

# Sharp Rise in Flow of Arms Into Mexico Noted by U.S.

By PATRICK McDONNELL, Times Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO—U.S. officials report an alarming increase in the flow of arms across the porous 1,900-mile border into Mexico.

Most of the arms are believed to be destined for participants in Mexico's lucrative—and often violent—drug trade, although authorities say Mexico has also been used as a conduit for arms destined for other Latin American nations.

The gun smuggling, which has always been a problem, has escalated and become more lucrative in recent years as Mexico's drug business has boomed and its participants have found a need for additional firepower, according to law enforcement officers.

Authorities point to various numbers to back their concern. In fiscal 1984, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms' Houston office, which covers more than 1,000 miles of border in Texas and New Mexico, documented 1,480 U.S.-purchased guns that ended up in Mexico; since this fiscal year started Oct. 1, the number is approaching 10,000.

### 'Mom-and-Pop Operation'

"I don't want to say that things are getting out of hand," said Phillip Chojnacki, special agent in charge of the Houston office, "but we're fairly confident from the cases we've made . . . that it's reaching major proportions. . . . It's gone from a mom-and-pop operation, where relatives would buy a couple of guns so cousin Joe could protect his farm down in the interior, to a real commodity that drug traffickers are looking for."

Officials say the flow of guns is part of a two-way traffic of contraband between the two nations: Drugs come north and guns go south. In some cases, authorities say, the same smugglers who have brought narcotics into the United States return with arms. One agent compared the technique to that

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—Phillip Chojnacki, Special ATF agent in charge of the Houston office

employed by cross-country truckers who are hesitant to return home without a load of goods.

"Where you find narcotics trafficking, you find firearms," said David Troy, assistant special agent in charge of the ATF office in Los Angeles, whose territory covers the border areas of California and Arizona. "The narcotics industry today cannot operate without some kind of weaponry attached to [it], both because of the threat of rip-off by their own kind and the threat of enforcement operations."

Another agent noted that weapons sometimes serve as an extremely stable form of currency. "Whereas pesos and dollars may fluctuate, these guns maintain their value," he said.

South of the border, the arms traffic has raised considerable concern among Mexican officials, who are often out-gunned by trafficking rings equipped like sophisticated militias with guns brought in from the United States.

Of particular concern, authorities say, are semiautomatic, military-type weapons such as the AKS, Uzi, AR-15 and MAC-10, which can readily be converted into fully automatic, machine gun-style arms capable of firing hundreds of rounds a minute with a single pull of the trigger. Ammunition, silencers and other accessories are also part of the illicit cross-border trade, they say.

### Gun-Running Cases Emphasized

"Both nations must work within their national boundaries to stop problems such as this smuggling of contraband arms across the border," said Francisco Fonseca,



Steve Bryant, slain Hare Krishna devotee, shown in L.A. temple in 1976.

The recent slaying of a disenchanted Hare Krishna devotee who persistently alleged wrongdoing and deceit in the movement has sent new ripples through the divided Krishna community.

Since the fatal shooting May 22 in Los Angeles of Steve Bryant, 33, and the arrest of a Krishna follower in the murder, plans for a broad investigation by a federal grand jury have been announced. Even the sect itself has decided to conduct an internal probe of possible wrongdoing by Krishna members.

Both Bryant's death, and his allegations of wrongdoing by Krishna leaders will be examined by a federal grand jury in Moundsville, W. Va. That is the city nearest the 600-member commune and Indian-style palace that is a showcase settlement for the 21-year-old International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

The Hindu sect, which drew on young Americans' fascination for Eastern meditation and chanting in the late 1960s, attracted between 5,000 and 10,000 followers in its first dozen years. But the movement also has been embroiled in legal battles over airport soliciting and parental charges of kidnaping vulnerable youth into the order.

### Authority Questioned

Internal conflict surfaced after the 1977 death of the sect's 82-year-old founder from India, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, when 11 gurus carved out areas of dominance.

Since then, members of a growing, internal reform movement—estimated to number about 300 Krishna believers—have questioned the authority of the leadership and accused some leaders of condoning or participating in immoral practices and physical intimidation of followers. Most of the self-styled reformers—which included Bryant—are initiates from the days of Prabhupada; Bryant was easily the most vocal among them.

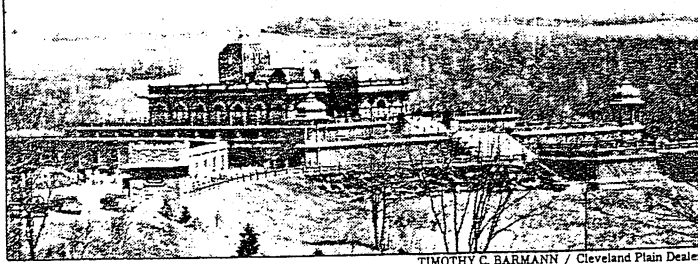
Bryant himself was no saint: By last winter he was carrying a gun and advocating violence against offending gurus as a last-resort solution.

He had joined the street-chanting, saffron-robed sect in Detroit when he was 21. As his disenchantment with the movement grew after Prabhupada's death, he began writing a book he called "The Guru Business," and he hoped to expose alleged wrongdoings by leaving hefty packets of photocopied "evidence" with law enforcement officials and newspapers across the country.

### Family Breakup

Bryant's crusade initially stemmed, by his own account, from the breakup of his family at the Krishna's 4,000-acre New Vrindaban settlement—largest in the Krishna movement—which lies perched in the hills of West Virginia about 70 miles south of Pittsburgh, Pa. He attempted to prove that the guru-founder of New Vrindaban, Kirtananda Swami Bhaktipada (formerly Keith Ham), lured Bryant's wife into becoming a devotee several years ago, then helped her get a divorce and prevented Bryant's access to his two sons. Spokesmen for the community countered that Mrs. Bryant left her husband because she wanted to.

Bryant progressively broadened his attack by collecting interviews from others who charged that some among the movement's almost three-dozen gurus manipulated devotees, broke up marriages and allowed child abuse and drug trafficking—claims the dissidents said went unacknowledged or were denied by the

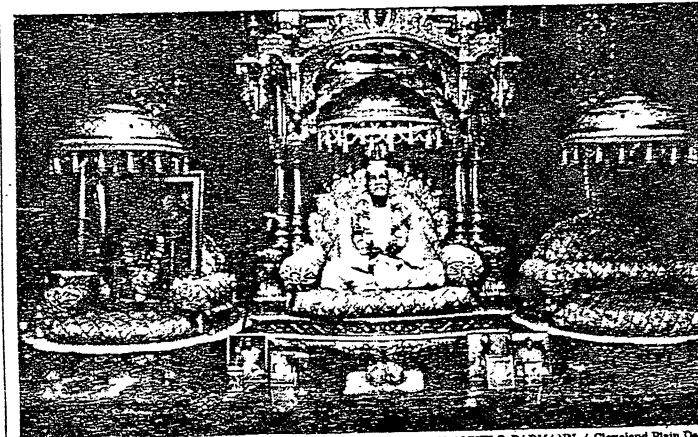


Indian-style palace of the Hare Krishna movement in Moundsville, W. Va.

# Killing Sparks Federal Probe of Krishna Sect

## Group Members Cite Internal Conflicts, Allege Threats After Disenchanted Devotee's Murder

By JOHN DART, Times Religion Writer



Above, a statue of sect's founder and, below, the guru-founder of New Vrindaban, Kirtananda Swami Bhaktipada, surrounded by children.



movement's various leaders. Bryant also challenged the legitimacy of the 11 gurus who immediately succeeded the founder.

In the year before his death, Bryant tried to drum up support for his claims by traveling between West Virginia and California. Convinced that he was a marked man, he was constantly on the move, living out of his van and disguising his appearance.

Krishna spokesmen have vigorously denied Bryant's accusations. An internal review by a special society committee last year concluded that his claims of wrongdoing were largely unfounded. And a New Vrindaban spokesman this month claimed that Bryant and like-minded supporters were not true devotees, that in fact Bryant "had not followed our religious practices for at least the last seven years."

But Bryant's fellow dissidents continue to maintain that critics of the sect are in danger. Several followers said in interviews that they have been threatened themselves or have heard certain sect

leaders casually mention violence as a way to deal with internal critics.

According to a California member who insisted on anonymity, when Bryant's name came up during a gathering of Krishna leaders in September at New Vrindaban, he heard a ranking commune member allegedly say: "That guy should be afraid. There are 250 residents here looking to blow his head off."

And officials of the reform-oriented Berkeley temple announced early this month that they had received anonymous threats warning them to drop their attempt through federal court to gain control of the temple's assets.

For the most part, dissidents interviewed gave information only on the condition that they not be identified by name, profession or city of residence for fear of reprisals, they said, to themselves or their families.

Spokesmen in the West Virginia Krishna community and a Los Angeles-based guru all denied knowing of any threats to



Thomas A. Drescher, one-time-follower now held in West Virginia.

followers or non-members and, by contrast, insisted that nonviolence—even to the point of not killing animals or harming insects—is an inviolable tenet of their faith.

Nevertheless, Marshall County Assessor Alfred (Pinky) Clark, who is attempting to levy heavier taxes on the commercial aspects of New Vrindaban, said he obtained a gun permit and a revolver after hearing of Bryant's slaying. Clark, who lives within three miles of the commune, said he had received threats in the months before Bryant's death, and that a day laborer at the commune's farm told him after Bryant's death that "the talk was going around to 'get Clark.'"

"We're being very watchful and cautious, although things have quieted down since the announcement of a federal grand jury investigation," Clark said.

### Problem of Violence

Over the years, guns and violence have presented a problem for some Krishna communities, although possession of the weapons has been defended by some Krishna leaders as a defensive need.

Law enforcement authorities in 1980 found a variety of weapons at the Krishna farm of Berkeley guru Hansadutta (Hans Kary), and later confiscated an illegal submachine gun found in the trunk of a car used by the guru. Kary lost his position in 1984 after a conviction on gunfire and felony vandalism charges for shooting up a storefront and car dealership. He has been living at New Vrindaban since then.

Bhaktipada, when told by a Times reporter in 1981 that one of his New Vrindaban devotees had recently bought a large number of weapons at local shops, said: "I have no objection to a certain number of persons in the community having weapons for self-protection. But they should be in the hands of cool, level-headed Krishna-conscious persons. . . . If there is a need for violence, we can become violent." Several weeks later, Bhaktipada said the young man agreed to sell the guns "at my suggestion."

Last October, the West Virginia guru was bludgeoned into a coma and hospitalized for 26 days by a former devotee, Michael C. Shockman, who is serving a 15-month prison term after pleading guilty to malicious wounding charges.

### Statements to Reporters

Only two months later, Bryant himself sent to reporters statements saying that death was scripturally justified for gurus guilty of the crimes he had been alleging. However, he disavowed any personal intent to carry out that threat or to conspire to kill anyone himself.

Bryant's own vocal belligerency and illegal possession of a gun landed him in the Moundsville jail in February. He staged a three-week hunger strike, writing to a Times reporter from jail on Feb. 15: "I've pretty much reached my rope's end in combating this demonic cult on my own and so I've decided to fast to death if I don't get some Govt. help."

Bryant's lawyer in Moundsville, David R. Gold, later said, "I thought he was unrealistically hopeful that he would single handedly be able to mobilize public opinion against the [New Vrindaban] community." Bryant was convicted for carrying an unregistered gun, which Gold said Bryant got for defensive purposes, then was released pending an appeal and returned to California.

In the early morning hours of May 22, Please see KRISHNA, Page 32

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