

[Hindu Protest Forces Sony to Remake CD](#)

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SACRILEGE

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New anti-Hindu defamation coalition gets results

Aerosmith's latest cd, "Nine lives" went straight to the top of the pop charts when it was released March 18th. It also went straight to number one on the hit-list of the American Hindu Anti-Defamation Coalition (AHADC) recently convened by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. The reason? The CD's sacrilegious cover. What at first glance looks like the classic image of Lord Krishna dancing upon and subduing the multi-headed serpent Kaliya has been digitally transformed into a creature with a cat's head and a women's torso. According to Luke Burland, spokesperson for Aerosmith, the band was unaware of the image's source or significance.

But not for long. The AHADC launched an all-out offensive against the CD, mostly through a World Wide Web site (hindunet.org/anti_defamation/sony/). Within weeks it was visited by 10,000 people, 1,400 of whom signed on-line protests to Sony and its subsidiary Columbia (producer and distributor of the album), Aerosmith and several major chain stores. These companies were bombarded with e-mail, faxes and phone calls, conveying everything from righteous indignation and threats of boycotts to promises to interfere with Sony's large India business and even violent retaliation.

Sony and Aerosmith got the message. In an April 16 call, Joseph Salvo, senior lawyer for Sony, told Chetan P. Tanna, attorney for AHADC, that an apology would be issued and the offensive cover withdrawn. On April 18, Aerosmith, through their New York public relations firm, Kathryn Schenker Associates, issued an apology and stated their "deep concern and dismay at the notion of having offended any religious group. At no point did the band intend to harm or show disrespect to the Hindu community, nor did they intend to denigrate any religious image. The image will be replaced in all future runs with a completely different image."

And so it might have ended, except the issue had nines live, too. First, contrary to Sony's lawyer's first representation (that they will attempt to recall CDs on the market already), Aerosmith was only promising to remake the cover for any new ones. And with four million already produced, that could amount to none, pointed out AHADC attorney Tanna. In the first week, the CD sold 140,000 copies. At that rate, it would take more than 30 weeks to sell out. This is not acceptable, Tanna said. "Why should we have to continue to walk into Tower Records and see a two by three foot display of this cover?" The AHADC considers the matter far from settled, and intends to pursue the recall of the already-issued CDs and will continue to protest to Sony, Columbia and individual stores. Hinduism Today has added its complaints about the obscene depiction of Lord Ganesha which appears on the CD itself, and the denigrating lyrics of one song which say, "I wanna be a Hare Krishna, I'm gonna tattoo a dot on my forehead, ha ha ha ha ha."--both unnoticed by the AHADC.

Then there is Aerosmith's unexpected explanation about the

image's source. The original picture was taken without permission from a book by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON, and published by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International (BBTI). According to Aerosmith, "Upon being informed of the origin of this image, the band went through all of the proper channels to obtain licensing approvals for its use from this Trust. Having obtained this permission, Aerosmith believed that no further issues existed."

The BBTI is the official repository and copyright holder of all Srila Prabhupada's writings, as well as paintings done by many ISKCON artists. According to their statement of April 28 to Hinduism Today, they did not learn of the use of the image until "after the cover was produced" (but before it went on sale). Determining that they could not risk losing a copyright infringement lawsuit against giant Sony (wherein the loser might have to pay all the winner's legal fees--perhaps more than a million dollars), they opted for a financial settlement. "Our rationale was: If we couldn't stop them, at least we should make it hurt," said BBTI president Madhava Puri das. Terms of the settlement are a secret, but Tanna was informed it was "well in excess of a hundred thousand dollars." The BBTI says the money will go toward "the building of the new temple and city project in Mayapur, India, and to fight future infringements." But Tanna queries, "'Do we really want to use this tainted money to build a temple?' is the question Hindus really want to ask."

On April 26, in response to Hinduism Today's request for a statement, Annuttama Dasa, Director of Communications of ISKCON of North America, issued a rare rebuke to their

affiliated organization. "The BBTI made a big mistake to not just fight this all the way. Frankly, no one in ISKCON was consulted about the decision to negotiate with Sony. Many members are extremely angry about the album and incensed to know the BBTI decided not to fight. Sadly, the BBTI did not consult Srila Prabhupada's followers and thus failed to uphold that heritage."

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