indeed at the upper end of a spiritual evolutionary chain. To do this they need to reveal to an outsider that Krishna indeed does exist at, and as, the end point of any search for higher consciousness. Arguably, converts have a hidden objective to illustrate the truthfulness of the self-referenced philosophy of Krishna consciousness as opposed to reflecting objectively on their life and the reasons behind their conversion.

This objective needs to be enacted by them for without it they cannot begin to believe in the ideology in the first place. In other words their real objectives are hidden to themselves as well, their narration begins first and foremost with the basics of that ideology rather than an open self-dialogue of the past. In a sense then conversion, one can argue is about self-deception, rather than self-transformation. Arguably, if we accept that the bulk of conversion accounts are more reflective of the conversion process itself rather than accurate testimonies to prior states and cultural location, then the most discernible site of such narrative self-deception lies in their possible reworking of the time sequence of their lives, into an evolutionary scale of 'once was lost-now am found'; central to this is the invention of the conversion period as a turning point in their lives, a watershed that clarifies and distils the eclectic nature of their past into an self-satisfactory and self-meaningful unity of the past - in other words a wrongly placed belief that they are indeed self-transformed - that explains their present location in terms of the generalised ideology of the movement and in terms of their own sense of self-worth and a human need for closure and congruency in terms of a self-understood and - perceived as - self-actualised image of life as meaningful 'in totem'; in other words 'they are converted'.

The heavily emphasised nature of seekership, of being different and unique, and therefore of being at a point of cultural dislocation that made their conversion a predestined and inevitable event, is in this version of reality, misplaced or skewed for seekership 'sets up' a historical background ideally placed to enter into a luminous phase of transformation. Their turning point may be one of many turning points for all we know, but is given top priority in the process of reconstruction-come-conversion, and as such becomes inadmissible as an explanation of conversion; rather it serves as an indice of the event and processual interactive dynamics of the process whereby people learn - including mastering the art of reconstruction - a conversion role.

There are arguably various indirect examples of this in the accounts of the four narratives. Firstly, in a general sense, respondents at times use jargonised terms that one suspects were not part of their frame of discursive reference previously;

words like materialism, spiritual platform, material senses and so forth. Of course this does not 'prove' reconstruction for it may merely suggest the use of colloquialisms one has become used to. One expects to find such self-referencing in any given social group. However, in this circumstance, people are not describing present events around their world, but prior states of feeling and behaviour in terms of the present, and as such, these terms can be seen as potentially exaggerated descriptions of these past events. For instance if someone had a general interest in spiritual matters, it is qualitatively different from someone reporting they were in an existential crisis in terms of such an interest, and failed to relate to others on this level who were not on the same spiritual platform. Self-referenced terms can potentially create a gloss or a depth that was not necessarily there before; or such previous states and behaviour are remembered and cognitively re-actualised with a vibrancy that may not have been so acute at the time. This may be particularly relevant in the realm of ideas; what may have been passing interests or vaguely considered concepts, become within a new universe of discourse, to be held with more vigour, but remembered as exhibiting similar degrees of intensity before. Thus seekership can be considered as reconstruction in terms of the fact that Krishna Philosophy would demand such a history of them, would demand that they have a life before conversion that is constituted centrally by searching for the truth. At times the narratives of the four individuals seemed to exhibit just such tendencies. I have tried to indicate where this is relevant in the textual presentation of the stories.

Reconstruction is impossible to prove tangibly unless one has conflicting accounts of the same story told at the actual relevant time. However there is undeniably a common sense 'feel' of reconstruction on some of the narratives. This is most relevant in terms of the crisis periods and 'turning points'. For instance in Paul's story, the period just before and during his conversion is highlighted by an array of comments that present a feeling of impending doom, such as the drug bust. There are similar cases in Tom's (he was 'going introspective' now, he had reached the point where he did not care if he did not wake in the morning if he did not have answers etc.) Abe's (the existential crisis of spirituality at University, he felt he might as well die etc) and John's (his bout with heavy drugs) stories. Are we to assume that these crises are real and thus conversion is about forming an unusual belief due to a period of personal stress, or are we to believe that these turning points are emphasised over and above other periods in life, because they occurred at the point of conversion. Obviously, all these factors play a role, and on a common sense level, one can understand how people for their own sense of congruency in life, rework history to some degree. There are very few individuals in life generally who could honestly say they do not do exactly that. This said I have tried to present the narratives in a fashion that allows us to assess the intensity and relevance of reconstruction; in regards to this I feel these individuals were in fact going through a fairly intense crisis. Whether it can be seen as a turning point after the fact, we can only speculate.

Another incongruency on this level is the claim that they accepted the philosophy without doubt and instantly (although they don't all say this. Indeed most of their accounts show that it took a significant process to internalise such views). Regarding this, there is a common sense reason that we should not too readily accept the entirety of their accounts; these individuals appeared fairly resolute in their refusal to accept any of their own cultural backgrounds in terms of values and prejudices etc. They appear thus to be fairly sceptical people with a leaning towards educated scepticism, in the sense that they were against most values and behaviours of the dominant culture, including values of the dominant institutionalised religions, as well as ultimately unaccepting of alternative value systems. Why then would they challenge other ideologies and not this one considering that inevitable, to different degrees, all the converts proportion ultimate and prime authority to Krishna. This question has been considered within the bulk of this paper; the individuals do not view Krishna philosophy in the same light as other meaning systems. But the overall question remains, is this an after the fact internalisation or were they partly aligned to it in the first place, or more predisposed to become aligned to it?

A complete answer to this is unattainable. We cannot know the specificities of their past substantially enough to begin to make claims that they have altered that past in a significant fashion. In a sense we come back to point zero; do we, suspecting some degree of reconstruction, ignore their anecdotal narratives entirely? Certainly, the answer to this is an emphatic no. We may show reconstruction, yet this is proof of conversion, not proof of the irrelevance of prior-conversion factors. In other words reconstruction is an indices of conversion, a clue that we should investigate this as conversion. A starting point to warrant an examination of individuals, but not a blanket excuse to dismiss religious accounts. There is enough substance in their accounts to illustrate a significant relationship between pre-conversion and the event of conversion, as has hopefully been demonstrated here. Moreover, there is a recognition on the part of the respondents as to their own conversion, and implicitly a recognition that their views have altered substantially through the process of conversion. One needs to avoid the implication that converts are totally in the dark as to their own past, and we are somehow privy to the real past. In other words, just because there is reconstruction, this does not justify in any way discounting their previous ideological positioning. It does suggest that we treat their accounts both as natural histories and as critical histories. In the light of the above comments, and in the light of the explanatory framework suggested by taking the accounts as natural histories, we need now to assess finally the potency that should be given to differing arguments of conversion discussed previously.

Conversion as coercion?

The general observations presented in this dissertation suggest that conversion in these cases has little to do with instances of brain-washing, irrespective of the claimed retrospective nature of converts accounts. There are simply far too many indications of volition and diversity to think otherwise. The conversion process not only points to a degree of active agency, but to a process that is precarious, at times painfully undertaken in terms of sacrifice, and arguably self-empowering. In these ways it cannot be compared to a case of passive and vulnerable individuals been manipulated into a given way of life and ideology.

The weaknesses inherent in the brain-washing argument, and arguably in any argument suggesting a deterministic degree of situational factors - whether these be environmental, social-psychological in creating pre-dispositional states, emergent interactional and socialisation factors, or group dictated strategies of social control - is evidenced most vividly by the high degree of defection in these movements. Simplistically put, if an individual fails to get what they want out of a movement, they leave. This possibility is always there and often realised. Situational factors whether they be in the form of direct coercion, subtle persuasion, socialisation etc are ultimately ineffective as prime determinants, whether or not this is their original intention. This in turn may be suggestive that we consider conversion as a site of negotiation between groups wanting members and individuals wanting power; where such is not perceived as achievable or achieved, then there remains very little to negotiate. We need to question in this regard whether conversion in fact ever occurred. We turn now to considering in more depth these dualisms between control and volition.

Conversion as situationally determined?

Theories stressing conversion as caused through the existence of 'structural' spaces that create the ideal conditions for the socialisation of potential converts, also fail to capture the full empirical experience in the lives of the four devotees. However in many instances, as has been discussed, interaction and encapsulation can be said to play some sort of role in terms of these experiences. Do the weaknesses inherent in coercion arguments apply as readily to theories that stress structural and emergent situational dynamics as pivotal to conversion?

Let us for a moment re-examine the data presented so far through the eyes of an interactionist orientation. Emergent interactional processes are primarily responsible for conversion, and thus conversion is more about situational variables and structural locations as opposed to cultural and ideological spaces and dynamics. The real possibility of pursuing an alternative life-style depends

on whether a person is free of other roles, obligations and social relationships. Converts are distinctive only in that they are in a space that makes them structurally available at the time of conversion, and this constitutes the main underlying reason for why particularly they, and not others convert, irrespective of anecdotal accounts to the contrary. Even if such individuals have a past of disenchantment and seekership behaviour, so do thousands of others.

The respondents can be seen to provisionally fit this picture. They come from middle class backgrounds and have the resources and 'space' in terms of time and educational orientation to contemplate alternative life-styles. They are not tied to structural and societal institutions such as family, friends, relationships, study or work and if they are, they seem to all be in a process of giving such up or rejecting them. Their levels of dislocation and alienation are thus important but only in indicating that they are individuals who are relatively free to convert, rather than necessarily being 'ripe' to convert. Conversion is by default in a sense, in terms of being in the right place at the right time, and are thus vulnerable to the real causal factors of conversion, interactional and group organisational dynamics.

Abe, Tom, Paul and John are from middle class families in terms of education levels; all have some form of higher education, or have had the opportunity and resources for such an education. They generally have not completed such studies, or are not utilising their education specifically. All report having experienced bouts of not coping with jobs or studies particularly during the period prior to conversion. The important point here is that they come from a resource base that allows them this freedom to 'feel' culturally dislocated and search for alternatives. Parents, except in the case of John, in fact supported them through these periods of crisis. Thus to some degree all respondents are not, and do not need to be, tied into the major structural and cultural institution of work in any significant way. They are also not tied into other major structural institutions such as marriage and children. These factors are relevant in that such availability corresponds with the time period of their conversion. If they were part and parcel of the dominant system in terms of jobs, mortgages, work ethic, marriage and so on, it is unlikely they would have even considered speaking to devotees, let alone joining such a generally perceived fringe movement. Therefore, converts' lives and their narratives of those lives, rather than revealing individuals who were dissatisfied with their cultural positions, who were desperately searching for some alternative or absolute truth, reveal individuals who had not, as yet, joined the dominant system, and were thus structurally available; their lives represent thus, not a case of their being ready to convert, but a case of them simply being there to convert.

This suggests that there will always be a number of people who convert into fringe religions at any particular time, and opens the door for an explanatory framework that makes the interactional processes of coming into contact with the

group and being socialised into the groups ideology, and the movements strategies of transforming individual worldviews, the dominant causal factors in conversion. The arguments that are labelled as 'interactionist', including the organisational approach of Griel and Rudy, can be seen to rest on a understanding of a sequence of events that make the conversion of individuals coming into contact with a group a likely event, not because of who those individuals are, or who the group is, but because of the strength of the recruitment and organisational strategies - strategies that set in motion an interactive process geared specifically to activate and complete conversion - employed by such a group in recruiting and transforming such individuals to further its own purposes of expansion. The ideological content of the individuals and the group are not therefore of direct importance, except for dictating who a group will target in its recruitment drive.

The real reasons behind conversion then lie in socialisation. It is obvious individuals will not be forthcoming in terms of information regarding processes of encapsulation and socialisation. This is primarily so for if such factors do play a pivotal pole, the individuals concerned will not be aware of them. If the conversion process is indeed so thorough in encapsulating and inculcating a new universe of discourse etc, then converts will believe their burgeoning commitment is self-willed and voluntary. If the conversion process is looked at as a process of socialisation, such socialisation will depend on individuals actively believing their commitment is voluntary. Through an embracement of the converts role, and the adoption of a Master Attributional Schema, an individual will come to believe they were predestined for this path of enlightenment, that they had always somehow been different, that they had been searching all their lives for this very truth and so forth. The very act of belief necessitates an act of self-belief; if that belief were not perceived as self-willed, then conversion would in effect fail.

In terms of these points, interactive socialisation created through encapsulation can be seen as pivotal. It is in the act of playing a role, and seeing others around you - others that are your exclusive reference point in the cocoon of the Hare Krishna life-style - playing that very same role - that one comes to believe. Comments made before entrench the possible validity of this, as do the converts accounts in terms of relating the austere nature of learning the methodology, and the obvious influence of believing in what ones new reference others believe in.

There is sense in understanding conversion as the experience of friendship; perhaps in the devotees individuals find a group of friends who not only have common interests, but treat them as unconditional companions. There are many statements in the narratives to this effect. This suggests a strong argument for an interactionist approach and a case against the relevance of alienation in that it suggests that devotees are motivated to make up their feelings to their previous

philosophical quest by reference others who have become important to them; it is within, and because of the group interactions, that devotees begin to believe in the ideology, as their new friends do. This is certainly useful and relevant for there are on a number of levels indications of the importance of this companionship between the devotees, and the collective nature of existence at the temples of the Hare Krishna suggests the relevance of this interactive factor. The fact that this is a 'closed system' where none can contradict this interaction and communal bonding, and the fact that such friendship are based on something that everyone believes in (Krishna and the concept of Bhakti devotional service), a shared belief where community is based unconditionally on a shared faith rather than the politics of difference, and where individuals can rely on others without fear of retribution or ridicule, and where everyone is going passionately about the business of 'saving the world', creates a tangible energy at times. It is perhaps understandable that this type of interaction creates a clarity of vision and a certainty in belief and action, conditions under which individuals will believe anything.

In these ways an interactionist approach is useful in explaining facets of conversion. However the empirical content of this paper and the explanatory frameworks derived from such, suggest that there are severe 'internal' weaknesses to this approach, irrespective of the status of converts accounts. The concept of structural availability is useful in that it aids in locating the 'type' - in the sense of a broad definition of class - of people that may convert as opposed to the rest of the population. Individuals who convert into NRMs, such as the four devotees here, in general come from structural spaces (no competing ties such as jobs and marriage, the time and space/resources) that allow them the possibility of making such a choice in the first place. However this concept cannot be "... treated reductively as a simple substitute for analysis of meaningful motivation and predisposition" (Robbins:1988:87). We need to ask why people are structurally available in the first place, and it is the latter that dictates as much their likely availability. The antagonisms between structural versus ideological/cultural locations are in a very real sense deceptive, for availability can only be seen as consisting of all three which are dialectical to each other and cannot be usefully employed without each other.

The same weakness as commented on in reference to brain-washing logic imbues this approach also, when employed over-deterministically. If one suggests that people convert into a movement because they are structurally available to convert and lack no competing ties, then why do not more people convert? Why do the masses of individuals who are available and come into contact with a movement, not convert instead of following conventional roles, buying into the dominant culture, or converting into a political agenda or other secular meaning systems? Who are the people that illustrate an interest in these movements? Who are the people who end up opting for this life-style? Is this dictated purely by a groups recruitment strategies and the internal facets of

encapsulation and socialisation? One can argue that the four individuals discussed in this paper here had exactly the same opportunity structures as others to make more conventional life choices. We need to ascertain whether interactionist theories can inform us why they ended up joining the movement for a significant amount of time, and in doing so, find that interactionist conversion theories are vulnerable to exactly the same critique they level at more traditional approaches of conversion in respect of their potency in locating the specificities causally of individuals who convert. In a sense they are forced into applying the logic of structural availability and a 'radical change thesis', for their general framework cannot explain some of the crucial causal dynamics of conversion.

It is incorrect to conclude, as for example Rochford does (1985:78-79), that the mere fact that individuals are structurally available implies their conversions have no central connection to their dislocation from a 'dominant culture' but rather is more predominantly a case that such individuals had not yet participated in that culture. One needs to question why individuals are structurally available at a particular juncture, especially if such individuals report that prior to conversion they had disengaged or estranged themselves from dominant cultural institutions such as jobs, parents, marriage and relationships etc. In terms of Rochford's data, many converts spoke of personal crisis in their lives, of spending long periods 'on the road', 'on the streets', being in drug cultures, participating in meaning-seeking behaviour and so forth shortly prior to joining (1985:60-68,80,93-96). In light of this, and in light of the narratives here, one can argue, non withstanding the possible existence of some degree of reconstruction, that the more important connection between structural availability and conversion lies in the relationship between availability and dislocation; the availability of converts in fact to some degree 'proves' their estrangement, and thus suggests connections between conversion and prior conversion states. Individuals are structurally available because of their perceived states of estrangement, and one cannot view structural availability apart from an individuals make-up, circumstance and belief system, and whether such a make-up is at least in some way congruent to a movements particular ideology and aims or what that individual perceives to attain out of any relationship. An illuminating example of this is that a married individual may be structurally available for an affair in general - which is in a sense a self-willed transformation - but may not be available for an affair with Margaret Thatcher as opposed to Brooke Shields (Robbins:1988:87), or a same sex affair. Or for example, one could say that although the four devotees may have been available for a number of transformations/conversions in a new age line, it is unlikely they would have become Jehovah's Witnesses, or members of a right wing political party in terms of their ideological positioning.

In this light structural availability as an explanatory concept can be turned on its head and utilised in a framework that suggests connections between the circumstance of individual lives and conversion in respect of ideological

motivation and cognitive alignment partly congruent prior to any interactive processes. Viewing social data as to structural availability in this light leads one to make connections between conversion and individuals and certain groups of individuals. If one follows the logic of an interactionist orientation, then anyone can be converted, contrary to their claims that they explain more specifically who converts than do motivational type theories. They are guilty in this sense of reductionism, for, by ignoring or negating the existence of pre-conversion factors, they imply that converts go through a change that is some how entirely related to the process itself; hence this is a total and radical change. This is close to saying that individuals are brain-washed into conversion.

Obviously conversion is about deep re-orientations in outlook, cognition etc, however this is related primarily to a continuity between a converts life experiences and world views, and the cultural conditions such are shaped by, and the possibilities offered by conversion. Indeed, conversion - if one takes that to mean 'real' commitment demonstrated over a lengthy period of time - can be said to be inseparable from previous identity, in that it is those individuals who have a similar outlook to that of the movements, and are thus enriched in terms of previous levels of disenchantment, who end up becoming converted in a real sense. The interactionist approach can be seen in this sense to depoliticise, deculturalise and depersonalise conversion, and in implication, suggest, as brain-washing models do, that conversion occurs within a social void.

Much of the logic of this approach is so self-evident, it loses a critical edge in respect of locating the causal dynamics and social locations of conversion. This is tied to an almost complete negation of ideological considerations within its causal variables and general logic. For example interactionists stress the importance of differential recruitment and social networks as to the success or failure of conversion in terms of private network recruitment versus public recruitment. Do differential recruitment strategies have causal relevance to actual conversion though? It is obvious that individuals will be more likely to join an existing network of friends than a 'group of strangers'. Further one cannot view recruitment dynamics as causal without an ideological component. Movements do not choose a particular target group for recruitment in a willy-nilly fashion. Rather their choices are dictated by their initial ideological grounding. The Hare Krishna self stated 'world-rejecting' ideology means they would find it difficult, and unproductive, to insert themselves into various pre-existing networks. However the movement uses networks where and when it can for they obviously have a higher harvest potential, but crucially they only target networks that would have an already existing degree of ideological compatibility with their own views. Further, the devotees often develop 'regulars' in their public forays, and as such, if and when, those individuals accept an invitation to come and visit, they are already friends to a degree. This is not though not only a case of people becoming converts because they become friends, but a case of those individuals being susceptible to the ideology of that the movement in the first

place. One cannot look at a groups recruitment strategies without looking at their ideological grounding, and it is this grounding that provides the causal determinant of whether recruitment becomes conversion.

Most of the weaknesses in these approaches stem from the fact that they almost never include an ideological dimension to their arguments. This point leads us to the central illogicality of interactionist type approaches when considering conversion in terms of causality; many of their stated reasons as to the insignificance of pre-conversion factors, in fact point to the relevance of such. We must ask, how much do such interactive processes actually tell us about why people convert into alternative 'worlds' and how is this related to links between contemporary culture and conversion into NRMs. In negating pre-conversion and other ideological variables interactionist approaches imply conversion is a change devoid of change. Although not as simplistically portrayed as brain washing models their conception of occurs in a cultural vacuum, with little connection to cultural processes, or critically, to differing 'cultural locations'.

Similar comments pertain to the use of the concept of encapsulation. In assessing the usefulness of using implicit and explicit group goals and group mechanisms of social control and commitment, one needs to ask how far these forms of social control and commitment mechanisms go in explaining conversion. Certainly they make sense of certain features of conversion but do they explain why conversion happens and to who it happens? Perhaps the problem here lies in the fact of considering these processes as a direct consequence of a goal or a strategy, rather than being tied to an overall ideological position in a world of competing ideological positions. In many ways the idea of creating and maintaining a cocoon or a boundary between members and the outside world are illuminating and provide an explanation as to the inner mechanisms and internal levels of control an expansionist strategies in groups. We need to ask how far this can be seen as directly causal to conversion into differing groups.

There are many social bodies that develop a cocoon around individuals - generally more social and ideological than physical - such as elitist country clubs, Rastafarians, gender groups, the ku klux klan or gothic punks etc. An element of their success is that their members define themselves as different and maintain boundaries to others that are viewed as not being in the group. There are high degrees of sanction and peer pressure in terms of maintaining these boundaries. Yet do these factors explain to us why people initially become members of these groups, or remain so? These factors are dictated more by ideological compatibility than encapsulation, for unless encapsulation can be shown to be completely successful as a coercive isolationist strategy, then it cannot be seen as successful in affecting change. If encapsulation strategies are the dominant factors in conversion, then one should see a high ratio of conversion. Individuals who are structurally available become prey to the

interactive socialisation processes of a movement, and should, all being equal, be converted. This cannot explain why only a very small percentage of individuals can be said to become committed members of movements in terms of choosing such as a life-style rather than remaining for a short while. The low ratio of conversion illustrates that other factors must be at work to ultimately explain conversion.

A common denominator of most social groupings, all of which are self-contained and isolationist to a degree, is their counter-cultural or conversely, their dominant-cultural ethos; their ideological positioning in relation to wider society. Their encapsulation tactics in terms of boundary control of their members relates to this ideological grounding as much as it does to a desire to maintain a cocoon, or foster new identities. In this sense one cannot simply equate isolationist tactics with conversion for individuals remain members more because of a compatibility of their own 'ideological positioning' to that of the groups. At times interactionists seem to suggest that conversion is only about the ability and effectiveness of encapsulation strategies and thus tend to equate strategy with ideology, when it is palpably not the same thing.

In this way interactionist approaches are incorrectly so termed for they fail to show a process of interaction between 'things', instead imply a linear relationship of a group socialising an individual. Lofland (1977:225) recognised this flaw in a later reappraisal of his earlier model and suggested that his earlier approach was in fact anti-interactionist in that it presented a picture of individuals as a natural medium through which social forces operate. One does not get the feel or sense of development, of organic growth, of trials and tribulations, of growing pains, of conflict, in terms of this view of the conversion process. Looking at conversion as purely the ultimate conclusion of group strategy or group initiated socialisation processes suggests that there is no negotiation of social space, and in a way suggests individuals are as passive as coercion models imply.

Not only are individual passive, but they are implied as uniform. How do we differentiate those who are simply in the process and those who have graduated out of it and become converted? How can we tell if someone is more than a convert in name besides lengthy commitment? If we follow the logic of interactionists, all individuals present in the group - members - should, all being equal, be either converted or on their way to conversion. The logic of this falls apart when we look at those who leave as well as those who stay. Interactionists and coercion arguments, following their own logic, can only explain defection by suggesting that the socialisation-encapsulation-interaction process was not effective enough or had not been completed yet or was badly managed (2). These reasons are inadequate for they assume that defectors either 'de-convert' or 'escape' conversion, and thus there is an assumption that individuals were converted in the first place or the tactics of the group were inadequate.

Conversion and de-conversion (which by definition is always a possibility; individuals re-converts into another meaning system) is not as linear as this. Perhaps individuals defect because they were never converts or because they ultimately did not have enough common interest with the group? Without an ideological component that investigates compatibility or the lack of it, and the related plausibility of meaning systems to individuals (plausibility is surely a combination of compatibility and non-compatibility or the other way around) these issues cannot really be seen in anything but a deterministic fashion. This brings to light the urgent need for control groups in studies; not only non-converts but also would-be or nearly converts, and ex-converts or defectors (and not only those who have been de-programmed whose accounts are at least as dubious as converts: see endnote 21: chapter two).

Interactions produce a linear and mechanistic image of conversion that one feels does not do qualitative or causal justice to a eclectic and complex phenomenon. The implication is that people learn conversion rather than choosing and using conversion. There is no doubt that conversion is to some degree about learning social roles as there are many individuals who join a group without necessarily being congruous with their ideological stance. However can we say these people have been converted? Again the low ratio of 'real' converts suggest conversion must be about more than role play or a learned behaviour. Where converts become committed members, there is a strong link to an ideological/cultural history and consequent compatibility/plausibility between group and individual, beyond performing a role and ending up believing that role.

If one waives or negates the life histories and previously held ideologies and self-identities of individuals in terms of alleged reconstruction, then one can only view conversion as radical total change, a metamorphosis in which the new shape and form is hardly recognisable. This may be inaccurate for even those individuals who have only stayed with a movement for a short while, for it suggests a very one dimensional picture as to the general motivations of individuals. This point is illuminated when we consider the embedded understanding of conversion to be found in the interactionists and conversion as coercion logic as well as in the social drift model which stresses also behaviour over cognition. Either conversion is a 'sudden' and total type of change, or it is of a completely precarious nature. Although both these elements are obviously embodied in conversion, they are neglectful of a third possibility. If one waives or negates the life histories and previously held ideologies and self-identities of individuals in terms of their inadmissibility as scientific data, then it seems logical that conversion is about radical total change, a metamorphosis in which the new shape and form is hardly recognisable, or conversely something fleeting and transitory. Why do people change though? To move forward, to empower themselves on levels they felt to be alienated on before? Surely change has something to do with one's past, and surely conversion would also. Following this reasoning, conversion will not appear to be a total radical change or break

with the past, or indeed transitory (although it is always precarious and open to change, to de-conversion and re-conversion) but a continuation and enrichment of some central part of an individual's past.

This is not to say individuals do not change, or that they always 'move forward' in a progressive development related to their past, but to say that some individuals may indeed be predisposed to some sort of conversion and the reasons for such 'tendencies' are tied to the society that they live in. Useful insight into the 'why' question of conversion cannot be gained by looking at interactional or behavioural processes only. A major reason for conversion is a perceived sense of alienation from the 'dominant culture', and it is whether that alienation is in fact overcome that is crucial in whether a convert remains committed to a particular group. Social-Psychological motivational type theories are also guilty in this light for they fail to provide a detailed enough picture of such potential considerations and thus also suggest conversion to be a case where social forces - in this case pre-disposing variables - act on individuals without reciprocity.

The interactionist models of conversion in one sense are best described as explanations as to the potential process of conversion; they look at situational determinants of a process already underway, and thus end up often looking at the recruitment strategies of social groups and their operationalised structures to achieve this recruitment. They are explaining the dynamics of the organisational patterns of these groups rather than explaining the reasons behind conversion or the individuals involved in conversion. In this sense they are a useful explanation as to the process of conversion, how conversion happens, but have no real claim in asserting as to being a causal theory of conversion, for they offer little in the way of ultimately explaining to us why one person becomes and remains a convert, another not, or of relating conversion to wider social change.

Although it is of course useful to employ as many viable explanatory frameworks as possible when looking at social phenomena, this is not to say that one can simply mix them up. Explanations that pertain to process - although related to cause - cannot be viewed in terms of the same analytical light as to those pertaining to cause. This flaw is inherent in interactionist studies that tend to ignore both conflict as well as instances where individuals attain self-empowerment, within movements and the connections of such to wider cultural alienation, implying once again that the conversion process is so linear, pervasive and complete that the people involved are hardly individuals, but in a fashion nothing but brain washed duplicates of their 'reference others' or a group. Interactionists, although not implying that converts are slaves to the group or its leader as brain-washing models do, tend to inadvertently imply that converts are slaves to the actual conversion process itself, which in turn implies that conversion is a process separate to the wider fabric of society. One is close in this sense to being guilty of making conversion itself meaningless for it

appears to be something devoid of human actors and of wider processes of culture, socialisation, alienation and socio-cultural transformations.

Why do some individuals play a role better than others? Are the individuals who convert simply more susceptible to socialisation methods and encapsulation strategies? If they are, why so? Said differently, why do these determinants not act uniformly on individuals? Why do the majority of individuals defect when the same situational determinants are in place? Rarely do empirical studies separate nearly-converts from 'real' converts. This research has the advantage - although not presenting a control group - of presenting the cases of individuals who have been in the movement long enough to throw little doubt as to their present state of conversion. Even though they are more representative of a minority, and even though they may themselves defect at any given time - the very act of conversion implies the possibility of subsequent conversion -, they need to be placed in a different category to those who can be said to have never converted. In reference to this one cannot but conclude that 'real' converts become so, not for situationally determinant reasons, but because their previous life-trajectories situated them in a position of ideological compatibility to the ideology and life-style of the movement.

If one looks at cases of 'real' conversion then one cannot adhere totally to a notions of conversion as sudden, radical, total, fleeting and imposed; rather it needs to be seen as eclectic, precarious, volitional, gradual and sometimes long-lived. Explanations that over emphasise situational determinants, cannot view conversion as anything but the former. If one takes away situational factors (as occurs in the Hare Krishna as individuals stay longer; the individuals discussed before all illustrate that as one stays longer, one's life is less controlled, more diverse, less related to learning the process of Bhakti but living it) some individuals still remain. Interactionists are looking predominantly at those individuals who have not converted and in other words they are not discussing conversion, but dynamics of preliminary socialisation and the social control necessary to enact such socialisation and generate a large following. It is interesting in this regard that the Hare Krishna movement, originally overtly expansionist, has learnt over the years that this is easier to attract individuals to the movement for a short while, than it is to keep such individuals; they can be said to have changed their general strategies to ensure a stable following rather than a mass short term based one.

In general these approaches are discussing the process of conversion and not really the organic causes of conversion; the how and not the why. These two facets although interrelated, need to be separated at an analytical level, for there is arguably a case for locating more primacy in terms of 'real' conversion, to more organic factors as opposed to processual details (3). This is not to say the latter do not play any part in the causes of conversion. However if we concentrate exclusively on the process, we may miss the fact that conversion is

an in fact an individualised unusual event, as opposed to the notion that massive numbers of individuals convert. A significant amount of individuals may indeed join movements, but a very small minority end up opting for the life-style in a real sense. In terms of this, longitudinal studies are imperative, as are studies that compare non-converts, nearly-converts or verbal-converts, ex-converts, and converts themselves; in other words we need qualitative and quantitative study with an emphasis on longitudinal case studies, with relevant control groups, before we can begin to claim with any degree of certainty, the essences of conversion and its relation to wider cultural change in society. This research does not in any way achieve this agenda, but hopefully points in a useful direction in terms of such a research agenda.

The example given in endnote three, this chapter, illustrates that it is particularly tricky to generalise in terms of issues such as gender and their relation to alienation and empowerment in respect of NRMs, unless we have a substantial understanding of individual ideological backgrounds as opposed to vague notions of social psychological motivations apparently applicable to large grouping. This research has in general tried to show that it is necessary to understand these factors in relation to the real life worlds of individuals rather than various situational factors at work during the conversion process. In relation to this one needs to point out that converts are in actual fact seldomly as 'structurally available' or vulnerable to interactive and organisational dynamics as is generally implied. Individuals are attached to the world in very real ways, and it is tricky to categorise them too deterministically in terms of situational factors, or class, gender, sexuality, psychological traits, or demographics of age etc. Converts go through a painful and sacrificial process in opting for a life-style that excludes many other possibilities. Converts make 'hard choices', deciding in the end to join, and give up relationships and previous habits because they cannot fit such into their new life. Ironically in respect of this, one imagines that a strong element of reconstruction relates to converts claiming that breaking such ties was easy and done without conscience or due process. This suggests again that conversion is about choices and considerations of self- empowerment in the face of competing choices and perceived states of a lack of power.

A final common sense point that indicates the validity of the comments above. It is arguably unlikely that the individuals discussed in this paper would have become reborn Christians or accountants unless their lives had been significantly different. Of course they may still become any number of things; that is the nature of human unpredictability. We can however trace genealogies and life-trajectories in making sense of what they do become. Life-choices and circumstance are shaped and determined, not only by tangible social forces such as economic classes, or situational determinants, but by specific ideological locations which encompass many variants within a given cultural ethos. We need to be wary thus of labelling either people or circumstance too broadly. The conversion and continued commitment to Krishna of these

individuals rests importantly on the foundation of their previous experience and it is to this foundation and its relation to wider society and change within that society, that we need to pay more attention in understanding conversion or any other form of change.

Although this dissertation has not come up with proven ideas, it has hopefully come up with testable ideas in terms of the need for a closer investigation into the links between individual conversion, NRMs and culture. It has hopefully been shown, by illustrating the danger of deculturalising conversion and thereby rendering it and the people involved, empty of causal social content, and by showing the narratives of real converts are not so easily defined as neutral forces in their own lives, that there are in fact grounds on which to build a relationship.

In closing, the empirical cases of conversion in this paper do not fit easily into theories of conversion mentioned thus far. Perhaps this is so for they are instances of 'real' conversion; most conversion theories are possibly illustrating examples of the majority of individuals who have spent time in a NRM, but cannot a priori be assumed to ever have converted in the first place. Of course there is no ultimate state of conversion; at any given time individuals may become de-converted. This is the nature of change. We need to look more closely at all kinds of 'converts', not only religious ones with an emphasis on qualitative longitudinal research and control groups, and a discursive social-psycho analytic methodology that can trace and analyse reconstruction in a tangible fashion. It would be illuminating for example, if we could capture data on any of these four individuals if in the future they converted into another meaning system, allowing us to see how they reconstruct their past in Hare Krishna in light of a new orientation.

In the case of the Hare Krishna movement, stories such as the ones here, need to be incorporated into any conversion theory if such is to be seen in the first place as a conversion theory. The fact that a tentative qualitative assessment of their lives and the reasons behind their conversion, do not fit readily into existing theories, shows not only that perhaps we are examining qualitatively different states, but also the danger of making huge generalisations about conversion based on quantitative and quasi-qualitative assessments that cannot even separate converts from non-converts. This dissertation does not resolve this issue and is no more able to make generalisations, but at least it has afforded the opportunity to problematise these issues critically in relation to 'real' instances of claimed conversions and to assess the potency of generalisations made before, and on that basis, begin to formulate a different set of questions to empirically examine in the future.

END NOTES.

CHAPTER ONE.

1: Hamilton (1995:1) sums up the core objectives of a Sociology of Religion; why have or are religious beliefs and practises so central a feature in culture and society (what is the role and significance of religion in society), and secondly, why have or do religious beliefs and practices taken such diverse forms (how can we achieve an understanding of particular beliefs and practices of particular groups and societies) He goes on to say that " The fundamental concern of most ... sociologists of religion .. (is) to further the understanding of the role of religion in society, to analyse its significance in and impact upon human history, and to understand its diversity and the social forces that shape and influence it" (1995:2).

2: Again a passage from Robertson voices this point more clearly: "the most important aspect of the study of religious movements is not the question of whether they constitute a new, viable form of transformative religiosity, let alone the question of what gives rise to them. The central most general problem has to with their general significance with regard to changing conceptions of the relationship between individual and society, and between extra-societal agencies and society itself(Robertson:1979:306). "... for in coming in to terms legally and politically - as well as sociologically and psychologically - with the new cultism, "society" is, willy nilly, involved in the issue of what constitutes its own boundaries, and in a sense its own foundations (Fenn, 1978). The fascinating legal issues which surround the debate about the new movements - particularly since the eruption of the controversy surrounding the people's temple - should not be allowed to obscure the wider sociological problems. Or, better, the legal and constitutional issues should be seen as embodying crucial sociological issues (Robertson:1979:308 in Robbins:1988:198).

3: Meaning, belief and identity have been in the past, generally conceptualised or 'seen' in linear separate terms in respect of both the individual and the world outside the self. These conceptualisations were both reflective of a discursive narrative of emerging classes that constructed and reflected their 'place' in the world. Changes in conceptions of the self and identity are extensively documented and debated; for some insightful examples see Hall (1992). It is crucial to note that which ever way one attempts to divide a history of the self or a history of changing perceptions of identity, one will be guilty of making crass generalisations that misconstrue the contradictions and historically grounded events that existed in and about such phenomena. This is particularly so when making broad sweeping comments in historical referents as it implies, or by nature cannot include, the lack of time specificity in any historical narratives or reconstructions. It is important thus to point out that any comments made are suggestive rather than accurate historical commentary.

4: An understanding of the human subject as a core identity or 'self' that is a timeless unified body of parts, an internal singularity, personality, nature, - a 'biology' - , that exhibits the capabilities of self reason, self consciousness and action, and as such is 'given out' (without change to itself or that world) in interaction with the world outside - which is a separate entity, immutable and unchanging as the core of the self itself - as an external 'whole' individual identity, is the essence a Cartesian definition of self. This conception places identity as the nucleus of a subject and thus is 'individualist' in conception and in comparison to non-western conceptualisations of the self. This conception germinates the popular idea of an inner-core that exists at birth and unfolds in time without significant change, for it is untouchable by the world outside. This conception develops out of western history itself - or rather more accurately our reconstruction and narrative of history - , and relates to structural change since the emergence of the modern period and the modern subject. This concept of the self then has its origins in an intellectual legacy of Decarte's dualism of mind and matter, the Reformation and Protestantism which set 'man' free from traditional religious structures to face God as an individual, the Renaissance which conveyed man as the centre of the universe, and the enlightenment which gave man the carte blanche and the reasoning capabilities to be master and understander of the world outside. These developments then 'created' a self that was both indivisible and unique. This conception of the human subject was both a discursive description and understanding of an emerging middle class as well as possible an objective reflection of a changing world.

5: Facets of Sociology have always endeavoured to show the illusion of this the logic implied by the Cartesian separation. Hence, the development of a sociological conception of identity, generated primarily from the work of the early symbolic interactionists, reflects that the self is not separate from the world but shaped and mediated by the world and others in it. The sociological concept of an identity, as being a self that begins *tabula rasa* and then develops and is mediated over time with interaction with other selves and the outside world, developing into a more whole representation of that individual, is one that points to development of the self over time through interaction, but still utilises a conception of self and the world as unified and stable. Individuals and society are stable because subjective identities internalise the world and are joined to it in a reciprocal relationship. This conception of self again reflected changes in the world as it became more complicated and differentiated, and thus hard to conceptualise a linear and unaffected conception of the human subject who obviously interacted with and changed the world.

6: Central tenets of these two conceptions of self are challenged by a more 'recent' - to sociological theory at any rate - understanding of self; the concept of an intrinsically divided self, an identity never (initially or over time) fully formed, always looking for new selves in a world never fully formed, a de-centered self.

This conception stems from the idea that the world itself has fundamentally changed, become a post-modern rather than the modernist world of the enlightenment. One of the primary objectives of social theory delving into the self has been to understand how subjects become de-centered, and how such is actualised over time, historically and in relation to wider structure. This is the objective of many post-modernists, who have through methodological and conceptual tools such as 'sign', text, and self-narrative, begun to trace genealogies of the self.

7: This is perceived to have stemmed from the fact that religion is a field still in search of a successful theory and method (Budd:1973:1), a field that has never generated any indigenous methodologies, rather borrowing from the humanities and sciences, and reaching a methodological impasse of chronic proportions (Kepnes:1986:504). This plight seems unresolvable through normal channels, as "the analysis of religious beliefs and behaviour, and their relation to other parts of society, is peculiarly unsuited to the methods used so successfully elsewhere in sociology" (Budd:1973:17).

8: For Wilson secularisation theory "relates to a process of transfer of property, power, activities, and both manifest and latent functions, from institutions with a supernaturalist frame of reference to (often new) institutions operating according to empirical, rational, pragmatic criteria. That process can be demonstrated as having occurred extensively, if unevenly, over a long historic period, and to have done so notwithstanding the spasmodic countervailing occurrence in certain areas and instances of cultural revitalization exemplified in the emergence of charismatic leaders and prophets" (Wilson:1985:11-12). Further, "... whereas legitimate authority once depended on religious sanctions; whereas social control once relied heavily on religiously defined rewards and punishments; whereas social polices, conspicuously including warfare, at one time needed supernatural endorsement, or at least the endorsement of those who were recognized as the agents of the supernatural; and whereas revealed faith once specified the boundaries of true learning-now, all of these functions have been superseded. Authority is now established by constitutions. Social control is increasingly a matter for law rather than for a consensual moral code, and law becomes increasingly technical and decreasingly moral ... Social policies increasingly require the approval of an electorate, which endorse a manifesto. Revelation is a distrusted source of knowledge, and the methodology of modern learning puts a premium on doubt rather than on faith, on critical scepticism rather than on unquestioning belief. The erstwhile functions of religion have been superseded, and this constitutes a process of the secularisation of society. Religion has lost its presidency over other institutions" (Wilson:1985:14-15)

9: Charges of manipulative practices have long been made against groups that seem different to the status quo for how else can it be explained that 'ordinary folk' would join strange and bizarre sectarian movements; surely, somehow they

have been coerced into losing their autonomy and critical capacity for free choice (Hamilton:1995:213-4). The popularity of this model is thus in part explained by the fact, " That it provides a convenient and 'sensible' account for those who are at loss to explain why individuals are attracted to 'deviant' and 'menacing' groups. Moreover it exempts both the 'victim' and his or her significant others outside the movement from any responsibility, thereby preserving the integrity of their world-views and lifestyles " (Snow and Machalek:1984:179). Although this type of reaction to some form of 'otherness' is hardly new, the case in North America depicts a situation beyond prejudicial stereotypes, in that the credibility given to such explanations and models has been entrenched by academics and professionals as well as public opinion and media portrayal. Psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health workers, and in some cases, sociologists, have over the last few decades given such models professional stamps of approval and become thus, whether intentionally or not, contributors to a burgeoning organised 'anti-cult' movement, a movement who have through their assessment of non-traditional religions, and methods of de-programming converts, have influenced the media, the courts and the public in a negative way toward new movements (Shinn:1987:144-69, Wright:1991:125-6, Richardson:1983:98-100).

10: The former can be said to refer to the hegemony of cultural values and meaning systems inherent in the capitalistic west; these values are not completely tied to one particular class, and as such, although reflecting and ensuring the continued hegemony of dominant classes, serve the generalised social and economic institutions of a particular society, and thus affect the majority of a society. In western industrialised countries thus Capitalism is the dominant meaning system, and values such as the work ethic, materialism, individualism and patriarchy are internalised. Alienation from this system is seen as disenchantment in terms of the above values, and can thus also refer to the classic Marxist one, where individuals are estranged both from themselves and a sense of community through such values. The 'counter-culture' can be loosely seen as the values and groupings that in various ways resists such values and search for alternative moral agendas.

11: They go on to suggest that groups who are connected to potential recruits through interpersonal networks have more impressive growth rates and a larger chance of ultimate success in terms of size and expansion. They compare the sizes of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist and the Hare Krishna, the latter being one of a few groups who recruit mainly in public spaces, and consequently are far smaller. Rochford (1985) though points out the Hare Krishnas have different strategies in different cities, many of which are based on network ties rather than public recruitment, and goes on to show the critical importance of such pre-existing social bonds in his research. Shinn (1987:138) also shows the potential relevance of such bonds in a concrete example of one individual.

12: Richardson (1983:93) suggests that in fact in some cases such ties are positive and contribute to membership rather than competing with it.

13: Lofland in a follow up study of the Moonies (1977), found there to be five sequential stages during weekend workshops and other periods of longer durations, in which encapsulation was created, allowing the groups ideology to be unfolded and a setting in which doubts could be raised and countered, as well as facilitating an environment wherein affective bonds could be formed and entrenched without interference. The first is 'Absorption of Attention' where in prospective converts every waking moment was closely controlled and monitored and a full days activities had the consequence of absorbing all of the recruits attention. The second is 'Collective Focus' whereby collective activities were at a maximum and attention was thus focused outward and on the group as a collective entity. The third is 'Exclusive Input', which refers to measures insuring total input. The fourth is 'Fatigue', whereby all waking hours were filled with activities at a physical and social pace that was intense. The last is 'Logical Comprehensive Cognition', referring to the way in which the movement ideology was systematically and carefully unfolded, making it seem logical and encompassing, and hard to resist (Lofland:1977:809-10). Converts who expressed doubt were told such were acts of Satan, and the dire consequences of leaving the group was then pointed out to those expressing the doubt. The way in which 'nearly' converts express their levels of - at the time unthought of - dependencies on the group, illustrates the importance of encapsulation (Lofland:1977:813-814).

14: Griel and Rudy's work which is perhaps best described a 'interactionist-organisational' perspective is interesting for it connects directly social control, group strategy, and the possible effects of such on conversion. Their approach is tied to the interactionist/social network school. Scholars have possible incorrectly downplayed coercive and manipulative practices in some movements due to their reaction to brainwashing theories. Can conversion be seen as a direct or indirect result of such efforts as conversion was seen to be a direct result of brainwashing, or the result of pre-disposing variables? Griel and Rudy (1984:260-61) have suggested that groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, therapeutic drug communities, radical political movements, 'deprogramming' bodies, and some new religious movements should all be viewed as Identity Transformation Organisations (ITOs) in that they all centrally share the purpose of encouraging potential members to change their behaviour and take on new social roles and overall to develop novel modes of self-conception. Research has suggested that whether one calls this process conversion, resocialisation, deprogramming or achieving sobriety, the process of identity transformation fostered by ITOs is essentially the same. The key element in this process is obviously an individuals reorientation and the emergence of a new identity, a conversion. Griel and Rudy infer that identity transformations take place primarily as a result of the efforts of the ITOs in achieving their goals, through

shaping the individual; conversion is seen as a direct result of the ITOs transformative goals. Griel and Rudy suggest that ITOs all share certain structural features which evolve and are dictated by the core social processes involved in attempting to transform an individual's identity. One important feature, and one particularly relevant to NRMs is that of a type of social control that serves to restrict contact and communication between members and non-members, thereby facilitating the task of identity transformation. According to this view (Griel and Rudy:1984:269), encapsulation has the direct purpose of isolating members of a particular group in order to facilitate their acceptance of a novel conception of self and reality through keeping them apart from versions of reality that may discredit this new vision and simultaneously ensuring they are exposed to intensive interaction with individuals who support or already believe in this new vision. Through various types of encapsulation, a potential convert becomes a committed believer. This is not to say that this process guarantees conversion, nor that it is without structural contradictions in terms of other goal of ITOs.

15: Encapsulation is a process whereby an individual is encouraged to change his or her reference group, to discontinue associating with significant others who may maintain and support previous world views that are competing constructions of reality and to associate with significant others that represent a social community that supports and 'lives' this new reality; encapsulation thus fosters conversion by erecting a social boundary between potential converts and rival constructions of reality as well as ensuring that a potential convert's interactions are with those who support the vision that new converts are being encouraged to believe in (Griel and Rudy:1984:263). It is this protective layer, a kind of social cocoon, that is seen as primarily causal to conversion. As 'greedy organisations', ITOs demand not just a part of their members' energy and commitment, but demand their total allegiance. In the case of some new religious movements, like the Hare Krishna, devotees are dependent on the organisation in many ways like shelter, subsistence, companionship and shared faith, although this dependency is ultimately voluntary, rather than coercive. Thus ITOs like the Hare Krishnas construct ways to make members want to depend on it, various commitment mechanisms that steer people to assimilate the group's needs as their own (1984:264). Thus physical, social and ideological encapsulation (see endnote two and three, chapter three) encourage a transformed identity.

CHAPTER TWO.

1: I was left often with the feeling that either theories have little purchase on the reality of this life-world or the individuals involved have little purchase on their own past and present reality in the wake of their conversion into the ideology and way of life of the Hare Krishna. This rift between observer and observed always remains, whether one attempts to cross through speculative explanations

from qualitative accounts of conversion, or through more quantitatively driven research. On the one side of this disjunctive, there are people living a life, and on the other, people making interpretations of that life. This applies as much to morally motivated assessments of 'deviance' and brain-washing as to more 'neutral' academic ones. This process of interpretation illustrates that despite perceptions of progressive 'knowledge' as to 'the human condition', we remain to a large degree in the dark as to what motivates action and life-style and what peoples 'root' sense of reality are; how they envisage and live their lives, and indeed what are the underlying conditions of such lives. This process of 'knowing', always incomplete, does allow us some closure in that it reveals the error of making all encompassing generalisations, or accepting singular theories, particularly when looking at phenomena that are objectively subjective, yet so obviously meaningful to individuals and their action.

2: We as researchers thus make up part of the web of an event in our very attempt at understanding it; we are not as distanced and objective as believed.

3: Historically, there is said to be a difference in terms of methods that help us understand from an insider's perspective, a religious act, and methods that explain a religious act in terms of social theory. There is good reason to believe that the separation between these is somewhat contrived (Kepnes 1986), and that in fact we employ - or should at least - naturally both orientations, understanding and explanation, in our methodological discourses. The fact that religious beliefs and rituals are to some extent irreducible to explanations should not be a necessarily impossible hindrance, or a predetermined outcome to either phenomenological relativism or mechanical reductionism.

4: I first stayed with the Hare Krishna in Muldersdrift outside Johannesburg, and in Mellville, in 1989 while doing a life history of one devotee. In 1994/5, I communicated and stayed with the Hare Krishna devotees in Rondebosch. The paper's data comes from interview material from these stays, and many discussions with devotees, and generated field notes from participant observation and visits.

5: There is to my knowledge precious little work done in South Africa on NRMs, or conversion into ideological meaning systems (religious and otherwise), and almost nothing sociological on the Hare Krishna movement.

6: The confusion surrounding what exactly constitutes conversion stems in the large part from quantitative oriented research, and research that excludes out of hand, the relevance of qualitative data. Crucial here is that if one wants to assert that converts accounts are reconstructed, and have no causal relevance to conversion, then one needs to substantiate this as well pursue the significance of reconstruction. In other words, if reconstruction is evident, it needs to be forthcoming in an interview in a spontaneous manner so we can

decipher it and assess its relevance. Asking specific questions, will dictate the nature of reconstruction and through the use of catch phrases, premeditate its occurrence and its specificities.

7: For an example of this see endnote one, chapter five, where there is an assessment of omitted data in Rochford's (1985) questionnaire answered by Hare Krishna devotees.

8: One example of the necessity for this is illustrated in the work of Rochford on the Hare Krishna (1985). He bases a fair amount of his general analytical interpretation on the fact that converts accounts can be seen as no more than motive talk. He backs this up well, yet at no stage does he attempt to illustrate real cases of reconstruction and much of his data comes from questionnaires that are set up in a very specific manner. Further he was in a situation personally where he became more than just a researcher of the movement, and thus had an opportunity - albeit from a complicated and ambiguous footing - to engage in just such a discussion. Did he ever find that he was beginning to reinterpret the past in terms of his changing feelings for the movement? Another example illustrating the danger of not fully investigating the occurrence of reconstruction lies in the work of interactionist theories who dismiss anecdotal accounts entirely on the basis that converts motivational dispositions to conversion have no verifiable reality in terms of reported pre-conversion 'states' without providing 'proof' in the form of the inner workings of textual accounts fails or alternative sources of information that may discredit converts accounts.

9: The most important and world-shaking - in the sense of an 'academic world' - legacy to emerge out of the work of social commentators writing under the banners of relativism, phenomenology and post-modernism is the realisation that we, as commentators on social life have been possibly deceiving ourselves as to the extent of our progressive knowledge and understanding of social life and individual instances of it. The realisation that at this level of life - the first instance of experience - social actors are engaged in discursive construction, and that we are ourselves engaged in similar activity in our interpretation of such life, will ultimately create something of a paradigm switch in sociology. How do we move beyond this, how can we hope to locate and analyse reconstructed and self-referenced narratives? It is hard to catch a ghost. In terms of this it seems clear that instead of making our orientation to explain quantitative instances of social life, and then work backwards - which seems to be 'objectively' problematic - we should start with the qualitative, start with the individual and work our way, cautiously, forward.

10: In the interviews I asked no specific questions at all bar a general broad initial question. After this I attempted to refrain from specifically orientated questions, although the temptation was sometimes enormous to do so. The general question asked went something like this: 'I would like to know about why

you became a Hare Krishna devotee and what you think about it now. Whatever you think was important. I am interested in how you felt then and what you saw as important then, as well as now. Please say whatever comes to mind'.

11: If indeed there is a high tendency for retrospection, one needs to see how converts view their past and present at that point in time; at another time it might have changed, or they may have reinterpreted what they said before in terms of what was spoken about, or in terms of their thoughts and attitudes towards me as a researcher, and the implications in terms of this of what they think they should be telling me. Or they may (a common tendency for most people) simply reconstruct causal factors, make links between things they had not considered in that light before. Indeed the fact that I was asking about their past and their feeling about being a Hare Krishna may have caused them to think about things they had not for some time. In regards to this, one has the potential to get an unedited version of reality only once. The only way to reach a similar point would have been to compare interviews in terms of time, which was not in the scope of this paper.

This general orientation as to interviews was not as intentional for the interview of one respondent, Paul, as I did this interview a number of years ago; however the interview 'flowed' well and I never asked specific questions for they seemed unnecessary. At any rate, I did not go into that interview with specific questions in mind, as I was looking to do a number of interviews with him, and this was intended as an exploratory first interview. This did not happen and the experience of doing that interview, and its success, lead me to the conviction of the suitability of the above described style. It led me to realise that it is crucial to be aware of how you handle an interview in the sense of how you can affect what converts say. This also shows how crucial it is to have only one interview, for you can make converts think about things in their past in a different way, or influence them to see the relevance of things that they at that time, both at the time of the interview, and at the time they are speaking of, did not think of in relation to other circumstances or other remembered events and feelings. In a sense you are creating a window for them to include such in their overall reconstruction of their past.

12: Not only would it require an emphasis on gender issues and gender roles for both men and women, but there are a multitude of consequent dynamics that would need to be looked at in isolation in terms of the general purposes of this research. Another consideration was that to gather relevant information in terms of pre and post conversion lives in interviews (one would require a more structured and probing approach in terms of eliciting relevant information in an interview situation, and such might well disrupt the style of interview described above. Further there was not a significant amount of obviously related information about gender forthcoming, so I did not feel compelled to orient towards a specifically gendered approach) and internal dynamics (for women I

missed out on an unknowable amount of relevant data in terms of not having as much observational access, and further it proved difficult to gain interviews with women as readily as with men) presented a number of problems, and it seemed all in all prudent to try and avoid centralising gender. There are, where relevant comments made in terms of gender roles and dynamics. For an analysis of gender related issues in the Hare Krishna, see Rochford (1985), and also a comment on this, endnote three, chapter five.

13: I felt confident that those who had been involved in something that requires so much energy and devotion and sacrifice, for so long, could be called converts, whatever that may mean. Further, the decision as to who to target was made in light of the potential hazards of retrospective accounts; I reasoned that I could counter the possibility of having 'unscientific' data by speaking to people who had been in the movement for a similar amount of time. There were a few reasons for this; if I encountered a high degree of reconstruction, or if not, it would be revealing in terms of the accounts belonging to those who had been devotees for substantial period, and as such, this retrospection would, I assumed, be consistent at least. Further I assumed that long standing members would have experienced more crisis, hardships and doubts in terms of the process of becoming committed to the movement. I hoped their conversion would give me more insight into the personal process of conversion than say members who had been there a relatively short space of time

14: One issue that does seem necessary to mention here is the impactful relationship between researcher and respondent in terms of living with the devotees and in terms of interview situations. Although I tried generally to be a neutral presence, I made clear my role as a researcher rather as a potential convert (although I participated in everything I could), and thus was not really ever neutral. Besides the many interesting dynamics between researcher and those he is observing (such as the constant dialogue/competition between devotees wanting to convince/convert me, and my attempts to find out about them, not only as converts) this meant that the devotees knew who I was and what I was doing there. They also therefore knew what my interests were and potentially this had effectual consequences that are hard to determine. It must be remembered the movement has generally received 'sympathetic' responses from academics as opposed to bad press from the media (in America at least). They see academics generally in favourable terms and perhaps are keen to reveal many things that would not necessarily be forthcoming or organically spontaneous if I was not there. In interview situations, although I strove for spontaneous responses, there is a possibility that devotees knew what I was interested their previous circumstances and thus had time to 'prepare'?

15: The issue of reconstruction makes transparency both difficult and easier, for it forces one to come to terms with the nature of experience and data, and how we interpret it. This perhaps explains the differential way researchers have used

accounts, and explains why some have been inclined too easily to dismiss such as relevant; it is obvious that reconstruction is conversion and conversion is reconstruction in terms of illustrating that change is taking place. Perhaps this is such an obvious point that it has generally been taken as something that does not need to be problematised. The pervasiveness of the reconstruction issue is due to the fact that it goes to the heart of sociological endeavours in the sense that it challenges many of our traditional methods that have avoided entering the world of subjective meaning. Reconstruction is located at the core of all human attempts of 'finding meaning', whether this is making sense of other peoples lives in a sociological manner, or looking for meaning in one's own. When making narratives of the world and of our place in the world, we discursively and inevitably reconstruct that world to 'fit' the narrative to some degree. Whether or not one narrative is more 'empirical' than another is not the crucial factor; the point is that all are narratives and this applies both to academic exercise as well the phenomena we study from religious belief to a belief in the superiority of the free market to socialism. As academics we feel that our narratives are more objective and varied in the sense of taking in diverse aspects of life; hence we see ourselves as deconstructing rather than reconstructing. If we take reconstruction on board then we are forced to become in some degree transparent in both our methods and the awareness of their limitations.

16: Some reject the bulk of convert's accounts outright, the most extreme form this being found in the brain-washing or forced coercion models of conversion, which, through their labelling of converts as passive manipulated victims, lacking autonomy and free-will, deny the legitimacy of converts testimonial explanations and recollections of their experience of conversion. A more sophisticated and complex - but ultimately similar - rejection of converts accounts is found in some of the theories of conversion that stress interaction as causal and pivotal to conversion, and situational factors such as social networks, structural availability and encapsulation and recruitment strategies as creating suitable conditions for such interaction, rather than predispositional and individual motivational factors. On the other side of the coin are accounts that accept accounts without a critical examination of them, seeing such as unfettered histories of the event and process of conversion and using such to locate the causal and wider dynamics involved in conversion.

17: These approaches tend to lump all movements and all converts into one mass. There are for instance, huge differences in terms of groups in respect of ideologies, strategies, organisational dynamics and so forth. This diversity applies also to recruitment strategies; for example, it is well documented that the Moonies have very intense strategies aimed at convincing potential converts of their point of view, whereas anyone who has spent time at a Hare Krishna temple will know they follow a far less pressurising intellectualist type approach to newcomers. Thus in some cases there may be more overt forms of persuasion, yet one cannot make this claim of all NRMs (Shinn:1987).

18: Converts categorically do not play a role in their own conversion, but are thus passive and unknowing victims of cults and their leaders, puppets on the guru's string (this is not to deny the obvious influence of charismatic leaders on individuals), manipulated by cults and NRMs which are perceived as sinister bodies stealing future generations of productive citizens, away from home and country. Organisations that exist to deprogramme the convert and halt the tide of non-traditional religions, are conversely viewed in an heroic light, even though the process of deprogramming can similarly be said to contain elements of isolationist and exploitative psychological practices (Shinn:1987:153-60). The assertion that converts lack 'free will' during the conversion process is a metaphysical one and therefore problematic in use as an empirically proven fact. Further, the loss of autonomy argument dismisses the possibility that religious commitment is surely to some degree a volitional act, in part a self-determined process, whereby both commitments to join and to leave are carefully and rationally calculated as well as negotiated. The process whereby an individual becomes a convert, is in essence one in which there are by definition two or more negotiating parties involved and strong empirical evidence would be needed if one implies such a process is unilateral.

19: Very little clinical evidence is to be found regarding such practices within these movements. Although some elements of classical thought reform methods are present, crucial elements are missing in cult type indoctrination attempts, and most researchers have found there is also scant evidence for any form of direct control or coercion (Robbins:1988, Richardson:1983, Rochford:1985).

20: These models have been characterised as an attempt to portray certain types of religious behaviour as a medical problem; this bias which has been aptly been called a 'medicalisation of deviance', implies that certain forms of religious commitments are in fact induced mental pathology/aberrations, and the causes of such commitment are reducible to psychiatric or psychological factors only. Such medical model conceptualisations of conversion are seen to be reductionist, untestable and generally inappropriate. The proclivity of these models towards medicalising only certain forms of behaviour in certain unpopular groups as deviant reflects a bias toward anything different such as collectivist and eastern groupings. This bias is bourn out by the fact that brainwashing metaphors are not applied to more conventional groupings such as convents, monasteries and the military, all which can be said to have similar traits. Related to this point of bias, it becomes clear that the brainwashing metaphor is a contrived rather than factual one when one considers that the anti-cult movement is hardly only a group of concerned citizens and parents, but a social movement in its own right; it can be described ironically as both a 'counter-movement' and a conservative movement in that it fits the description of a social group that wishes to maintain a status quo and resist what is perceived as a dominant and very threatening trend; the new social order that NRC

envisage and enact produce behaviour and life-styles that are in many ways fundamentally threatening (Bromley and Shupe:1985:65). In its fight to achieve these goals, this movement has had to adopt the brainwashing metaphor to legitimate its claims over the right to control peoples religious choices and life-style orientations. In other words it has had to make the issue of conversion into NRMs a un-religious or secular issue; brainwashing is thus a scientific explanation that takes the issue of religious freedom out of the equation (it is necessary to do so in a society that places individual freedom and religious choice as a core constitutional issues) by asserting that individuals are brainwashed into losing that very freedom, and thus compromised in a way serious enough to evoke a radical response that needs to rescue such victims through physically pulling them out of such movements and isolating them to re-programme them into normal conventional behaviour, thus achieving their 'recovery' in a way reminiscent of the control that the religious movements themselves are accused of. Further by making the issue one of individual rights and freedom, and thus one of legality, the anti-cult movement has managed ironically to get the courts in some cases to condone this claimed form of repression of individual rights (Shinn:1987:167-8).

21: The empirical base of such models is questionable in that it stems from the testimonies of ex-converts and in particular, the testimonies of deprogrammed ex-converts; such accounts cannot be seen as reliable for they are based on accounts of individuals who are centrally challenging their past actions and trying to fit into a new life that is based on a rejection of their life as converts. Ironically then, just as accounts of converts as to their life before conversion and their reasons for conversion cannot be taken at face value for such accounts involve strong elements of reconstruction based on a new identity, accounts of ex-converts would be similarly biased and unreliable as it would be in the best interest of ex-converts to affirm their alleged passivity as unsuspecting victims and their lack of personal motivation in reference to conversion, for to believe that would be to help them get on with their new lives, rejoining conventional roles, family ties and protect them from stigma and help manage guilt feelings (Robbins:1988:74). Thus these ex-converts's new position as enemies of the movement they believed in, leads them to reinterpret their motivations for joining, which before, may have been seen by them to be one of individual choice, is now remembered as brainwashing (Rochford:1985:289-90). Empirical data that is used to back up coercion models is always drawn from specialised network samples of ex-devotees involved in a social network of deprogrammers, counsellors, ex-convert support groups and concerned organisations (Robbins:1988:74). Singer, whose work was influential in promoting acceptance of coercion models, utilised such a network (Richardson:1983). In short, many ex-converts do not make the claim they were passive victims of mind control, and those that do are likely to be involved with the anti-cult network and/or undergone deprogramming (Beckford:1978)

22: If some form of isolation and indoctrination were all that is required in the recipe for conversion, then would not everybody who came into contact with such groups, be converted? If charges of brainwashing were sustainable, then there would be a high percentage of conversion; this is the most damaging and empirically testable critique of brain washing models, the fact that of people who decide to remain with groups for a lengthy period, a small percentage only remain committed. In other words if such groups employed similar techniques to those used on POW's, most would be indoctrinated. One is left with the conclusion if coercion does exist, then it is ineffective. Many researchers have found that there are no attempts to coerce members to stay, whether to prevent individuals from leaving by physical control, or by isolating them from influences from wider society (Hamilton:1991:214-215). Perhaps though such movements do exercise mechanism of social control, which have only limited success (Wright:91:127). In other words, if there is coercion, only particular individuals are susceptible to it, therefore conversion cannot really be explained by coercion.

CHAPTER THREE.

1: For Griel and Rudy, physical, ideological and social encapsulation is the core causal mechanism in creating commitment through interaction. The most obvious of these is actual physical encapsulation, whereby groups ensure that potential converts are physically distanced from the outside world. Interestingly, an extreme example of this is when deprogrammers rescue converts from sinister cults by creating a setting where they are physically removed from interaction with the movements who support the 'victims brainwashed delusions'. In the case of religious movements, although there is little evidence of such direct coercion, groups, according to this thesis, certainly use this mechanism of isolation to aid the process of transforming the potential converts identity and worldview. Lofland (1977) reported that potential recruits to the Divine Precepts movement were always taken to an isolated farm where they were strongly discouraged to leave. Also, the absence of television, newspapers and telephones etc. created a controlled setting wherein a new ideology could be fostered without competition (Griel and Rudy:265). Religious groups such as the Moonies and the Hare Krishna, convents and monasteries, as well as therapeutic drug communities create a real life cocoon that encapsulates and confines their members to a system of controlled and disciplined communal living, where recruits spend nearly all their lives within the community in a totalised environment, safe from competing world-views and, critically, continually interacting with significant others that reinforce their blossoming new identity. Of course there are numerous works on how if one isolated within a particular setting, one will inevitably take up the belief systems of the setting, and of those around you. A cocoon of this nature is then instrumental to individual transformed identities, and according to this perspective, to the conversion of individuals. Many works on NRMs stress this factor as singularly

crucial to the success of a particular movement in retaining a respectable number of devotees.

2: Members of a ITO cannot remain 'within' indefinitely. In the case of NRMs a crucial element to their survival is the recruitment of new members at a steady pace and fundraising, and most use their own human resources to go out into the world and achieve this. Converts thus are exposed to potentially damaging influences and competing world-views for short periods of time, and, if one follows the logic of this type of argument, are in a countervailing situation re the purposes and goals of physical encapsulation. According to Griel and Rudy, ITOs, overcome this by arming their converts with two other forms of encapsulation to counteract these influences. Firstly social encapsulation which instead of eliminating interaction between converts and the outside world, channels interaction in a manner that allows converts out in the world, but 'not of it' in the sense of not being affected by it. A social cocoon is thus provided to dress an individual in, when in the world, making them imperious to undesirable influences in that world. This is achieved through the prescription of specific modes of behaviour or dress that distinguish those on the inside from all outside, and thus reinforces the boundary between them. The third form of encapsulation used by ITOs is that of ideological encapsulation through which converts are armed with their groups particular version of reality which is to them as plausible to everyday conceptions of the world and as such they are encapsulated in a space capsule that allows them to venture beyond the group without the danger of damage to their identity support systems (Griel and Rudy:1984:267). In the case of NRMs the converts are often armed with an ideology that is not easily open to refutation by outsider events and opinions. For example the Hare Krishna belief system is built upon the denial/rejection/condemnation of many western core values and obviously if a convert has come to believe in such a world view, he/she has the tools to ward off countervailing views and happenings that may in normal circumstances challenge and erode newly found beliefs.

CHAPTER FOUR.

1: " Other scholars have agreed that religion faces doom (Freud 1927;Fenn 1978;Wilson 1979), and that science driven secularization gnaws steadily at the roots of faith. However, anyone who glances in a newspaper sees that religion continues to affect deeply a wide range of human activities, and it is hard to discern extinction in a phenomena as varied and vigorous as faith ... As a human phenomenon, religion arises through social exchanges in which individuals seek rewards and attempt to avoid costs. Although science rewards highly rewarding technologies-ignore for the moment the costs and dangers of technology-it has come nowhere near solving the chief problems of human existence. Until that inconceivable day when science and technology transform humans into gods, people will postulate supernatural exchange partners from which to obtain the most general and valuable rewards ... religious organizations often gradually

reduce their tension with the surrounding sociocultural environment. For the particular organization involved, this is tantamount to secularization, the gradual accommodation to secular standards of belief and behaviour. However, this process calls forth a countervailing process of religious revival and innovation ... Stark and I have not limited the response to deviant "cults", instead recognizing that new religious movements are highly varied in nature ... Religions that abandon powerful, specific supernatural claims thereby lose their ability to serve many people's religious needs. More youthful and vigorous religions, that promise rewards and confidently explain the costs humans endure, will win converts at the expense of the more fully evolved religious organizations " (Bainbridge:1997:405-6).

CHAPTER FIVE.

1: An extended example of Rochford's (1985) assessment of conversion into the Hare Krishna is useful here to contrast to the possible usefulness of the conceptions put forward in this paper. Although Rochford's work on the movement as a changing organisation etc is extremely useful and based on indepth interactions with the Hare Krishna over six years, his analysis of conversion into the group is to be found wanting exactly in terms of the themes discussed here. In his analysis he uses both quantitative as well as more qualitative analysis and data, including a lengthy life-history of one devotee. He first looks at the demographics of devotees and then considers 'macro-structural social-psychological' approaches to conversion, which essentially amount to motivational, pre-disposing type theories, he finds that in terms of the data at hand, such theories explain conversion only up to a point. Conversion is obviously a process and experience that cannot be explained by a single theory. The problem is that Rochford does not, in my opinion go far enough in interpreting his own data, and in consequence, does not give preconversion factors approaches an even hand as explanations of conversion in terms of his own data. He uses accounts of devotees from a survey to show that converts exhibited meaning seeking behaviour before conversion (63-8), data, that Rochford suggests reflects that most devotees were seeking new meanings and alternative life-styles prior to deciding to join. Rochford then goes on to mention the ways in which converts describe their most important reasons for joining, reasons which in general emphasise the importance of the link between their pre-conversion cognitive orientation and the movements ideology and life-style; the most important reason given by devotees is an attraction to the philosophy to the movement, followed by the attraction or the friendliness of the devotees.

After mentioning these factors, he concludes that, although with some individuals (how many?, how important is this?, does this apply to individuals who remain in the movement or those who leave after a relatively short period?) a prior ideological and cognitive orientation may be important in conversion to the movement, this does not play a central role, citing reconstruction as the main

reasons to not emphasise these roles. He does not follow up the implications in his theorising of possible causal connections between the fact that the vast majority of his informants were meaning seekers, and their pre-conversion lives backed this up to a significant degree, with their general ideological positioning in terms of self-identity, spiritual and political views etc, and their conversion into Krishna. The survey questions he asks do not really uncover these connections and are not really designed to do so. This is illustrated in two ways when one looks at his data presented in his table on the reasons devotees give for joining (70). Firstly, the fact that for his third given reason, 'Fact that I was going nowhere and I wanted to explore another life-style' only eight percent respond affirmatively to this as the most important reason (larger percentages give as secondary factors) is possibly deceptive; this is so because this reason can be seen in one sense to incorporate the first two reasons, 'Philosophy of the movement' and 'friendliness of the devotees' which are given as the two most important reasons by the largest amount of the devotees, thirty-nine percent and sixteen percent respectively. Other 'hard' data (such as being religious and spiritual in general orientation, prior involvement in meaning seeking behaviour and the reasons behind the fact that they were 'structurally available') that Rochford gives, suggest that a very high percentage of devotees consider their conversion as being primarily due to their being disenchanted with the dominant culture, and not being able to find suitable alternatives, therefore centrally looking for the right type of alternative, and thus a higher percentage should of considered the third reason as generally the most important.

The reason they possible do not is that this question is presented as a specific reason rather than a general one in the survey. In other words it competes with those two question and forces a specific choice, whereas perhaps it should rather have been presented alternatively, or deciphered as the most important in lieu of other data available. Another reason is that perhaps the devotees only realised this specifically as they became incorporated into the movement; in other words they came to realise what they were looking for, and also what they were missing, as time went on and they began to understand what the movement and philosophy offered them in real terms. This does not mean they reconstructed these elements, but rather only understood them in retrospect. Interesting in this regard is Rochford's footnote to the table. He says that most of the respondents who listed 'other' as their reasons for joining, spoke of various issues that became realisable only through their involvement within the practical life-style involved within the movement. He suspects that many more would have listed this as their most important reason if such had been included. Although he does not mention what these issues are, it seems possible that they were related to the links between prior ideological positioning and the alternative that a Hare Krishna life-style provided. This again shows that perhaps the most popular reason given or general cause of conversion, would lie in Rochford's third category. An illustration of this lies in the way Rochford deciphers the fact that because a large amount of devotees (the second largest amount give this as the

prime reason for joining, and a large amount mention that as a significant secondary factor) to be evidence of the importance of social ties. This is undoubtedly correct, yet this factor is also partially explicable in ideological factors in the sense that why would devotees consider the friendship of others to be so important, unless they could not find such levels of affinity in their normal lives. Perhaps this shows that to fully investigate these kind of relationships, between individual ideology and life-style and group ideology and life-style, and decisions to convert into a new life-style, one needs more than survey questions that don't allow enough understanding of an internal perspective. Perhaps most crucially he does not demonstrate, in terms of 'status' of differing devotees, who says what. We have no way of knowing how long particular devotees have been in the movement; in other words, no way of knowing who can be seen in real terms, as converts. Rochford at various points says that perhaps pre-conversion alignment is applicable in some cases, and that some individuals do indeed actively create their own conversions. However we are not always sure how exactly this is possible in terms of his own extensive data.

2: Interactionists and role-play theorists suggest high defection rates indicate that conversion is more about interaction and encapsulation as opposed to motivation and prior conversion alignment; when interactional features are taken away, there is no underlying cognitive orientation to sustain conversion, thus proving there was none in the first place (Robbins:1988:76). However it is just as feasible that high defection in certain groups are attributable to the fact that their ideological basis is ultimately unfeasible to most converts in the sense of not being connected to any level of previously felt disenchantment, and consequently, when those individual move beyond the confines of the group, confines that are in the some cases like the Moonies case, extremely encapsulatory, motivation for staying dissipates for it had no original basis of cognitive alignment. This is not suggestive that conversion is related only to interaction, in that when it is not evident, conversion is transitory, but related to the lack of compatibility of defectors. Individuals who do remain do so because they have an ideological affiliation that runs beyond the allure created by interaction processes. If one however considers the minority that stay as being 'true' representative of the definition of a convert, we need to look at not only the strategies of the group, but the ideology and plausibility of that ideology in terms of the specific group, and the specific individual and their ideological standing and past. In terms of this, the relevant factor in respect of defection, lie not in only the situational group factors, but in the fact that the Moonies ideology is less defined, or plausible, or 'world-rejecting' than say the ideology of the Hare Krishna.

3: One example of the danger of not centralising cause over process can be found in Rochford (1985:124-137) in his analysis of gender and conversion into Krishna. Although his analysis centres around general pre-dispositional causes (he analyses women's membership in Krishna in relation to their wider status

within modern patriarchal society, through the concepts of realms of private and public power, and marginality, suggesting that the movement alleviates feelings of marginality through providing clear distinctions between private and public roles and between gender roles; women feel they have security and a type of self-status and importance within those roles), his over emphasis of social networks and interaction as cause tend to limit his ability to explain why certain women may be motivated to join, and he ends up inferring too generally that all women join for the same reasons, or are 'pushed' into conversion thorough marginality rather than creating their own type of self-empowerment. His analysis, complicated and interesting, however lacks a critical edge in terms of looking at issues of conflict within the movement in terms of ideology, differential status, and perceptions of power. He fails to show sufficiently the contradictory nature of the relationship between marginality and the appeasement of such within the group; after quite correctly showing that one cannot assume *prima facie* that all converts are predisposed cognitively through alienation from the dominant culture, into converting into NRMs, he posits exactly that in terms of women. All women that become devotees, are predisposed towards the movement in searching for a way to resolve their marginality. He offers no real alternative to this. This leaves many questions in relation to gender unanswered. Most critical in this respect is that gender conflict, within Hare Krishna, where one finds direct separation of gender into private and public realms, and the existence of strong patriarchal and sexist ideology, is not really pursued. It is difficult to believe that such does not play some role, whether hidden or more directly. It is perhaps because the patriarchal element in Krishna is in fact not an overly deterministic one, despite an ideologue that is expressly sexist, and the fact that many women gain positions of power, or at least feel they have empowered themselves, that some women become long terms converts. Conversely though, the fact that there are many more men in the movement may illustrate that these conflictual elements are seldom resolved. This weakness in his analysis is arguably because he attributes causal relevance to process and interaction as opposed to looking directly at why specific women may feel empowered in Krishna. The interactions and group affective bonds in between women are of obvious crucial importance in generating perception of personal worth and power, and thereby overcoming marginality, however it is the initial existence of such alienation that draws women to Krishna (through gender based network ties) and the transformation of that alienation into instances of self-empowerment, is causally related to the levels of their original marginality, rather than only the interactive processes whereby they overcome such marginality. If that marginality continues to exist, then one expects some conflict of interest. This reveals that there are two separate processes at work; group ties etc are how conversion happens, but perceived and actual marginality are why conversion happens, and also, why deconversion occurs (Shinn, 1987 reports that many women leave Krishna due to its patriarchal ideologies and treatment of women and the separateness of its life-style).

APPENDIX A.

CONVERSION NARRATIVES.

Abe's story

When viewing the auto-biography of Abe, it is not obviously transparent that his pre-conversion life represented anything out of the ordinary. He seems to have had a fairly sheltered middle class background, with the 'normal' doses of adolescent rebellion and growing pains. This said, he does seem to reflect a past that was characterised by existential angst, and a deep need for spiritual solutions for such. He reflects an individual who seems to have been intensely spiritual in the sense that this was not a nominal thing to him, but something he based his whole self-perception on, and how he viewed his life in terms of being meaningful or not. Although he does not really fit the description of being a rebel, or does not appear to have engaged in meaning seeking behaviour consistently or obviously, this theme of spiritual angst does seem to have pervaded his life. He feels alone and frustrated in terms of this spiritual 'nature', and fails to find satisfactory resolution through any conventional channels. His disenchantment came to a head for him while at University, and it is during this period he converts into Krishna. His attraction to the movement is described by him in terms that clearly show that his decision to join is based on this crisis of meaning, and it is the fact that the movement resolves these issues for him that motivates his continued commitment. He can be described as someone who was centrally searching for spiritual self-transformation, at the time of his conversion, although at times in his narrative, comments that attest to such an interpretation, are perhaps coloured by images of his present rather than his past. Abe had been with the movement for seven years, when recounting his story.

There is certainly in his narrative a general feel that he saw his pre-conversion life and pre-conversion identity to be based on a questing nature. He displays a distinct yearning to find out the 'deeper' answers in life, and as he grows older, is unsatisfied with meaning systems such as Christianity and 'secular' pursuits that do not provide him with the answers he is looking for, or answers that do not meet up with his developing worldview. He reflects passion for spiritual meaning, and his interests in 'esoteric' subjects, in cultures and meaning systems beyond a western capitalistic Christian one, and his interest in the parallels between different cultures, reflect a desire to find out underlying truth about life. Abe believes that 'all his life', he has had an interest in spirituality and 'spiritual pursuits'. Brought up by his mother in Cape Town, he feels that she has had two important influences on him; firstly she was very 'open-minded' and bringing him up as a single mother she had to do so in a very independent way, so that he 'became naturally independent'. As we get a glimpse of his life it becomes evident that this independency is important in that it contributes towards him

making life choices that are, to say the least, unusual. She has also had an influence on a part of him that he considers a crucial facet of his life and his 'nature', his spirituality. All his life he has been interested in spirituality and different forms of 'spiritual pursuits'. His mother was a Christian and took him to church regularly from a young age. By the time he went to highschool, he was a practising Christian, going to church every Sunday, and being very 'spiritually minded'. Thus from a young age he goes to church and becomes a practising Christian, becoming more and more 'spiritually minded':

" ... my whole life I've been strongly interested in spiritual pursuits, all and anything, that happens to be my nature ... I was very religious by nature ".

Abe's religiosity seems deeper and more intense than a vague and nominal religious grounding. This seems fuelled by a motivation to find not only answers but 'the truth'; he seems to believe in a hierarchy of truths, and was/is not prepared to live or believe in religion in a nominal sense. Later in his narrative he says that " **The strongest desire I have is to find out the truth**, to know, to know sort of answers and uh, if I find something which is more profound, more truthful, then I'll take that up certainly ... ", a statement which seem to describe his general religious orientation well.

Abe starts moving away from Christianity later as there " **always seemed more than what the church presented as real spirituality**", and he began to " search elsewhere". He recalls his mother as being influential in this search as she was also quite " liberal about her spiritual understanding, being interested in astrology and healing ", interest's Abe 'picks up' from her, becoming inquisitive about "all sorts of esoteric sciences" and doing courses on subjects such as astrology. As he grows older he challenges and broadens his beliefs more. He also becomes "... more rebellious, you know how youngsters do, started experimenting, marijuana, going out with friends and so on, in standard seven and later, so at that point I wasn't particularly Christian ". His interest in 'esoteric subjects' becomes heightened though and by the time he starts University in 1987, he "... wasn't a practising Christian anymore, I was much more interested in esoteric things, astrology, parapsychology, that sort of thing ".

This 'searching' element in Abe's life is perceived as central to his personality and it is what separated him from his peers and friends in that his spiritual interests remained a solitary pursuit while his relationship with others was social as they did not share his spiritual interest or need:

" ... and my friends were never particularly spiritually minded and our relationship was more a social one, **I was very much a loner, and I would study by myself, read and research books on spiritual activities** ... we had a good close circle of friends, meet on weekends, always go out together whatever we were doing, but none of them were particularly strongly spiritually motivated

or curious as much as I was. I was the only one, and then even when I came to University and I had other friends, still there was not the same spiritual interest ... And when I eventually joined the temple, they couldn't relate to that, none of my friends that I'd had in the past could relate to this Krishna consciousness ... so that separated us, **that showed the difference between us ultimately, and they were simply happy continuing their social lives without any need for spiritual input, but I had a strong need for some sort of spiritual input, so that's where we separated** ".

The only people seemingly in his life who shared his passion for spirituality were his mother and later his girlfriend:

" I did have a girlfriend at that time and that was probably the main relationship I was experiencing, so the other relationships were very secondary, and I was very seriously involved emotionally with this girl, you know how it is. We were very close and very attached to each other. We'd visit, I'd visit every day and so on. She was sixteen, seventeen, I was nineteen. And so we were very young, but very close, and we'd visit the temple together, she and I on Sundays. And so she was also able to appreciate it, being also a vegetarian, and she could relate to that spiritual side of things very much ".

Thus, besides close relationships with his mother and his girlfriend, Abe saw himself as something of a loner. This feeling was based in part on his perception of himself as being different in a spiritual sense. This self-definition, as essentially a spiritual person, a person who needed some degree of spirituality, and a person consequently of a solitary purpose - for it is obvious that he perceives that his 'aloneness' was directly related to him being different specifically in a spiritual sense rather than in a social sense -, becomes increasingly more centralised to his life as he grows older. This self-perceived core of his 'identity' develops into a self-estimate of how the state and success of his life is. It is in this sense that these feelings are instrumental to a intense crisis he undergoes while at university. This crisis is precipitated and generated, in Abe's mind, by a perceived lack of 'spiritual input' and meaning. This following passage reveals some nuances of Abe's sense of self and place during this period; it illustrates that he saw himself as being someone who needed a higher purpose and alternative, a person who was dissatisfied with his existing life in terms of meaning and purpose, and a person who was frustrated and alienated by knowing that there is something more congruous for him, but not being able to find it:

" ... when I was at Varsity I was in quite an existential crisis, just generally within my own consciousness, **because I didn't have a strong spiritual foundation or meaning in my life, I was looking for meaning in my life** and my life at that point was pretty meaningless. I hadn't found a particular spiritual practice or gotten any answers in life, and I was really in a state of consciousness that,

uh I didn't care whether I was living or dying, I was thinking why am I having to go through all this existence and to do all these things I don't really want to do, and then at the end of it struggle so hard to survive and then die? What's the use of that. I may as well just die now. And that's exactly how I felt and I was in too much of a state to do anything productively actually. I guess its adolescence or that time in one's life, but I was really feeling this very strongly, I couldn't at all appreciate the material system as such, and I knew there must be a higher alternative, but I didn't know what exactly. So I was definitely searching for something at that point ... "

This suggests a generalised state of disenchantment with the world, but one that seems different in the sense that it was, in the mind of Abe, unresolvable by 'conventional' channels. His interest in alternative esoteric things did not answer all his questions about life or the absolute answers or meaning, nor did traditional religion, nor on the whole did social interaction with others and social activities such as drug taking: " ... they didn't seem as close friends, it was more like some associates I would meet here and there, and we'd go out to places, on a few occasions we'd go travelling up the coast for a holiday. Other than that just socialising around campus ... It didn't seem as a major part of my life, nothing meaningful ... I was sort of taking in drugs, smoking marijuana, as a sort of escape, but that was only making things worse because that just clouds the consciousness ... after awhile I would feel the negative effects on my consciousness, bad moods, aggressive behaviour, short temper, that sort of thing, which meant the chemicals were having a bad side affect. But still I would just take it as a habit, as a social thing but I was realising that definitely there are detrimental side effects ... I'm sure it was habitual ". Even his relationship with his girlfriend, although close, was not always easy : " ... because even that can be fraught with so much anxiety, you know how love affairs can be ..." These felt tensions were for Abe centrally related to his searching nature; he say later that " by nature I was very spiritually minded. It's just that I didn't always have the answers to the questions I would ask. There were so many things that were unclear. So I was unhappy ".

There is one central feature of Abe's pre-conversion life that is possibly crucial to his eventual conversion into the movement, a feature that is clearly viewed by him as pivotal. His desire to find an ultimate truth to what he perceived as the 'problems of existence' that beset him seemed, at the very least, to place him in a circumstantial 'place' - both in terms of him being a religious seeker and in terms of the felt tensions that his seekership brought to bear on him - that made his conversion into something that answered those questions sufficiently, an understandable event. Although fitting into the world around him, Abe felt that his life was in crisis in terms of 'spirituality' (he felt if he could not achieve that desired level of spiritual fullness, he did not see the point to life as is evidenced in what he says about not caring whether he lives or dies). Although he may have been 'ripe' for some sort of conversion, was he ripe for just any

conversion? Is it relevant that he converted into Krishna consciousness particularly? It is possible that Abe converted into the movement because it was a worldview that was compatible with the spiritual needs he speaks about, as opposed to other spiritual avenues. The movement is described by him in terms that suggest it was something that he has been waiting for all his life, but had not known was 'out there'. One gets the feeling that he was looking for a spirituality he could 'live', rather than the 'flat' type of spirituality that Christianity espoused to him, or the simply intellectual satisfaction that his interest in esoteric sciences brought.

His conversion occurs during his period of growth and crisis at University; he meets the Hare Krishna devotees, and six months later decides to move into the temple and devote his life to being a devotee. He first meets the devotees when he hears of a vegetarian lunch being given at UCT, and becoming interested in vegetarianism, goes along. His feelings after that initial contact, and the revered way he speaks of the experience, provide insight into the tone and hue of his (self-perceived) swift attraction and submersion into Krishna consciousness: "**...the first day I ever went to the university lecture, the first day I ever met the devotee's, and I tasted that food, I thought this is something I've never experienced before, and actually I can't say that I've experienced something as nice as this. And I left in such an elated state that, you know it's difficult to explain, but that's how I experienced it directly, and I just had to go back**".

After this, in Abe's memory of events, his conversion into the movement is inevitable and natural:

"... in my life I can see an evolvement. When I finally joined the temple, after meeting the devotee's in 1987, February, March, by the time it came to October I was going to visit the temple every Sunday, going to University guest lectures every Tuesday, by October I'd moved in, I'd moved into the temple fully. That's after six months of contact, and it seemed at that point that my whole life was finally geared towards this point, my whole evolution coming towards this point of becoming a Hare Krishna devotee. Every thing was working towards that ultimately, like a natural progression".

His recollection of this period seems acute in comparison to any other time in his pre conversion life. He sees this period as being a crucial metamorphosis and turning point. Not only does his joining the Hare Krishnas seem a natural evolution to him, it also seemed to occur in a vacuum to the other events of his life; they became irrelevant to this 'higher priority' (as he calls it later) pulling him towards Krishna:

"... And I was becoming more and more, I couldn't help myself, but I was becoming more and more interested in this Krishna consciousness I was

happily able to drop everything, even if it meant leaving my girlfriend, just ending my studies, moving out of home ... so I was happy to move into the temple and that's why I felt it was a culmination of my life at that point. It was a major turning point in my life at the age of nineteen and moving into the temple."

This attraction to the movement is described by Abe, in terms that suggest a magnet-like quality between his consciousness and Krishna consciousness; he could not stop himself being drawn closer and closer to the movement and the devotee's and the activities that went on at the temple and further away from his other life:

" ... from first meeting the devotees in March, until that time in October, it was just a matter of going to the Tuesday guest lectures, and then eventually on to the Sunday lectures at the temple. **And just being there, hearing the philosophy, chanting Hare Krishna, taking the vegetarian food, that was so attractive. It was the general process itself. Of course there were one or two devotees who, there were actually not many devotees at the time, five at the most, and it was their general association that was so attractive, that I couldn't resist.** I had to go every single week, there was just no way I could miss it. It was even more important to me than my studies. It became like that ... And then I used to start asking, now you know I'm seeing you on Tuesdays and Sundays, can I see you even more, when?, how can I get to see you more often? So at that point they said, well were having a festival, come around in the morning and spend the day. So I went to spend the day, helped out, and then the next week I said, well I'll bring some things, and stay over for a few days and then when I was there, **I didn't want to leave, it was very nice** ".

He found it difficult to adjust to the routine of temple life after moving in, but nevertheless found it worth it:

" I can't tell you, it meant waking up at three in the morning, and struggling through chanting my rounds during the day, the morning meditation at least from five to seven, and falling asleep on my feet, I was so tired. **It's a very austere practice, but I was so happy despite all that. It was because I'd found meaning, all my questions were being answered** ".

He does not say more tangibly how his questions were answered, yet there is a strong emphasis in his story that this was essentially about finally finding the answers to the questions of life that plagued him. The comments below reflect a self-awareness about the process and how it overall 'just felt right' for him. His story in a significant way illustrates how important the 'ideological positioning' of an individual is, in terms of conversion, for when he speaks of finding about finally 'who he is', and various other comments in his narrative, he is speaking about issues that were of critical importance to him before he ever came across the movement. This possibly separates him from a wider population in the sense

that not everyone is concerned with or shows a sustained and indepth interest in such matters; (also see the comments he makes later about the similarities of different religious cultures):

" So finally I was finding out who I am, you know life, karma, reincarnation, soul. So many philosophically profound points, which made a lot of sense to me. And once one gets that realisation of the heart, one can't see material life again in a normal way ... by nature I was very spiritually minded. It's just that I didn't always have the answers to the questions I would ask. There were so many things that were unclear. So I was unhappy. But with Krishna consciousness, not only did I practically get the answers by just reading the books, **and it just felt right, you know what I was reading just felt right.** You know I can't say logically or scientifically or whatever, it's more correct than anything else. The other thing is that I was in such bliss just by going there very innocently and appreciating the talk and the meals, I was so happy I wanted to go back. If something, if you find something you like, then ... So it must be different for different people, but for me, I was able to really, uh I was strongly impressed by it. If I'm impressionable or not it's hard to say, but, **this particularly really did strike a chord with me** ".

This extract shows that there is a self-realisation that it was not only within the philosophy itself that he found his answers, his meaning, but within the process; going there, taking part in the activities, the association of the devotees, as well. Significantly with regards to this, he recounts that his attraction to the philosophy became poignant only after mixing with the devotee's and taking part in the movement's activities:

" I read one book, the science of self-realisation while I was still on campus and, I first looked at a few pages and I put it down because I couldn't quite relate, but **once I'd met the devotees and found out a little more about the practical side, then I picked up the book again and I couldn't put it down, at that point**".

It appears thus there were for him three central attractions; the actual association of the devotees, the life-style they seemed to live, and the philosophy of the movement, although it would appear that the association of the devotees and the life-style they lived seemed most imminent during these initial phases of his conversion. Together these facets seem to have created more meaning in his life and answered his questions. However we do not have a clear idea why his questions are answered in the movement. Can we accept this because he says so? What is different about the movement that answered his questions where other channels had not? These questions become clearer when we look at how he describes his gradual submersion into the movement; although this move towards Krishna seemed natural to him, and immediate and natural in a strong sense, the change was not linear or uncomplicated in terms of disentangling himself from his previous life affiliations. Even though difficult, he

nevertheless found that leaving was ultimately not a problem in terms of his certainty about becoming a Hare Krishna. In talking about this he reveals clearly how he saw his conversion as a step forward for him and a natural one and something he could not resist, even if it meant breaking off other ties:

" ... the problem came when I decided in October 1987 to join, listen I'm going to live at the temple. Just for one week I said to her, don't worry, and she was in a state, a terrible state, because it was a fact, I was leaving her. And it was like that ... so it was a real tragedy, a real crisis. For her probably more than me, cause I couldn't help it but my consciousness was just so attracted to the Hare Krishna movement, that it was inevitable, ... so even if it meant leaving the girlfriend behind, you know, it was something I felt that had to be done. I didn't really want to end it, I mean it was a nice relationship, but this was the higher priority. This was the whole thing, because this was finally something so fulfilling, it was something even more fulfilling than a relationship with this girlfriend ... I was staying with my mother still, so it meant leaving her, so that wasn't a problem ... I said I'm going to become a Hare Krishna, I'm going to become a Hare Krishna, I may be shaving my head. She said as long as you stay in this house you won't shave your head, and I said that's all right, I'll stay at the temple. She said that's fine, that's very nice, as long as I'm happy, she's happy also ".

Although being intellectually active and open has become very important to Abe over the years - from speaking to him this feeling became very clear to me; that a core part of his make up was connected to this hunger for ideas and 'intellectual and spiritual pursuits' - he considered quitting his studies as irrelevant as he felt that:

" ... I'm still going to be studying. And now I'm studying what I'm really interested in. Finally I've found the thing which is, uh, I'm getting answers to my questions, which is going to bring a little more direction and clarity to the meaning of life, which I liked, finally some direction, and something I enjoy. Which I didn't find completely at varsity at that point. **This is the missing link** ".

After this initial entry into the movement, Abe settles in well at the temple, although this process of joining was by no means easy and involved a number of difficult personal processes for him:

" is quite a training process, it's not that it's been, you know, plain sailing all the way, cause Krishna consciousness purification has to be there, one has to develop saintly qualities and one realises how conditioned one is, how in illusion one is, also how many unwanted bad qualities there are in the heart and, well, how fickle the mind can be. When one practices the meditation, one realises these things, so it's quite a discipline, quite a training, and it can be a little austere for those who are not used to that sort of thing ..."

At times these hardships and the Krishna way of life have got too much for Abe:

" I actually have a few times gone and said you know it's all too much. In 1991 uh, basically just due to restlessness, boredom, frustration, feeling that I'm not using my potential fully. I didn't quite have a goal. I was living in the same house for four years and doing the same thing and I felt I needed a change. I think it was something like that. **The thing is we surrender ourselves to the process, because we can appreciate the benefits, but sometimes the purification can be quite intense or a little too extreme**, it can happen like that sometimes. And the mind, it's been described, has been conditioned by material thinking for many lifetimes, or to speak of just this lifetime, our upbringing since birth, our conditioning by our parents. So it can be quite an intense process. And as a result of that I got bored and restless and I still had material desires, I thought well maybe I can still enjoy with my friends, have a nice girlfriend, do all this, eat and drink and be merry, you know all those sort of things, sex and drugs and rock and roll. **I still had an inkling I could still enjoy those things again. However it simply took a matter of trying to enjoy them** for a few days or weeks, that I immediately became completely disgusted again. It's like you know an alcoholic may think, I did get some pleasure from drinking so let me drink again, but not realising it was more suffering than pleasure he was experiencing. But now because he's in a state of, quite a good state of mind, he still recollects that actually that may be also good. **But I just had to see in perspective again, I just had to be reminded of where I used to be in consciousness**, my state of consciousness, where I really was then, I was just forgetting to appreciate how fortunate I was. I just went back to my mother's house. Stayed at home, went out with friends. I wasn't really practising my meditation any more, I was just putting on some trousers, and I would go out, drink, smoke and so on and listen to music. That's all, I mean there was nothing else in life really for me to enjoy. There was nothing else that really appealed to me. So very soon I got tired of that and I couldn't really stay away from the temple. Even at that time I would still visit regularly and I would really appreciate the association of the devotees. And they were always very accommodating. Please come in whenever you like, feel free, make yourself at home, and it was not as if there was any challenge or guilt trip, or anything like that ".

The above reflect a process that was never linear or complete. It suggests that conversion is not a once-off event, but perhaps a process that is continually re-evaluated and negotiated. The above also gives us a part answer of the movement meant in real terms to Abe's in respect of identity, and self-perception of life-purpose and trajectory. It is important that Abe goes back to the movement despite difficulties and hardships, and that in Krishna he finds a sense of belonging that the outside world cannot give him. Abe believes that the movement remains essentially what he wants to be:

" But its well worth it, and although I've had a few ups and downs through the past few years now, finally I'm finding that this is where I belong, and even though I may have sometimes you know, even left the temple, small minor crisis, but I've always realised, within the short space of a few weeks or months, that I can't leave Krishna consciousness, I just can't ".

The core reason for Abe's conversion lies possibly in the way he has developed and grown as a person within the movement, rather than reflecting an individual that has been coerced/seduced into a loss of autonomy, a one-dimensional person, conditioned into a totalised worldview. Obviously, in the act of conversion one believes in certain central ideas and reject others, yet this is not to say that such a belief system is fanatic, nor self-critical, nor to some extent open. One gets the feeling that in many ways he finds that his previous interests can still be pursued within his life as a Hare Krishna: " ... now still I put on plays at the temple, and have an interest in psychology, dreams, para-psychology and so on ...". Abe, having been in the movement for a significant time, seems to think of his life as diverse and interesting rather than limiting. Perhaps it is a mistake to view the life-style of devotees as one of a robotic subservience, but rather a life that is in some ways diverse and eclectic. In particular one gets the feeling that Abe's intellectual appetite has been furthered in his mind, rather than limited, as one might assume would occur when believing in an absolute type worldview. His thoughts and beliefs about religion, about different cultures are still active, yet do not compete with the movement's beliefs; they co-exist within the movement, but not as equal information, rather these previous beliefs seem to 'fit' into the Hare Krishna worldview. This is of course understandable in a sense of 'embracing the converts role' and 'a master attributional schema' that reflects the reconstructive nature of his story; yet this seems to fail to capture the sense of negotiation within himself and a sense of self-volition, and a sense that he believes his mental awareness has become broadened and heightened rather than dogmatic. Speaking about his previous interests in esoteric things:

" ... I don't pursue it to a large degree, but I can appreciate it very much, and if it does conflict then I don't pursue it any further ... actually there can be some benefit even, from learning academic studies, **particularly if one has a Krishna consciousness perspective to begin with.** To sift through what may be presented to one generally, see it from a spiritual perspective. I feel I'm getting an even better understanding of the psychology of mankind or humankind with this Krishna consciousness perspective. The mind, intelligence, false ego, and there's ultimately the spiritual behind all that, which they don't teach much in university ... uh, I keep finding parallels, and that's something I'm very interested in, different cultures, and their similarities, like the holy name of God, the name is supposed to be holy, and our basic philosophy is to chant the names of God, chant the Mahamantra, and feel the affects upon the consciousness of that spiritual sound. Now even Jesus Christ was teaching 'Hallowed be Thy name for when he prayed the prayer to our father. Uh, which means the name of God is

holy and he was simply teaching what was present, already present in the Jewish culture at that time, he was teaching Jewish people and they were Hebrew ... and especially in the Kabbalah, an esoteric Jewish culture, it's mentioned. The holy name of God, it's so sacred that they don't even want to mention that name. The Jews have that concept that the name of God cannot even be spoken, because it's so holy. And not only that, previously, going back some thousands of years, the Hebrew priests would on occasions, on specific holy occasions, vibrate the sound, vibrations of the name of God and generate certain effects as a result of that. I'm not sure of the details but certainly the name was vibrated at specific times and occasions, and effects were experienced. Much like we would say according to the Vedic culture, priests, traditional, Brahmans, would recite Mahamantra with such impunity that they could use this in effect to even light a fire for instance. They would light the ceremonial sacrificial fire with mantra. They could evoke the presence of the higher beings from the higher realms, to be here, just by chanting the right mantras. So that's there in the Jewish culture as well as in the Vedic culture. Uh, other practical things like having an altar on which you put the deity, whether the deity would be, what would you say, like an idol, a picture, a carving of some sort. But the deity, a worshipful object is placed, found in many of the African cultures, the so called primitive cultures of the planet. Not to speak of pre-Christian western culture, when they came with the Christian teachings they simply took what was there and reshaped it slightly into a Christian context. Many of the pagan festival days and so this is the thing. Unfortunately in the west people are presented with Christianity and it's quite a dogma and so therefore they take it as the be all and end all. Any open minded person will see many parallels in many cultures. **Now the interesting thing is that vedic culture does seem to be one of the original if not the original culture. The age of Sanskrit text shows this. So when things come in parallel, it seems that this is the source that so many cultures have got their teachings or ideas from".**

There is thus a dialectic here between a total belief and a self-perception of being open-minded. Although Abe professes to being open minded and his greatest desire being to search for the truth, he reveals clearly a absolute belief in Krishna, seeing the philosophy as the source of all else, accepting it as the original primacy of all else. However it is important that Abe considers himself still to be open and searching; he believes that Krishna philosophy has the most persuasive knowledge, but when he speaks about this he reflects someone who is actively engaging in thought rather than accepting a dogma. Whether one can claim he is no longer open to other avenues of knowledge is not that important, for he believes he is still a thinking critical person. This I believe is crucial to his continued conversion, and it weakens implications that religious converts are simply automatised vessels of ideology.

When speaking of what he sees as the major reasons of his commitment to Krishna, Abe illustrates that he intensely believes he has found the truth or the closest thing to the truth and believes that this has created meaning and satisfaction in life:

" So we could say maybe it's one's piety or acceptivity or even past life progress, but those are all sort of theoretical points, subjective things. So for the individual it may be different, either way, but invariably now I can say that I haven't actually found, the other thing is that I haven't actually found anything more profound, or philosophically logical. **So that's also another very important point. The strongest desire I have is to find out the truth, to know, to know sort of answers and uh, if I find something which is more profound, more truthful, then I'll take that up certainly. But I must confess on this planet, from all the studies I've done on various religions and cultures, I haven't really found anything as profound.**"

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Tom's story.

Tom has been a Hare Krishna devotee for four and a half years. He sees his life, prior to joining the movement, as being a succession of stages of trying to find answers; 'absolute' answers, not temporary or partly profound ones. In Krishna, he feels he has found exactly that; in his mind his long and often anguished search is over. His narrative reveals strongly a self-perceived searching impulse, and that he was never satisfied with his life-style and was, in his recollection, always looking for more. He sees the reason for this as primarily because 'he was a deep thinker', he sees himself as being unique in this sense to his peers, and his eventual conversion thus seemed quite natural to him in terms of the circumstances and nature of his life. Themes of anguish and disenchantment in terms of meaning, circumstance, the lives of significant others, conventional wisdom and behaviour, are evident in his dialogue. He perceives his seekership and unique nature to be central to his conversion. In his search he tries alternatives, and conventional mediums, yet none bring him satisfaction; he needs something more concrete, more real, something 'one hundred percent with guarantees'.

Tom comes from a Jewish family, growing up in Bramley, Gauteng. His background in terms of resources allow him the space to try out various options; often his parents carry him through various periods, and he does not really need to complete or follow up anything he does, always needing more 'time to think'. He never gets into the jobmarket as such, despite various opportunities. By the time he joins he has had the opportunity to have gone a few different routes, but refuses to take up anything that did not fit his self-referential standards of perfection.

Speaking of his early years Tom reveals a fairly unusual view of life in that he seemed particularly questioning of things most people would take for granted. This seemed tied to a desire to make some sense of his world. He says that from a early age, he found difficulty in accepting things in 'a general normal sense', in accepting explanations for things on a surface level, or accepting what others said of life. These feeling continued to plague as he went through life. His words reveal that he believed himself to be a perceptive observer of all around him:

" I was always trying to make sense of things, of the situation, you're always just in the situation, you have such and such family, such and such friends, such and such pets ... but I couldn't just accept everything just as it is. I could accept it in the sense of a general normal sense, but I wanted to know more. You know you remember childhood, you might of had some good times, you know being in the family situation, but then you always wonder?, well

not everyone wonders, different people, different ways. But I used to ask myself a question, OK, I'm in this family situation, one day we're going to have to leave this family situation. That's a fact. Either we're going to drift apart, just by seeing others, growing up, or ultimately one of us are going to die, so even though we might have this family life and it might seem secure, but it's all temporary. And I couldn't make sense of this, why, why ... I had a lot of questions in my mind, like I always wanted to know the other side of death, when I leave this body what's going to happen. I had this craving inside to know. And then I always used to think that, we'd kind of, just to get on with our lives, we'd hide some kind of reality, some underlying reality, like if you think of, ... everybody would ask you things, how is everything, how are you doing, how's your life, and you say, no everything's fine. **But I used to watch people you know, observe people. I was very much not so talkative, but more of an observer, and I used to ask myself are these people really happy, besides on a superficial level, but inside. I could just sense, cause I was perceptive that way, I could see that no, there was something missing, that these people aren't really happy ...** in everyone actually, family, friends, just people outside ... Then I'd like observe people and think that they're covering something up ?, or are they trying to just accept the situation that they're in, and then trying to forget about something deeper you know, because you can see it on the faces on a lot of people. I used to watch a lot of people, ... like ultimately everyone wants to be happy and content, but then I always wondered why they needed some kind of intoxication. I used to watch a lot of people smoke or take alcohol, drugs. I never got into that kind of thing. I always wondered why, if a person was content and they said they were fine, why would they need a cigarette. There are different kinds of addiction, alcohol, things like that. These things used to go on ... And then you'd become attached to that situation because, you'd get some nice situation, and you become attached, and then something breaks it, something gets in the way, and then we'd become frustrated and ask why's it like this. And then that attachment, we want it, we crave it, but we just can't get it. It seems like there's an overruling power, something above us not letting us have what we want, for instance say when you were young you had a pet and you really got attached to this pet. You're young, an innocent child, your parents come home with a dog, and over a time you become attached to the dog, you playing with it you take care of it. Then suddenly it gets run over, and you see this situation. There's your dog that you've become attached to, in the road with its guts spilled out. That's a reality, what is the solution?. Buy another dog, get stressed all over again. So these things were going on, why is this going on ... I could see that people in general, not only in my own situation, they had the same kind of problems. **So I used to think that by higher arrangement it seems that everything we want, crave, gets taken away somehow.** Even within a relationship, we try and look for a perfect relationship. We search, we search, whatever it is, parental, girlfriend, boyfriend, brother or sister. We search for this ideal relationship but ... ".

The above sets the general tone for the way in which Tom reviews his life. In a sense the above may indicate a degree of reconstruction. Can one take at face value such probing at such a young age? In other words is it not clear that Tom has inserted these emphasis on a past that was more than likely normal? Does his account reflect reconstruction, accurate testimonial, or a bit of both. It is evident as we move through Tom's story that he indeed did seem intensely perturbed by these considerations, and that the accumulated weight and exponential nature of such throughout his life, indeed placed him in a social space where he would be attracted to something that offered a more total and holistic worldview.

After finishing Matric, he had no real ideas of what he wanted to do with his life, except that he needed time to think about it, he was still 'searching'. At this stage he expresses having serious reservations about doing things simply to satisfy others, or just to do something, and reveals an absolutist tendency in terms of refusing to continue doing something that does not satisfy him, that he cannot find significant meaning in, a tendency that becomes increasingly stronger as he moves through stages of his life. Parts of the following also entrench the idea that he is someone who saw themselves as a outsider looking in, an observer rather than participator, although sensing what is going on, seeing the suffering occurring in others:

" After I finished school I went to this business management course and I did it for a few months, then I stopped, it wasn't that I wasn't coping, I just found it very monotonous and boring and I didn't see anyone holding a gun at my head, saying you have to carry on. Only maybe to please certain people. So why I'm putting myself through this?, what for. But then what's the solution?. If I'm not enjoying this and I have to put up a front, should I just go around, just carry on?, and if people ask me how your studying going, should I say no its ok and lie, but internally I hate it. **So rather, at that stage I was kinda of searching for what I wanted to do**, didn't know really what I wanted to do, had kinda of ideas. I was still staying with family, so then, due to peer pressure, family pressure, pushing you, you have to do something, you cant just lay around, then I decided to go to the army, it would give me some time to think. I always needed time to think, this was me, I was always a very deep thinker. So I went to the army ".

He goes to the army in Potchestroom for two years, and it proves to be experiential for him:

" It taught a lot of things. It made me realise that this material world was not polite, a place of niceness. I found out that these people don't really care about you, don't really care ... and also its another reality you know because you're exposed to other kinds of people to before in family circle or whatever circle you were brought up in, so you're exposed to so many different kinds of people and you see some new realities, you see some people who are crazy. Not trying to

look for faults in people, but I always used to like observing people to see what was going on, and in the army I saw a lot of suffering, in all ways. I didn't like, I don't know why by some good fortune, I was like that, I didn't like to see anyone suffer. Why should it be like this. I'd see other peoples pain and I'd feel it myself. Although I was always an observer, keep myself in the background, cause once you're in the situation, you get caught up in it. But if you're standing outside looking in, you can make some observations. So I was like that, and I remember like just small things waking up in the middle of the night and someone screaming at you. Having some mental hangups and problems and I thought, everyone got some mental problems. Why this?. I experienced a lot of pressure in the army you know, obviously, you get up very early in the morning, they sometimes scream at you for no reason. **And then you just come to accept that that's maybe just their nature. But I couldn't just accept that, there must be something. What's eating all these people up? Why are their hearts so cold?. So I was searching for the truth "**

After the army Tom's life enters into a series of uncompleted attempts at entering the world of work. He takes up various things to please others and to do something, but can not find it in himself to continue if it diverted from 'his path'. Although there is not at this stage a clear idea of what that path was - although one gets the feeling that at this time he was clearly 'into' being healthy, advancing the body and mind; this becomes clearer later, when he speaks about Karate, and it being his religion. It seems obvious that he needed some sort of 'discipline', he says as much later. After the army Tom decides to study, needing still more time to think:

" Well basically because I was in the medical corps, working with a dentist, so when I came out of the army, I wanted to study something, cause I wanted more time to think. **I'll be honest and straight foward, being caught up in middle of everything, I needed more time. I wanted answers, I wanted to know.** So I went to study dental technology. I wasn't really craving to do this but people said you'll make a good living and you'll work with your hands and you'll make a good living and so I decided while I'm still searching, so I did dental technology. So I entered dental technology, and I was studying, and, I was living with my folks. I had quite an easy period in the army compared to others, living at home, but still just being in the environment. So, anyway, I started dental technology, and I studied for two years; my results were pretty good, theoretically I liked it, I never knew I had it in myself to get good results, I was never really that way inclined. That was something I discovered about myself ... I was staying with my parents ... I had quite a few friends, but I never had a close friend, it was kinda like acquaintance friends ... I had my general circle, I'd actually mix with a lot of people, I'd like to understand people, not really in an extrovert way, rather I'd like to find things out, observe people. I had other interests, I used to weight-train, which was very intense for me, it was like a discipline for me cause I needed some discipline and then later I did martial arts. I was really into that, being

health conscious, in everything I did. And this was another turning point because in the career, in the course I'd chosen, when it came to the practical year, like I'd done the theory part for the first two and a half years, now we were supposed to go into practical and work in a dental college, and I did that, but then when working there I found that it was actually detrimental to my health, so many chemicals in the environment, and also an elderly person who had been working there for many years, had got ill, had some lung disease. And then I started turning away from that. I thought why should I hurt myself. My health was more important. So my parents weren't too happy, but from a health point of view ... I wanted to try a creative line, the dental thing had got a bit monotonous, so I thought I'd do something more creative, maybe I'll be a bit happier then. So I decided to do interior design. I qualified, I did very well ... Inscape in Rosebank, qualified ... it was kinda of a crash course. I needed to do something pretty fast after dental, so I did it in a year. Some people take two years, but I really worked hard, sometimes until three or four in the morning, just to get the course finished, and I did well "

At this point in his life Tom spends time mainly on his relationship with his girlfriend. This seems a significant relationship, but as with every thing else Tom has doubts. These doubts, in his memory of those times, seem to permeate his life; doubts about his relationship, different philosophies, daily events, whether he is happy, whether others are. Although his narrative is fairly jumbled, the following reveal some of his anguish over these issues, and that he is perpetually unable to accept things as they are. Or so it seems to him now. He remembers having the suspicion that there is some higher force dictating events for 'nothing is permanent':

" well, you know we all have our personal life. If you are into some relationship, and we all go through it, then, to be honest that takes up most of your time ... at that time, like having a relationship with somebody, was the most important thing, because everything now has changed with the relationship and we had a good relationship. But at the back of my mind I always used to think, we're going to one day have to split, something might happen ... you know in a relationship you become complacent and also you sometimes think you have the ideal relationship and things are uncovered, not that you want to have that, but suddenly you have some differences, and you try hold onto something as long as possible, even if you know it might not work, but um, its kinda distressing ... materially speaking we had one of the best relationship you could of wanted, could lead to further developments, engagement, marriage whatever, but still I wasn't satisfied, even though materially speaking I was in a good position. I was working for my father at the time, and it wasn't really strenuous work, it was easy going thing, would work when I wanted, but... I had my discipline, I was still training martial arts, but then with this relationship that took up a lot of time, suddenly I was neglecting everything else, becoming cut-off. Because, you see I was trying to understand, what is reality, you know with everything. What is

reality cause we see everything that changes in this material world, one day you have a job, one day you don't, one day you want to do this, one day you want to do that to think, you can't artificially pretend that you're happy, because it will show.. **You have this relationship, and it seems good for awhile, but because of past experiences, how long is it going to last? So these things go on in one's head, and so anyway, I used** Somebody will say, are you, and you say yes, I'm happy; but for me I was kinda of an extremist, if I was a 100% happy, I would have to feel it, I'd have to experience it and I would have to do that, there would have to be no doubt in my mind, and if I couldn't tell you straight to your face, if I couldn't tell you that, then I wasn't ... You know even though I had all these things, so then what? So then you read different books, different kinds of philosophies, maybe meditation, and then you hear a lot of good philosophies, take some kind of meditation, then they leave, and you try and understand why? but say like yourself, maybe you are doing some kind of meditation, spiritual, maybe even you belong to some kind of religion, but then you know, you go through ups and downs, and then I used to think well if its not up all the time, then why is it, because you know, I was always very idealistic and I always used to wonder, what is it that can make you 'up' all the time, and naturally as well, and why? **Of course, while all this was happening, cause like I said, maybe there was something higher ... because I always used to watch the news, and I always used to hear, murder, mayhem, rape, what do you do now? You think what's going on? Where are we, where am I, what am I in?** But sometimes, like I said, I see people going on in their everyday life, carrying on with enthusiasm, trying to make it, forget it, but they don't look happy either, to tell the truth, they're not 100%, so I was thinking in this world, if you've got like a darkness, I saw more darkness than light in the majority ".

These questions continue to plague Tom and he begins to search for answers in books and different groups that he and his mother go to. He does not find the one hundred percent satisfaction he is looking for however. He does find some solace in different interpretations on reality such as reincarnation, but always wonders what comes after that. He is searching for something more profound, with all the answers, a permanent situation with guarantees.

" Ya, even that, cause even though my relationship might have been good materially speaking, but still even if mine was good, somebody else's was bad, I always used to think, why was their's bad? Could mine get bad? So, then I thought, maybe I was being selfish, because maybe this wasn't life, because I knew it was temporary, so as good as it may have been. I was very determined that I wanted a permanent situation, and I wanted guarantees otherwise, I couldn't take it as seriously as I wanted to take it. Like from even very young you know, I used to always think, why is everything so bad and if I'm in what might seem an ideal situation, why is everything around me not so good, why is there murder, rape, stealing, security gates, why do they need it? And I used to look at animals, why are they in that body and I'm in this body? Used to think

about these things. And until I had the answers, my intelligence wouldn't be satisfied. So, I'd read books to try and understand why, cause I thought that a lot of my intuition was okay, but still even when you're young, you're not just born with knowledge, you have to go to school, **so I'd read different books. Uh, different things on eastern religion, Buddhism, different healing, different types of yoga, 'cause my mother kept a lot of these books in her house. She was into like different kinds of spiritual things, and we'd gone to many different groups, you know like you hear of groups where you sit in a circle and they do some psychic reading, just different things like that. My conclusion was that they were all fallible, I couldn't see anything that was just 100% perfect, and I was a perfectionist, and you don't see perfection, then you'll have like an itch.** And, uh there was something to it, definitely, I mean I wouldn't say it was completely wrong. There was definitely something, it had some reality, but it wasn't like the complete reality, and even though I read one book on Buddhism and reincarnation, and they proved that this one priest, they called him Lama, he died, the whole book was about how they discovered that he'd reincarnated into this body. They found him and they brought him back into this body, and I thought, and then what? I mean its a very good discovery, you've now proved reincarnation, but I already believed in reincarnation, but, and then? It was a very good argument. Not only that, there were so many proofs they gave, the young boy who was born, he could quote all the Tibetan, it was beyond a doubt. Already I felt this was correct. And then I thought, and then? What after that? What comes next? Okay, so he's reincarnated into another body, what's the big deal? I mean it is a big deal, but there must be something after that ".

Frustrated, Tom and his girlfriend go down to visit Tom's cousin at her new age community. His expectations of an alternative are again not met. In the following, it seems clear that his anguish is reaching some sort of crisis point for him. This need for answers becomes more and more a profoundly felt tension in his life. It seems though he needs more than answers, he needs something real and concrete. The manner in which he describes his frustrations in this period is interesting for it reveals he was, in his memory of his feelings and events, looking for something like a total experience in the sense of a real and concrete alternative:

" Like everybody desires something, so if you desire something strongly enough, maybe you are going to get it. So I thought, let me leave the city, go out to the country, and maybe I'll be happy there. Let me go and visit my cousin on her plot, in Knysna, like I had my ideals of what it might be, but then ya, then I left Johannesburg, went down with my girlfriend to the plot of my cousin. It was supposed to be some farm community, new age farm community, just to get away. Anyway, so I went there, sure it was nice, it was rewarding, but still I was frustrated, because I'd expected to see something else. Maybe I was an idealist and I'd expected to see my ideal, but when I got there, I couldn't see it. I mean it

was definitely better than modern, materialist, city, passionate kind of life. It wasn't really hippy, ja, kinda just people there out in a field, they also used to do some kind of meditation but, I expected to find people who were vegetarians, and because it wasn't completely like that, I mean that they weren't eating meat, they were eating fish, but I knew something was, I was that way inclined, but you know I wanted to understand why, why am I this way and I tried different kinds of vegetarian groups and it was different, but never, ... **you know there was more, I wanted something more concrete, not just some philosophy, I wanted it more concrete, and I still thought it was fallible, and I really got frustrated one day, I started beating on this tree, feeling like I cause when we desire something so strongly, and I was really determined to know things, why things were,** I was very determined, I don't know why but I just had this .. Until I had answers, I wanted to know ...

These frustrations start spilling over to his assessment of the lives of others around him, and the system he lives in. He questions politics, relationships, sexual behaviour. He wonders why he and others need any form of intoxication to be happy. He does not seem to share these feelings with anyone, not even his girlfriend. He feels other do not have the same desires as he does, or the same profundity. The theme of being searcher and a loner in this search becomes more and more evident as his narrative progresses as does his anguish that such feelings bring to him

" sometimes I used to pray, that I didn't want to wake up the next day unless I knew what was going on, because ... I used to pray like that. Anyway, so I went back to Johannesburg. I was a bit disappointed, because the conclusion I came to, that, maybe not all, that their high came from intoxication, marijuana, and I couldn't see, I'd observe a lot of people taking drugs, and yes, they seemed to have gotten over the pains of material life for some period while they were on it, but when they were off it, I used to see that they were down like anything. So why this? ... you know it wasn't like, kinda of, I never had a grudge against them, had bad thoughts about them, I was just being very practical, and thinking, people are getting intoxicated, so why? And uh, in this condition can you really see things as they are? You know, can you really think intelligently, and I thought no "

In his perception his girlfriend did not feel the depth of angst that he felt:

" she basically took everything much lighter, she wasn't as deep, and this was kinda bothering me, because I was deep and she wasn't deep ... she was interested, she was deep to a certain extent, but she didn't take it that heavy as I would take it. She'd take it a lot more lightly and I suppose I liked to be in a secure situation, I couldn't see security. I saw everything as temporary ... To get away from this kind of life. And also, to experience what it would be like. You know you experience things in the material life, you see your parents going away

on holiday, so you want to experience this. Is this real happiness? To go with your girlfriend somewhere, to the wilderness? And then? Like you know you go somewhere for a month, and something's nice, for a moment, when you're in this position, with your relationship. And you know the next day you have to go back to work, or you have to go back to the city life, or just back. So then you think that, even if I'm in this position now, still there's so many things going around, so many walls going around in the world, why am I in this position? And is it going to last, or is it going to like ... And then you take it all on yourself, and uh, more frustration, because you can't put your finger on it, can see you don't have any knowledge, you just speculate. But, you know you're frustrated. So, you know, it just depends, on who you are, if you want to know things or not. So I was really beginning to want to know. From there we went to Plettenberg Bay. I mean, sure by our standards, it was quite heaven. We were enjoying, thinking we were enjoying, even though sometimes, you felt lousy the next day, and also, it seemed like things were just going well, along with all this enjoyment, there's always, like the next day you wake up sunburnt, you think to yourself why, or you have a hangover, not that I drank, but still. And I used to feel kinda guilty as well, along with all this enjoyment as well. A lot of people wouldn't admit it, just about the way things were, maybe, am I selfish, should I be more, it was just like thoughts, I needed some answers you know".

These questions that Tom had did not only concern his personal life, but also the system around him. He questions the world around him in terms of politics, contemporary religion (it appears that to some degree he did not really believe in Judaism), sexual behaviour, ageing. He also seems to more and more question his relationship with his girlfriend, although it still is very important to him as is his martial arts (these are the two 'good' things in his life according to Tom). Although what follows again is often confusing and jumbled, it does seem to reflect an individual who looks at the behaviour of others, and his own, in a fairly intense and unusual fashion; again the idea of needing absolute certainty and a guarantee comes out:

" I was kinda anti-politics, apolitical, because you know the way I saw it, it was corrupt. I used to think it was all for their own personal gain, power, name and fame, and I wasn't much impressed ... Well, to do with Apartheid and things like that, I always used to know in my heart it was unfair. And that well, I didn't like it, 'cause we're all humans, so, **being brought up in a white environment I suppose, you hear a lot of derogatory statements. I mean some people joke about it you know, but I didn't think it was a joke. I used to actually hold it in, 'til I had some reason, real reason. And then also I used to watch Violet, the maid at my mom's house, and think am I a king? That I get to be served? Couldn't make any sense out of it. And then another thing used to get home as well all the time, I used to see everything around, it was all about sex, like everything you see, advertising, I'd think what is this? You know, like when you fall in a ditch, and you can't get out, it's covered with**

mud, or maybe quicksand, am I in like a sex-pit? Everything is sex now. And with so much sex life, I don't see anyone who is happy. So that wasn't the answer, and but it seems to me, well I had this inclination, that this, the sex thing, was part of the problem, of the world, uncontrolled, and I knew my own propensity, I couldn't become that way, I would have gone crazy, so I needed answers, cause I didn't want to see myself in that situation. We had, you know, yeah, a normal relationship, physical as such, you know, like we tried the experiment thing, once in a while we tried to experiment, and we tried, but from practical experience, I don't know, I came to the conclusion that these desires were insatiable, that we could never be satiated. So, and it makes you dull, down. So, what is it then? You know, you see and then I'd think how I'd even watch, how men would be led by it, women, just because of this sex-thing, drive. Cause, like I said, I would observe them. Often I used to just watch friends, how they were kinda just led by these desires. Almost like a slave to them ... its not a case of whether I liked it or not, I just wanted to know, is this absolute reality? The way its meant to be? Maybe it is. But it didn't seem like people I saw with all their sex desire, then if the sex desire is so good, why are you still smoking, why are you causing harm to your own body? So it just didn't make sense because if something is giving you pleasure, then you need some outside addiction to cheer up? Then why wouldn't you just say, if this is the ultimate, then fine, why don't I just have sex life the whole day and night. Why do I need cigarettes and alcohol to cover it over? Or why do I get exhausted when I expend energy in anything? Whether its that or training (his karate), why can't I just go on and on? So, now what? I just went back to my martial arts point of view. I found that, like, **even if I go to some spiritual organisation, cause I was born in a Jewish family, and I was always thinking, yes, maybe just go to the synagogue, just become more religious, but then I also found there was some sort of artificiality there and hypocrisy, I didn't see it all as a bed of roses. So there was some sense of superficiality, so many people coming in there to maybe socialise, not really understanding who God is, where God is. Maybe not all, it was just the general mood. You know like I've always been perceptive that way, I could go somewhere and I could pick up the mood of the place, I don't know why, I could just pick it up. Couldn't make sense of this ..."**

To Tom his relationship and his martial arts are the two solid things in the stormy sea of his life. However he questions the nature of relationships more and more as well as the impersonality of training:

" So, I was kinda making martial arts my religion. I trained very hard, but still its kinda impersonal, because you still need, ... cause love plays apart. I found, at least I had one conclusion, that love was the highest. But, what is love? You know what I mean, so many speculate on it, so many have ideas on it, on what is the ideal? Still, a strange thing, cause you don't know. I was trying to work out whether it was love or lust. Because, whether it was some selfish thing or

unconditional. But, there was some doubt, like I said, whenever there's a doubt, then why should there be a doubt?. Like you think, am I just using her for her body or is it really the person I care about. I suppose a bit of both, all in all, I have to be honest. **And then of course you want it to be a permanent situation, but then in the back of your mind, it depends on the person you know, either you..., cause you know its temporary, everybody knows its temporary, but some people wont admit it, they'll just cover it up, make it an illusion.** Every relationship has to end in this lifetime, yeah, you see other people get old, you see people dying around you, and then its a reality you know. You can't just hide it, even though you want to be eternally youthful, or you want to enjoy eternity. You see, even if I could try to forget about that, and try enjoy the situation I'm in, but it would always be in the back of my mind, that I'm going to have to get old one day, and that I'm going to die, and I'm going to have to separate. Something might go sour, so this was always at the back of my mind. I took it that what I have it the best. **But I knew, I still wanted answers.** So it was kind of my own personal discipline of martial arts on the one hand that was good, and the relationship on the other. I weighed these up, kind of a tug-of-war, and it looked like the relationship was winning, but still I wanted guarantees, you know, and if it couldn't be guarantees, that would be it. I was always like that you know. If I went to one of these, what do they call it, a funfair, people would say, you should go on this rollercoaster, or everybody would be running to one, so I'd say, can you guarantee me that if I go on these things, that I wont. That the carriage might not fall, or get some injury, and no-one could give me the guarantee, so I said, well I'm not getting on it. And I was stubborn like anything. They said, come on its fun, I said well, if you can't guarantee me... So, can you guarantee me this relationship's going to be like this, or like that. I had to be honest, and I used to question her, that even if I had children one day, I'd want bring them up in a certain way. I'd want to never feed them meat, never think about it, even though I wasn't fully vegetarian. Actually, I was virtually, I hadn't even come across the consciousness movement".

He begins to question his relationship more and more :

" ... these things were pretty strong, and the differences started coming out, and I was thinking of the future, because trying to have some consciousness, and I'd just be too compulsive, and not knowing if you see so many divorces, its gone crazy, so many abortions, its madness. Its like a real hit and run thing, like a real perversity... all these things, 'cause I could see that kinda situation I might be getting into. Like you sort of get a taste for what it might be to be married, or even like even have a..., 'cause sometimes when you're in Joburg, when you're just in your everydaylife, you might be with your girlfriend, or your fiance for some period, the other times you might be doing something else. So, then I used to think, well, actually you know this personal thing is a very good thing, this is the ultimate, because you can experience the maximum pleasure out of being with another person. Your pleasure is not going

to be imprisoned, so I was kinda making up my mind. Well, I came to some conclusions, but wasn't completely happy, and... anyway, you start to get frustrated cause there are differences even in what's called the most ideal. Everybody's an individual, but now everybody wants their perfect match. Otherwise... you know like I said, in terms of depth, people have different ideal situations. Not only in mine, I'm not saying just in ours, I could see in everybody's relationship around, my parents, that everybody wants the ideal. And as soon as they don't get it, there's a fight, or some conflict you know. And, that's another confusion I had, that everybody's looking for an ideal relationship..."

Even though realising that he shares similar problems to others around him, Tom recollects not being able to ultimately accept his life as it was; more and more he starts going 'introspective' and spiritual in his quest for answers, and also seems to be becoming fairly desperate:

"But, I couldn't accept that, cause for me, nothing was impossible, it was mine, I was just like that, I was determined, there must be, there must be something... I mean, I didn't create this body, here I am, but it wasn't my intelligence. If I had the intelligence to create this body, or her body, or anybody else's body, then why aren't I doing it now? Why? So there must be somebody that knows better than me, so, ... and that thing or whatever, that intelligence, he must know better. **So I was going a bit introspective now. I was always a bit, but I was going a bit more introspective now, cause externally I couldn't really find anything. Anyway, so one day I read... like I said, I didn't want to wake up the next morning if I didn't have the answers and I meant it. Why must I? What must I do? What am I going to do? Not that I was suicidal, 'cause I also thought that was wrong. Who am I to, anyway I wasn't that depressed as anything. I just wanted to, really had a need to know, and I didn't really want to wake up unless I knew what was going on. So, that's me "**

Amidst this Tom discovers one of Prabhupada's books. Although the manner in which he describes this may well be retrospectively skewed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, to him this book was revelatory:

"So anyway, one day I was sitting on my mother's bed, and I opened the door, and I found this book, an easy journey to the planets, it was about that, so I said let me read this, cause this sounds interesting), about other planets, I'd always had thoughts about that. So I read this book, **and for the first time in my entire life, I'd read something that made sense to me. I couldn't believe what I was reading, 'cause everything just fitted into place, you know it was very logical. Not only very logical, but it explained everything as it is... Well, it was giving answers, it was explaining like how there were different planets in the universe, and each planet has a different consciousness, you know. Like some are more animal-like, some are more elevated, then, then it was explaining**

reincarnation, about reincarnation. Not only was it doing that, but it was giving some kind of scriptural evidence, it was giving quotes, which I was impressed by; somebody comes to me and says reincarnation, and I say okay it sounds very good, you know there's a next life, but when you present it in this way... this was more concrete. This had some... I think it started making a bit more sense. This was, this looked like the theory to the practice, the original. And then I discovered that Sanskrit was the oldest language on this planet, and these vedic scriptures were going back millions of years, and I was impressed, because there was really intelligence behind all this time, not just some speculation. And the way they explained it made a lot of sense, like how there were 8 million 4 hundred species of life, and the figures they gave, and how they divided into so many categories and why one gets a body according to different activities, like thinking and desiring, looking at how and why activities affect us in this life... This gave a kinda basic, obviously I've read more after this. But, you know, this was giving answers, and this was direct, it wasn't like, speculation. I'd read so much speculation, which sounded good, but this was really concrete and for the first time, I thought, wow, I couldn't believe what I was reading, because this is what... and uh, you know like karma, it explains the theory of karma, then it went into further detail. It gave names of different planets, how one can attain these planets, and it was explaining yoga, not the yoga I knew, but real yoga, spiritual yoga. I couldn't put the book down. Like before, I'd read different books, and they were really interesting, but you know, you'd read for a little while, and then put it down, maybe after a couple of days you'd go back to it, but I couldn't put this book down. I think I read it straight through. **I sat on the bed and read that book straight through, and I remember, I was like, telling my mother all this, about what I was reading. But this hit everything straight on the nose. I mean, everything I read was going round it. But this, shew, straight on the nose.** I mean, I even said to myself, once, I remember making this statement, you know after going to so many things and becoming frustrated, I said, my next step is that I'm going to join the Hare Krishnas. I'd never even heard of them... I don't know, I just said that, it was strange, before I'd even read the book, I didn't know anything about them. Could have been from a movie. Strange. So I read the book, and it answered all my questions. So, I wanted to read more, cause a lot of the quotes in the book were from the Bhagavadad Gita, which is the scripture, so I had to get hold of the Bhagavad Gita. So, I got hold of it, and I read and I couldn't believe it, and there was another book, 'Science of SelfRealisation'. I read that. I found the centre in Hilbrow, I got an address... That was, I think, the end of '90 ''.

Tom recalls feeling that the ideas expressed in these books seemed concrete as to opposed to other ideas and literature and he expresses a revelatory type of realisation typical of religious 'awakening'. It would be wrong though to immediately assume total reconstruction here for the ideas expressed in the books genuinely seemed to appeal to him in terms of the very questions that seemed to dominate his waking hours, and if this were indeed true then one can

on a common sense level understand his recollection of an instant sense of relief and his burgeoning attraction and time allotment to those who expressed these ideas:

" So actually, like I said, I liked this. You know, so many things you do out of sentiment. But, this wasn't sentimental, this was giving very concrete answers, even though not easy, but just too, like it hit the absolute reality on the nose. **And I was astounded, I couldn't believe what I was reading, I just couldn't believe it. That somebody could, with this knowledge, could be there, so I read and read, and uh, then eventually you know, it took up all activity, and... I believed from the start, 'cause it answered all my questions. For the first time in my life, I wasn't so frustrated anymore. I had answers.** But now, there's the theory and there's the practice. So, it was a mix, one needed to engage in the practice... But it hit me very strong. Because this was what I was searching for, this is what I was looking for. Like a lot of people might be very absorbed in something, but they're not actually looking for it. They might read it out of interest... So because it was what I was searching for, it hit me very strong. But still, I was trying to be cautious, because you know, I wanted to wait so that I had all the answers, so that I wasn't disappointed. But still, I was trying to be cautious, because I wanted to wait until I had all the answers... That I wasn't this body, that I was something beyond the body? So then I carried on reading, but then I realised the position I was in, was so like, the conditioning I'd had was so strong, that it was very difficult to break away. Like even though the knowledge was there... but on the practical side of it, its another story. Because, you know... so, I went through a lot, so I couldn't, you know..."

So Tom started to feel that even though he had dipped into a philosophy that incredibly seemed to deal with core issues of his general orientation, he felt a need to go further and engage in the practice that philosophy prescribed. He found though that this proved difficult in terms of his family and his own 'conditioning'. Nevertheless he was extremely determined as he really seemed to feel this was what he had been looking for. It however takes over a year to join on a full time basis. Various comments over the next few pages reveal that it was neither an immediate or an easy process. These statements also show how Tom was in essence 'checking out' the movement before he made his final decision:

" They couldn't accept it obviously. Because you see, even though like, spiritual and material life diametrically oppose one another in a sense, and whatever anybody stands for in materialistic thinking, and then you try and tell them that this is not actually what it is; you can't just do that. Because, its something they thought their whole life about, and everybody has. **But, because... it was so difficult, it was very, extremely difficult, but I was determined.** Now I'd come to the conclusion, even before, that I didn't have the answers. So that intelligence that gave me this body, it created everything... all life and death, but

in everything that I saw, everything else I didn't see that. I thought maybe they might have something, but I didn't see that they had everything. All the information, and I thought that god gave all the time, all information. Not only did I feel, but I knew, you know, so I had to act on it, because I had to try act on it. But now you see, according to time, place and circumstance, it wasn't such an easy thing because of this age we are living in, and obviously I knew that not everybody could just accept it, but like I told you before, I had to live with something, if I knew something was right, and I'd be acting in another way, I'd just be acting superficially, and I wouldn't be able to do that. A lot of people might be able to put on a front. I couldn't do it. So I had to act on it. So I didn't want to believe the situation I was in, but I found the situation I was in very difficult, to practice Krishna consciousness, 'cause they were all doing things in materialism, that kind of lifestyle. Just the situation. Being in the family situation, if they ate meat... now I had the philosophy behind what I was doing and uh, 'cause everything I'd identified before, but now I just had the concrete. So I just tried to live like this way, but it was difficult, because even being conditioned by the material, you know you have weaknesses. I suppose it may differ for different people, but uh, I had to do a lot of studying, you know to be able to maintain in that philosophy and practice. In this age, outside, its not very easy, but it can be done, but it depends how strict you are...

This process, 'to get the spiritual strength to withdraw from material life', is difficult for Tom despite his conviction and feeling that Hare Krishna philosophy is profound. He struggles to maintain the type of life-style prescribed in his normal environment, and eventually leaves Joburg to get away from things and goes to Cape Town for awhile and then spends six months in Durban, being a partial Hare Krishna while also running a branch of his fathers jewellery business:

"I was living at home. I still had my girlfriend. She found it interesting, but not as interesting as I did. Anyway like, basically you see, **this philosophy is giving all the answers, why we're in this situation, why we're experiencing this stress, why is everything like it is. Basically its telling you everything, and not just telling you, but practically you can see it; you can see it.** So, you find you are not the doer, you are not doing, you are not the actual doer, even though maybe you want to be, but there's some higher control. So, you might want to do something, but material energy will create some situation where you can't do that, no matter how much you want to. Face it. So ultimately, this process is devotion, and you have to depend on the higher authority, Krsna, by surrender. But you are not the doer, you're not the controller; and then everything will fall into place. **So anyway, its kinda a long process, there's a lot of little points around it, purification. I accepted it from the start.** You see, because of my conditioning, of the ideal situation, I was still looking around for a new way to be in Krishna consciousness. Now that I've found... but now I wanted the ideal situation. So I was trying to put myself into different situations, to see

where would be ideal. And everybody was kinda like opposing, so I had to get away, get some space, because you just couldn't think straight amongst this. So I had to go away for some time. I came to Cape Town, for a little while, and then I went to Durban, to see the different temples. I always was the experimenter. So I thought, let me try open some small business and try practice from the outside. I need a bit more surety before I join, which I did. This was the beginning of '91. So, for a major part of that year it was a struggle because your conditional life does not want to let you go so easy. So it was a struggle, but sometimes... But, you see the thing is, you can't do it on your own because of the process. You need help, the help has to come from above. Just like if you're in the ocean and you're drowning, you can do as much swimming as you want; you're not going to get anywhere, you need some medical help. So basically, this process like I said, its not just the theory, its the practice as well. So the strength to do it... To get material strength is very easy, everybody can. Its very easy to engage in material activities, and you have so much strength for it, but to get the spiritual strength to kinda of withdraw, is not an easy thing. So there's a process, to it basically.

He finds then that the association of the devotees helps him become more conscientised, but the most important thing is the physical act of chanting:

" So the spiritual strength comes from chanting. You have to chant. If you don't chant, it'll be very difficult. You might have some philosophical understanding,... if you associate with the devotees, you'll have that association, but the chanting is your spiritual strength, the sound vibration. Just like when you meditate you know, that meditation is going to absorb you in your belief, and it'll give you the strength to become relaxed... Ja, definitely, chanting is very powerful. That's what does it. Ya, its like with anything, with anything you can think of you need their counselling and, its a combination of different things, like we are all conscious right, so everything we do affects all consciousness, everything. Like I might tell you something now that might make you cry, tell you something else that might make you laugh. So just from the sound vibration coming out of my mouth I could change your mood with this, or evoke anger, just by sound ... Anyone could. You know, you could say something to make somebody angry that can change, that can affect their consciousness. And also, what we eat affects our consciousness. So basically, if all our activities are engaged in material, our consciousness will be there, but if you engage your consciousness in spiritual activity, then it will become purified. But, actually that pleasure that we're seeking, that everybody is seeking is in the sound vibrations of the chanting, and that gives you the spiritual strength. Because you can't artificially give anything up, because you won't be able to sustain it, you'll have to go back to it ".

During this six months in Durban, Tom begins to feel he cannot live in two worlds. But a decision to join means giving up his attachments to the material

world including his girlfriend which is difficult. Speaking about his time in Durban he says:

So I wanted it like that, cause I needed some more time. I knew some people, which was nice, but I also had the time to think a lot, not just to... Even though I knew 100%, I was 100% sure that what I was doing was perfect, but I just had to think, what angle am I going to be doing it from ... Jewellery, my father's; it was a branch of my father's. But actually, this is a way of life and you know, I found that it required 24 hour commitment. From doing a lot of reading you have the answers as to why things are like they are and what difference is it going to make to what I do, how's it going to affect, and I just carry on in my business, and I go to the temple, that's good, but there's some higher purpose ... Well, I tried to keep the relationship going pretty much normal, but at the same time, it wasn't working out because, like I said, the spiritual strength comes from chanting, so if the one party's chanting and the other one's not, then where does she get her spiritual strength from? But now, so either of you could be weak, and kind of surrender to her programme of life. She was in Johannesburg, and then she calls the whole time you know. So it's a decision, but it's not easy, cause you'd already had a close relationship. So I was going in this direction, straight, boom, spiritual life, no compromise, but because I already had all this, I wasn't just going to be cold. So I told her I'd never leave her, but she'd have to follow me. Not out of an egotistical kind of thing, just because you know, that would be best for everything, because I wasn't going to hide. I'd never be happy. She was very upset... She was here in Cape Town. But she couldn't really understand it. She still had some attachment for her parents, and she also wanted to experience more things, so you can't force. It would of been good. I don't think I would of gone as far as I've gone now, but still, it could of been good. But anyway ".

Tom moves down from Durban and moves into the Hare Krishna temple in Rondebosch. He recalls that this process of becoming a devotee was far from easy, but one made easier by chanting which he remembers as a kind of cleanser:

" ... like it wasn't so easy, because we are attached, we are attached materially, because you discover for millions of lifetimes you've been in material activities, so all of a sudden, you want to do a U-turn. When the car's going at 200 miles per hour in this direction and all of a sudden you want to turn automatically. It's not such an easy thing, there is going to be a lot of resistance, and the material energy's very powerful, and you're not going to just give up that easy. So, like I said, your only strength is to chant. So you just have to go 200 miles in the opposite direction and just depend on chanting ... Well, this chanting process cleanses the mirror of the mind. Now in the material sense, one thinks that there's a good person. So to some percent I'm a good person, I do this and that. But, there's a lot of pleasure in the chanting, these names are very blissful to

chant, you always feel bliss when you chant. But, at the same time it also cleans the stuff in the heart, that deep-rooted things, it pulls it all out, to the surface. So all your bad qualities come out, and then its like a fight within yourself, and then also, not only within yourself, but breaking away from material externally. The two together,... at the same time, what do you do, because its difficult. But, then there's some relief. Cause as this stuff comes out of your heart, there's a relief. But if you leave it in there, then it just gets worse and worse, you suppress it. But when this stuff comes out, which means its actually working, so the more and more further you go, the more and more relief you get. So you just carry on, and then because you are actually asking Krishna for help, Krishna helps and he makes the situation good for everybody., But now we want to... we're saying, Krshna help, its like we are still holding on to our material attachments, at the same time so this is the thing. Just fighting like anything to overcome the material, you know. Like I said, we all think we're very good people, but there's actually a lot of bad within us, there's a lot of kind of desire, tendencies that come up when you're sweeping. And then you think, my goodness, am I really this person? Am I really this bad? And this is another thing you have to deal with, its like an ego thing. Its like all your bad habits become revealed. You become complacent, which is a good thing, cause otherwise, how would you know? If we want to become better people, if we want to spiritualise our life, we want to develop our relationship with the supreme person, we have to become pure.

All in all then Tom has found this choice of life-style a difficult one, but one that in the end he seems very happy with, and after four years in the movement, he still can't believe his good fortune:

"Well, its very like, like I said, as you're going along, things become revealed to you, and like even, when you're becoming purified, even if you go back out there, you won't be able to partake in material life, engage in those activities Yeah, there have been who have left. See, it depends on the individual you know. Because spiritual life is not a cheap thing. Some people think that they must go for a few months, I'll become perfect, everything will be nice, but it takes a lot of... just like anything, you go work out there, you get a job, you want to study something, it takes a lot of sweat and blood... so even in spiritual life, even though its blissful and its nice, still you have to have a greed to want it, and you have to be very sincere, that this is what you want. And not only that, not just blind, you can't just sentimentally go for it..., you have to have some understanding of the philosophy, because its not sentimental, its very scientific, very. So with all that together, this is what motivates you. And then, like I said, its all the chanting that's your strength. You have to just keep going. The process is to change and sometimes some people become complacent, think they've changed enough. But, its not like that, **its not cheap. Its something you've really got to work at. Anyway, its nice, because the more you, as time goes, the more peaceful you become. Everything, your sleep,... its**

very powerful, very powerful. Actually, its so powerful its astounding. Like I said, I'm still, to this day, after 4 years, can't even comprehend what good fortune it is to be able to be here ".

University of Cape Town

John's story.

John has been a devotee for eight years. He has stayed in a number of different ISCON centres in the world, and also been to India. Generally John is an extremely busy person with a lot of duties and responsibilities in the movement and thus it was hard to get him alone for a decent amount of time, and our interview was constantly interrupted, and cut short. This is possibly the reason that his narrative does not seem always to have the depth of other narratives.

He sees himself as having a 'problem' background in which he enjoyed material life immensely, including things like drugs. He does not reflect any serious theme of searching for anything 'deeper', or questing for answers, prior to joining Hare Krishna. However John does reveal a belief - in his case it is very difficult to say whether he believed this, or felt this, in his pre-conversion life or whether this has been reinterpreted since joining - in a natural order of things, a hierarchy of better and better 'tastes', in which 'one' is destined to follow a certain path. Thus, comparatively to the narratives of Abe and Tom, he does not see his pre-conversion life in terms of a quest for absolute answers per se, but rather as a natural evolution from lower to higher points of consciousness, spirituality and 'taste'.

John comes from Alabama, where he spent most of his life growing up, going to school and later university. He then moved to New York to find work as a ballet dancer, and it was there that he met the devotees and joined the movement. From early on in his life John remembers being different in the sense that he was never able to accept the ordinary - as considered by significant other's - for himself:

" I do remember always rejecting the ordinary materialistic way of life. Although I didn't know what I was looking for, I knew I didn't want to grow up and take a job, get skilled in some sort of occupation and work nine to five. I knew I did not want that, I absolutely did not want it. I definitely had a firm conviction of this already in high school, so therefore when I left for university, I majored in dance, ballet and theatre".

John went to university in Alabama, and felt strongly he wanted to do something creative, not caring whether it was commercially viable or not. His account of this suggests a person who sees themselves as strongly independent to follow their own path in life:

" ... so I went to university and majored in dance, ballet, theatre and drama even though at the time many people were thinking, at least my peers were thinking that majoring in theatre, dance and drama as such, is not very secure you know because many people, especially in that field are out of work. It's not like you can get a job based on like your high school certificate, it's getting a job based

on talent, you have to go through auditions, and you have to be discovered so to speak, so this is difficult. Actually my family did not support me, they were thinking this is kinda crazy, and they didn't understand, what do you want to do with theatre major, with dance major, and I told them, you know I want to be a dancer, I want to be an actor, this is what I want to do. So I didn't care about that, I just wanted to do what I wanted to do. And I've always been like that, I've never let what someone else thought or the general consensus held, affect my decision. I would just do what I felt like doing or what my heart told me to do ".

His family although not being happy with his decision, could not really say anything as he was independent of them financially as he got money from the state due to the fact that his mother has died at an early age:

" ... Well, uh they were not educating me as such so they couldn't say much. And basically I was supporting myself. You see it's kinda like my grandmother brought me up, my mother died when I was very young, three years old, so if your mother, if you have a parent that died, you get some money from the government, so you get that until you're twenty one as long as you're in the state. So I didn't have to rely on my parents, so I was very happy ".

John sees himself as always having been a happy person due to this financial and personal independence. His friends saw him as always being someone with a positive spirit, someone to lean on:

" You know that's why I've always kinda of been happy, even in material life before I became a Hare Krishna devotee, I was always happy. On a material platform, my friends always thought I was very positive and I was kinda their shoulder to lean on, whenever they had problems they would always come to me. So actually when I decided to become a Hare Krishna, they couldn't believe it 'cause they thought, you were the person who inspired us, why you need Hare Krishna? Because they thought that to become a Hare Krishna, meant that you couldn't deal with material life."

After Varsity John goes to New York to where he starts dancing as a professional. He develops a group of friends there. His friends and he " ... used to like to take in opera, ballet, things like that. I was very much into the arts, some movies, going to clubs, I loved to dance, loved dancing..." His self perception at the time included a picture of himself as a philosophical monk type:" ... **I was a little bit philosophical, I used to read about Mao, many other philosophers, I was also doing some transcendental meditation, I used to read some Nietzsche, I used to even read some other eastern literature. I actually loved proverbs, I used to love proverbs, I used to like that a lot. Because... And I used to like living in a very practical way "**

When speaking about his friends and relations it seems that he did not value most of these relations very highly. He found his relations with others to be generally unsatisfactory and in fact superficial so much so that: " I walked away from all of them, I walked away from all the relationships, after awhile I just became bored with them ". It is with the Hare Krishna devotee's he finds these qualities of friendship he was looking for. He meets the devotees and joins the movement in New York. At this time he is working as a dancer, but then gets laid up, starts reading Prabhupada's books, meets the devotees and joins. In his recollection of events he seems to have had an immediate attraction to the ideas expressed in the books:

" ... what really made me join ISCON was, when I was trying to be a professional ballet dancer, and I was working as a professional dancer, but then I had an ankle injury and I couldn't dance any more. So I didn't know when I'd be able to dance again and I was forced to stay at home, and I was drawing unemployment so I didn't have to work, so I wasn't concerned about money so much. **So then I started to read a lot of books, some of them were Prabhupada's books about the Hare Krishna. And I actually developed an attraction for the books so much I used to read them every day, and then I met the devotee's, and I started to go to the temple "**

However he joins more because of his attraction for the devotees and their type of life-style. He starts going to the temple on a regular basis and finds himself becoming very attracted to the movement and the devotee's and after he meets them and goes to see how they live, he is unable to leave:

"... I found that the chanting and being with the devotees was something that I had always wanted. I had always wanted to be with people whose friendship didn't depend on what your material position was. I just liked having a friend for the sake of being a friend, and I found that in the devotees who liked you no matter what background you came from, and that's what made attached to the devotees. I became very attached to the devotees, and I just wanted to live like that, like them. And after coming into contact with them, making friends with them, I was unable to leave there " In contrast to the devotees his other friends seemed to him to be shallow and not really friends: " I actually went back for a short period of time to be with my other friends, but that became very dry after awhile, I saw what the other side was like. I always knew that my friends were too materialistic, and that they, they didn't really fulfil my desire of friends, but it was the only thing I could really find so I had to settle for it, but when I found something higher I immediately wanted to accept it. And that's what made me become a devotee, my friendship with the devotees, more than the philosophy itself ..."

His friends struggled to come to terms with his decision to join the movement and this contributes towards his disenchantment with them: " ... and the friends I

used to do these things with, they were actually quite disturbed when I wanted to become a Hare Krishna. Because I also started to tell them about the philosophy and things and they wanted no part of it. They were much opposed to me becoming a Hare Krishna and moving into the temple, they thought that it was a form of escapism. Some cult. Also the movement had a lot of bad publicity in America. And it was actually at that time I realised that I had so little in common with those friends. **I didn't mind giving them up** ". (later he becomes friends with some of them again, they see now that he has stuck with it so long that they have to respect it). Thus friendship with the devotees was in his mind a crucial factor in making a decision to join the movement. After being in the movement he came more and more to appreciate this 'real' friendship of the devotees and the limited nature of his previous relations, although it is very unclear as to whether he had these feeling before or after meeting the devotees), and to 'understand' that such can only have occurred in a spiritual setting:

" ... yeah I knew they were not ideal friends. Even when you found someone who superficially tried to be that ideal friend, they were not able to persevere for a long period of time. Those qualities of selflessness, actually being a friend unconditionally, no-one in the material world can be like that. Even if I found someone superficially, that would display that for awhile, after a time they would reveal themselves. Because you cant be a person like that without some higher understanding. Because these are qualities that are beyond the material and unless you have some help into that other realm, you cant really display these qualities. Like I've had some friends who were poets and things like that, and they know usually what I feel, qualities and things, but still they were just like superficial, and they couldn't really know like it were part of their character ".

The other important reason in his recollection for joining the movement was that it felt natural and 'right' and he felt no compulsion to question what was happening to him. This is possibly related to the fact that he had some affinity to the ideas of the movement before he met the devotees as he had read many of the books, even started to chant and meditate. However it also seems more than this in his recollection. His pull towards the devotees, their dress, their style of life, and their unconditional friendship. As we see a little later in his narrative, the immediacy and naturalness of his attraction to them is also related to his understanding of pre-destiny, the way on which some people will naturally and inevitable gravitate towards the movement. Related to this is the belief that if you are that sort of person then you will naturally be able to appreciate a higher taste, a more advanced form of spirituality. The general feel I got from John is that he sees his whole life as a succession of stages from one taste to another, each incrementally better

" It came so natural. It was such a natural thing that I did not have to withhold myself in any way. It just happened. After my ankle injury I just started to stay at home, I had to lay for several weeks in bed with my leg elevated and I

just started to read Prabhupada's books and after reading the books, um I started to chant at home, I started to do some meditation, and then I just met the devotee's and I started to go to the temple. I developed more of a desire to become a vegetarian. I already had the desire to become a vegetarian but was unable to do it, then after meeting the devotees I said now, the first thing I did was become a vegetarian. And like that, it just happened so naturally, naturally, that's why I knew it was right ... it was the most wonderful thing when I first went to the temple. I saw the devotees with their shaved heads, and the duris, beads and skirts, and to me it looked totally natural. I didn't think these people look weird, I mean cause actually for a person whose never seen this, they do look weird. But for my mind it didn't appear weird, you know I just thought they're completely normal people and I just felt completely at home".

This gives a sense of how John remembers his conversion as something akin to destiny. These ideas are strengthened when he speaks of the philosophical reasons for his conversion. It is interesting that he now sees the reasons for what he remembers feeling then :

" ... Of course now philosophically I understand why. Like the Bhagavad Gita teaches, you know how one comes to devotional service. Because of past life activities, a series of devotional activities, and one may take birth in a non-devoted family for some time, but without even endeavouring to, one will become naturally attracted to devotee's and devotional service in due course of time, because of one's background or past life. And that's why you get a lot of people, they just come to a point, devotee's just want to come to the temple its such a natural thing to them. Whereas you get some people who see the Hare Krishna as a threat". The above gives an idea of how John, in his mind's eye considers his and others process towards and conversion into Krishna as one predominantly defined by predestiny.

Another important reason in his mind for his conversion lies in the self-perceived problem he had with drugs at this stage in his life. He seems to say that the temple was there to help him with this problem, although at that the same time he says he enjoyed the drugs and didn't have a problem with them at the time:

" What also... a period before then, I had a bout with some drugs. This was after the injury, after that I started to do drugs, heavy type drugs, cocaine. It's easy to get in America, especially New York. And it's quite addictive also, so I uh saw the temple as a way to stop. Although it wasn't a long period I was doing it, up to about six months, but I saw it could become a major problem, and somehow or other, the temple was there at that time to help me. **You will find a lot of devotees who have come to the movement who have taken alternative drugs ... I was never angry with material life. Like I told you I mean I was totally enjoying myself, even though I knew that these drugs were**

self-destructive, the use of them, but still I enjoyed taking them. That was, at that point on a daily basis. Not in large quantities, I didn't want to take large quantities cause I was also dancing, I needed my lungs. Although marijuana was very nice... Buts that's another thing, **before I used to have at least one joint every day, right and um, but then when some friend introduced me to cocaine, I immediately gave up marijuana! Because that state of euphoria was better, I'd rather have cocaine than marijuana. So similarly, when I got something even better than cocaine, which is the holy name, the Hare Krishna Mamhamantra, I was able to give that up".**

When his injury had healed, John did not go back to dancing, but started his own business which created a enough money for his liking of cocaine:

" ... and I had money also to buy them cause after my leg got better I started my own business and I made quite a bit of money, I was even making more money than I was when I was dancing so I had a lot of money to blow on drugs ... it was a cleaning service, cleaning privately for people, flats. It's not like in South Africa, in America you can make quite a lot of money cleaning. Like here people get paid very little, but in America you get twelve fifty an hour just for cleaning someone's apartment, fifteen an hour for cleaning someone's shop and we did shops as well, so you could easily make a hundred dollars a day ... ".

John has intense and firm convictions in respect of the Krishna faith. He does however have doubts as to his ability to be pure, but still has no doubt in terms of the general process and reveals how for him - although often talking in the third person or about other devotee's - it meant a hard road of staying in the devotional process to be 'purified':

" ... The only thing really is my inability to uh, purify my heart of all material desires, but I have no doubt in the process itself. It's not doubt really, it's just that, the only thing I **feel about myself because I come from such a problem background, I feel that sometimes these desires are still there, you know to enjoy materially, cause it takes a long time to rid the heart of these desires. But the devotional process gradually purifies one. But there's no doubt about the process itself. Actually there's no doubt at all really** ... There are ones (other devotees) who are unable to give up the desire for sense gratification, the desire to enjoy this world. Not that everyone in the temple has given it up. But at least they have the intellectual understanding that although the material desire may still be there, but to leave and go try fulfil them is not the right thing to do. So stay in the devotional process, until I become purified ".

This process for him did not come easily, he likens it to giving up to smoking and other drugs. The following reveals how he sees this process as one of being austere and evolving from differing levels of appreciation and 'taste':

" So it's difficult. In order to control the mind, you must at least preach yourself with intellect, because intelligence is higher than the mind. Just like one may want to try and stop smoking, the mind is attached to smoking, the mind basically does two things. It accept and it rejects. So the mind says I want a cigarette, it doesn't care that its harmful to the body or whatever, the mind just wants a cigarette because its attached to it. But the intelligence you know will tell the mind, no, you know the harmful affects of smoking, so don't. Yet the victory of the mind in this case depends on the introduction of a higher taste. It's described in the Bhagavad Gita that if you develop a higher taste you naturally want to give up the lower taste. If a person has had some very nice bread, the bread might be nice and tasty but you give a person a nice slice of cake which is superior in taste to bread, you know a person will find no problem to give up the bread and taste the nice cake, but if you if you just try and take the bread away without giving something else to replace it, it will be difficult. **And similarly with Krishna consciousness, its so sweet and nice, you experience such happiness from the spiritual platform that material things seem dull and dry. And that's what happened to me. Otherwise I would of never being able to give up, I don't know, so many bad habits.** So that's why actually, other ways of getting people to give up bad habits don't ultimately work, cause you're constantly saying I can't do, I can't do, and you're reinforcing yourself by... because being adverse to something also means you're attached to it ".

Paul's story.

Paul's narrative is rich with facets of pre-conversion life, thus allowing us the possibility to pinpoint more clearly possible connections between that life and conversion into the Hare Krishna movement. Like Abe and Tom, he views himself as something of a loner on a quest, although this is not tied in exclusively with a perceived lack of spirituality, but rather a generalised dissatisfied with "the system". He tried many more alternatives, and was arguably far more of a 'rebel' than the other individuals before opting for a life in Krishna. These instances of counter cultural activity however in general moved him more and more into a confrontation with the 'dominant culture' around him, reaching an intense point of crisis, that was not only 'felt', but evidenced by his objective 'outsider' status.

Paul's early years, which are spent primarily at Michael House, a boarding-school and then St John's, both South African white middle-upper class training grounds, are fairly normal except for what seems to be a high degree of 'rebellious' behaviour and disenchantment with the world around him. He goes to boarding school when he is nine which he finds " a bit traumatic" as he has to be away from his parents for six months at a time, and difficult as he had never experienced the kind of discipline and isolation that such schools

embody. As he grows up, he increasingly becomes - is labelled and labels himself as such - something of an outsider and a rebel. This seems initially due in part to him not being of the same class bracket as his peers:

" My parents had to really scrape and save to send me there, so I was always called the underdog, and everyone else pretty rich, had whatever".

His outsider status becomes increasingly linked his tendency towards rebellion at various stages during his schooling years, rebellion that culminates later in him being expelled from St John's at the end of standard eight. During these times he also develops a group of friends that are similarly rebels.

" ... I got knocked over by some dick from standard five. I was concussed and had to go to the sickroom. I was sitting on the bus, and I was smoking and the guy just looked at me and smacked me, hit my head ... basically my teachers gave me a hard time. I remember just like the other day, getting into trouble and being caned, getting oral work. My buddies and I always seemed to be in trouble ... (later)... I had one friend, his father was, ah, like an alcoholic. So he was a bit of a joller as well, we used to joll. I mean I basically did these thing, drink from when I was twelve at boarding school. People are often shocked to hear that, I mean even now kids I know who are twelve, fifteen aren't drinking like that. Shocking. But at that stage, in a way, you know we used to go to parties together, do sport together ... he was clever you know, but he wasn't a super academic like some of the other kids. It was the same with myself, right, I thought I was cleaver but I didn't do much work. So we kind of fitted together. Another good friend was Lance, he was also there, very clever guy, but also a rebel. It just so happens that the year I went to St John's college, they said it was the worst standard they'd ever had, the biggest bunch of rebels together. Another good friend Greg Fouche, also jolling together, we used to joll a lot together, like our whole group you know ".

In standard's eight, nine and ten Paul begins then to encounter increasing problems with dealing with authority figures around him while also developing more definitive counter-cultural beliefs. All the while his self-perceived image of being a rebel seems to become more self-defining at a introspective level. In standard eight Paul is expelled from school:

" I was a rebel. I used to bunk out in standard eight on the weekends from college. I used to smoke at school. I remember I really couldn't stand this guy, we used to have a housemaster at the boarding house, used to give you cuts ... he was like a jerk, like a straight, like a straight jerk and I remember, the only thing I remember when I was kicked out, I can't remember why, but I remember being in his office and I was really upset, I really didn't care and then I phoned my parents cause he phoned my parents, kinda like a warning that I'd be kicked

out, and, that's right I remember, I bunked out on the weekend, that's why they wanted me out ".

Paul then goes to Damelin and lives at home. Earlier on, and then particularly during this period, from eight to matric, Paul starts developing beliefs concerning the world around him, beliefs that, as we shall see later, mature and become stronger as he becomes more and more 'against the system' as he grows older:

" ... one thing was National Service, from about **thirteen I was adamant that I didn't want to do National service. I was really against racialism, I remember a couple of friends who would say racialistic things and I didn't like that. I was completely against racialism. Conceptions, like spiritual conceptions, again I was like anti materialism.** I remember one time, like these kids who used to have rich parents, go overseas, and I was just sitting outside on this mercedes at the back of school, and just like scratching this person's mercedes. I don't know if I was envious, but it may have been that I was envious that my parents weren't rich... rather I felt they were just so snobbish, so proud of their wealth. I was quite against money, probably even from that stage, because one thing I saw you know, definitely I remember seeing, all of these people that were so rich, but if you went to their house it wasn't like such a nice house you know, even though they had so much money and they were so called happy people , actually they weren't so happy ... I remember when I was in standard nine, that's the year I went to Damelin, cause I got kicked out of the school. I kinda just checked out the people in standard nine with me, altogether about sixty people and half of them smoked dope on almost a regular basis you know. I went out with them every week-end, or every second week-end, and these people come from some of the richest families you know and they were very unhappy "

During this period of his life, Paul 'hangs out' with a group of friends, however he saw himself as sharing very little of substance with them in terms of his burgeoning 'deeper' ideas:

" Another guy, also from standard nine, matric, ah Alister, cause ah, there was a group of us, about three or four of us, we used to joll together on weekends, and we used to smoke a lot of dope together. So this guy Alister, we always reckoned he'd become a tramp, just by his ways, he just didn't care, didn't care. Also kind of against the system, but we didn't really discuss a lot. I was going to Damelin and staying at home and I was travelling back and forth every day on the train and a couple of other guys did the same. One of then didn't smoke but he used to drink, and we used to joll. **It was strange, none of them had the same ideas as me, anti-apartheid, anti-system, we were just kinda drunkards together, smokers together, jollers together, that was kinda the only thing that held us together, there was no kind of philosophical basis ...** I never used to be able to relate to them on that kind of platform ... this guy

Lance, friend from school, he was, even though we were good friends, he was different, he was into things like ACDC, things that I see today as kind of demonic. Interesting guy, didn't really like Reggae, used to smoke though. Actually I was the first person he smoked dope with. I was kind of a hero to him, cause I was a rebel, but he didn't have the same kind of ideals as me, that kind of thing. He was somewhat racialistic as well, ACDC kind of racialistic "

However he has a number of more significant relationships that are more based on his inner self, friendships that become 'deep' and reflect more his burgeoning 'anti-system' feelings and his more personal felt beliefs and activities beyond being jolling buddies. The following extracts illustrate how importantly Paul viewed these friends as well as indicating the content and nature of his beliefs.

" ... a couple of years after that time we had at school, **we had more like a deep discussion relationship. We used to discuss things like spiritual life, other planets. He was more like an intellectual type ... but at a later stage he was more of a philosophical friend, someone I could discuss my feeling with, my knowledge I had on the spiritual plains.** He was a good friend ... this was another friend, a year older than me, kind of always, not like, kind of a hero figure, not exactly like a hero figure, but he was a musician and I was into music as well. We used to be quite deep friends as well, you know ... Steve was the guy I could always talk deeply with ... this guy Steve Cook, he was also into Reggae, and he was also, I had become a vegetarian when I was about sixteen and he was also a vegetarian, his father is a well known homeopath here in Joburg, so we thought very much the same. He didn't smoke dope or anything, didn't touch dope, but we were both, we used to jamm together, sing, both into reggae, you know move together ... at the time, my brother, he was doing some kind of meditation, and he said to me, why do you smoke so much dope, what kick do you get out of it, you don't get much kick out of it, you'd get a lot more out of meditation, you should try it sometime. And I said OK, yeah, and I went to the T.M, Transcendental Meditation, you know went for a couple of days during my lunch break ... yeah, still while I was at school. And then at that sametime, you know I used to go over to Steve Cook's house, he was a vegetarian, and we used to meditate ... the girlfriend I had at the time, in standard nine and matric, she was very clever, Jewish girl, good school. She kinda found my friends radical, had a good thing going though, shared things ... this friend of mine Greg Fouche, you know he and I went to school together until the end of standard nine, and we were good friends. **At that time we were both anti the system ... yeah nine and matric I was definitely anti, I saw the system as being, I guess like more on a political level I saw something wrong, oppression of the mass of the people. Medicine, cause I was into alternative medicine.** From standard nine I had that idea, cause my friend, remember, Steve Cook, his father was a homeopath, we both had these sorts of ideas about medicine, wanted to do the same thing. Actually we both went to Varsity together, took the same courses with the aim of going into studying alternative medicine. But

definitely from standard nine and matric, I remember being against the system, seeing the **system as oppressing the masses, western medicine as ah, just cut out the disease, not going to the source of the disease ... "**

It becomes obvious in the course of his narrative that Paul is looking for something more than just the ordinary run of the mill; his statements reflect a desire to find alternative goals and ideals in life. This is arguably more than a case of being mildly interested in alternatives, but a case where individual beliefs seem transported into real attempts at creating a different life in terms of something different to the dominant cultural form around him. Although it is extremely difficult to periodise when Paul develops his beliefs, and the relationship of such beliefs within the circumstances of his life - for instance it is not always clear when he becomes politically conscientised, whether this is before university or during (although in his recollection of events it was certainly before) - or whether his beliefs in anti-materialism were more of a reconstruction based on Hare Krishna ideology -, it seems clear that during this general period, his identity is based on a fairly holistic conception of being someone alternative to the dominant culture around him, and developing bonds with people who felt the same way. His burgeoning beliefs concerning politics, western medicine, anti-capitalism etc, do not only exist as half-baked interest in alternatives, or aimless rebelliousness, but part of a developing consciousness that is in essence based on being 'anti'.

This is illustrated by the fact that these were not only beliefs, but generated into actual cultural expression and form. For example with his desire to take up alternative medicine. Or, although he does not say this directly, his drug taking. A more illuminating example of this however is his affinity to reggae which develops later into a self-identity that represents his general feelings about the world around him. He likes reggae as a musical form from standard six, but later he grows 'dreadlocks' and sees himself as being something of a Rastafarian, finding thus a cultural form to express his evolving definition of self and the world beyond him; 'jamming' and playing reggae can be seen as counter cultural form as it expressed for him his feelings regarding the system, specifically regarding oppression, freedom and redemption; this was strongly connected to evolving political awareness and his general feelings of the world around him:

" Reggae signified for me, ah rebellion to a large degree, it signified freedom, like black consciousness, the dope was cool. Ja, I got into Reggae quite heavily, I liked other music as well, I grew up with Dylan you know. But Reggae was the kind of thing I always liked, right up until I joined actually, and definitely it was kind of a belief in redemption, Babylon "

Comments later in his narrative reveal more the importance of Rastafarianism to him and the symbolic importance of his dreadlocks. His self-definition of a 'rebel'

becomes during this significant period, more holistically 'alternative' as he develops ideas and beliefs that are centrally against the 'system', which seems to have become in his mind, a personal enemy, an abstract concept in his mind that he wishes to escape, defeat and become the antithesis (a later quotes reveal this better). This seems related to his objective levels of alienation at this time while staying at home and staying at Damelin, and then later when he goes to WITS. In this time he becomes increasingly frustrated with the world around him. He recalls experiencing deep frustration in respect of the world around him, and the pain he sees in others. As we saw before he saw the cultural system around him as oppressive etc, and these feelings develop into a more intensely felt personal pain. His lifestyle - that of 'he has to joll', drinking and smoking pot - reveals a deeply felt frustration that significant others fail to understand him and what he does, and he cannot understand them. He often feels entrapped and frustrated. His parents, whose presence in his life which was previously fairly minimal, becomes intense and their relations become at times antagonistic, and he increasingly stays away from home as much as possible:

" ... I used to write songs more actually, I used to write poetry. This was like at a later stage in Matric, cause I think these were the most significant times for me, kinda from when I got kicked out of St Johns up until I dropped Varsity. **I used to write a lot of poetry, I used to get stoned. I really hated the system, you know was against a lot** I remember one poem I wrote, I was, instead of being inside a cell I was outside of it and everyone else was inside, kind of like they were all just conditioned and I was the one who could see how screwed they were. Just like the whole scene then ; work, my parents were every single day, getting up, waking up early, five o'clock, having some tea, my mom does her face, getting dressed, hair must be done, things to do before work, going to work, coming home after picking up Brian, pouring herself a drink, waiting for my dad, starting to cook the supper, having supper, sitting in front of the TV. **But its just like day in and day out, day in day out, and then come the weekend, used to always, from standard six, I used to go out on week-ends, I used to have to joll.** And because I lived in Benoni, I used to not go home for the week-end. I used to go out with someone else, so ah, ah, they just weren't happy about it, so I felt they just couldn't relate to it. It seemed to be strange, how come they never go, how can they just sit, how can they never go on a joll, amazingly how can people go on just sitting around? "

After Matric these tensions between him and his parents become too much and he leaves home:

" ... my parents told me that unless I cut off my dreadlocks, stopped seeing all my black friends, stopped smoking dope, I had this one black friend, we used to go and score and smoke. **So I told them I do all these things, this is me, if you don't like it and want me to leave, I'll leave.** So I left. Actually this was before Varsity started".

After Matric Paul goes to study at Wits, keen on furthering his ideas about alternative medicine. He has expectations about Varsity and life there that don't meet up. He studies for awhile, but spends a lot of his time smoking and hanging out in his flat with other smokers. At some point around this time he gets bust by the cops for dope for the first, but not the last, time. This whole period has a feel of desperation to it, a feel of impending doom. He is smoking a lot of dope, hanging out with people who do the same. Eventually he decides to quit Varsity.

" my mother, she wanted me to go to Varsity, she arranged a flat for me, paid for the flat. I started Varsity, she paid for my studies, and it was around this time I got bust by the cops ... **of course at this time you know I was completely against the system, especially with smoking lots of dope.** This friend Lance, we were scoring together in Hillbrow and the way it looked was that I was some guy in the street who was a contact for the guy's who were selling, and I was making a cut. And the same time we were buying there were a couple of cops buying and so the guy who bought the stash, Andrew, they bust him. I just ran, so they didn't catch me but they caught my buddy Lance, so I knew they would come looking for me at my flat cause his father came round and told me. And then there was big trauma, my parents came, **my mom was really angry, shouted at me, said I wasn't religious, I said I am, I'm a Christian, I was a Rastafarian you know.** And then a week later they came to my flat, this was strange, because I was at Varsity, and the people I was with in Hillbrow, Steve, the same guy Steve you know, and some other guys, we all jolled together a lot, about six guys, we were all dope smokers, weird situation to be in for studying. Anyway a week later the cops came, found dope, took us away. In fact I was locked up at John Vorster's for five days. My parents came to see me, I remember it was weird, bars between us. He walked out, my mother stayed, I just told her that they didn't actually find any dope. Anyway then I went to court on the Tuesday, paid the fine, there was free bail. And then I went home. My father said to me, ok were going to see a lawyer, cut your dreadlocks. **He said cut your dreadlocks and this was a big thing, you know they symbolised what I felt, what I saw as wrong with the system, and I don't know sometimes to this day, I don't know why I said yes to him, why I let them cut them off.** Then we went to see a lawyer, got a fifty rand fine and then, ah, after that a couple of months after that I decided to give up Varsity. So at the same time I was living with my parents, I had moved back after the cops, I was still jolling, smoking it up. I had always felt I was different, people had all of these views, but I just couldn't see how they could see that. **And even like, as I told you, my expectations at Wits, everyone would be anti-society, communistic. I was never a communist, my brother was a communist, is a communist, but I was anti the system, definitely anti the system.** "

Paul remembers first coming into contact with Prabhupada's books with amazement: "... this guy Steven Cook and I , we were looking at one section of bookstand all his books were there, and I remember I was amazed, I said wow, all these books and they were all by the same author. At least fifty books were there. I was completely amazed ..."

Paul comes into contact with literature that offers alternative meaning and is immediately attracted to them: " ... so when I got to John Vorster, when I read that book ... before that I'd been reading Jesus Christ, the Gospel by Ludwig Welheim, it's kind of alternative views on Jesus Christ. I'd read that before, and then I read that book in jail, and when I came out I got more books from that same guy I was telling you I had discussions with, and I read other books like Lyall Watson, Gifts of the unknown Gods, **you know that, fascinating hey. I remember I was very interested in these themes, power, supernatural, amazing. I was very much into it** ".

Paul's life goes on a spiral toward moving away from 'normal society' after this. He moves back into Hillbrow, and continues in the same life-style as before. It is at this time that he meets the devotees for the first time. This period, which is described over the next few paragraphs, seems a crucial one - in Paul's recollection of events - to his conversion in many ways. It represents the coming together of all his previously felt tensions, the circumstances of his life, the frustration of not actualising his felt beliefs of the world, or not being able to find a space in which to really actualise them. It illustrates his love hate relationship to the city and how he saw himself as an rebel-urban outcast-alternative hero. All of these dynamics seem in his narrative to reach a boiling point, and this period is seen by Paul as the evolution of his path towards moving away from society totally, of becoming in real terms 'outside the system'. There is a feeling in the following passages that Paul sees himself as nearing some 'point of no return' . :

" And then what happened after that, I left Varsity while I was still at home, I left in May, end of June maybe, oh yes, it was while I was studying for exams, and then I got a job. As soon as I got one, I moved out again, got a flat ... I got a job as a salesman, they trained me as a salesman, sold printing machines ... I kept the job for three months , and it was at this time I met the devotees and around the time I met them, I was still very much into dope. I had just received a whole lot of dope from this friend of mine, brought this lot from Swaziland, and I was making bank packets to go and sell it. **So at this time I was living in a flat in Berea with five other people, the same people I was hanging around with before when we got bust, they were all just drop-outs.** So they were all just staying with me, I was the only one who had a job. They'd been kicked out of their flat, so, ah, you know I said come and stay with me. So my mother came to the flat to see me cause I hadn't gone to work that day, I'd said I was sick and she phoned work and they said I was sick, so she came to see me. And she

opened the door, and there was this pile of dope, and my friends sitting around smoking. So she freaked out and took the dope, and told my friends she was going to the police. So I phoned her that night, you know to ask not to go to the cops. And I remember at that same time I was speaking on the telephone, you know, at the bottom of Highpoint in Hillbrow, and some guy was, kind of an older man but quite an odd looking guy, said, **'hey come on hurry up man ek se'**. I got so angry, I put the phone down and starting screaming at him, **I'm going to kill you. I was just like so angry with the guy**. I was never like a violent person, in fact I never got into any street violence or anything, only in rugby, had a couple of incidents you know. I always used to kind of pose like that, cause everyone used to pose like that, **you know, tough man. I used to carry myself like a brecker I suppose, but when it got down to it you know, I never actually had any fistfights, even though everyone had that impression of me, everyone. But that was the strange thing though, cause I was really antiviolence. I was kind of a passive person**, but on the outside everyone saw me as really tough. You know, I suppose I carried myself like a tough guy. And so you know, I turned on this guy, really shouted at him, he left, I carried on speaking to my mother. This happened, I think it was on a Thursday evening, and then on Sunday, I had a whole lot of cobs, and I was selling. And that Sunday the cops came to my flat. **That morning I'd been to see my mother, you know and pacified her, told her I was a Christian, told her about the devotees, you know by this time I'd already met the devotees**, in my second month of working, and I used to come out to the farm. My friends also, they used to come, the friends I stayed with in the flat, we all used to go. And my friends had all gone out with them to Cateridge for a festival, and that Thursday when my mother bust the flat, three had just come back. My friends were quite into the movement as well in some ways, some of them weren't really into it. And that Sunday, the next Sunday, the cops came and bust the flat. And at that time I'd already intended to give up my job, and the one girl who was living with us, her uncle had a farm down in Natal, and I was going to go and work on his farm, just for a place to stay, you know, **get out of the city ..."**.

His feelings for city life are ambiguous, a love-hate relationship. He enjoys parts of his life in the city, yet things seem to keep spiralling towards some sort of crisis. Talking about his feelings for the city he goes on to say:

"... I don't know, you know it was kind of a love hate relationship. I'd always go back to Hillbrow, I liked it ... Yeah I used to like going to Hillbrow, just sitting and watching the people. I used to sit at Lucky Lukes, it was called at that time, just sit there, just watch the people ... **I kinda of fancied myself as being a kinda of, ah kind of a rebel again, kind of like some you read about in books, see in the movies kind of like an outcast from normal society, life you know. I remember when I was at school I saw that movie, Run Baby Run, and that had a big affect on me, I wanted to be like that, a rebel, its amazing. I wanted to be somebody outside society. Anyway, I was saying I liked**

Hillbrow, city life, kept on going back. **But this time I'd had enough, especially with the cops, the cops. So I decided I was going to go and work on the farm. And also at that time, you know I was quite good friends with the devotees and I was developing some inclination to the movement,** so I went down to Durban when the cops bust my flat. When I came back that Sunday, the whole flat was upside down, my friends weren't there, the cops were gone, and I didn't stay at the flat that night, I stayed with a friend's brother. And from there, I just kind of put my things together. Actually I'd already left my job ... Yeah, I think I'd just kind of left it, I think I must of, I think it was within a couple of days of leaving it. Cause I remember my friends went down at the beginning of that week to stay with the movement, I didn't go cause I was working, but I remember I was only going to work for a couple more days and when I'd finished I was going to come down to the farm and visit and then, you know, all of us wanted to maybe find a place down in Tonga, sit around and smoke, cause we, I think I was scared of the cops, and we didn't really like the city that much. And then, ah, I went down to Durban, and I went to visit the devotees, and I joined ..."

When he goes down to Durban, he stays with the Krishnas for a couple of weeks, and decides during that time to join the movement due mainly on the influence of one devotee:

" Yeah we had a farm in Cateridge, just outside Durban, so I went to that farm, it was so beautiful and peaceful. There was this one guy who used to be a Rasta , he actually preached to me, and it was by his discussions with me that I actually joined. It wasn't really that at that time he convinced me, but he said, why don't you come and stay for a couple of weeks. And I had nowhere to stay in Durban, cause this girl ended up letting me down, she never came down to Durban. And I had to leave because of the cops you know, the cops were looking for me. And she was going to come down, she gave me her uncle's phone number, and he said I couldn't stay on the farm until she came, so I was practically stranded, so I went to the farm and he said, why don't you come and stay for a few weeks, and I said, Ja, I had nowhere to stay, I might as well stay here. So I came, and from that time on, I just, ah, stayed. I remember, **Novancumienda, you know he gave that talk on the Sunday, and he said, its not enough knowing about God, we should do something for God, and those are the words that struck me, if we know what's right, we should do that, and I said Ja, shaved my head, joined "**

It seems to Paul that many of his more deeply felt beliefs seem to be represented in the movement. In the following extract he reveals a desire to find not only higher ideals and try to live them, he reveals also a desire to find people who live them and to follow such people. For the first time - although there are a few passing comments as to interest in specifically spiritual concerns and desires, this is not as overpowering as in the case of Abe - in Paul's narrative we find evidence of spiritual seekership, not only a general seekership. It is

interesting in this regard that wherever he is in a crisis, he pacifies his mother he is a Christian. The following extracts reveal Paul's (mostly unspoken) tendency towards finding some sort of spiritual mentorship. In this sense one finds in Paul's pre-conversion life, a desire for 'instruction', to follow a greater cause or person, as well as a belief that he has the essence of spiritual knowledge inside of him:

" See, what I found as I went along, that a lot of ideas I already had myself, were expressed in the movement. Actually one thing, when I kind of started my spiritual quest, probably from Matric you know, I had a desire, cause all religions are corrupt, but all religions must have the truth as well. So what I wanted to do was to travel to every single temple, go through Africa, up to Egypt, India, go through all the temples and learn each philosophy. And as far as I was concerned, they were all corrupt, so how come I was the only one who could see they were corrupt. So I said, I'm going to take the best from all of them, and put them together, and give it to humanity as the solution, and its actually amazing that this philosophy is actually the essence of all religions, and it kicks out all the cheating processes. So this is what I actually desired. I felt this was from a previous life, I mean how come I was so young, I was eighteen when I joined, and I though it was from a previous life, you know looking for the actual essence of religion and wanting to give it to people"

The Hare Krishnas that Paul meets, fulfil his criteria of saintly people, in that they seem to practice what they preach; the following passage reveals how his previously felt ideas on spirituality are crucial in motivating his initial feelings as to the movement and the devotee's. It also shows how in the sequence of his narrative, he moves naturally from speaking about previous ideas on spirituality to meeting the devotees who were in his perception, people who had real spirituality, people who were actually living the spiritual life he had dreamt of:

" I remember even at that time, I mean I disagreed on certain points like I didn't believe God had a form, but I liked the vegetarian food a lot, they were nice people. I remember when I was in nine, matric, my mother and father decided I was a problem kid, and we went to see a psychologist and I thought this was useless, but I went to see him, and I remember the first thing he said was, I had my dungarees on, why do you wear dungarees, so I said what's the big deal, so I wear dungarees, and he starting telling me, no I wear dungarees because its a symbol of rebellion, which maybe it was, which is not a contradiction at all you know. But I remember from when I was a kid I always liked to wear dungarees. I just thought he was a jerk, he really was a jerk. And I remember driving back home with my mother and father and they were saying what is this rastafarianism. The psychologist had asked, so my mother was saying, what is it. And I said to her, ja you know you read the bible and things, and theres so many saintly persons, so where are these saints, there must be saint in this

day, but where are they? And I said, as far as I'm concerned, Bob Marley's a saint, the things he said. Of course my views changed in the meantime, but at that time, I thought he was a saintly person, you know, singing about the truth. So I always, **if there were saintly persons, I wanted to be with them, I wanted to follow them, so when I came across this movement, I really felt they were nice people, and who really did what they said, they didn't like say one thing and do another ...** Ja for sure, **they were actually practicing what they were preaching. They're not just showing off some meditation,** or saying they're better than anyone else. I don't know, because of course my conceptions have changed over the last five years, so I can't always remember exactly how I felt then, but Ja, definitely they were nice people and ..."

He seemed to feel a genuine reverence for the movement, the philosophy and the devotees, as is illustrated when he begins talking about them to his friends after the initial contact. This passage reveals also that he was in process of becoming aligned; he speaks of 'our' philosophy before he has joined:

"... we used to smoke and get stoned, **and I used to speak about our philosophy at Krishna, and once I'd start speaking I just couldn't stop,** and he used to enjoy listening to me, and I used to become embarrassed, you know because I was stoned and self-conscious. And I remember, I used to say, Oh God, I've been speaking for so long. He was always very cool you know. At other times if anyone else was there, he'd say, start speaking, let them hear".

Paul then stays for while at the Durban farm. He enjoys the daily activities and finds the devotees to be nice people. However, there is one devotee, a devotee who used to be a 'rasta' that Paul particularly has affinity for, and that seems instrumental to his conversion. In his recollection there were pivotal words that were said by this devotee that finally convinced him to join. These words, and his understanding of them, show clearly how he incorporates into his previous beliefs and self-identity; he sees his decision to join as a combination of who he is as well as what he perceives the movement can offer him in becoming something new. The fact that the beliefs and ideas that he encounters at the movement are congruent and similar to ideas he has held dear before seems crucial in his conversion; the passage where he sits around the fire, smoking pot, chanting, musing about becoming a jahman and a devotee represents a window between old world and new:

"... I did enjoy it, the daily programme, **the communal life, meditation, I liked it. I'm basically a social person. I remember, a couple of months after joining, I left, and went to the Transkei, and I really missed that one particular devotee, he had listened and talked to me a lot at first, and asked me to come up to Joburg to the farm, and so after a couple of weeks I did, he ran the farm. And I remember I really missed him, he was something like a father figure, someone who was really concerned, really concerned for me not**

really like my mother and father, but someone who really cared and someone who symbolised, saintliness, yeah saintliness. I used to say, I'm going to grow my dreadlocks again, and he used to say, if you're going to grow your dreadlocks again, you're going to show you are a rebel of society, but if you dress like this, you're showing everyone that you're not just rebelling against society, but you're rebelling against the whole of material existence. And those words really stuck in my head. And I really missed that guy ... Well, I only left for the most, three weeks. I went to stay with my brother in Cape Town, hitched through the Transkei. **But I always used to chant, I used to sit by the fire with one of the books, and sing. Smoked it up a bit. But I used to see myself as a Jahman, you know up in the mountains, so I thought I'd go to the Transkei, take my robes, grow my dreadlocks, kind of fancied myself like that, you know completely against. Also you know I thought I was too young to give everything up, but that wasn't practical you know, its impossible to lead that kind of existence. And you know I remembered his words, I'm trying to rebel against the whole of existence, and I knew that was my lifestyle, to rebel against not only material existence, but the life that comes with it. You know, people are trying to get out of it all the time".**

In many ways Paul feels that the movement is the holistic alternative he has been looking for. This is obvious in one sense for he has stayed there for five years. Yet this is a crucial facet when looking at conversion for it possibly explains why he has stayed so long. If one can say that his initial conversion is due to the alignment - already set in place to some degree - of his previous identity and that of the movements, then it is the totalised alternative the movement represented, and the fact that this alternative makes real previously held ideals and beliefs, that makes such a conversion possibly transform into long term commitment:

" Well, we don't have enough people to do that yet. That'll take time to show contemporary society an alternative. **But what we are showing is that people of different sorts can live together happily.** And whenever there are disputes, these disputes aren't based on where people are coming from, but based on 'I think this is a bad idea', you know things like that. **So we do have an alternative for society, because we're showing people we can live together. Of course we have a whole formula for this if one gets into the philosophy, and by that philosophy I'm convinced that we do have a formula for a perfect society, and that's why I'm so enthusiastic to preach Krishna consciousness.** You know, I can see it working out, people being able to live together, a formula for everybody to live peacefully together, and not only at peace with one another, but at peace with themselves as well. That doesn't require great scholarship, but just an understanding that one has to serve God, and chanting Hare Krishna wherever you are. And in such a society that we

have the formula for, people can be at peace with themselves and God. Our scriptures say that everything in the world, materials, are controlled by the Lord, and so one should therefore accept these things necessary for one's self, so in other words everyone is entitled to Gods property, but we shouldn't take more you know than we need. So we teach simple living ".

He looks back on his previous life now with a compassion for those still in the 'outside world':

" When I go down town you know, look at the city, look at the back of flats, especially the back of flats, its the worst, gives me a sick feeling in my stomach. The fronts not so bad you know, its the back, gives me a sick feeling to know people are living there, you know cause I was in that situation, how are they really feeling, are they really suffering ".

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APPENDIX B.

History and Ideology of the movement.

The spiritual leader of the ISCON, A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, now deceased, can be seen as a parallel to many of his devotees for he too moved from an early religious history, to a secular grounding and understanding of life, to one devoted fully to the understanding, preaching and appreciation of his adopted God Krsna, and living the life prescribed in the Bhagavad-Gita, by Krsna. He was born as Abhay Charan De into a devoted Krsna family in 1896. During his childhood, he was instilled with an appreciation of Krsna; his family lived opposite a temple that worshipped the God Krsna and his consort, Radha, and Abhay used to worship the deities there every day (Shinn:1987:34). According to Prabhupada, his father was a pure devotee of Krsna who raised him as a Krishna-conscious child from an early age (Daner:1976:15). As he grew up he lapsed in his faith, but later found and developed it ultimately into a life devoted exclusively to the furthering and teaching of that faith.

After his studies, Prabhupada went into business, first managing a pharmaceutical company and later starting his own companies. This business career was at many times at odds with his burgeoning devotion to Krishna, and he donated large amounts of resources and time to publishing books about Krishna. He did this on the basis of instructions from his spiritual master, Bhaktisiddhanta, who he had met in 1922, and became a disciple of in 1932. Abhay became more and more involved with his master's Gaudiya Vaisnava community - which had been started in 1918 by Bhaktisiddhanta - and was initiated as Bhaktivedanta (one who has devotion and knowledge) in 1939 two years after his masters death. In pursuit of his masters wishes of translating Sanskrit scripts and publishing them, Abhay starting "Back to Godhead", an English magazine, designed to further the scriptures of Krishna. He started the League of Preachers in this regard, and in 1959, officially renounced all worldly pursuits including his family, to further his spiritual destiny. In that same year he was initiated as Sannyasin and known from then on as A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. In 1965, with a couple of dollars and many sanskrit books, he set off for New York on a free passage on a business contact's ship, to pursue his spiritual masters dying wish of spreading Krishna consciousness. Days before his death, Bhaktisiddhanta in a letter, charged Prabhupada with the holy mission of spreading Krishna consciousness to the English speaking people of the west, (Bhaktivedanta, AC:1991:339, Daner:1976:16, Shinn:1987:35-6) and this he set out to do with, ultimately, incredible success.

In New York, lower Manhattan, Prabhupada started preaching to people on the street and built up a small following of ex-hippies. From the first temple in Second Avenue, ISCON grew into a organisation with more than forty temples and farms worldwide and nine thousand initiated devotees at the time of

Prabhupadas death (Shinn:1987:38) in 1977. Prabhupada has personally produced over fifty bodies of translation and summary works on various Indian spiritual classics (Bhaktivendanta:1991:xiii), and seems from all account to fit the description of an authentic guru. ISCON has acquired property all over the world and considerable financial resources, yet theses have never been personally absconded by Prabhupada, and to his death, he appears to have lived a devout and spiritual life in terms of Krishna scriptures (Shinn:1987, Daner:1976).

Although the movement has gone through periods of negative public opinion and controversy, court cases, internal disputes and power struggles - particularly after the death of Prabhupada - as well as disputes based on the apparent contradictions of Krishna scriptures and necessities of survival and expansion (Rochford:1985), its central belief system has not altered in any way (Beckford:1985:32). For good accounts on the more organisational dynamics of the movement, see the latter two references.

According to any devotee one questions on the matter, the core of the movements teachings and philosophies are to be found in the Bhagavad-gita or the Song of God, Geetopanisad which is recognised as one of the most influential writings in past and modern day India. Prabhupada writes that the Gita is " ... identical with Krsna; and because Krsna is the Absolute Supreme Personality of Godhead, there is no difference between Krsna and his words" (Bhaktivedanta:1991:93). The Gita is said to originate between the fifth and second centuries B.C and may have been related to the Mahabharata, the history of the ancient world. Prabhupada says that the Gita and the Mahadharata were written at one time, some five thousand years ago (Daner:1976:23). The Gita, or more accurately Prabhupada's interpretation of the Gita lies at the core of ISCON teachings. The Gita has been translated into English many times, but it is stressed that Prabhupada's translation is the purest version of the real spirit and teachings of this ancient script, the 'As It Is', for it emphasises the centrality of devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna as the only possible passage to liberation, and the unconditional necessities of a authentic spiritual master and emersion within a correct Bhakti-meditative environment, to achieve such spiritual bliss and advancement. To get a feel for how the Hare Krishna movement can be seen as a lived ideology we need to look at the central tenants of these teachings, for they represent a logical, all encompassing, attractive and new worldview to the western believer.

The Gita has been seen by scholars from all over the world and by influential political and spiritual leaders in Indian history, as the most important and influential of all Hindu scriptures, and has been viewed, in context of the attenuated history of Hinduism, as the first introduction of a more personal and loving God; the Gita represents a breakaway from earlier Hindu pantheism to a more montheistic religious basis. This theme of a more personal God has been given dynamism through interpretations of the Gita by various Vaisnava

philosophers, who, from the eleventh century centralised the concept of God as a reachable personal entity and the need for devotional practices of Bhakti to attain communion with him. The teachings of Prabhupada and his proclaimed Parampara or disciple succession, are traceable to the tradition of the Vaisnava dualists. (Daner:1976:24-5). Perhaps the most influential was Lord Caitanya who revived the tradition of devotional religion in eastern India. ISCON has obvious links to this Bengali cultural and philosophical tradition that was revived and expanded through Caitanya and his devotee's endeavours in the fifteenth century. Caitanya became the leader of the Krsna-Bhakti movement which considered Krsna to be the supreme God rather than a demi-God or an avatara/incarnation of Visnu. Caitanya was responsible for introducing the process of kirtana, which is central to the devotional teachings of Prabhupada and ISCON. The kirtana, or the sankirtana - meaning to chant the name and praises of Krsna, either through group dancing and chanting of religious lyrics celebrating Krsna's life, or through repetitive chanting of Krsna's names, or through street processions of chanting and dancing - was seen by Caitanya as the most potent mode of producing the necessary meditative process for Bhakti or devotional activity of Krsna.

The Krsna-Bhakti movement became so popular it spread through most of eastern India. As it grew, Caitanya commissioned theologians to write and shape the doctrines of the movement in Sanskrit. The uniqueness of the Bengali tradition is that it emphasised certain elements as central over and above the many differing legacies of the Gita and other Vedic scriptures making up the religious heritage of Hinduism. Firstly it accredited Krsna as supreme deity, making central the existence and materialization of the Lila or story/pastimes of the cowherd boy Krsna, and shaping a specific practice of religious devotion to the supreme deity. It has been seen thus as novel in equating religious experience in aesthetic terms and formalising sexual and emotional erotic experience as a means of experiencing and reaching the divine.

The core of the teachings of the Bengali movement were based on the legend and interpretations contained in the Bhagavatam, a script whose main purpose was to explain and promote devotion to Krsna. In the tenth canto, it recites the pastimes of Krsna which have become popular legend in India far beyond the Vaisnava tradition. The Bhagavatam, like some parts of the Gita, were revolutionary in context of more traditional Vedic teachings. In orthodox Vedic religion one may attain meditation and communion with God through a diversity of means, and the Vedas are challenged for their ineffectiveness in this fashion. In the Bhagavatam Krsna clearly states that Bhakti is the only form of attaining Godhead. Thus meditation or devotional practice becomes in the Bhagavatam an emotional all encompassing way of life that is a complete surrender of one's self and life to God, and the only way of surrender and spiritual advancement.

It is thus the practice of Bhakti that takes focal point; this fact contributes to another revolutionary idea expressed in the Bhagavatam, and one centralised by the movement of Caitanya, that anyone who practices the correct devotional procedure can achieve liberation from the material world, irrespective of caste (Daner:1976:27-9; Rochford:1985:11) The Gita presents caste as immutable, one cannot leapfrog spiritually from your given position in society. A Sudras/worker is so due to past life indiscretion and cannot attain the spiritual position of a Brahmanas/priest during a lifetime or even many. The Bhagavatam however does not endorse the spiritual supremacy of even Brahmanas on the basis of birth; rather spiritual status is based on qualification, thus creating a window of liberation for any who practice Bhakti in the service of Krsna. Not surprisingly most of the followers of the Bengalise Krsna-Bhakti were from low caste social and economic groups.

Krishna philosophy is generally based on these Bengalise traditions of Krsna-Bhakti as well as the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavatam. As did their predecessors, the movement sees itself as reviving the only true religious tradition of Bhakti, but outside the borders of India, throughout the modern western world. Central to the belief system of ISCON and that of Bhakti, is the Hindu belief in the separation of body and soul, and reincarnation and Karma, which are fused together in an internal logic necessitating the practice of devotional Bhakti. The soul or jiva, is an individual's genuine self and is ceaseless; it is however trapped through material corruption in an evolutionary cycle of rebirth and transmigration of the spirit soul (samsara or reincarnation). To achieve the highest form of spiritual advancement in the human form, which is mukti/release from the cycle of birth and death and a resumption of an eternal life of spiritual knowledge and bliss in service of Krsna, the Supreme God, in a bodiless form, individual souls need to understand their state of maya/illusion of false identification with their temporary bodies and return to the loving service of God. This process is far from easy, particularly in this age of Kali-yuga wherein individuals are especially contaminated with identification with their material bodies and organic senses that foster enjoyment of the material realm. If an individual soul follows this path of illusion of gratifying bodily pleasures and senses, they will be reborn endlessly - until the age where Krsna will appear again to release all souls into bodies that are of lesser animals or of lower castes through the laws of Karma. If however the soul endeavours to attain communion with God, they will be reborn into bodies and families that make the possibilities of spiritual advancement greater. Thus only by denying the body and partaking in devotional practice, can a soul break the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, thus overcoming the laws of Karma and attain self-realisation. Thus the practice of Krishna-consciousness is the practice of Bhakti or loving service to God, and is the only means of achieving salvation into the higher realm. To a devotee who comes to believe in this logic, the purpose of life itself then is to pursue the truth which is Krsna; thus achieving self-realisation and bliss is a realisation of one's true relationship with God. The process has been described

using the terms of the monthly Krishna consciousness magazine started many years ago by Pabhupada, as 'Back to Godhood'.

Crucially, one must not enter on this path for the selfish reason only of liberating yourself, but enter it in the knowledge that it is the process itself that is important, in terms of revitalising appreciation of Krishna in a holistic and universal way. In many ways then the methodology prescribed by the teachings is seen by devotees as the core tenet of religious renewal. This methodology requires a life of simplicity (yet it is not without diversity or complexity), of discipline and abstinence (yet there is an abundance of some 'things') and above all, a life of exponential commitment. There are procedures and behaviour one must follow every day, and taboos one must refrain from. The basic tenets and prescriptions are as follows (as explained to me by devotees I have met, observations made, and from Prabhupada's 'laws' contained in the The Krishna Consciousness Handbook (1970) and other literature such as his translation of the Bhagdava-Gita (1984) and the Science of Self-realisation (1991):

1)Krsna is to be accepted as an individuals only refuge and passage to liberation; Krsna is synonymous with the ultimate God, and is thus 'eternal, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-powerful and all-attractive'. Krsna's preachings are to be found in the oldest known scriptures to mankind, the Vedas, and particularly the Bhagavad Gita, which are the record of God's actual words.

2)All and any action is to be conceived of as a sacrifice to the Supreme Lord, and through this process only, can normal behaviour be seen as devotional. Such practice is a 'bona fide spiritual science that leads to the state of unending blissful consciousness'.

3)In terms of such practice, a devotee must chant sixteen rounds every day of his life; chanting the Mahamantra is the most expedient way of achieving communion with God, and the chanting of the Lords name over and over again enacts his pleasure. The Mahamantra (Hare Krsna Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare) enacts the presence of the Lord even to those not uttering it; hence the prescription to enact Sankitana (dancing and praising the lord on the streets).

4)One must think constantly of the name, form and pastimes of Krishna also, and continually read the Gita and the Bhagatum, as well as receive instructions on the meaning of such. 'Pure' devotees only ever think of these matters and are 'at the Lotus feet of Krsna' twenty-four hours a day.

5)A devotee must constantly prostrate themselves to the images of Krsna; in the presence of the incarnations of Krsna and his consorts, a devotee must see, touch and worship these forms of Krsna. This applies also to a spiritual master who represents Krsna and is a 'pure' devotee

6)A devotee must partake in and perform the spiritual ceremonies prescribed, that honour Krsna. A devotee must also perform the prescribed rites taught by the guru. A male devotee must have his head shaved, except for the Shikha, and

devotees must wear their designated spiritual robes, and decorate their bodies in clay in the signs of Vaisnava.

7) Prasada must only be eaten after offering the food to the deities, and one should drink the water used to wash the deities. A devotee must refrain from sinful food like meat, fish, eggs, onions and garlic. A devotee must never be associated or partake in any activities related to animal slaughter. A devotee must never take in any intoxicants like cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, coffee or tea. A devotee must never gamble, or have illicit sex (intercourse is only for the procreation of Krsna consciousness children between a designated couple).

8) A devotee must exhibit 'saintly' characteristics particularly those associated with being in the process of Bhakti; thus a devotee must be kind, unquarrelsome, studious, peaceful and so forth.

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APPENDIX C.

Life-style of the movement.

The following fieldnote brought home to me that it is, for someone not of the Krishna faith, almost impossible to get a feel for the strangeness of living the life of a devotee without actually being there.

3:30 on a cold morning. I wake to hear my roommate start rising, preparing for the start of what is for devotees, a very long day. Before his eyes open, I imagine he begins automatically to chant quietly, invoking a state of celestial connectiveness. All the devotees do this continually when not engaged in direct conversation. Coupled with this low key dialogue is a continuous tugging at their 'worry beads', a touch type connection to the divine. I surface from sleep to these soft sounds of chanting. Oddly I don't feel at all disorientated, as if I have been here for some time. There is nothing on my mind, I would love to just lie here and listen to him chanting. He sounds so content. Is he thinking anything at all, or is he as peaceful as I feel listening to him? It's always incredibly quiet here, adding to the tone and feeling of a general celestial surrounding. Is this a contributing factor to conversion I wonder, to be able to live in a cut off world that promotes not only a total worldview, but one that is physically isolated and all encompassing world in terms of a variety of ritualistic flavours? That familiar frustration pounds in, why do I always have to start thinking stuff so soon after sleep? I wonder what life would be like if there were not such an overriding impetus to think so much about life in the modern world? Goes with 'being the academic', a *modus operandi*, a critical disposition. Just as academics are a breed in the sense of having boundaries of operation, one of which is to think and be critical so to do religious believers (are they one breed?) have boundaries of operation (or dispositions?) Slowly other sounds filter in. The sounds of devotees rising, chanting, going to shower. All very low key, a mumble. Everything is so quiet here, no noises of the outside world, traffic, the neighbour going to work. Quiet enough even to still my restless mind. My roommate goes through a series of personal prayers and then sets off for a cold shower, nudging me to wake up and asking me to join them all in the temple at 4:15. It is quiet, so very quiet. I must get up, brave that icy shower, and go downstairs for the routine round of prayer and dance. I look forward to it, it doesn't affect me in any way, I'm an outsider looking in. Is that true? I realise that just maybe I'm looking forward to it, to be part of everyone else doing it ... Its a routine, which is nice, uncomplicated, something you just do, like everyone else. And of course, those feelings of liberation through hours of dance, almost an ecstasy. Certainly, its invigorating, and in a world steeped in thinking and pre-meditated action, refreshing in more ways than one. Is this in part how it happens (conversion), the slow erosion of worldly ideas amongst the routines of religious and communal life? The slow release of previously dominant ideas in

the face of a more immediate sensation - part of the whole?. It dawns on me, I've only been here a few days and I'm already suspending that sacred cloth of academia: rationality, objectivity; or maybe I'm getting simply closer to the truth of the matter (more objective?) re those who espouse religious beliefs, from their point of view at any rate.

An average day in the movement is taken up fully with communal activities all designed to purify yourself and increase your Krishna consciousness. The daily programme for average single men and women (Brahmacaries and Brahmacarinis) in the temples I visited goes something like this (I always lived with the men so my observations are more coloured with their experiences): Three o'clock in the morning to three-thirty, devotees get up and take a shower (often, like in Muldersdrift, only cold water, which certainly wakes one up and generally evokes a strong sense of austerity) and generally spend time performing private deity worship, chanting the mantra or japa with your prayer beads, and preparing for the day depending on your position. The deity caretaker for instance, (the pujari), who has to dress, feed and clothe the deity idols has to generally get up earlier to perform their duties. In these early hours of the morning the temple is resonating with the sounds of devotees chanting. Generally one is not supposed to speak very much to others during this time, but obviously friends engage in chit chat while chanting as well. It is hard to convey a sense of the business of it all, a weird combination of carefree happiness and 'celestial' serious contemplation. By around four fifteen to four thirty, all the devotees (including married couples) arrive together to perform the first of a number of aratrika ceremonies. This first ceremony, the Mangala arati, is all about worshipping the incarnations (many would call these idols, yet it is important to understand that in the minds of the devotees, these inanimate objects are imbued with the living essence of the deities and are dressed, clothed and fed, and worshipped as the real thing; the word idol does not convey the real sense of living texture that these idol imbue to the worshippers) of the deities. The deities have already prior to the ceremony been 'fed' by the pujari who, after taking the deities out of 'bed' and clothing them, places trays of prasada (holy food) at the different alters and leaves them there for fifteen minutes so the deities can eat to their satisfaction. After this the ceremony begins.

The deities are dressed in their traditional attire and covered with flowers which women devotees prepare freshly every day. The whole ceremony is imbued with ritualistic activities and offerings. The pujaris offer various articles like incense, lamps and shells to the deities during the ceremony. These offerings are ritualistically and precisely enacted; the pujari stands before the deities and offers the object with a raised arm in a circular motion. The objects are then offered in turn to all the devotees and to anyone else present; I remember being quite bewildered when offered various objects and having no idea how to respond. The ceremony is also full of energetic displays of faith. It begins with all

the devotees chanting the mantra over and over again, swaying slowly. Then, led, usually by a male devotee of senior prestige, the devotees begin singing rounds of sanskrit verse, and inbetween, more of the mantra, to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. It is all very rhythmic and infectious, and starts slowly but builds gradually into an ecstatic display of dance and singing. By the end of the ceremony the devotees are practically running from one side of the small temple to the other. Generally the women devotees stand at the back of the temple and the men at the front, but by the end it becomes at times rather intermingled (although I noticed that generally the men seem to be more boisterous and active). It is hard to convey the sense of joy and simple fun the devotees seem to get out of this, but after witnessing (and often being drawn into singing and dancing by the infectiousness of the whole process) many of these ceremonies, it was hard to not conclude that the ritualistic aspect of this life-style was central to making an abstract set of teachings into a 'living experience'. After about an half hour the ceremony winds down, the devotees all kneel in their own time on the floor with their heads down and make a prayer to Krishna.

It is important to recognise the spirit of ritual and myth that come out of such ceremonies, and the way these emotionalise and make real the proceedings for the devotees. Important here is the presence of the incarnations in the ceremony. Everything is directed towards them, and the way the ritualistic detail is enacted out, and the mythical religious traditions that are brought to life with the Sanskrit verses, as well as the powerful and varied colours imbued on the deities, makes for a situation that seems seeped in exotic realism, emotionalising in a communal togetherness of worship, intellectual mythical beliefs.

Adding to these 'feelings' is the continual hum of chanting that resonates around the room. Devotees believe that the Mahamantra is crucial to the essence of all other Bhakti practises. It is the suggested way of evoking the presence of Krishna in the age of Kalil, and devotees do sixteen rounds of their one hundred and eight beads every day in terms of cleansing themselves and creating the necessary preconditions for celestial connectiveness. The chanting of mantras is seen to have a physical power as well; many devotees have explained to me how powerful Brahmans can start ceremonial fires or invoke the actual physical presence of deities with mantra chanting. The sound energy generated from chanting is thus seen as intensely celestial, and the effect on individuals of communal chanting over for a sustained period is not surprisingly felt intensely in terms the whole ritualistic generation of religious reality. Notwithstanding a 'scientific' point of view that would likely dismiss the reality of the physical claims of chanting, there is no doubt as to its psychological affects. As an outsider sceptical of these sorts of things, I found myself almost intoxicated by these continual rhythmic sounds of chanting.

Then the devotees partake in the Tulasi ceremony wherein the Tulasi plant, said to contain the spirit of all pure devotees of Krishna is worshipped in order to enact a control of any sinful thoughts; men and women dance and chant separately on either side of the plant and each stop at one point to water the plant. After this ceremony the devotees continue to chant or do their duties. They return to the temple to greet the deities and perform prayers, after which they perform a ceremony called Guru Puja in which devotees pay respect to their personal spiritual masters by offering prayers and flowers to an edifice or picture of their master. Following this devotees have the Nectar of Devotion and the Sri-mad Bhgavatam scripture classes wherein verses are recited and lectures given by senior devotees. After this heavy schedule the devotees take morning prasad and then commence their diverse daily activities and duties which include book and magazine distribution/fund raising, collecting supplies, cooking, sewing, cleaning up and maintaining the temple, going out to administer the food for life programme or the University programme, preparing for festivals and visits from revered devotees and spiritual masters, and so forth. The duties depend very much on your position and status (including gender) in Krishna, and what is needed to be done in terms of human resources. Generally newer devotees have more classes during the day, and are also obliged to go out and chant in public as a group in the afternoons. In my experience, it is generally the more senior devotees who do the tasks general organisational necessities of the daily life at the temple. In the evenings devotees attend more classes and take prasad (time depends on whether its a guest evening or not), but hours in the evening are generally less regimented, and devotees are allowed some time to 'socialise' between themselves. Many though, particularly newer devotees, are dead tired and retire as soon as they can.

Besides these daily procedures of devotional practice there are various days and events that have special significance. There are two ekadasi days monthly which are set aside for the total reverence and remembrance of Krsna; devotees obey a partial fast and chant and sing for twenty four hours, suspending other duties, and generally the temple bursting with sounds and laughter. The most important festival day, observed by all temples, is Janmastami, which is the official appearance day of Krsna. Devotees observe a total fast on this day. There are many other festivals that are designed to include the wider public and further the calling of Krsna (as well as being to raise funds of course), and are at the discretion of the temple president; the devotees get extremely excited about festivals and take days preparing. There is a special feel at the festivals for the devotees, and they tend to fairly exuberant in their dancing and singing.

There are a number of other public venues where the devotees generate funds by selling food and receiving donations for literature. They have been active at university campuses in most cities for many years, and fairly recently have begun to sell food at festivals such as Grahamstown and Rustlers valley, as well as various 'raves' and craft markets. These public ventures have obviously the

three tier purpose of spreading the word of Krsna, generating funds, and recruiting new members.

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