

# Emerging Social Change in India through Sanskritization at Iskcon

(With Special Reference to the Iskcon Vrindavan (U.P.),  
Jaipur (Raj.), Mayapur (W.B.), Ujjain (M.P.) & Delhi)

S. S. Charan<sup>1</sup> & Dr. Rajesh Kumar Sharma<sup>2</sup> & Rajni<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Deptt. of Economics, Govt. P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)

<sup>2</sup>Head- Deptt. of Sociology, Govt. P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)

<sup>3</sup>Research Scholar

## I. INTRODUCTION

Society, religion and sanskritization are complementary to and are internally linked with one another. A society successfully and ethically exists only when religion governs it, and religion often leads to sanskritization. Religion ideally serves several functions. It gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforces social unity and stability, serves as an agent of social control, promotes psychological and physical well-being, motivates people to work for positive social change through sanskritization, promotes traditional views about gender roles, and engender intolerance towards people whose religious faith differs from one's own.

The relationship between religion and social change is not fixed or cast in stone. It can vary depending on the nature of particular religions, the culture in which they are located, and the type of social structures at any particular time and place. Giddens's idea of reflexivity can be instructive. It suggests that while religion is a social construct, it also becomes a structure and influences society in many, often unanticipated ways. Religion essentially brings about social change in society and it provides the people of different sections of the society a platform to imbibe what sacred is and to give up

1. Deptt. of Economics, Govt. P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)
2. Head- Deptt. of Sociology, Govt. P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)
3. Research Scholar

what profane is. Sanskritization is a particular form of social change found in [India](#). It denotes the process by which [castes](#) placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the [rituals](#) and practices of the upper or dominant castes. According to M.N. Srinivas, Sanskritization is not just the adoption of new customs and habits, but also includes exposure to new ideas and values appearing in Sanskrit literature. He says that the words [karma](#), [dharma](#), [paap](#), [maya](#), [samsara](#) and [moksha](#) etc. are the most common Sanskritic theological ideas which become common in the talk of people who are sanskritized. Sanskritization is a process by which lower castes seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of upper or dominant castes. Srinivas defined it as a process by which "a low

or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), known colloquially as the Hare Krishna movement or Hare Krishnas, is a [Gaudiya Vaishnava](#) religious organisation. ISKCON was founded in 1966 in New York City by [A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada](#) who is worshipped by followers. Its core beliefs are based on select traditional [Hindu scriptures](#), particularly the Bhagwad gita and the Srimad Bhagwatam. ISKCON says it is a direct descendant of Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya Vaishnava Sampradaya. The appearance of the movement and its culture come from the [Gaudiya Vaishnava](#) tradition, which has had adherents in India since the late 15th century and Western [converts](#) since the early 1900s in America, and in England in the 1930s.

ISKCON was formed to spread the practice of [bhakti yoga](#), in which those involved (bhaktas) dedicate their thoughts and actions towards pleasing the [Supreme Lord, Krishna](#). ISKCON today is a worldwide confederation of more than 700 centres, including 80 farm communities, some aiming for self-sufficiency, 70 [schools](#) and 100 restaurants. In recent decades the most rapid expansions in membership have been within [Eastern Europe](#) and [India](#).

Change is inevitable. The present century is particularly notable for the social change in the marginalized through sanskritization. There are several ways that witness it, but the ISKCON temples all over India where everyday and especially on Sundays there can be seen a large gathering of people performing various rituals together in a mood of perfect collective consciousness is so noticeable. Indeed, in India the ongoing process of Sanskritization is quite successful as the members of the so-called lower castes are making attempts to change their destiny through the various centres of religion, and particularly through ISKCON.

## II. AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study and be familiar with the implications of the major religions in India and world at large and to interpret them in the context of social change in India
2. To concentrate on the element of secularism in religion and to interpret it in the present scenario at ISKCON
3. To visit, observe, study and be familiar with the history of ISKCON and its implications
4. To be familiar with the teachings of Prabhupada and to explore in them the seeds of social change and sanskritization
5. To explore the influence of Prabhupada on the people of the various religions, castes and creeds all over the world, and particularly in USA
6. To interpret religion as a powerful means of social change
7. To study M.N. Srinivas's concept of Sanskritization and apply it to the scenario of social change in India through ISKCON
8. To observe and interpret ISKCON all over India as great and effective platform of Sanskritization
9. To be familiar with the people's unshakable faith in the powers of Lord Krishna and ISKCON
10. To study and interpret the cause and effect relationship of the popularity of ISKCON all over India as centres of spiritual peace
11. To observe the scenario of Sanskritization at ISKCON at the specified above mentioned five study areas.

## III. OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live. Since religion is such an important part of societies around the world, sociologists are very interested in studying it. [Sociologists study](#) religion as both a belief system and a social institution. As a belief system, religion shapes what people think and how they see the world. As a [social institution](#), religion is a pattern of social action organized around the beliefs and practices that people develop to answer questions about the meaning of existence. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized. Classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century such as Durkheim, Weber, and Marx were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. Like those of [Plato](#) and [Aristotle](#) from ancient Greece, and Enlightenment philosophers from the 17th through 19th centuries, the ideas posited by these sociologists continue to be examined today. More recent prominent sociologists of religion include [Peter L. Berger](#), [Robert N. Bellah](#), [Thomas Luckmann](#), [Rodney Stark](#), [William Sims Bainbridge](#), [Robert Wuthnow](#), [Christian Smith](#), and [Bryan R. Wilson](#).

## IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Each [major sociological framework](#) has its perspective on religion. For instance, from the [functionalist perspective of sociological theory](#), religion is an integrative force in society

because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in the social order by promoting a sense of belonging and [collective consciousness](#). This view was supported by [Emile Durkheim](#). A second point of view, supported by [Max Weber](#), views religion in terms of how it supports other social institutions. Weber thought that the religious belief systems provided a cultural framework that supported the development of other social institutions, such as the economy. While Durkheim and Weber concentrated on how religion contributes to the cohesion of society, [Karl Marx](#) focused on the conflict and oppression that religion provided to societies. Marx saw religion as a tool for class oppression in which it promotes stratification because it supports a hierarchy of people on Earth and the subordination of humankind to divine authority. Lastly, symbolic interaction theory focuses on the process by which people become religious. In fact, Sociology of religion provides an extensive significance of religion and it brings into the notice that religion in all the centuries has played a dominant role in bringing about a positive social change in society.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR HYPOTHESIS

- Religion is a great power and has a vital force to lead the people in a community towards the sacred modes of living.
- Religion, society and sanskritization are complementary to and internally linked with one another.
- The marginalized in India are joining the process of sanskritization for the sake of a respectable social and cultural status,
- Sanskritization is a process which allows the marginalized to raise their social and cultural status by imbibing the cultural modes of the members of the upper Hindu castes and by practicing their modes of worship and rituals.
- All the religious institutions in India witness a scenario of sanskritization.
- The marginalized take sanskritization as a panacea to all their problems that prevent them from joining the main stream of the nation.
- ISKCON temples all over the world and particularly all over India allow the people from the different castes, creeds and religions to worship and perform rituals there in perfect harmony with one another.
- Sanskritization essentially is bringing about a positive social change and the rays of hope to the marginalized in India.
- The ISKCON temples all over India directly or indirectly teach the people a lesson of secularism, and lead the people to spiritual peace.
- ISKCON is bringing about a tremendous socio-cultural and religious change in India.
- The success of the process of sanskritization in India is apparent at the ISKCON temples in particular.

## VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is an empirical one based on the observation method and in accordance with all the steps of scientific method suggested by the eminent social scientists for the researchers. It was conducted on 300 units of information (60 from each of the specified study areas) selected randomly which includes the pilgrims, localites, concerned authorities etc. In order to visualize the emerging trends of social change through ISKCON temples in India the research scholar made a participant observation. For the purpose of the study both the primary data collected through the schedule technique and interviews and the secondary data collected from the secondary sources were used. All through it, the hypotheses was tested. The cause and effect relationship was studied minutely and thus, finally, a generalization was made. All through the work the objectivity was strictly observed by the scholar, and the central focus was made on all those things relating to ISKCON that are bringing and are likely to bring about a tremendous social change, and that are allowing the marginalized an effective platform for their social upliftment.

## VII. KEY FINDINGS

- The entire Indian society reflects a positive social change these days, a change that has opened new vistas of education, modernity and progress to all.
- Sanskritization is a popular ongoing social process which is tremendously drawing the people from the lower sections towards it.
- Almost each of the members of the marginalized sections is eager to join it for the sake of social upliftment and social change.
- ISKCON is making a tremendous contribution to the success of the process of sanskritization.
- ISKCON hails everyone whosoever visits it as a member or as a visitor.
- ISKCON does not observe the casteism or regionalism, and allows everyone to mix up with others for the sake of chanting and for the performance of the rituals.
- ISKCON is a perfect platform which reflects a live scenario of social change and sanskritization.
- The Indian marginalized in particular joins ISKCON for the sake of their upliftment and raised status.

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#### AUTHORS

**First Author** – S. S. Charan, Deptt. of Economics, Govt. P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)

**Second Author** – Dr. Rajesh Kumar Sharma, Head- Deptt. of Sociology, Govt. P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)

**Third Author** – Rajni, Research Scholar