

# The Rajneesh sannyasin community in Fremantle

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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## ABSTRACT

In the early eighties, the world media depicted the emergence of a spiritual movement popularly known as the Orange People, or Rajneeshees. Dedicated to an Indian *guru*, named Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, they dressed in orange-coloured clothes, wore a wooden beaded-necklace with a photo of the Bhagwan on it and called themselves *sannyasins*, a term traditionally related to Indian religious discipleship. The spectacular nature of this movement invited the attention of the media and indeed, generated much interest, particularly in their sexual practices. As with other media inspired fashions, the movement appeared quickly and seemingly disappeared as quickly. Rajneesh was extirpated as a unique person in much the same way that superstars pass in and out of the world. Most scholarly work on the subject considers Rajneesh and the Orange People to be a product of their time, the media effectuating the primary evolution of the group.

During this time, Fremantle in Western Australia became a major centre for the movement. Using interviews with 21 *sannyasins* still living in Fremantle, this study documents the rise, expression and demise of the *sannyasin* community in Fremantle. The interviews illuminate the development of the movement from its earliest days in India to its high point in Oregon, as being in everyway consistent with a normal corporate growth facilitated by its presence in media. While the media's interest has declined, the movement itself has not gone away. *Sannyasins* now are not doing anything radically different from what they used to do. Their social and professional relationships appear to have remained largely the same throughout all the publicity highs and lows and the rise and the fall of the movement. The informants as a group offer a perspective that seems to reflect the wider society and the broad de-centring

processes associated with the development of post WWII globalisation.

The thesis concludes that it may be more useful to consider the movement as being a symptom of globalisation with characteristics that can be found throughout all developed countries. Only the Orange People's 15 minutes of fame has come and gone and it continues to have a presence, even in its invisibility.

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## Introduction

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In April 1985, a local West Australian television station aired a report on their current affairs program, *60 Minutes*, featuring Sheela Silverman. Sheela, as she was popularly known, was visiting Australia as spokesperson for the Orange People; so called by the media because of the distinctive orange and red coloured clothes they wore.

The Orange People, also often called Rajneeshees, the Rajneesh movement or simply *sannyasins*, were a spiritual/religious group that formed in the early sixties around the Indian mystic, Rohan Chandra Rajneesh, who claims to have become enlightened in 1953, aged twenty-one.<sup>1</sup> Although he developed a large following of Indians in the early years of the movement, in the early seventies, what started out as a trickle of interested Westerners who had come across him while travelling in India, soon became a flood as news of the movement spread by word of mouth and through the publication in English of several of his lectures.

When they first started, little was actually known about who the Orange People were, what they did or what they believed in. With the increasing number of Westerners joining the movement and subsequently returning to their home countries to set up Rajneesh centres, however, given the nature of their appearance, their presence was noticed and they incited curiosity. Stories emerged in the mass media that were initially ambivalent. As images from their spiritual headquarters in Pune, India, however, began to circulate in the press, what gained the most currency were rumours about strange sexual behaviour, incidents of violence and enormous wealth.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “mystic” here should be understood in its Indian context as someone who has achieved a high level of spiritual awareness, or “enlightenment”.

The German press, in particular, painted for the most part, an adverse, yet arguably seductive, picture of the movement in its early days. Enhanced by photographs of naked bodies appearing to be wildly acting out their innate animality, these stories and images found their way to all corners of the globe. Then in 1981, a German film company produced a documentary on the Pune ashram, *The Ashram*, showing an encounter group session, purportedly the most confrontational of the psychotherapeutic groups that were a part of *sannyasin* life, particularly from the mid seventies to the early eighties. Close to pornographic representation, this film, along with the other media images emerging, functioned to create increasing global interest in, not to mention moral outrage at, what was happening in Pune.<sup>2</sup>

One only has to watch television for a few days to see that these three key ingredients – sex, violence and money – continue to popularly inform the basis of what is regarded as “newsworthy” events. It is what creates and keeps an audience. The Rajneeshees seemed to be doing things differently; better for some, worse for others. You could say that there is always the sense that there is “something else”, and if only we knew or could understand it life would make more sense. On the other hand, knowing how others push the limits, so to speak, can function as a means of defining oneself, of reinforcing one’s belief in ourselves as meaningful human beings – essentially one’s values, morals and ethics – especially if the way these are portrayed is as a form of “deviance”.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, W. Adrian van Leen (ed), *O is for Orange...: An examination of the Rajneesh Religion, Also Known as the Orange People* (North Perth: Concerned Christians Growth Ministries Inc., 1983), 182-184. Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), 239 claims that the session was “staged”. See also, Lewis F Carter, *Charisma and Control in Rajneeshpuram* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 63, and James S Gordon, *The Golden Guru: The Strange Journey of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Stephen Greene Press, 1987), 68 and 83-86.



In hindsight, we can articulate what is now a popular version of what the public knew of the Orange People, which came from such mass media reports. In short, they were represented as being a group of hedonistic baby boomers who, riding on the storm of the anti-establishmentarianism endemic of the sixties and continuing into the seventies, followed the “Hippy Trail” to India. In their search of an alternative life-style that would allow them the freedom and happiness being denied them in the Western world of consumer capitalism, oppressive social and political structures and repressive sexual norms, they found Rajneesh and his Ashram in Pune. There they could indulge in all kinds of immoral behaviour, the most well known of which were a patent disregard for sexual taboos and yielding to violent impulses. They were brainwashed and manipulated by Rajneesh so that he, in turn could indulge in costly fetishes, such as Rolls Royces and fancy jewellery, and the desire for power. They relinquished their families, careers, money, possessions and minds for experiences of “bliss” that Rajneesh orchestrated. They were blatantly disrespectful of all religions, politics and any other social institution and were rambunctious and confrontational when they did not get what they wanted. Under the guise of spiritualism, they were the antithesis of asceticism, irreverent to all that was valued and legitimated in religion in both the East and the West, profane rather than sacred.

The most any of us who have never been involved with the Rajneesh movement can say about it then is based on mass media reports. In effect it was a “media culture”, in so far as it has no other reality or actuality other than what has been constructed by the media. This is not to say that some universal reality exists, since the telling of any event is always from a particular perspective. Rather, it simply reinforces the

function of the mass media to create a “reality” that is distinct from any individual reality. Is there a reason then for the media to function in this way?

By the eighties most *sannyasins*, as followers mostly called themselves, were from the West. The movement was well established financially and a highly organised spiritual centre had been set up in Pune, India. It had become a worldwide phenomenon with reportedly around 250,000 members and 575 centres in 32 countries.<sup>3</sup> In Australia, the movement was well established with well over a thousand *sannyasins*, concentrated mainly in Sydney and Perth.<sup>4</sup>

Then in 1981, Rajneesh suddenly left India and moved to the United States. The group bought a large tract of ecologically devastated land in the state of Oregon and set up a new spiritual centre the size of a small city. Considered an experimental commune, Rajneeshpuram, as it was called, was developed at an extraordinary rate and thousands of *sannyasins* lived there or visited, many intending to make it their home.

Since its arrival, however, the commune experienced conflict with the local Oregonian community. Although this was also reported ambivalently in the local press initially, as events unfolded reports spread nationally and internationally and negativity increased. At the same time, the Rajneesh community, which published its own newspaper, *The Rajneesh Times*, dismissed the growing negative opinion in

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Wright, *Oranges and Lemmings: The Story behind Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (Richmond: Greenhouse Publications, 1985), 4. Wright claims, however, that the real figure was probably never more than 100,000 and that many of the centres and communes were only houses of isolated members. Gordon, 150, also suggests that it is difficult to assess how many people were part of the movement and that figures were often inflated by the movement –from as few as 40,000 to as many as one million.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Aveling, *The Laughing Swamis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 3 and Van Leen, 205-206.

negative terms of its own. Extreme, almost polar opposite views began to dominate. By 1985 the possibility of communication between the two communities had reached an all time low. The conflict had developed to the point where it did not seem possible that it could remain there. Local disputes had also gone federal and many considered a potentially disastrous confrontation, with comparisons often made to the People's Temple mass suicides in Jonestown.

The transition from developing India to capitalist America had not gone as well as hoped. As the centre in Oregon was disintegrating, various alternatives were considered and rumour had it that Rajneesh and his *sannyasins* were aiming to make Australia their "spiritual" centre.

### **Fremantle – infiltration or exultation?**

When Rajneesh left India for the United States (US), thousands of *sannyasins* found themselves stranded in India and many returned to their home countries where they directed their energy towards setting up satellite communes and Rajneesh meditation centres. There were many Australian *sannyasins* and Fremantle seemed suddenly to become a virtual hub of *sannyasin* activity. The movement seemed to be able to organise resources quickly and in a very short time, a commune was established in the city's centre, numerous businesses were running successfully, and all kinds of personal and spiritual development courses were on offer. *Sannyasins* seemed to be everywhere.

In the early eighties, this sudden influx of orange-robed people was met initially with a mixture of curiosity and wariness by the local community. For most of us, the only

knowledge we had of these Orange People was essentially from the media that constructed them, although initially not too negatively, as a bunch of “crazy hippies” whose catchcry of “life, love and laughter” seemed to be a licence to ignore, like the “hippie movement” in general, social and moral responsibility under the guise of spiritual development. Although there had been a lot in the press about the situation in the US, in fact, little was known about the Fremantle community – who they were and what they actually did. You could say that there was a sense of intrigue: did they really get up to all that the media claimed? People were generally curious to know what made them such a spectacular media event and at the same time, precisely because of the way they had been constructed by the media, people were wary of what they were capable. On the one hand, there was their infectious exuberance. On the other, there was an element of danger in that they were pushing the limits of social norms, were making no attempt to be quiet about it and might be capable of anything.

By 1985, when the *60 Minutes* interview mentioned at the outset was aired, the *sannyasin* presence in Western Australia (WA) was equated increasingly to the situation brewing in Oregon as related in the media. The initial curiosity and wariness was clearly being replaced by disapproval and distrust. The interview concerned the proposed development of a school for *sannyasin* children in Karri Valley, near the small south-west town of Pemberton (population 1000). Residents of Pemberton feared that the *sannyasins* intended to “takeover” the town by buying up property and stacking council meetings – a strategy that many considered had been used, to detrimental effect, in Oregon. According to the report, residents also feared that the supposed immoral behaviour of *sannyasins*, including allowing young

children observe adults have sex, would influence their children. The town rallied and public meetings were organised to discuss the matter. Resistance to the movement escalated to the point where *sannyasins* there were allegedly arming themselves in response to threats of violence against them, including a bomb scare. Fuelled by increasingly negative media reports, the popular view that *sannyasins* were a deviant force to be reckoned with dominated.

At least one of these public meetings was organised for residents by local church groups in Pemberton who invited Adrian Van Leen to address concerned residents. Van Leen is director of the Concerned Christians Growth Ministries (CCG), a largely fundamentalist group focused mainly on researching and investigating cults around the world and based currently in a northern Perth suburb. At the time, Van Leen, based on information from his contacts, believed that Rajneesh would soon be “kicked out” of the US and planned to make Karri Valley his base. Coupled with his views on the immoral social and sexual practices of *sannyasins*, this prediction formed the basis of many of the town’s residents' opinions on the *sannyasins* intentions. Fear and paranoia ensued.

This predominantly negative view, however, was counterbalanced by occasional reports that pointed out how hard-working and successful *sannyasins* were and how happy they seemed to be –ambitious and enterprising rather than indolent and pious. There were also letters to the editor in both local country and state newspapers opposing this negative view.

We are now very familiar with this kind of media reportage. In short, the greater the distance between any two parties, the greater the controversy. The greater the controversy, the greater the audience and profit. The controversy itself emerges as the principal narrative informing, or rather re-defining, the two parties. The part comes to represent the whole to such a degree that any points of intervention tend to lose their real significance and the story is never really told.

By the time of the *60 Minutes* report, the situation in Oregon had become a global media event and Sheela had become a familiar face in the media in the US and on her visits to Australia. Her approach to media interviews was decidedly confrontational and the public had come to expect her to be crude, rude, belligerent and provocative, an expectation Sheela did nothing to dispel.

At the end of the interview mentioned at the outset, Sheela was asked to reply to people in Pemberton who did not want the Rajneeshees in their town. “What can I say,” she said, “Tough titties.”

### **And then there were none?**

A year after Sheela’s “tough titties” remarks, the *sannyasin* movement in Fremantle seemingly vanished. The orange robes were gone along with the communes, restaurants, businesses and schools. The streets of Fremantle had lost their orange hue and only trickles of information on the movement made it into the mass media. The general consensus was that Rajneesh’s “spiritual experiment” had failed. The movement would simply slip into insignificance and go the way of countless other cults, with a few determined remnants on the periphery refusing to submit to defeat.

Often this is precisely what happens when any such radical movement collapses, especially when their leader is publicly exposed as a charlatan and either flees, dies or is imprisoned. Such was the case, for example, with the Manson family and the People's Temple. On the other hand, after such public exposure a cult might go underground and continue in another form, often re-generating to become a religion, institutionalised and dogmatic.

Despite the very public exposure of Bhagwan in 1985 and his death in 1990, there are clear indications that the Rajneesh movement has not disappeared. In Fremantle, for example, there are still several hundred people who consider themselves as *sannyasins* to varying degrees. Rather than disappear, it seems that in WA, yesterday's *sannyasins* dissolved quietly back into "normal" existence and today can be found in all walks of life, apparently living and working like the rest of us.

The opportunity exists then to take advantage of this presence and to attempt to answer some of the questions that arise when faced with such a spectacular rise and fall of a minority social movement.

Who were they?

What gave rise to them?

What were they doing then?

What caused their downfall?

What are they doing now?

What has changed?

## Methodology

In order to provide answers to such questions, this thesis(?) focuses primarily on the rise, expression and demise of the *sannyasin* community in Fremantle. Methodologically, this is a qualitative inquiry that involved interviews with twenty-one *sannyasins* still living in Fremantle today. While it is difficult to determine precisely the number of *sannyasins* in Fremantle, my research indicates that there are around 200. This cohort of informants, I believe, constitutes a reasonable selection for the purpose of this project. Eighteen of these interviews were in depth video interviews based on a series of questions that asked informants to relate their personal experiences before, during and after the days of commune life in Fremantle.<sup>5</sup> The remaining three were phone or personal conversations.

As a prelude to this, Section one outlines the historical development of the movement based on what has already been documented about the global movement in scholarly and popular texts, and on the numerous websites, books, CDs, videos and DVDs, and electronic resources on Rajneesh and his discourses.

A number of academic studies have been carried out on the Rajneesh movement, many of which have focused on the development of the movement in India and on the communes in Pune and Oregon. Several books have also been written by *sannyasins* and former *sannyasins* that, depending on their perspective, defend or repudiate Rajneesh and the movement. Such polarised opinions continue to define the movement and I have attempted to retain this throughout this section as a means of acknowledging the validity of multiple constructions of social reality. It is not my

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1 for these questions.



intention to answer the question as to whether Rajneesh was an “enlightened mystic” and “the ideal man who transcended human indulgence”, or rather, a “clever charlatan”, “cynical businessman” and “narcissistic nemesis of the state”. Rather, it is to analyse how such contradictions can exist.

Over 7,000 hours of spoken discourse and 1,700 hours of video have been recorded. Around 700 books of these discourses have been published in a range of forms. The volume of Rajneesh's work and that he was well known for his capacity for being “consistently inconsistent” and contradictory – a strategy he claimed was necessary to avoid creating a dogmatic philosophy to be lived by since, “there is no beginning and no end; we are always in the middle” – creates difficulties for a researcher with little prior knowledge of the movement. With this in mind, I have included relatively little of his discourses. Where I have used them has been mainly to illustrate certain themes that have emerged as arguably consistent.<sup>6</sup>

Section one is divided into two chapters. The first chapter begins with a description of Rajneesh's childhood, follows the early years of the movement in Bombay (Mumbai), India, and ends with an overview of life in the Shree Rajneesh Ashram established in Pune in 1974. Chapter two recounts the views of events in the US until the demise of the commune there in 1985.

Section two chronicles the development of the *sannyasin* movement in Western Australia, from its early days in the late seventies, through its heyday and decline in the early to mid eighties, to its presence now. Based primarily on interviews with

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<sup>6</sup> On the difficulties associated with classifying Rajneesh's discourses, see Aveling, 78; Carter, 298, note 23; Bob Mullan, *Life as Laughter: Following Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 32.

informants, this information also employs extensive research into local and national media reports on the movement and utilises the only study carried out on the movement in Western Australia, *O is for Orange* (1983), a report compiled by Adrian Van Leen, director of the locally based Concerned Christians Growth Movement. It should be noted, however, that though this report promotes a fundamentalist Christian perspective and consequently cannot be given theoretical credence, it provides important additional historical information of the movement in Western Australia.

All the informants I interviewed were in their late forties or early fifties. Three people I contacted refused an interview or to talk much about the Fremantle community. One of these maintained that he saw no reason for entering into any “nostalgic” dialogue about the movement since the whole point was to “live in the now”. Another, who was a “kid *sannyasin*”, given the nature of the mostly negative press about the movement, was quite wary of entering into any discussion about it. The other was extremely angry that I had contacted him and denied that he had ever been a *sannyasin* or had any knowledge of the movement.

While I attempted to gain an equally gendered view, seventy per cent were female and thirty percent were male. Seventy percent had no children and a small percentage, comprising both genders, had been sterilised. All interviewees held jobs. Several work in professional positions and a number run their own businesses. Overall, they tended to work in a professional capacity as psychologists or psychotherapists, social or community workers. Businesses were mostly to do with the creative arts such as graphic design or craft. Several also teach meditation and are

involved in other therapy or personal development work, either as their main line of work or as a sideline. In short, they are not doing anything radically different to anyone else in society.

In terms of relationships, there were a larger proportion of females not in monogamous relationships compared to males. Females who were single indicated they were quite happy with their current situation while males made few comments on their own situations.

Out of those interviewed, only two no longer consider themselves as *sannyasins*, both of them males. Both of them seemed to have created a sense of distance from the movement and were the most prepared to talk about the movement as a “cult”. Nevertheless, both spoke of a continuing connection with and appreciation of other *sannyasins* and Osho.

Section two includes a synthesis that suggests it may be useful to consider the rise and fall of the Rajneesh movement as an element of postmodernism. It argues that it could be viewed as a symptom of globalisation with characteristics that can be found throughout all developed countries.

**NOTE:** I have not used the names of informants, except where they have been already mentioned publicly in the press. Otherwise they are designated by “s\_1-21”.

## Section One: India and the US

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The Rajneesh movement officially began as the *Neo-Sannyas International Movement* in 1970 in Manali, India<sup>7</sup>. It was led by Mohan Chandra Rajneesh, who later changed his name to *Acharya* (teacher/master) Rajneesh, then *Bhagwan* (Blessed One) Shree Rajneesh, and finally, not long before his death in 1990, to Osho, as he is now known.<sup>8</sup> While Rajneesh never wrote an autobiography, Vasant Joshi's *The Awakened One* (1982), is generally used as the "official" biography of Rajneesh's life. More recently, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (2002) is a compilation of archival material relating to Rajneesh's life and the movement.

The following account of Rajneesh's life and the development of the movement until its downfall in 1985, is based largely on these two texts and discussions with *sannyasins*. As with any charismatic figure, however, such biographical accounts become part of the mythology surrounding the figure and generally need to be counterbalanced by more objective views, especially when the figure is a controversial one. To this end, I have incorporated views and interpretations from a number of secondary sources.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis F Carter, "The 'New Renunciates' of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh: Observations and Identification of Problems Interpreting New Religious Movements", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no.2 (1987), 158.

<sup>8</sup> Between Bhagwan and Osho, he also called himself Guatam the Buddha (claiming that Guatam had "taken shelter" in him for four days) and Shree Rajneesh Zorba the Buddha. Neither of these names lasted for long. After dropping both of these names, he decided that he wanted to remain nameless. His *sannyasins* found it difficult to address him without a name and suggested Osho, a term of respect and honour found in Zen stories. He agreed, adding his own meaning to the name, relating it to William James' term oceanic, claiming that it was not a name but a healing sound. See Osho, 76-78. I have attempted to use the names chronologically throughout.

<sup>9</sup> These include scholarly research, news media accounts and information from the Internet.

The principal aim of this section is to provide some background to the development of the movement in Western Australia. In descriptions of this sort, what one includes and excludes always runs the risk of being considered a misinterpretation. Nevertheless, I have attempted to provide a sketch that will give a sense of the polarity of opinions surrounding the movement.

The section is divided into two chapters. The first chapter describes Rajneesh's childhood, chronicles the early years of the movement in Bombay (Mumbai) India, and gives an overview of life in the Shree Rajneesh Ashram established in Pune in 1974. The second chapter recounts events in the US until the demise of the commune there in 1985.

## Chapter One: India – Origins of the Rajneesh movement

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### Early years: 1931 – 1970

On 11 December, 1931, Rajneesh was born to Jain<sup>10</sup> parents in Kuchwada, a small farming village in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India. He spent most of the first seven years of his life there with his maternal grandparents, his parents having left him with them at his grandparents' request. After the death of his grandfather in 1938, an event said to have left him with a profound interest in death and dying, Rajneesh returned to live with his parents who were living in Gadawara, not far from the city of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.

Rajneesh is described as a rebellious and independent child who often challenged authority figures and who had a tendency to question all social, religious and philosophical beliefs. From an early age, he considered himself different from other children, often spending hours alone meditating and experimenting with different meditation techniques. His inquiring mind and fascination with death also led him to encourage others to take risks, sometimes dangerous, so he could question them about their experience. At the same time, periods of melancholy, depression and headaches punctuated his life until his “enlightenment”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> According to Aveling, Rajneesh's father belonged to a small Jain sect called Taran Panth, “after its founder Taran Swami, a sixteenth century Digambra monk who preached against idol worship in favour of devotion to a formless God and a deep personal spirituality.” See Aveling, 71.

<sup>11</sup> On these early years, see Max Brecher, *A Passage to America* (India: Book Quest Publishers, 1993), 27-29; Carter, *Charisma*, 41-43; Judith M Fox, *Osho Rajneesh*, Studies in Contemporary Religion (Massimo Introvigne, Series Editor), (Torino: Signature Books, 2000), 9-14; Vasant Joshi, *The Awakened One: The Life and Work of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 38-41.; Mullan, 10-14.; Osho, 4-57.; Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *Dimensions Beyond the Known* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 149-169.; Van Leen, 33-35.

Rajneesh claimed to have become enlightened on March 21, 1953, at the age of twenty-one. The year before his enlightenment, he questioned and generally rejected all religious thought and tradition he came across and in the process, experienced a period described as similar to what Christian mystics have called ‘the dark night of the soul’.<sup>12</sup> His physical being was affected – his appetite disappeared, he suffered from extreme headaches and in general found it difficult to look after himself physically. Mentally, he was in a state of continual doubt:

In one respect I was as good as mad. I was myself afraid that anytime I might become mad...I could not talk to anybody because everything had become so inconsistent that even to formulate one sentence was difficult. In the middle of the sentence I would forget what I was saying; in the middle of the way I would forget where I was going.<sup>13</sup>

One night, sitting in a tree he often climbed to meditate, he fell and experienced a sense of being both on the ground and in the tree watching his fallen body at the same time.<sup>14</sup> This he describes as an experience of the separation of body and spirit to the extent that “the mere physical existence of my body finished forever”.<sup>15</sup> He stayed in that condition until a woman passing the next morning touched his forehead, bringing him back to his body. Reflecting on how and why this woman’s touch brought him back, he concluded that when the bodies of a man and woman come into contact:

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<sup>12</sup> Brecher, 29.  
<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Joshi, 51-52.  
<sup>14</sup> Joshi, 55; Osho, 61.  
<sup>15</sup> Joshi, 55.

...a current is established and an electrical circle is completed, and that very instant the consciousness of the spirit which has gone out returns.<sup>16</sup>

Rajneesh experienced the same phenomenon six times over the next six months and on March 21, went to a nearby public garden at midnight in a state he described as “the absence of hope” rather than hopelessness, “selfless” rather than helpless. While sitting under a maulshree tree, he experienced a sense of “no passage of time...the virgin reality – uncorrupted, untouchable, unmeasurable”. There was a sense of “going mad with blissfulness”, as if “the positive and negative were meeting”.<sup>17</sup> This is what is understood as “enlightenment”, and part of the mythos surrounding Rajneesh’s life was that he was a “returned spiritual master” whose mission this time was to bring about, “a synthesis between East and West , body and soul, materialism and spiritualism”.<sup>18</sup>

At the time, Rajneesh was studying philosophy at the D. N. Jain College of Jabalpur and though others reported significant changes in him after this experience, he continued his studies as usual, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy in 1955 and subsequently receiving his Master of Arts in Philosophy from Saugar University in 1957. During these student years, he wrote for a number of newspapers and magazines and participated in public debates continuing to critique traditional social structures. He also continued to experiment with meditation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Joshi, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Joshi, 64-65.

<sup>18</sup> Joshi, 15–17. See also, Carter, *Charisma*, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Joshi, 49-75; Carter, *Charisma*, 41-43.



Later in 1957, Rajneesh was appointed to a teaching position at Raipur Sanskrit College (Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya). Due to his “unorthodox” approach to teaching, however, he was soon asked to transfer to another university and in 1958, joined the faculty of Mahakoshal Arts College of the University of Jabalpur. He was promoted to professor in 1960 and continued teaching there until 1966. During this time he became known as *Acharya* (teacher or master) Rajneesh.<sup>20</sup>

From 1960, much of Rajneesh’s time was taken up with extensive travel throughout India giving public lectures, and he developed a large following of Indians from many backgrounds.<sup>21</sup> The documentary, *The Rising Moon*<sup>22</sup>, shows images of him in these early years surrounded by Indians who had obviously adopted him as their *guru*, a common occurrence in India that was beginning to become popular in the West.<sup>23</sup> Rajneesh’s teachings, however, were considered to be radically different to other gurus in that they were neither traditional nor a new take on the traditional. Instead, as he had been arguing since an early age, the traditions underlying Indian society were dogmatic and outdated and to continue with them would be detrimental to the future of India and to the pursuit of any “real” spirituality.<sup>24</sup>

For instance, in Rajneesh's early public lectures, he was highly critical of all forms of traditional Indian religious traditions, such as Hinduism, as well as politics and

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<sup>20</sup> Joshi, 76-79; Osho, 225.

<sup>21</sup> See “Glimpses into the Life of the Controversial ‘Guru’”, *The Times of India*, December 21, 2003. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-372471,prtpage-1.cms>, which mentions “a number of Gujarati, Maharashtrian and North Indian men and women” (accessed September 4, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> A documentary compiled from archival footage from 1968–1975, which follows Rajneesh in his early years – starting with the meditation camps held in Abu, continuing with his stay in the Bombay (Mumbai) apartment and through to the beginning of the Ashram in Pune. (n.p., 1992, 33mins).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on *gurus*, see David Smith, *Hinduism and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 167-180.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 172.

Mahatma Gandhi. This created enormous controversy wherever he went. He argued, for example, that Gandhi, considered the most revered spiritual and political leader in modern India, was not religious, was against the much needed modernisation of India and deified poverty rather than destroying it.<sup>25</sup>

When it came to politics, in contrast to the socialist ideals dominating Indian politics at the time, Rajneesh claimed that socialism could only occur as a *result* of capitalism:

Capitalism has shown, for the first time in the world, how to create wealth. I believe that in India socialism is inevitable, but fifty, sixty, or seventy years hence. India should apply all its best efforts to first creating wealth. The poverty in this country is so chronic, it has lasted for so long, that unless this country develops a capitalist system for the next fifty or one hundred years, this country will remain poor forever. Capitalism would make it possible to distribute wealth. At present, in the name of socialism, what we have for distribution is only poverty.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the controversy he created by such lectures, he often attracted crowds of up to 50,000.<sup>27</sup>

Rajneesh began conducting guided meditations after his talks, many of which were experiments with deviations from traditional Indian meditations that he viewed of no use in modern times.<sup>28</sup> In June, 1964, he led his first ten-day meditation camp at

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<sup>25</sup> Joshi, 83-85.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Joshi, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Brecher, 30-31; Joshi, 80-88.

<sup>28</sup> Osho, 224.

Muchala Mahavir in Rajasthan.<sup>29</sup> This camp became a landmark in his work since it was the first time that his discourses and meditations were recorded and published in a book, *Path to Realization* (now called *The Perfect Way*).<sup>30</sup> More camps followed, new meditation methods developed, and more people became interested.<sup>31</sup> Most of these early meditation camps and public lectures, though, were conducted in Hindi and attracted only a few Westerners.

Essentially, Rajneesh's aim has been described as not very different from those followed by Indian meditation Masters for centuries, namely to propel people into a state of "conscious awareness", often also called "witnessing". In other words:

... the dissolution of the boundaries that separated the individual from the cosmos of which he was an inextricable part; the experience of *shunyata*, the silent inner emptiness that lived, feared and unexplored, at each person's center; the development of a detached, vigilant consciousness that witnessed thoughts and feelings and actions.<sup>32</sup>

This state is considered to be of a higher order than ordinary conscious and is a necessary step before one can reach the ultimate state of "pure consciousness", or "enlightenment", a state where the duality of consciousness is said to be dissolved.

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<sup>29</sup> Osho, 225.

<sup>30</sup> Osho, 225.

<sup>31</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 45; Joshi, 82.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon, 29.

In 1966, Rajneesh resigned from his university post and concentrated on giving public discourses, continuing to speak around the country.<sup>33</sup> During these years he was supported by “a group of wealthy Indian businessmen”, and a woman named Laxmi, from a prominent and well-known Jain family, acted as his manager.<sup>34</sup> Laxmi, one of many women who later took on positions of management and control in the movement, later became his “personal secretary”.<sup>35</sup>

While Rajneesh's discourses were already considered controversial, in August, 1968 his reputation achieved new heights when he began a series of talks in Hindi focusing on “love” at a famous cultural centre in Bombay (Mumbai). Unexpectedly, Rajneesh focused on sex, explaining that while one had to transcend sexual desire to achieve spiritual awareness, the only way to do this was by completely surrendering to it. Only then could it be transformed into “spiritual” awareness. He insisted that there are similarities between sexual orgasm and spiritual awareness (or *samadhi*) since they are both moments when one experiences a loss of the sense of self and time ceases to exist. Hence, both are open to the energy for the creation of new life.<sup>36</sup>

While the premise that the transformation of sexual energy can lead to spiritual awareness (*samadhi*) is not an uncommon one in Indian religious discourse, most Indians focus only on the *samadhi* end of the equation. For Rajneesh, however, it was impossible to progress to *samadhi* without surrendering completely to one’s sexual energy. His message in his first lecture was that love and meditation “arise as a transformation of sexual energy, and that if sex is suppressed it cannot be

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<sup>33</sup> According to Joshi, (82), the university asked him to resign after returning from a tour “amid the usual controversy” and because of his style of dress.

<sup>34</sup> Aveling, 73; Carter, *Charisma*, 44; Gordon, 31-32.

<sup>35</sup> Joshi, 7.

<sup>36</sup> See Rajneesh, *From Sex to Superconsciousness* (Rajneesh Foundation, 1979).

transformed”. He encouraged people to “accept sex with joy”, and “to accept the divinity of sex in the same way you accept God’s existence”.<sup>37</sup>

In the publication of the Bombay series of talks, *From Sex to Superconsciousness*, which became his “most read book”,<sup>38</sup> Rajneesh explains his approach:

The book is about superconsciousness; sex is only to be the beginning, where everybody is. There are methods that can start the energy moving upwards, and in the East, for at least ten thousand years, there has developed a special science, Tantra. There is no parallel in the West of such a science...For ten thousand years people have experimented with how sexual energy can become your spirituality, how your sexuality can become your spirituality. It is proved beyond doubt -- thousands of people have gone through the transformation. Tantra seems to be the science that is, sooner or later, going to be accepted in the whole world, because people are suffering from all kinds of perversions. That's why they go on talking about sex as if that is my work, as if twenty-four hours a day I am talking about sex. Their repressed sexuality is the problem.<sup>39</sup>

Much of Rajneesh’s early teachings have been attributed to Tantrism, in particular, the branch known as the “left-handed path” of Tantra, and he was considered by many to be a “Tantric Master”.<sup>40</sup> Further, it was this focus on Tantra that

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<sup>37</sup> Joshi, 86-87. See also, Osho, 226.

<sup>38</sup> Osho, 226.

<sup>39</sup> *Beyond Psychology*, chap. 39, question 2, [Book on CD]. Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1988.

<sup>40</sup> On Rajneesh as a Tantric Master see Mullan, 42.; Gordon, 9; Barry Van Driel & Jacob Van Belzen, “The Downfall of Rajneeshpuram in the Print Media: A Cross-National Study”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 1 (1990), 76.; Van Leen, 7.

distinguished the movement from other East-West hybrids, influencing the development of methods and techniques quite different from previous ones.<sup>41</sup>

Briefly, Tantra is popularly understood as a pantheistic religion that assumes an underlying unifying law (*dharma*) that organises the diverse phenomena of the world into relative existence (*maya*). By a process of “deprogramming”, using various rituals and meditation techniques, Tantra aims to understand this law and use it to help develop individual consciousness free from limitations. For Tantra, the universe is a continuous, infinite process of “creation, preservation and destruction,” produced by the interplay of a dynamic, feminine energy (*Shakti*) and a static masculine energy (*Shiva*) that together create the illusory world of phenomena (*maya*). Motivating this play of forces is the power of desire and Tantra is unique in that it focuses on studying this principle of desire, accepting it as the prime motivating force of the universe. Desires are natural, and as long as we are embodied we will have them. Denouncing desire, then, only inhibits the flow of energy at the basis of life, limiting consciousness and preventing the emergence of a “higher consciousness”. To avoid the possibility of simply becoming a slave to one's instincts, Tantra proposes practical methods for transcending desire based on the *chakras* or energy centres believed to exist in certain areas of the body.<sup>42</sup> That is, enlightenment can only occur if one transcends both repression and indulgence. In one scholarly text this amounted to what the writer called the, “divination of libido”.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 3. On “left-handed” Tantrism see Carter, *New Renunciates*, 169.

<sup>42</sup> Harish Johari, *Tools for Tantra* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1986), 1-3. Mullan, 42-46 suggests that Rajneesh’s thoughts on sexuality are “reactionary” and notes his “eclectic” use of Tantric concepts.

<sup>43</sup> Mullan, 22.

Later, Rajneesh was to claim that Freud, Jung and Reich had “prepared the background” for Tantra to become a worldwide phenomenon. “They don’t know anything about Tantra, but they have made the basic background for Tantra to evolve”.<sup>44</sup>

In choosing not to deny the beginning of the journey, the moment of transformation of sexual energy, as do conventional religion and public morality, Rajneesh caused “distress to his audience and critics, then and ever since”.<sup>45</sup> Many Indians, including a number of Hindu leaders, were greatly offended by what they saw as a call to encourage “free sex,” and the outrage that ensued led to the immediate cancellation of the series; although it is claimed that he returned to Bombay (Mumbai) and completed the talks a month later “to a very large audience” (around 15,000).<sup>46</sup>

It was around this time that the Indian press began referring to Rajneesh as “the sex guru,” a label taken up with glee later by the Western press, which also called him the “swami of sex” and the “guru of the vagina”.<sup>47</sup> Rajneesh did little to deny such labels, and this focus on sexuality as a means to enlightenment or spiritual awareness, was maintained throughout the history of the movement and created arguably the most controversy, both in India and the West.

Most *sannyasins* viewed this take on sexuality as either a licence to experiment sexually and “hang the spiritual dimension,” or more “religiously” as truly having the potential to expand consciousness beyond the ego towards “real spiritual

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Sam, *Life of Osho* (London: *Sannyas*, 1997), 87.

<sup>45</sup> Aveling, 201.

<sup>46</sup> Joshi, 87; Osho, 226.

<sup>47</sup> Osho, 226; Sam, 67.

enlightenment”. Inevitably, critics viewed it as “deviant”, “indulgent” and “narcissistic,” and a threat to the morality sustaining the sacred institutions of marriage, family and reproduction.<sup>48</sup> For others, it became part of a marketing strategy that, given the ongoing “sexual revolution” of the sixties and seventies, penetrated a niche market.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the controversy of this landmark lecture on sex and spirituality, Rajneesh was invited to speak at the Second World Hindu Religion Conference in Patna in March, 1969, presided over by the highest religious priest of the Hindus, the Shankaracharya of Puri, who objected to his presence but allowed him to speak. Rajneesh began his lecture by critiquing all organised religions and their “priests”:

Any religion which considers life meaningless and full of misery and teaches the hatred of life is not a true religion. Religion is an art that shows you how to enjoy life. Liberation is not in running away from life, but rather in enjoying fully the life and the world...But these shops [institutionalised religions] which are being run in the name of religion do not want...a person... [to] become truly religious. Because then these shops will have to be shut down, and there will no longer be any need for a priest or a world teacher...<sup>50</sup>

Reportedly, the Shankaracharya stopped him after ten minutes, but due to popular demand he continued his lecture.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For views on sexuality see for example, Aveling, 189-190.; Gordon, 48; Mullan, 85-87; Van Leen, 157-182.

<sup>49</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 56-58. See also, Hugh B Urban, “Zorba the Buddha: Capitalism, Charisma and the Cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh”, *Religion* 26 (1996), 161-182.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Joshi, 88. Mullan, 153 suggests that the movement constituted a “world-affirming” religion.

<sup>51</sup> Joshi, 88.



To summarise this period, Rajneesh had developed an approach to spiritual awareness that, in India, was radically different from previous ones and had more in common with cultural trends in the West. For Rajneesh, “India needed capitalism, science, advanced technology and birth control, for without these it would be doomed to poverty and backwardness”.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, for these to work, one needed to overcome the “repressive mind,” and the key to starting this process was an uninhibited release of sexual energy.

### Bombay (Mumbai) 1970 – 74

In April, 1970, Rajneesh held a meditation camp at Nargol in Gujarat where he introduced a radically new meditation technique called *dynamic meditation*. It became his most popular meditation and developed a huge following.

Most traditional meditation practices were performed in relatively still or relaxed positions. In the course of his experiments, Rajneesh found that these techniques were not suitable for modern people (both East and West). For him, the modern mind had difficulty becoming still through silent sitting. A more active, cathartic release – a “cleansing method” – was a better way of reaching the stillness of mind that he saw as essential for living, what he called, a “passionate” or “creative” life.<sup>53</sup>

During the late sixties and early seventies, more people from other countries such as Europe and the US began to arrive in Bombay.<sup>54</sup> Among them were a number of

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<sup>52</sup> Frances Fitzgerald, “Rajneeshpuram”, in *Cities on a Hill: A Journey through Contemporary American Cultures* (London: Picador, 1987), 288.

<sup>53</sup> Osho, 204-206. See also, Gordon, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Joshi, 117-118. See also, Aveling, 75; Carter, *Charisma*, 49. For a description of Western *sannyasins* in these early years see Gordon, 38-42 and Satya Bharti Franklin, *The Promise of*

psychologists and psychotherapists, a considerable number of whom were involved in the Human Potential Movement (HPM) – a group of practitioners considered to be a breakaway from Freudian psychology who were experimenting with other less conventional therapeutic methods.<sup>55</sup> As one author describes this attraction:

Therapies such as Gestalt and encounter groups had helped them to express rather than repress needs and feelings; the theory and practice of Wilhelm Reich and his followers had taught them to recognize sexuality and its suppression as forces in shaping their physical bodies and their relationships with others. Still, they felt trapped, unfulfilled...Tantra as Rajneesh explained it seemed to be the means to help them to experience their feelings and sexuality so fully, so intensely that they would, in exhausting themselves, automatically prepare the ground for the relaxed self-acceptance, the self-actualization, and the ecstatic experience they craved.<sup>56</sup>

In his experiments with traditional meditation techniques, Rajneesh began to combine conventional Indian methods, such as *mantras* (chants), with expressive devices such as screaming, crying, rolling eyes and shaking often used in the bioenergetics exercises derived from the work of Wilhelm Reich, a principal influence in the HPM and according to Rajneesh, a “modern Tantra master.”<sup>57</sup> Some have pointed out that Rajneesh was given many Western texts during this time that he read and incorporated into his teachings.<sup>58</sup> Gordon claims Rajneesh’s ability to reach a cross-cultural crowd is evident in the way he explained his dynamic meditation to his followers:

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*Paradise: A Woman’s Intimate Story of the Perils of Life with Rajneesh* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1992), 22-59.

<sup>55</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 49; Fitzgerald, 282-287; Gordon, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Gordon, 39.

<sup>57</sup> Sam, 87.

<sup>58</sup> See for example, Fitzgerald, 290.

...to Indians, he spoke of waking the goddess Kundalini—the coiled female serpent that lies at the lowest chakra at the base of the spine—and releasing her energies to rise to the highest chakra, the thousand-petalled lotus of the mind. When he explained the “dynamic” to Westerners, he would speak of removing the psychological blocks, and releasing this body energy to the brain. The conception was still Tantric, but in English it sounded like pure Wilhelm Reich.<sup>59</sup>

*Dynamic meditation* is generally viewed as the breakthrough outcome of this cross-cultural influence. Lasting for an hour, in five stages, it begins with a combination of dance, breathing exercises and cathartic expressions, and ends in silent meditation. It is demanding physically, noisy, and often little or nothing is worn, even in public.<sup>60</sup> For Rajneesh it was a practical way to “deprogram” the mind and body through cathartic release, thus allowing a meditative state conducive to spiritual exploration. Many descriptions of personal experiences of this meditation are available.<sup>61</sup> It is still practiced today, though not on the scale it was in these early years.

Later, in works seeking to analyse Rajneesh and his movement, an alternative view sees the introduction of *dynamic* as the addition of an attractive new practice to a developing repertoire of “products” that could be marketed to those interested:

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<sup>59</sup> Fitzgerald, 290.

<sup>60</sup> Aveling, 74; Carter, *Charisma*, 46; A “verbatim report” of the lecture describing dynamic meditation is given by S A Vitaraga, *Lifting the Veil* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), 51-63. Descriptions of the five stages can be found in Joshi, 179 and Vitaraga, 51-63). Details on the meaning of each stage are in Joshi, 194-197. *Osho World* calls it a “dialectical meditation”, a combination of absolute effort and complete silence. See “Dynamic meditation”, *Osho World*, [http://www.oshoworld.com/onlinemag/dec\\_issue/htm/meditation.asp](http://www.oshoworld.com/onlinemag/dec_issue/htm/meditation.asp) (accessed 20 December 2004). See also Gordon, 3-5 for a personal description.

<sup>61</sup> Franklin, 41-42 gives a personal description of a session held at Chowpatty beach. Gordon, 3-8 also describes his experience and an analysis. See also Joshi, 179-180 and Aubrey Menen, *The New Mystics* (New York: The Dial Press, 1974), 201-214. Descriptions of personal experiences of dynamic meditation can be found in Brecher, 32-33; Franklin, 12-13; Gordon, 3-8; Sam, 30-32 and Wright, 13.

The impression is one of unrestrained opportunism. Ideology, practices, and services appear to have been totally “demand driven.” New recruiting potentials would suggest new services or beliefs and these were grafted to existing practices. Untrammelled by a shared belief system, Rajneesh managers could move with the “spiritual market”.<sup>62</sup>

On July 1, 1970, Rajneesh gave up travelling and moved to an apartment in Bombay (Mumbai) where he lived until 1974.<sup>63</sup> By this time, he had very much achieved *guru* status in India, and like many other *gurus*, he met people individually or in small groups, gave evening discourses on spiritual and esoteric matters, and hosted meditation camps in the countryside.<sup>64</sup> In *The Rising Moon*, he is surrounded in his apartment by followers. Singing, dancing, exchanging *namastes* (a Hindu form of salutation) and kissing his feet, the mood is celebratory and reverent. Every morning, followers met on a nearby beach to do *Dynamic Meditation*, often with a degree of nudity, and disciples could see him at almost any time of the day.<sup>65</sup> Whatever it was that Rajneesh was doing, it evidently struck a chord with many.

From September 26 to October 5, 1970, Rajneesh held a meditation camp in Kulu Manali, in the foothills of the Himalayas, and on September 26 he initiated his first group of six disciples, calling them “neo-*sannyasins*” and giving them new names.<sup>66</sup> This marked the official beginning of the Neo-*Sannyas* International Movement

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<sup>62</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 46-47.

<sup>63</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 47; Fox, 12; Osho, 226.

<sup>64</sup> Joshi, 94.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, 40; Mullan, 13; Osho, 231.

<sup>66</sup> Osho, 227. Aveling, 74 notes that initially there were three categories of *sannyasins*.

(NSIM).<sup>67</sup> Although English was used at times, Hindi was the principal language used by the movement, the main objective of which was:

[T]o create a spiritual awakening all over the world. It aims at eliminating all distinctions and divisions in the name of race, nation, casts, creed and religion, and building a world family of those who are seeking transformation.<sup>68</sup>

*Neo-sannyas* (initiation) was inspired by, but was radically different from traditional Indian *sannyas* whereby one renounced possessions, relationships and sex and took up an ascetic lifestyle, living on what one was given by others. The aim of this is to discard one's identity or ego, which is viewed as temporary and an illusion. The underlying philosophy is that, unlike in the Western world, existence is viewed as monistic rather than dualistic.<sup>69</sup>

In Indian thought, for married men, *sannyas* is considered to be the fourth stage of life's journey. After completing the first three stages involving education, work, and family formation and preparation of offspring, a man (only men were expected to pursue this life) may leave his wife and family to dedicate his life to the search of religious knowledge and experience.<sup>70</sup> For Rajneesh, there was no need to go

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<sup>67</sup> Mullan, 13; Carter, *Charisma*, 48. Aveling, 75 writes that it was around this time that the movement was formalised under the name *Jeevan Jagriti Kendra* (Life Awakening Centres) with I.N. Shah as secretary. First founded in 1965, these Kendra "aimed to conduct Rajneesh's tours and meditation camps, to publish his lectures and the quarterly magazine *Jyoti Shikha* (Divine Flame), as well as the monthly bulletin *Yukranda* (Religious Youth)." Books published by the *Kendra – Towards the Unknown* (1969), *The Gateless Gate* (1971), *Seeds of Revolution* (1972), *Lead Kindly Light* (1972), *I am the Gate* (1972).

<sup>68</sup> Joshi, 95.

<sup>69</sup> On the differences between traditional *sannyas* and *neo-sannyas* see, for example Aveling, 71-88.

<sup>70</sup> Osho, 227. For a more detailed introduction to traditional Indian *sannyas* see Aveling, 15-35 and Arvind Sharma, "Rajneesh and the Guru Tradition in India", *The Rajneesh Papers: Studies in a New Religious Movement*, edited by Susan J Palmer and Arvind Sharma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), 1-15.

through these stages or to have any religious ties. Instead, *neo-sannyas* was “open to all, including Westerners, without qualifying virtues or traditional vows”.<sup>71</sup>

Rajneesh rejected totally the need for renunciation. He viewed the asceticism associated with traditional forms of *sannyas* as a rejection of the body and of life. With its emphasis on the physiological, it was a social rather than a spiritual renunciation. Always fighting needs and desires in this way, he claimed, produced a form of masochism that reinforced repression and poverty, and was always ego-fulfilling rather than spiritually awakening. While others had preceded him in making changes to the traditional form of *sannyas*, one writer claims that Rajneesh was far more radical than most:

He worked within the tradition, skilfully drew out its parallels with much of contemporary Western psychological and philosophical thought, but also sought deliberately to destroy the external form of the tradition by bringing out its radical inner essence. In so doing, he provoked outrage and hostility, both in India and abroad, on an extraordinary wide scale.<sup>72</sup>

By contrast, the aim of *neo-sannyas* was to discard the ego by entering completely into desire to the point when it eventually dissolves. Only in doing so could one become open to the real “living current” that is eternal life.<sup>73</sup> Essentially though, his message was the same as for the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, that is:

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<sup>71</sup> Swami Anand Jina, “The Work of Osho Rajneesh: A Thematic Overview”, *The Rajneesh Papers: Studies in a New Religious Movement*, edited by Susan J Palmer and Arvind Sharma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), 49.

<sup>72</sup> Aveling, 71.

<sup>73</sup> See Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, *I Am the Gate: The Meaning of Initiation and Discipleship*, edited by Ma Satya Bharti (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 20-44 for his view on *sannyas* and renunciation.

...that God was in all things, a living current of energy flowing through the temporary and illusory world of forms, and that the Buddhas were those who saw through the illusion of self and of time to the great Oneness and Suchness of existence.<sup>74</sup>

As with traditional *sannyas*, a *sannyasin* generally went in search of a “Master,” considered to be someone who had already achieved a union with this Oneness of existence, who would guide them on their path to spiritual awareness. For *neo-sannyasins*, Rajneesh was their Master. The master-disciple relationship established in this process was largely a typical one. It involved placing one’s trust completely in the Master and “surrendering” one’s ego to him.<sup>75</sup>

*Neo-sannyasins* then were to place their trust in Rajneesh and surrender their egos, understood as, “the false idea that you are...somebody special” to him. He insisted, like many other Masters, that they should not worship or become dependent on him. Rather he would act as a “catalytic agent”.<sup>76</sup> For Rajneesh:

...understanding will arise within you; it will not be a transfer from me. I can push you and pull you here and there but I will have to wait.

And if you can also wait with me, someday your own inner flame will arise. It needs patience, it needs contact with a Master, but it cannot be transferred. The Master can function only as a catalytic agent. My presence will make you more and more thirsty; my presence will make you more and more mad; a great, an intense, an

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<sup>74</sup> Fitzgerald, 291.

<sup>75</sup> The book *I Am the Gate* (1977) was based on questions and answers from between April and June 1971. In this book, Rajneesh explains his ideas on what it means to “surrender to a Master”.

<sup>76</sup> Gordon, 33.

impossible desire will arise within you -- you will become a passionate search. In that passion your own candle will start burning. You will become your own fuel.<sup>77</sup>

The emphasis for *neo-sannyas* then was on the affirmation of life rather than denial, and the way to do this was by “cleansing” yourself of social conditioning and re-inventing yourself as “fresh, young, pure, unpolluted” through meditation.<sup>78</sup> *Neo-Sannyas* was a rebellion against all structures – a “deprogramming”, a “quantum leap into the unknown,” and a breaking away from the past.<sup>79</sup> It was a mix of traditional and modern, of East and West, which attempted to produce a *sannyasin* who, “no longer lives in the past or through the past; who lives in the moment, hence, is unpredictable”.<sup>80</sup>

This idea of unpredictability, spontaneity, or “living in the moment”, went hand in hand with the idea of discarding the ego, regarded as only an “assumed centre”, but without which we feel life is impossible. The “life” that Rajneesh was talking about, however, was the “pure consciousness” of non-dualism existing “outside” of the dualistic mind.

While it is not prudent to discuss complex theoretical debates here, it is worth pointing out that the kinds of conceptual alternatives Rajneesh was offering, though originating in the Indian traditions, resonated with some of the less traditional Western philosophies that were beginning to gain new credence in the sixties and seventies, all of which could be said to have been exploring alternatives to dualistic

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<sup>77</sup> *Dang Dang Doko Dang*, chap. 7, Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1977.

<sup>78</sup> Osho, 228.

<sup>79</sup> “Osho quotes on Sannyas”, *Osho World Online*, [http://www.oshoworld.com/sannyas/sannyas\\_quotes.asp](http://www.oshoworld.com/sannyas/sannyas_quotes.asp) (accessed January 6 2005).

<sup>80</sup> “Osho quotes on Sannyas”.



thought in some way. Rajneesh's contact with Western disciples, combined with his predilection as a voracious reader (some say he had a photographic memory), no doubt influenced his teachings, as perhaps also did his own background in philosophy. Carter, for instance, suggests that Rajneesh's philosophy reflects aspects of Gurdjieff and Nietzsche.<sup>81</sup> Aveling compares his teachings to the notion of "immanent vitalism", often associated with the work of Henri Bergson, whose notion of *élan vital* Rajneesh often made reference to as the "eternal, deeper life force", which he equated to sexual energy, or life energy (*Shiva-Shakti*). The influence of R. D. Laing and Wilhelm Reich are also often mentioned.<sup>82</sup>

For supporters of Rajneesh, this kind of cross-cultural experimentation was evidence of his ability to bring together disparate beliefs and practices in a way that was specifically relevant to the times and would give substance to the gaps they felt were created by modern existence. It was the perfect synthesis of Eastern mysticism and Western materialism, rational and intuitive thought, the spiritual and the sensual. At the other extreme, he was a clever Protean figure, a charismatic opportunist, who encouraged ideological heterodoxy using a "mish-mash" of Eastern and Western thought with the sole aim of manufacturing and marketing a new religion.<sup>83</sup>

Outwardly, there were four "commitments" when becoming a *sannyasin*. Firstly, one was given a new name. The new names were often Sanskrit names that Rajneesh chose to represent "some aspect of their character or undeveloped potential to which

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<sup>81</sup> Carter, *New Renunciates*, 166.

<sup>82</sup> On "immanent vitalism", see Aveling, 79. On Rajneesh and his use of *élan vital*, see *From Darkness to Light*, Chapter 25, Question 1. [Book on CD]. Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1985. and *From Misery to Enlightenment*, Chapter 10, Question 1. [Book on CD]. Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1985. On Reich and Laing see Carter, *Charisma*, 113 and Gordon, 63-64.

<sup>83</sup> See Carter, *Charisma*, 37-72.

they might aspire”.<sup>84</sup> Sometimes he gave new *sannyasins* their old names back. The new name was usually prefixed by either *Anand* (bliss) or *Prem* (love), but *Yoga* (union), *Deva* (divine) and *Dhyan* (meditation) were also used.<sup>85</sup> Prefixes identifying male and female names were also used – *swami* (Lord of Master) for men and *ma* (Mother) for women, the “ultimate point” of *swami* being to become “a master of his own being” and of *ma* to become a “mothering energy” whereby she can “mother the whole of existence”.<sup>86</sup>

For Rajneesh, new names were a symbolic way of breaking with the past, disconnecting from old identities and old associations, and part of the process of “dropping” one's ego:

Every day your identification with your old life will wither; every day a new man will come into being in his place (sic). You will be reminded again and again that you are now on a new journey. The change of name is useful for this purpose.<sup>87</sup>

*Sannyasins* were also expected to wear orange or ochre coloured clothes that, representing the first light of dawn and the first light seen when entering meditation, were meant to help a one to meditate.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, by being publicly visible, the clothes were meant to function as a means of creating awareness of the self, and so also assist in the process of dropping the ego.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Gordon, 32; Osho, 229.

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Osho, 228.

<sup>87</sup> *Osho World Online*, <http://www.oshoworld.com/onlinemag/may2002/htm/serialbook-90c.asp> (accessed January 6 2005)

<sup>88</sup> Joshi, 98 and *Osho World Online*.

<sup>89</sup> Mullan, 81.

Additionally, *sannyasins* were given a *mala* – a necklace of 108 beads and a picture of Rajneesh. The *mala* was said to represent 108 techniques of meditation often used in many yoga and meditation practices, and was to be worn as a means of remembering and incorporating them into daily life.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, meditation was considered an integral part of the life of a *sannyasin* who were committed to meditating each day.<sup>91</sup>

While becoming a *sannyasin* meant agreeing to these four commitments, Rajneesh maintained that the clothes, the *mala*, the locket and the new name were all just a “device” to test a person’s commitment to drop the ego and “move into the immediate”, so that one could move into the “ultimate” (enlightenment, God).<sup>92</sup> As he put it:

Orange is as good as any other color, or no color. It has nothing special about it. I could have chosen any -- green, black, that would have done. But its purpose is that it is a device. It is for people who are ready to do a few mad things -- because later on, bigger and bigger mad things are waiting. If you cannot do such a simple, silly thing as wearing orange, a locket and a mala, if you can't gather enough courage to look foolish, a laughing-stock wherever you go, and feel absurd and ridiculous -- if you cannot do this much, then this place is not for you, because bigger and bigger things will have to be done.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon, 32 and *Osho World Online*.

<sup>91</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 47-48; Fox, 11-12; Mullan, 80-84.

<sup>92</sup> *Book of Wisdom*, Chapter. 2, Question 2, [Book on CD]. Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1993.

<sup>93</sup> *Book of Wisdom*, Chapter 2, Question 2.

While visitors and “seekers” were mostly Indian, more Westerners were beginning to arrive in Bombay.<sup>94</sup> Christine Woolf, who became Rajneesh’s “constant companion” and the “focus of much speculation”, Ma Yoga Vivek, is reported to have taken *sannyas* around this time after being initially “horrified” by her encounter with the mass meditation on the beach.<sup>95</sup>

In a book written in 1970, a devotee described the attraction he and other Indians felt:

[T]he roles he plays are dramatic and the impact he makes on all who come near him is staggering...[T]here is something really powerful and extraordinary about him. His indomitable personality never fails to exert a strange fascination, even over people who do not agree with his views.<sup>96</sup>

Many *sannyasins* have alluded to this “strange fascination” with Rajneesh, often describing their meetings with him as something that could not be articulated; it could only be “experienced”. As one described it:

...watching him speak was more than a multi-media experience. Pedestrian, half-dead words shook and shimmered in him. They blazed fire in his eyes, leaped into flowers in his hands, and breathed perfumed music from his mouth.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 47. Bharti, 22-55 gives an account of her stay in Bombay.

<sup>95</sup> On Vivek as the reincarnation of Rajneesh’s childhood sweetheart Shashi, see, Joshi, 105-111. On Vivek see also, Brecher, 33-34; Fox, 12-13; Franklin, 61; Gordon, 39, 43. For an interview with Vivek in 1978, see “Interview with Ma Yoga Vivek”, *Sannyas News*, <http://www.sannyasnews.com/Articles/vivek.html> (accessed 20 July 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Fox, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Brecher, 30.

For critics of the movement, Rajneesh's ability to affect people in this way, when combined with his demand to surrender their egos to him, resulted in a form of brainwashing considered typical of cults. He gave the impression of a "world-class hypnotist" who mesmerised his audience with a combination of sound, gesture and timing.<sup>98</sup>

In May, 1971, Rajneesh announced publicly that he was enlightened for the first time.<sup>99</sup> At around the same time, he changed his name from *Acharya* Shree Rajneesh to *Bhagwan* Shree Rajneesh. "Bhagwan" is an honorific title that translates literally as "the Blessed One" and is used in India to describe an incarnation of God.<sup>100</sup> "God", "self-realized", "the enlightened one", "and the awakened one" have also been used.<sup>101</sup> Controversy surrounded this change of name. Many Indians were offended by the appropriation of this title by someone they viewed as undermining the classical tradition of *sannyas*. At the same time:

The name alienated many of the sophisticated Indians who had struggled to surrender to Rajneesh as a Master. To some it seemed [as] slavish and blind to accept Rajneesh as an incarnation of God as it had been to worship in the traditions he helped them to reject.<sup>102</sup>

Typically, however, the controversy did not concern Bhagwan himself:

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<sup>98</sup> Fitzgerald, 358.

<sup>99</sup> Osho, 231.

<sup>100</sup> Joshi, 112-116; Gordon, 38.

<sup>101</sup> Aveling, 75; Brecher, 15 and 33; Carter, *Charisma*, 48; Van Leen, 36 and 52.

<sup>102</sup> Gordon, 38.

Calling myself Bhagwan was simply symbolic-that now I have taken a different dimension to work. And it has been tremendously useful. All wrong people automatically disappeared and a totally different quality of people started arriving... The crowds disappeared. The word 'Bhagwan' functioned like an atomic explosion. It did well. I am happy that I chose it.<sup>103</sup>

As the number of Westerners increased, Bhagwan began to alternate between giving his talks in Hindi and English.<sup>104</sup> Many Western *sannyasins* were sent to live and work on farms in India or to establish meditation centres in their home countries.<sup>105</sup> Indian *sannyasins* were sent to their villages to spread Bhagwan's teachings.<sup>106</sup>

By this time, there were reportedly operational centres in fifteen countries worldwide – at least two active centres in England, one in the United States and others in European countries.<sup>107</sup>

Since 1960, approximately twelve books compiled from Rajneesh's discourses, *darshans* (being in the presence of a holy person or place) and interviews had been published in English.<sup>108</sup> *The Silent Explosion* (1973) is reported to have been “the public announcement of the new movement”.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Joshi, 113.

<sup>104</sup> Aveling, 75; Fox, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Joshi, 118-120 describes an early attempt to set up a commune in India as an experiment by Bhagwan to put his Western disciples' will to surrender to the test. See also Carter, *Charisma*, 49, 52-53; Gordon, 42-43.

<sup>106</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 50.

<sup>107</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 51.

<sup>108</sup> See for example, *Get Cited*, <http://www.getcited.org/mbrx/PT/3/MBR/10091202> (accessed June 20, 2006).

<sup>109</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 54.

Bhagwan's life is often discussed in terms of "phases." Esoterically, it is described as an experiment with what in Hinduism is called the three *gunas*, understood as "the three basic qualities that make up the human personality".

An individual of *tamas guna* shows inactivity, inertia, indolence; one of *rajas guna* exhibits intense activity or passion; and a person of *sattva guna* has the quality of serenity, calmness and wisdom.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout his school and college years, Bhagwan is considered to have been experimenting with *tamas guna*. While he was busy travelling and lecturing around the country he was experimenting with *rajas guna*. Towards 1974, he began to manifest the *sattva guna*.<sup>111</sup>

On the other hand, the idea that there were "phases" has been described in terms of securing an "international multilevel marketing structure," with the development of a number of business identities related to the Ashram, such as rental housing, cottage craft factories, a health clinic and an Ashram bank. On this view, Rajneesh cultivated relationships with those who had wealth and political connections, such as Laxmi, together with those who had professional skills (medical, legal), fame or experience in therapy.<sup>112</sup> As one writer claims:

While we may never discover the identities, affiliations, and motives (spiritual, political, economic) of his original backers, the corporate façade and management

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<sup>110</sup> Joshi, 69.

<sup>111</sup> Joshi, 75.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Carter, *Charisma*, 59-63.

based on intimate personal association with the charismatic figure became the standard for Rajneesh organizations.<sup>113</sup>

### Pune 1974 – 1981

On March 21, 1974, Bhagwan left Bombay (Mumbai) and moved to Koregoan Park, Pune (also known as Poona) in the Maharashtra State where two residences in adjoining properties of six acres had been bought. Pune was an expanding industrial city of 2.5 million people, 119 miles southeast of Bombay and 1850 feet above sea level on the Deccan Plateau. Koregoan Park was an area where the more illustrious residents of Pune lived in expensive mansions. The property was bought by a public trust, The Rajneesh Foundation, set up by “Bhagwan’s friends”.<sup>114</sup>

The Shree Rajneesh Ashram was established to cater for the hundreds of people that were coming “to be with Bhagwan”. Among them were many wealthy Western *sannyasins* who contributed financially to its establishment.<sup>115</sup> A decline in Bhagwan’s health (he suffered from asthma, diabetes and allergies) is said to have also contributed to the move.<sup>116</sup>

In May, 1974, Bhagwan gave a series of talks that explained his approach, his view of the master-disciple relationship, and his vision for the development of his work in Pune. These were published as *My Way: The Way of the White Clouds* (1975) and

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<sup>113</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 79.

<sup>114</sup> Joshi, 120; Osho, 233; Carter, *Charisma*, 54 and 79; Mullan, 14. Van Leen, 230 provides official figures published by the Rajneesh Foundation in 1979 and 1980.

<sup>115</sup> Gordon, 43.

<sup>116</sup> Joshi, 121-122; Carter, *Charisma*, 54; Mullan, 13.



attracted many Westerners.<sup>117</sup> Several of the *sannyasins* I interviewed cited this book as having influenced their decision to become a *sannyasin*.

Purportedly, from 1974, more than 30,000 people went to Pune. They came from around the world but were predominantly middle-class, well-educated and young.<sup>118</sup> At any one time there were around 6,000 *sannyasins* visiting and about 2,000 living and working there.<sup>119</sup>

A visitor to Pune in 1979 describes the diversity of people visiting and living at the Ashram:

The Ashram is packed with Americans, British, Italians, French, Dutch, Danes, Swedes, and especially Germans. Though English is the official language, the Ashram rings with their accents. There are Japanese—most of whom speak little or no English—and New Zealanders, Australians, and Canadians. There are Hindu and Muslim Indians, disciples who are Jain like Rajneesh and Laxmi, Parsees and Christians. There are—as in almost all the new religious groups I have visited—a disproportionately large number of American Jews, including a few rabbis. There are many Catholics too, former priests and nuns and seminarians. There are doctors and dentists, academics, lawyers, businesspeople, minor movie stars, artists, craftspeople, and every imaginable kind of therapist.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Osho, 233.

<sup>118</sup> Mullan, 23. Carter, *Charisma*, 84 cites Joshi, claiming 25,000 and other sources claiming up to 50,000.

<sup>119</sup> Mullan, 23. Brecher, 35 estimates 25,000 between 1974 and 1978.

<sup>120</sup> Gordon, 45.

Numerous descriptions of life in Pune exist.<sup>121</sup> Like many of the thousands of ashrams in India, one way it supported itself was through contributions by wealthy *sannyasins*. Similarly, like other ashrams, it imposed a particular regime or program of work and meditation, based on the religious ideology providing the foundations, which is meant to provide the support and structure viewed as necessary to move to a “higher consciousness” or achieve “enlightenment”. A Rajneesh Foundation pamphlet, *Welcome to the Shree Rajneesh Ashram*, describes the daily program(?) for meditation “camps” held from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month:

<b>MEDITATION CAMP (11<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> of each month)</b>	
6.00 a.m. – 7.00 a.m.	Dynamic Meditation
7.45. a.m. – 10.00 a.m.	Bhagwan’s discourse
10.15 a.m. – 11.30 a.m.	Sufi Dancing
2.00 p.m. – 3.45 p.m.	Taped discourse
4.00 p.m. – 5.00 p.m.	Nadabrahma Meditation
5.30 p.m. – 6.30 p.m.	Kundalini Meditation
7.00 p.m. – 8.00 p.m.	Nataraj or Gourishankar Meditation <sup>122</sup>

Those who attended could either purchase a “camp pass”, which covered all the activities, or a “daily lecture pass”, which was only valid for the discourse and meditation of that day. Discourses alternated between English one week and Hindi the next.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Joshi, 121-151. See also, Aveling, 191-193; Brecher, 35-39; Gordon, 17-90; Mullan, 15-31; Van Leen, 82-93.

<sup>122</sup> Van Leen, 83.

<sup>123</sup> Van Leen, 83.

Another program, called the “non-camp” program, took place from the 21<sup>st</sup> of one month to the 10<sup>th</sup> of the following month. A typical daily routine for this program was:

<b>NON-CAMP PROGRAMME (21<sup>st</sup> of one month to 10<sup>th</sup> of the next)</b>	
6.00 a.m. – 7.00 a.m.	Dynamic Meditation
7.45. a.m. – 10.00 a.m.	Bhagwan’s discourse
10.15 a.m. – 11.30 a.m.	Sufi Dancing
11.45 a.m. – 1.45 p.m.	Tai Chi
1.45 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.	Taped discourse
3.30 p.m. – 5.15 p.m.	Karate
5.30 p.m. – 6.30 p.m.	Kundalini meditation
6.30 p.m. – 7.30 p.m.	Yoga and Tai Chi
7.30 p.m. – 8.45 p.m.	Singing Group <sup>124</sup>

The Ashram consisted of three “circles” or “sections”.<sup>125</sup> An “inner circle” was reserved for people who worked in the Ashram who looked after Bhagwan and managed the overall administration and organisation of the Ashram.<sup>126</sup> The Ashram also published a fortnightly newsletter in three languages and a bi-monthly magazine called *Sannyas*.<sup>127</sup> Work was well organised and considered to be a form of “selfless service”. Many of these *sannyasins* lived permanently at the Ashram, some having purchased their apartments.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Van Leen, 83. See also Gordon, 19-20.

<sup>125</sup> Aveling, 192 refers to them as “circles”. Van Leen, 82 refers to them as “sections”. Their descriptions are marginally different.

<sup>126</sup> Aveling, 192.

<sup>127</sup> Van Leen, 229-230 provides details and discussion on what he calls, “the pink presses of Pune”.

<sup>128</sup> On the organisation of the Ashram, see Aveling, 192, Franklin, 76-77, Gordon, 19, Mullan 24 and Van Leen, 82.

There was the perception that the closer one was to Bhagwan, the higher one's status, and workers in this circle had their meals provided and were given prominent positions in the daily activities of the Ashram, including front row seats in discourses. There were about 1,500 permanent residents.<sup>129</sup>

Another section was open to all *sannyasins* and to the general public, and included the huge auditorium called *Buddha Hall*, where discourses and other activities were held. Discourses were taped and transcribed into book or magazine form.<sup>130</sup> *Sannyasins* and non-*sannyasins* alike could join in meditations, eat at the restaurant, and wander around the small public area of the Ashram and meet Rajneesh in *darshan*.<sup>131</sup> There was also another "sub-commune" outside the Ashram. Seekers and *sannyasins* lived in nearby houses or in whatever accommodation they could construct, such as bamboo huts and tents, near the Ashram.<sup>132</sup>

The Pune Ashram could be viewed as different to more traditional Indian ashrams in several ways. Rajneesh maintained that he was not attempting to impose or create an ideology. Rather, he was creating a "Buddhfield," an abstract notion understood as an "energy-field" created by an enlightened Master within which others would be able to go into deep meditation and move towards enlightenment themselves.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Aveling, 192; Carter, *Charisma*, 56.

<sup>130</sup> Van Leen, 82 and 229-230.

<sup>131</sup> Aveling, 193. For an extended description of *darshan*, see Sally Belfrage, *Flowers of Emptiness: Reflections on an Ashram*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1981), 136-148.

<sup>132</sup> Van Leen, 82.

<sup>133</sup> On the "Buddhfield" see, Mullan, 93.

Unlike most other ashrams, women were assigned significant and powerful roles. Rajneesh insisted that he did not want the commune “run by the intellect,” as he believed men would, but “by the heart,” which he believed was the province of the feminine. Women were more “receptive” and “intuitive” and so able to move towards enlightenment easier than men.<sup>134</sup> Additionally, informants explained that he was attempting to redress the inequalities of patriarchal culture, the oppression of “woman,” and in its place, introducing a kind of feminisation of culture. It was an extension of his Tantric orientation, which takes as its founding assumption the balanced mutuality of the masculine and the feminine.

Rather than adopting an ascetic lifestyle, the focus was to be on celebration and affirmation of life. “Life, love and laughter” became the catchcry. The commune offered an alternative and experimental approach to religious meta-narratives, and an environment where constructs of self, family and society were challenged, articulated and re-defined in the daily regimes and practices of the movement. The techniques used to achieve this, a combination of Eastern and Western trends such as dynamic meditation and later therapy groups, were unheard of in other ashrams. Rather than creating a sanctuary where traditionally quiet and disciplined spiritual work and meditation could be carried out, the combined techniques Rajneesh used meant that *sannyasins* were continually forced, “to live in a state of insecurity,” where, “all sorts of crisis situations are created, until finally there’s an explosion. And in its wake, a transformation.”<sup>135</sup> As one writer notes, while accounts of those who took *sannyas*

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<sup>134</sup> Joshi, 7. For a more critical view on the importance Rajneesh attached to women, see Fitzgerald, 321.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in Fitzgerald, 321.

and those who did not often differ in certain respects, they are consistent in describing the Ashram as having a “madhouse-carnival atmosphere.”<sup>136</sup>

In June, 1974, Bhagwan introduced his first meditation camp in Pune announcing that a “new phase” (the *sattva guna*) of his work would begin. He would now only work with “authentic seekers” and would no longer lead the meditations in person. Instead, his empty chair would be brought into the meditation hall.<sup>137</sup> This was in part due to health issues, but he also told *sannyasins* that it was a “device” to help prepare them to continue their work without depending on him in person. He explains this move:

Just feeling that I am present you may do things which you never wanted to do; just to impress me you may exert more... You must learn to work without me... if you become addicted to my physical presence then rather than being a help it may become a disturbance... Your meditation should be such here that it can happen without my presence, then wherever you go the meditation will not be in any way affected.<sup>138</sup>

Bhagwan continued to give morning discourses from July, 1974 until 1981.<sup>139</sup> Speaking on spiritual traditions (including Tao, Zen, Christianity, Tantra and Tibetan Buddhism) on one day, on the next, he would answer questions from his audience.<sup>140</sup> One book was published for each series of ten days, totalling over two hundred and forty books in seven years.<sup>141</sup> His incorporation of jokes into these discourses is

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<sup>136</sup> See Fitzgerald, 292-293.

<sup>137</sup> Joshi, 122; Osho, 234.

<sup>138</sup> *A Bird on the Wing*, Chapter. 1, [Book on CD]. Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1974.

<sup>139</sup> Osho, 235; Aveling, 76.

<sup>140</sup> For more details on English discourses covered between 1974 and 1980 see Aveling, 76.

<sup>141</sup> Osho, 235. Aveling, 76 lists the names of discourses published between 1974 and 1980.

often commented on with claims that after 1979, the number of jokes rose rapidly and many appeared to have been drawn from *Playboy* or similar sources.<sup>142</sup> Another aspect often mentioned is the ritual of being sniffed before being allowed to enter the hall to listen to his discourses and attend *darshan*. This was attributed to Rajneesh's asthma and allergies.<sup>143</sup>

In April, 1975, the first therapy groups took place.<sup>144</sup> Beginning with the introduction of encounter and primal therapy groups, which were cathartic-type groups designed to remove repressive thought structures and emotions and where participants were often pushed to violate all constraints of prior socialisation, the list of therapies soon expanded to include other more advanced ones that were meant to help the released life energy to flow through all aspects of one's being – physical, emotional, mental and transcendent.<sup>145</sup>

The groups were a blend of Eastern techniques of meditation and Western methods of therapy. Therapists, particularly from the Human Potential Movement centres such as Esalen in California and Quaesitor in England, but including more traditional psychiatrists and psychologists, went to Pune, many becoming “group leaders”.<sup>146</sup>

That so many therapists became *sannyasins* is viewed as significant, but opinions as to the reasons why they did vary. On the one hand, there are those who consider that the involvement of therapists in the movement rested on their disillusionment with

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<sup>142</sup> Aveling, 76.

<sup>143</sup> See Gordon, 20; Mullan, 24.

<sup>144</sup> Joshi, 124; Mullan, 26. Osho, 238 claims they started in August 1975.

<sup>145</sup> Joshi, 124. For more information of the different types of groups, see Aveling, 192-193. See also Gordon, 20.

<sup>146</sup> See Fitzgerald, 282-287, Gordon, 62-65 and Mullan, 20-22 for descriptions of the human potential movement.

the increasing commercialisation of the HPM and offered them a way to include a spiritual aspect or a “quality of meditateness” that seemed lacking in the West.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, many of these therapists seemed to consider Bhagwan as a “master therapist” whose work might be the next step in the evolution of psychotherapy.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, the therapies in Pune are described as a “symbiotic business merger” where Western therapists were allowed more freedom to experiment with some therapies that otherwise might have brought up questions of legalisation and regulation in the West.<sup>149</sup> Regardless of these differences, the groups became a major aspect of life at the Ashram. People paid to do them, as they did to attend meditations and morning discourses, and new *sannyasins* were often told to complete particular groups by Bhagwan.<sup>150</sup> By the end of 1977, the number of groups had increased to fifty.<sup>151</sup>

Bhagwan claimed that therapy was a “modern need” and the first stage of the path to developing a “new consciousness”, particularly for Westerners:

My insistence [on groups]...is very fundamental; these other ashrams in India have no notion of the modern mind. Buddha and his meditations...and Patanjali [the pre-eminent Master of Yoga] and his methods, are of immense value, but they cannot work directly on the modern mind...Before you can do Vipassna or Zazen, you have to go through groups like encounter and primal therapy and Gestalt. They will take the

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<sup>147</sup> Mullan, 26; Joshi, 123.

<sup>148</sup> Gordon, 65.

<sup>149</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 57.

<sup>150</sup> Aveling, 193.

<sup>151</sup> Osho, 238. Aveling, 193 claims that the number of groups eventually increased to eighty a few years after they started. Gordon, 62 claims thirty in 1977 and between sixty and ninety each month in 1979.



poison out of your system, then you will again be primitive, innocent, childlike. Then Vipassna will work. Otherwise not.<sup>152</sup>

The need to push the boundaries of social behaviour was initially encouraged by Rajneesh. He describes the process in one of his early discourses:

...if you watch the encounter group you will feel sick...because you will see such animality coming out; you could never have imagined that human beings can be such animals. But the animality is within you too, just repressed...You have to bring it all out that is repressed...without any evaluation about what is good, what is bad. And suddenly you see great animals roaring inside you. They are violent, and you have been taught to be non-violent. Great rage, for *no* reason at all, will arise. You will start beating the wall; you may start beating yourself.<sup>153</sup>

Both supporters, including *sannyasins*, and critics of the movement substantiate the occurrence of sex and violence in the groups, but their accounts and interpretations vary. For example, one suggests that at the time the Ashram was “a place to do a lot of whatever you had always dreamed of” and that in the early days “you could put on the boxing gloves and go a couple of rounds with similarly-minded people”.<sup>154</sup> On sex:

[A]s advertised, it was free. It was there for the getting and the giving, but not for the taking. In those pre-AIDS days there was lots of sex with as many partners as possible. Sometimes it was smash and grab with rage, jagged edges and not knowing each other

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<sup>152</sup> Quoted in Gordon, 62.

<sup>153</sup> *Philosophia Perennis*, Vol. 1, Chapter 10, Question 5. [Book on CD]. Osho Books. Osho International Foundation. April, 1995. Originally published Rajneesh Foundation. 1981.

<sup>154</sup> Brecher, 35.

in the morning. More often it was rounded and friendly with hand holding, hugs and lasting for absurd lengths of time and lovers staring deeply into each other's eyes for hours by candlelight.”<sup>155</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, the excesses of sex and violence are viewed as evidence of the effect of Bhagwan's charismatic leadership:

Rajneesh tells his followers to do as they like and not to worry about the consequences. They are not yet aware – he is the only one who is ‘truly’ aware – they are still living in a dream world, an illusion, so it doesn't matter what happens. What ever will happen is all sacred, because they are sacred (without fully realising it) – so they have his ‘go-ahead’ to do what they wish – and it seems some of them take him very literally.<sup>156</sup>

For what seemed to be a fast growing world wide phenomenon, with many Rajneesh centres also being established by *sannyasins* returning to their home countries, relatively little was known about what actually went on in the Pune Ashram. As world membership increased, rumours of strange sexual behaviour, incidents of violence and enormous wealth emerged. After the public release of the German documentary, *The Ashram*, in 1981, the focus on sexuality in the Ashram became the principal means of defining the movement for the general public and encounter groups became the public face of practices at the Ashram. As this kind of media attention increased, the commune responded with a decree by Bhagwan that the excesses of the encounter groups were no longer needed.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Brecher, 36.

<sup>156</sup> Van Leen, 194.

<sup>157</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 69; Fitzgerald, 300.

By the late 1970s, Rajneesh had been news in India for at least a decade. While most “branded him as a blot on the escutcheon of the nation” others called him “the greatest spiritual philosopher since Shankara two thousand years before”.<sup>158</sup> By the summer of 1977, he was becoming a “*phenome*” in Europe and several, mostly German but also English and Dutch, journalists had interviewed him. Rajneesh was virtually unknown in the US, however, with reports about the Ashram being relegated to small esoteric periodicals.<sup>159</sup>

At the same time, media reports began to liken the Ashram in Pune to the People’s Temple in Jonestown, which ended in mass suicide in November, 1978.<sup>160</sup> After this, charismatic movements such as the Rajneesh movement came under closer scrutiny.<sup>161</sup> Articles about the controversial practices and evident “cult” status of the Rajneesh movement appeared in the press, mainly in Europe and India. Consular officials at the US Consulate in Bombay were warned about the potential threat of any “cults” that were evident, the Rajneesh retreat and those of other apparent *gurus* with apparent Western followings being targeted.<sup>162</sup>

In the late seventies, the Indian government began to respond to this negative image of the Ashram. Rajneesh’s public discrediting of political and religious leaders, in particular Moraj Desai, the Prime Minister of India from 1977 to 1979, was affecting

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<sup>158</sup> Brecher, 37.

<sup>159</sup> Brecher, 37-38 provides details on other encounters with the press.

<sup>160</sup> On November 18 1978, renegade Christian Reverend, Jim Jones, and 900 members of the People’s Temple committed suicide by drinking cyanide-laced Kool Aid. The mass suicide was the result of the shooting of California Congressman Leo Ryan and four others at an airfield near Jonestown, Guyana, where the movement had moved. Brecher raises the question of the killing of the congressman and the four others as being a CIA cover up. See Brecher, 39 for comments on this.

<sup>161</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 63.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Brecher, 40.

the operation of the commune.<sup>163</sup> The movement was planning to relocate the Ashram to larger premises to establish a much larger commune where Rajneesh's vision of a "new humanity" could be developed.<sup>164</sup> Laxmi, who had been his personal secretary since his early days, was investigating possible sites for this development. These attempts to relocate within India, however, were being continually frustrated by Desai's government.<sup>165</sup> The government had also been investigating the tax-exempt status of the movement and had eventually cancelled it, resulting in an estimated \$5 million dollars in current and back tax claims.<sup>166</sup>

Relations with the local Pune community were also fraught with tension. The predominance and large numbers of Westerners at the Ashram, while initially having the support of local businesses, also caused a number of problems. On the one hand, many Indians were provoked by the public displays of affection by *sannyasins* in the streets (holding hands, hugging and kissing in public for example).<sup>167</sup> On the other, the number of incidents of harassment by locals, particularly of women in the Ashram, increased and threats were made on Bhagwan's life.<sup>168</sup> Curiosity about what went on at the Ashram is said to have led many Indians to "flock" to Pune. The views of Koregoan Park residents vary; some called for Bhagwan's expulsion from the area, while others complained about the number of local people crowding to see

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<sup>163</sup> Bhagwan's "vitriolic attacks" on Desai are viewed as one of two "serious errors" that nearly ended the movement in India. The other error being the permission given to film inside the Ashram for the film *Ashram*. See Carter, *Charisma*, 63.

<sup>164</sup> For more on the new commune, see Gordon, 92.

<sup>165</sup> Joshi, 145 claims the acquisition of land twenty miles from Pune for a new commune that Bhagwan called Rajneeshdham. Due to bureaucratic problems, however, it was unable to go ahead. See also, Fitzgerald, 303-304.

<sup>166</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 64; Osho, 243; Gordon, 93; Fitzgerald, 304.

<sup>167</sup> Mullan, 23.

<sup>168</sup> Osho, 243. For more on reactions of Indians see Gordon, 18-19. For details of reports of violence against Bhagwan and *sannyasins*, see Joshi, 161-162; Carter, *Charisma*, 71; Mullan, 31; Gordon, 94.

what was going on as a nuisance.<sup>169</sup> News also that some Westerners visiting the commune ended up as psychotic patients in Pune hospital and other members were engaging in drug-running and prostitution to finance their stay had also become public knowledge.<sup>170</sup> At the same time, Bhagwan had introduced a program of sterilisation. Although it was not mandatory, many viewed doing so as evidence of their commitment to him.<sup>171</sup> Things came to a head when, in May 1980, an attempt by a Hindu extremist was made on Bhagwan's life during morning discourse. A knife was thrown but fell short and the assailant was removed from the hall.<sup>172</sup>

The events of this period are treated differently depending on how the movement is viewed. For *sannyasins* and other supporters, the actions of the government were a vendetta in response to Bhagwan's controversial views.<sup>173</sup> For critics and others, it was the logical course of action to take in order to stem the growth of the movement, which on this view is perceived largely in negative terms.<sup>174</sup>

In the late seventies also, there were changes within the commune. Threats to Bhagwan and the commune led to an increase in security measures at the Ashram. The organisational structure of the Ashram was also becoming more rigid:

Boundaries between the *sannyasin* community and the external world were less permeable. Rules had been formulated for official Rajneesh centers in the West. *Sannyasin's* behavior was being examined for deviation from orthodoxy.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Brecher, 43.

<sup>170</sup> Fitzgerald, 302; Mullan, 24.

<sup>171</sup> Gordon, 82-83; Fitzgerald, 300-301; Sam, 94.

<sup>172</sup> Joshi, 149-150; Carter, *Charisma*, 70; Gordon, 91; Mullan, 30; Osho, 246. Franklin (47) writes of a similar attempted assassination at the Bombay apartment, before the move to Pune.

<sup>173</sup> See Osho, 243 and Brecher, 48.

<sup>174</sup> For example Carter, 64.

<sup>175</sup> Gordon, 91.

On April 10, 1981, Bhagwan entered “the ultimate stage of his work” and began a period of silence.<sup>176</sup> To some this was another “new phase” , a continuation of Bhagwan’s work that at this point became focused on creating a “new human”, a concept said to parallel closely Nietzsche’s idea of the “superman” as developed in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.<sup>177</sup>

This creation of a “new humanity” was considered to be necessary for planetary survival.<sup>178</sup> Bhagwan had been claiming repeatedly the urgent need for this “new humanity” in his morning discourses.<sup>179</sup> His view that, “the whole of humanity up to now has lived in a schizophrenic way,” and that, “everyone has been cut into pieces, fragments,” was framed in terms of differences between the East and the West.

In the West, the focus had been on the body, while in the East it had been on the soul:

The East says that the body is illusory, it is only an appearance, a shadow, it has no reality.

The West says that consciousness is a by-product -- it does not exist in itself, it is an appearance. When the body dies nothing remains, the body is all, and the consciousness that you feel is just the combination of all the elements of the body.

Rather than viewing the East and West as doing different things, however, Bhagwan claimed that both were essentially trying to find a rational way of being one,

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<sup>176</sup> Joshi, 157; Osho, 247; Brecher, 49. Carter (64-65) claims that several observers note a decline in Bhagwan’s performance as the charismatic leader and speculates that this may have led to the beginning of his silent period.

<sup>177</sup> Jina, 50. Entering periods of silence not uncommon for gurus in India. On Nietzsche’s influence, see Carter, *Charisma*, 41.

<sup>178</sup> Jina, 50; Gordon, 92.

<sup>179</sup> Gordon, 92.

“...because to be two means a constant dis-ease, a conflict”. His whole approach he said, “is to bring a bridge into each individual, so that you are one whole”. To this end, he symbolically employed Zorba (the materialism of the West based on Nikos Kazantzakis’s novel *Zorba the Greek*), for the body and Buddha (the spiritualism of the East) for the soul.

Others have interpreted this silence as a strategic move towards establishing an “experimental society” supported by a “multilevel spiritual marketing structure”. A “lower profile” may have made it easier for Bhagwan to negotiate a visa to the US.<sup>180</sup> Additionally, it is claimed that there was a “marked degeneration” in Bhagwan’s discourses during this period resulting in his silence.<sup>181</sup> Bhagwan’s health was also said to have been deteriorating for some time and there were rumours that he might die. The apparent development of severe back problems that might require surgery at any time was added to his allergies, asthma and diabetes.<sup>182</sup>

While heightened scrutiny, increasingly negative press coverage, death threats and tension within the Ashram itself and between the Ashram and the local Pune community and the government were viewed as contributing factors to Bhagwan’s departure from India, Sheela Silverman, assistant to Bhagwan’s personal secretary, Laxmi, had been advocating for Bhagwan’s move to the US for medical treatment for some time and had already investigated possible locations where a large commune could be established.<sup>183</sup> While some claim that Bhagwan did not want to

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<sup>180</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 65-66 and 71; Gordon, 92 provides an account of the move to build a new commune.

<sup>181</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 64-65.

<sup>182</sup> Joshi, 162; Mullan, 31; Gordon, 93; Osho, 247; Brecher, 49.

<sup>183</sup> For descriptions of events that preceded Bhagwan’s departure see Brecher, 50-54 and 73; Carter, *Charisma*, 70-72 and 128-129; Gordon, 93-95; Fitzgerald, 303-304; Joshi, 162-163.

move to America, others maintain that from the early eighties, Bhagwan, Sheela and others had conspired to move the commune to the US.<sup>184</sup> One *ex-sannyasin* claims that during this period, Australia had also been considered as a possible alternative site.<sup>185</sup>

Bhagwan's departure from Pune was planned but known only by a select few, and on June 1, 1981, along with his household and medical staff and a small circle of "higher level" *sannyasins*, he left Bombay for the US. Most of the *sannyasins* in Pune at the time, around 6,000, found out after the fact and there was much confusion and chaos as thousands prepared to leave India.<sup>186</sup>

Initially many thought that he had gone temporarily and would return to India after an operation in the US. There were also some who were angry at the way it happened, having invested everything they had into the community there in the belief that things would continue as they had for a number of years. Some left and others stayed in India to participate in the dismantling of the Ashram. Most were dispersing to Europe, America and Australia, however, where they would soon be told to create and live in self-sufficient communes.<sup>187</sup>

Comments from Fremantle informants who were in Pune at the time offer some insight into the effects Bhagwan's sudden departure had:

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<sup>184</sup> On Bhagwan not wanting to move to America see Joshi, 163. On Sheela's role see, for example, Brecher, 70; Carter, *Charisma*, 70-72; Gordon, 93-95.

<sup>185</sup> See Carter, 70.

<sup>186</sup> Gordon, 94-95 claims the plan to move to the US began in late 1980 with considerable sums of money being moved illegally out of India and key personnel being sent to the US ahead of Bhagwan's departure. See also Brecher, 70, and Carter, *Charisma*, 70-72 and 131-132.

<sup>187</sup> Gordon, 93-94.



When Osho left India, it was on a 'need to know' basis. I was personally shocked...glad I didn't burn my nursing certificates...I was suddenly flung out into world...and needed to borrow money to come back. [s\_4]

When I came back to Perth I was shocked after leaving the 'cotton wool' world of the Ashram. I had hepatitis, no money and stayed with my parents. I felt lost and missed the community. [s\_11]

I was there at the end of Pune 1. A core group went to the US. A bunch left. There had been no warning. I had to find my own way back. I had no money. Some were stuck. In some ways unconscionable. But it saved my life, created a breather. I had to immerse myself back into society...I created a business...the idea was to get enough money to get to US. I had to find a new way to be in the world during this process. [s\_6]

Just before he left he organised to have western films and a bar in the Ashram to familiarise us with the west because we'd become so institutionalised. Some had been there for years and were out of contact with things western. People cut their hair, wore make up... [s\_8]

It was evidently a very disruptive time for *sannyasins*. A large number of those who went back to their own countries, however, invested their time and energy into establishing new communes and saving enough money to go to Oregon in the US, where America's "largest experimental commune" would soon be developed.

## Chapter Two: An experimental community in the US – Oregon: 1981 – 1985

/1981/

On June 2, 1981, Bhagwan and his entourage arrived in the US and stayed at Kip's Castle, a mansion recently acquired by the Chidvilas Rajneesh Meditation Center in Montclair, New Jersey.<sup>188</sup> By this time Sheela had clearly replaced Laxmi as Bhagwan's personal secretary and, with the help of her husband at the time, Jayananda (formerly John Shelfer, a New Jersey businessman), purchased what was known as the Big Muddy Ranch in Oregon consisting of 64,000 acres of arid, overgrazed land.<sup>189</sup> The nearest town of Antelope (with a population of 40 mainly retirees) was 19 miles away and it was 150 miles from Portland, the largest city in Oregon. Although many considered this land as close to an ecological disaster, in a few years it became the site for the establishment of "the group's most ambitious experiment".<sup>190</sup>

The Big Muddy cost US\$5.75 million and included lease rights to an additional 17,000 acres owned by the Bureau of Land Management.<sup>191</sup> During the late seventies, the movement had attracted large numbers of wealthy and professional people so that by the time of Bhagwan's arrival in the US, it was well established financially, with businesses and centres operating in many countries around the world and well able to finance such an enterprise. As Carter suggests, it had become a multinational corporation, "with many technically independent legal identities in many countries around the world":

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<sup>188</sup> More information on Chidvilas can be found in Brecher, 53; Carter, *Charisma*, 69-70 and 132-135.

<sup>189</sup> Details of the purchase are found in Brecher, 71-72 and Carter, *Charisma*, 133-135.

<sup>190</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 84-85.

<sup>191</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 133.

The movement is coordinated and supported through a fluid and complex composite of profit and nonprofit corporations, trusts, communes, cooperatives, service centers, businesses, minor factories, meditation centers, therapy centers, and unofficial networks.<sup>192</sup>

In July, 1981, Sheela, her husband and a small group of *sannyasins* moved to the area, which was later re-named Rajneeshpuram (often referred to as Rancho Rajneesh or simply, the Ranch), and immediately began organising for the establishment of the new commune. Initially, the movement claimed that it intended only to establish a small farming community that would accommodate around forty people. Several properties in Antelope were purchased and building permits were soon requested, one of the first being an application for a printing plant to replace the small mail-order store there that *sannyasins* had been using to ship publications of Bhagwan's discourses. At the same time construction on the Ranch began in earnest.<sup>193</sup>

Reactions to the arrival of the new dwellers from the townspeople of nearby Antelope were reportedly wary yet welcoming and there was a degree of "goodwill" from both parties. News that the group was a "cult" having immoral attitudes towards family, sex and God had reached the predominantly Christian population, however, and there was some apprehension about what the group was actually intending to do:

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<sup>192</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 72-73.

<sup>193</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 135-138 maintains that initially, Sheela and other members of the movement claimed that they were planning only to build a small agricultural commune with 40 residents. Given their actions, which many regarded as underhanded, however, it became clear that they intended to develop a much larger commune. See also Gordon, 120-121 and Van Leen, 244-245.

Some local concerns were quite limited at first (offence at advertisements, concern with the rapid growth, annoyance at misrepresentations, land-use and sewerage concerns). Sheela sought to dispel these by renting a hall for meeting the neighbours. The most concerned of the residents cumulated Rajneesh materials, began researching the movement's background, established small telephone networks, and considered ways to block further development. Others were initially friendly, with offers of advice or loans of equipment.<sup>194</sup>

With Bhagwan's arrival at the settlement on August 29, 1981, suspicion became more widespread and for many locals it implied the intention to establish a major spiritual centre there. Things moved quickly from the start and while *sannyasins* were busy applying for building permits and trying to dispel the negativity towards them through concerted public relations exercises, resistance from the local Antelope community was increasing and becoming more organised. Locals from Antelope organised with the two communities having jurisdiction over the ranch (Wasco and Jefferson), and with lawyers from *1000 Friends of Oregon*, a "watchdog" environmental group contacted by local residents, to challenge further development by the *sannyasins* by blocking the issue of commercial building permits on the grounds that county land-use plans limited non-farm uses to designated Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB).<sup>195</sup> They suggested that *sannyasins* explore development in Antelope, the nearest UGB, rather than attempt further ranch development. As a result, *sannyasins* immediately purchased four additional lots there.<sup>196</sup> The last thing

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<sup>194</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 137.

<sup>195</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 136-141. Urban Growth Boundaries are regional boundaries meant to control the development of high density urbanisation. For more on 1,000 Friends, see Kirk Braun, *Rajneeshpuram: The Unwelcome Society* (West Linn, Oregon: Scout Creek Press, 1984), 161-168 and Brecher, 140-141.

<sup>196</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 139-140.

locals in Antelope wanted, however, was an increase in *sannyasin* presence in their town.<sup>197</sup>

In the space of about six months, it became evident that the Ranch settlement was not going to go unchallenged. By the end of 1981, the two communities had become embroiled in an increasing number of legal, political and public relations actions. Local residents were organising opposition to *sannyasin* development through lobbying, the press, legal challenges, and pressure tactics.<sup>198</sup> *Sannyasins* were counteracting these actions using the same channels.

Suits, countersuits, injunctions and appeals were filed by individuals and attorneys on both sides.<sup>199</sup> The most uncompromising of these was the attempt by local residents to *disincorporate* Antelope by organising a special election with the idea of voting to abolish Antelope's UGB status as a means of keeping *sannyasins* out of their town. Disincorporation of a town was a highly unusual step to take, and the issue became a major media event, giving voice to the local community in their attempts to discredit the *sannyasins*. The story reached a worldwide audience and support for the townspeople came from other similar minded individuals in places such as India and Germany. While this generated a certain amount of support for locals from organisations around the country, it was mainly to be "a lot of rhetoric and nothing more", with most, except for several nearby towns, adopting "a ho-hum attitude" to the situation.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Braun, 43-45; Carter, *Charisma*, 142-145 and 149-152; Van Leen, 244-246 quotes a *Washington Post* news report claiming that *sannyasin* numbers swelled to 300 during this time. By July 1983, only 16 original residents remained and 70 *sannyasins* were now living there.

<sup>198</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 139-143.

<sup>199</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 143.

<sup>200</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 145. See also Braun, 44.

*Sannyasins* counteracted by filing a petition to incorporate the commune as a city, thereby establishing a new UGB and so enabling them to develop essential public services. It also meant that the city could be involved in revenue sharing as well as state liquor, petrol and cigarette tax money.<sup>201</sup> At the same time, if this petition was unsuccessful, *sannyasins* also increased their presence in Antelope since securing control of at least one UGB would be necessary to continue development. In under a year it became apparent that relations had degenerated to the point that any further relations would be fought out in the courts.<sup>202</sup>

/1982/

During 1982, it had become clear to the local Oregonian community that *sannyasins* planned to build a much larger community than they had originally claimed.<sup>203</sup> Conflict between the two communities continued to rise and was now moving in new directions to include more involvement by political figures. While sections of the community devised numerous strategies to block further expansion of the community, construction at the Ranch nevertheless continued at a remarkable pace and plans to hold the *First Annual World Celebration* in July, expected to attract around 7,000 *sannyasins* from around the world, were underway.<sup>204</sup>

Many have commented on the ability of the *sannyasin* community to change, so quickly and radically, the landscape of what was considered an ecological disaster.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Van Leen, 243.

<sup>202</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 141-143 and 149-151. See also Brecher, 82-84 and Gordon, 122-123.

<sup>203</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 143-144.

<sup>204</sup> For example, see Carter, *Charisma*, 145-146. Purportedly more than 200 people were initiated into *sannyas* each day of the celebration. See also Van Leen, 237.

<sup>205</sup> For example, Gordon, 119.

By the end of the first year, in mid 1982, they had brought in mobile homes, installed a new irrigation system, dug wells, cleared land, planted crops and fruit trees, and established electricity, water supplies and sewerage disposal systems, all of which cost US\$20-30,000,000. By July, a modern, fully-equipped dairy barn had been built, more houses sited and a repair and servicing depot for farm vehicles had been completed. They had also established a printing and publishing facility (with a weekly newspaper – *The Rajneesh Times*), started a small airline (*Air Rajneesh*) and developed shops, restaurants, a discotheque and bar and other commercial activities. Work also began on a large two-story administration building, and on “the largest solar greenhouse in America, covering 2.02 acres.” Other planned projects for the year included constructing educational facilities, a community centre and a 350 million gallon reservoir.<sup>206</sup> Without the ability to develop commercial activities on the ranch, *sannyasins* developed these in Antelope where around 100 *sannyasins* had moved.<sup>207</sup>

*Sannyasins* viewed the commune as a microcosm of contemporary society, a “spiritual and material oasis,” which, therefore, could not remain simply as an agricultural society if it was to truly reflect the dilemma of modern man. In one of their publications, *Rajneeshpuram: An Oasis* (1982), they claim:

Our vision of Rajneeshpuram therefore includes provision for a small city, so that we can provide a complete working model, a society in miniature, for the whole world to study...If we can build a city in a semi-desert, surrounded by land that has

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<sup>206</sup> Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, *Rajneeshpuram: An Oasis* (Antelope, Oregon: Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, 1982), 11. See also Mullan, 127-129; Carter, *Charisma*, 144-145 and 153-154.

<sup>207</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 90 and 145.

been reclaimed and made agriculturally productive through love and care, recycling wastes, exploring new sources of energy, giving back to nature as much as we take from her and enhancing areas of natural beauty and wildlife, we will have achieved our goal.<sup>208</sup>

Aside from their ability to organise such vast amounts of capital to invest in its construction, there is little doubt that the beliefs of the *sannyasins* living and working there were a major contributing factor. While the idea of work as “selfless service” had been encouraged in Pune, the idea of “work as meditation” or “work as worship” became more pronounced in the US.<sup>209</sup> Many *sannyasins* believed that they were building a community where they could live for the rest of their lives and were intent on achieving Bhagwan’s vision of this “new society”. Carter suggests, however, that the notion of “work as worship” should be taken at face value only:

Many *sannyasins* were encouraged to “stay in the world” – to manage investment (and continue contributions). Talents were to be placed at the disposal of the movement and those lacking wealth or notable talent contributed their labor.<sup>210</sup>

Nevertheless, the need to finance such a huge project became a priority both for those actually living in Oregon and for those in other communes around the world.

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The strains between the two communities continued to rise. The strategies and tactics used by both sides led to continued tension and threats were often exchanged. This alarmed some officials and one requested assistance from federal authorities to allay any further escalation of violence by seeking accommodation of the conflicting

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<sup>208</sup> Quoted in Mullan, 129.

<sup>209</sup> For details on the types of residents and daily routines on the commune, see Carter, *Charisma*, 20-26.

<sup>210</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 74.

<sup>211</sup> Gordon, 103-104 and 152. For more details on the financial aspect, see Carter, *Charisma*, 73-119 and Mullan, 130-132.



interests. Effectively, this resulted in a “compromise agreement”, signed on July 8, whereby:

...the Antelope council would approve all pending building permits, consider new applications within 30 days, impose no moratorium on building, endorse the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram, avoid interference with the Rajneeshpuram comprehensive plan, approve residential use for buildings already so occupied in commercial zones, and drop all pending litigation. In exchange, Rajneesh representatives agreed to request no new permits in Antelope for 1982, to pay costs for any community improvements required for their developments, to restrict further development in Antelope until services were available, to pay professional costs associated with zoning changes, and to drop all pending litigation.<sup>212</sup>

In November, *sannyasins* succeeded in gaining political control over Antelope through the election of *sannyasin* residents to nine out of ten official posts.<sup>213</sup> This was largely reported as a “takeover” by the press:

Locals felt that Rajneesh residents were involved in a subterfuge to protect expansive development plans rather than a genuine choice to settle permanently in Antelope. They also believed that the Rajneesh settlers intended to displace them and their way of life. The highly mobile Rajneesh settled as directed by commune leaders and felt the law protected their right to do so. They saw locals as hostile bigots seeking to exclude any who were different. Long-term individual settlement plans make no sense from the point of view of *sannyasin*. They merely participated in the experimental community of Bhagwan.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 153. See also Braun, 45.

<sup>213</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 145 and Gordon, 123-124.

<sup>214</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 161-162. See Braun, 113-129 for a description of council meetings after this.

According to one study, however, “the election merely formalized de facto dominance, forcing the local opposition into the broader political arenas of the surrounding counties and state”:<sup>215</sup>

The agreement did not resolve all conflict, however, since the Antelope council immediately put forth an ordinance that would exempt all long-term residents (non-*sannyasin* residents) from any new taxes. In response *sannyasin* leaders decided to elect their own members to the council in the next election, due later in the year.<sup>216</sup>

There were about 70 *sannyasins* living in Antelope at the time and only a few prior residents.<sup>217</sup>

While opposition did increase, *sannyasins* nevertheless succeeded in fighting off most of it. The disincorporation of Antelope was defeated in April, 1982.<sup>218</sup> In May, commune residents won the right to incorporate the new city of Rajneeshpuram.<sup>219</sup>

Opposition to the planned First Annual World Celebration was also overcome and a 2,000 tent city had been constructed to accommodate an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 visitors to the commune for the festival, held from July 3-7.<sup>220</sup>

In spite of the legal turmoil and uncompromising rhetoric that had plagued its establishment in Oregon, the Rajneesh commune had achieved most of the fundamental requirements for their vision for a “new society” and by the end of 1982, had succeeded in establishing itself physically, economically, and politically.

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<sup>215</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 161.

<sup>216</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 153. See also Braun, 47-48 and Gordon, 132-134.

<sup>217</sup> Braun, 49-50.

<sup>218</sup> Braun, 45-46; Carter, *Charisma*, 151-152; Gordon, 122-123.

<sup>219</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 152-154. Although city status had been granted in the lower courts, the decision was challenged by 1000 Friends and then by the attorney general later. It remained an ongoing issue. See also, Juliet Forman, *Bhagwan: The Buddha for the Future* (Poona, India: The Rebel Publishing House, 1987), 300 and Gordon, 123.

<sup>220</sup> For descriptions of the festival see Carter, *Charisma*, 156 and Mullan, 130-131.

<sup>221</sup> As further development continued throughout the year, the local community persevered with expressing their concern and dissent. While local organisations opposing the commune were also supported by other oppositional groups (those with “anti-cult” or fundamental emphases) from nearby counties, their impact on the broader political and ideological communities in Oregon appeared to be minimal. The dispute was considered largely a small scale one, and although occasional conflicts and skirmishes had been a part of life since the arrival of the *sannyasins*, many officials were more concerned with avoiding any kind of violent confrontation by encouraging compromises than with the expansion of the community itself. On their part, both state and regional press characterised it as emerging from conflicting religious identifications, often encouraging “religious tolerance” rather than positioning themselves on either side of the dispute.

Nevertheless, relations between the two communities continued to deteriorate. At the same time, as commune spokesperson, Sheela had become increasingly “unrestrained and provocative” in her dealings with the local community and with the press. <sup>222</sup>

Relations within the commune were also changing. By this time Sheela had virtually assumed complete control over the commune including who could become a commune member.<sup>223</sup> Claiming that she was acting in consultation with Bhagwan, who was still silent at the time (and this continues to be a moot point), she had established an organisational structure that led to greater regimentation and division within the commune. Commune management had developed more formally, with a group of “coordinators”, or “moms” as they were called, who met regularly with Sheela and ran the various departments in ways that were quite different to Pune

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<sup>221</sup> See Carter, *Charisma*, 165-166.

<sup>222</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 166.

<sup>223</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 78 and 160.

management strategies.<sup>224</sup> Studies indicate that these internal differences resulted in several key *sannyasins* leaving the commune, with others being “ex-communicated” by Sheela at the festival in July 1982.<sup>225</sup>

During the eighties, Sheela also set out to consolidate and standardise communes and centres around the world with the view to bringing them in line to follow the same model being established in the Oregon commune and to contribute financially to its development. She went so far as to demand that restaurant menus were planned in specific ways and commune décor was patterned on that of the Ranch. This resulted in a number of communes, centres and businesses around the world closing down and many *sannyasins* left.<sup>226</sup>

Regardless of whether Sheela was acting on behalf of Bhagwan, according to one *sannyasin*, she was an embarrassment to three-quarters of the people at the ranch, while the rest thought she was “wonderful”:

The us-and them mentality that Sheela emphasized in mandatory general meetings and did her best to create by abrasive public behavior fostered an atmosphere where it was easy to suspend critical judgement. Whatever our Bhagwan-appointed leaders did was necessary, imperative. The community was struggling for its right to exist. In a battle against opponents who wanted us out of the state, the country – who saw us as red devils, Christ killers, communists, and menaces to the “American way of life,” – the community’s frequent skirting of the law and its dictatorial internal policies seemed justified in many ways ...Trusting Bhagwan, we “pointed the finger

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<sup>224</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 160. See also Forman, 258-259 and Gordon, 111 and 153 for details on Sheela’s closest allies.

<sup>225</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 160.

<sup>226</sup> Aveling, 194; Carter, *Charisma*, 185; Fitzgerald, 345-346.; Gordon, 117 and 159.

at ourselves” whenever we disagreed with anything, looking at our own motivations and conditionings and finally saying yes to whatever Sheela and her coordinators said. Surrendering to Sheela was to surrender to Bhagwan...Except for Sheela and her Jesus Grove cohorts, it was virtually a classless society...Only the position of a handful of Sheela’s deputies never changed...we were all having a ball. Playing at what we were doing. Never taking it seriously no matter how hard or long we worked at it. Living moment to moment. Knowing that life was a game, a *leela*, a play.<sup>227</sup>

These comments from Fremantle informants who visited the Ranch also give some insight into the way it operated under Sheela’s control and its differences with the Pune Ashram:

I went to the Ranch a couple of times for celebrations. I didn’t like it much. It was an inhospitable landscape and Bhagwan was in silence. I felt that people were treated for what they could be used for, rather than as individuals who were precious. I thought it was terrible. Everyone worked long hours in difficult conditions. I couldn’t see the point. [s\_8]

...weird things were going on... Most people didn’t have the whole picture....people asked later, ‘How could they not have known?’...But we didn’t. ..I thought I was going to die there...we were building a new world...a lot were getting married to stay...What Sheela did...break down communication between us...There were spies on the ranch...you weren’t supposed to talk to anyone about marriages...It was divide and rule by Sheela and her regime...On another level...it was like having a bad government...Nothing to do with you, doesn’t affect you...Somehow the ranch

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<sup>227</sup> Franklin, 199.

was becoming more serious...guns....bizarre...We were being fed about how antagonistic the 'outside' was... 'If it doesn't fit with me, I don't want to think it's true". What happened was amazing...Osho and Sheela didn't understand...they said it was some kind of divine experiment. Somehow we were compromised...If you spoke out; you were made to leave the ranch, to look like bad guys... [s\_9]

I was struck by the difference in whole tone of the place. Wild, loose [Pune] versus more rules [Oregon] ...Everyday life was controlled by the power group around. It's still a controversy as to how much he [Bhagwan] knew. It was like the way a cult works...anything you don't like is you. The advantage was – you do lots of work on yourself. The disadvantage was that it disempowers you. [s\_6]

On the ranch it was very hierarchical. Women organized things. Osho viewed women had a better understanding of relationships. I worked on agricultural equipment, machines. I'd never done it before. People were put into positions where they didn't know what to do, often at the bottom of the heap. The bloke in charge knew how to do it. The women in charge knew nothing. ..At the top, women were fighting. Men were itching about being bossed by women...there were problems. [s\_7]

Most of us were not aware of the politicking that was going on...we were building a city...Oregon was a major re-adjustment, suddenly he [Bhagwan] was in silence...I didn't want to be there for the first year...couldn't hack Rajneeshpuram...exotic India versus the semi-desert of Oregon. Then I realised the environment not so important...Osho was. I had lived in Osho's house in Pune. In the US we lived in tents, A-frames...worked 14 hours a day, but it was great fun...I didn't get on with Sheela. She was jealous of people 'close' to Osho. I was one of 12 'energy' people. Sheela gave me a hard time...she sent me to clean the toilets and showers...Not

everyone could get into the Ranch...at 125 square miles...you could be happy without knowing what was going on. [s\_4]

Sheela did ridiculous things...she was grandiose, a very powerful woman, intimidating, rude to the media, got everyone's back up and turned everyone against *sannyasins* in general. Not one *sannyasin* has a good word for that woman...it was a classic case of abuse of power...it went to her head...It was their own fault as well as they kowtowed to her and were split...it felt wrong, but they thought it must be right...I thought I was doing what Osho wanted. The smarter ones left. Others hung in. Sheela held the ultimate threat – ‘don’t do as I say and you can’t see Osho’...The Ranch was a closed community. She kicked a lot out of Oregon. This kept them in line through 1985. [s\_1]

Many informants spoke of this feeling of being split between realising or having the sense that something was not right with what was happening in the commune and the belief that whatever was happening, it must be what Bhagwan, even if through Sheela, wanted. It was part of the experiment or a “device” he was using to enable them to transcend the boundaries of illusional reality and so achieve their highest potential.

In studies on the movement, this dilemma has been described in psychological terms as an example of a “double-bind” – a concept formulated by anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, and others in the 1950s. As a kind of unacknowledged contradiction or paradoxical communication, the double-bind, if left unchecked could, it was claimed, become pathological and manifest as schizophrenia, for example. Bateson was

aware, however, that a similar kind of double-bind has been traditionally used as a teaching device by Zen Masters, among others.<sup>228</sup>

Not long after Bhagwan's arrival in 1981, commune officials had filed a petition for him to gain permanent residency as a religious worker. A temporary extension had been granted in October that year, but in December 1982, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which had also begun investigations into immigration fraud in late 1981, denied the petition. This denial sparked demonstrations by *sannyasins* in cities around the world.<sup>229</sup> In January 1983 after challenges by *sannyasin* attorneys, however, the ruling was rescinded and a year later Bhagwan was granted classification as a religious leader.<sup>230</sup>

/1983/

In the early part of 1983, visibility of the movement increased in Portland, the largest city in Oregon, after a large demonstration there to support Bhagwan's right to remain in the US and with the purchase of a hotel and establishment of a restaurant. Although it never became very popular with non-*sannyasins*, the hotel was used frequently by *sannyasins* in transit to Rajneeshpuram.<sup>231</sup>

The movement also became more visible in Salem, the state capital, when reporters for the *Rajneesh Times* acquired press privileges in the legislature and in nearby Madras, when *sannyasins* opened medical facilities there. Madras also became a centre of controversy and media attention when there was a confrontation between

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<sup>228</sup> For example, see Gordon, 163-164.

<sup>229</sup> Mullan, 136.

<sup>230</sup> See Carter, *Charisma*, 163 for details. Also Mullan, 136.

<sup>231</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 170.



*sannyasins*, who went to the town to protest the tauntings of a local minister and his group of protesters of Bhagwan, who had taken up the habit of driving in one of his numerous Rolls Royces to Madras and back.<sup>232</sup> Some view this as an intentional provocation on the part of Bhagwan.<sup>233</sup>

Soon after gaining control over Antelope's city council in November 1982, *sannyasins* had set about introducing a number of changes including attempts to routinise town businesses, exercise control over community facilities and plan for enhanced services to provide for the swelling numbers of new town residents. None of these moves was supported by locals and prior residents. Conflict and subsequent legal action continued to develop during 1983.<sup>234</sup>

Although the *sannyasins'* right to incorporate had been won in May 1982, opponents had launched a court challenge and in mid 1983, the incorporation was still in doubt. *Sannyasin* lawyers continued, however, to find ways around the various challenges. Development and construction of Rajneeshpuram continued at an intense pace with *sannyasins* working long hours to complete housing and other facilities.<sup>235</sup>

While the press had been reporting on the new community and the events that had been taking place since their arrival, it had been largely uncritical of the movement. In May, 1983, however, an incident occurred that turned the press clearly against the *sannyasins*. As a means of solving the continuing conflict between *sannyasins* and

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<sup>232</sup> He is said to have accrued around 90 Rolls Royces and while he was known as the "sex guru" in India, in the US he became the "Rolls Royce" guru. For details on his accumulation of Rolls Royces and different views see Gordon, 114-115.

<sup>233</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 170-171. See also Braun, 130-142 for a description of the Madras conflict and 168-170 on Salem. See also, Fitzgerald, 341.

<sup>234</sup> For details of these proposed changes see Braun, 113-129 and Carter, *Charisma*, 171-174 and 178-179.

<sup>235</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 175.

prior residents in Antelope, *sannyasin* lawyers suggested that if the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram could be guaranteed, then *sannyasins* would leave Antelope. Accusations of “blackmail” and of taking the town’s old-time residents “hostage” initiated an “uproar” that “could be heard across the state”. *Sannyasins* retaliated with accusations of religious discrimination and bigotry.<sup>236</sup>

The conflict took another new turn in June when moves were made to involve state and federal authorities. Questions concerning the separation of church and state were raised and a four month investigation of relationships between commune, church, corporation and city was initiated by the Attorney General’s office in Oregon.<sup>237</sup>

While in combination with the range of lawsuits pending, the as yet undecided incorporation of Rajneeshpuram, and immigration issues, this new move increased the pressure on the commune; it nevertheless succeeded in fighting off most opposition. It continued to develop and began preparations for the Second Annual World Celebration to be held in July.<sup>238</sup>

In July also, the commune published a book – *Rajneeshism: An Introduction to Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Religion* – which is alternately viewed as an attempt to “systematize a religious institution for the movement” and signified “a dramatic shift in the movement’s orientation”, or simply as a strategy initiated by Sheela to “satisfy the INS” and so influence the granting of “religious worker” status

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<sup>236</sup> While Braun, 169-170, argues that this was a way for *sannyasins* to mitigate litigation, Carter, *Charisma*, 178-180 proposes that it was part of a larger strategy, which included harassment of locals by *sannyasins*, to achieve incorporation.

<sup>237</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 180-183; Brecher, 137-140; Fitzgerald, 333; Gordon, 127-128.

<sup>238</sup> For descriptions of this festival see Braun, 186-195, and Carter, *Charisma*, 183-185.

to Bhagwan.<sup>239</sup> A more “cynical” view suggests that it was part of a larger plan of Sheela’s to “develop a basis for legitimacy independent of Bhagwan”.<sup>240</sup>

Just prior to the next planned world festival, to be held on June 29, a bomb exploded in the Rajneesh Hotel in Portland. While no one was injured except the man who set the bomb, the explosion provided credence to reports by *sannyasins* of threats from the local communities.<sup>241</sup> As a consequence, with the upcoming festival, security measures on the ranch, which were already receiving attention from observers, increased “exponentially”.<sup>242</sup>

From June to September, control over Antelope’s school became a hotly contested and legally complicated state tax issue.<sup>243</sup> The end result was that the fifty-three *sannyasin* children, who had been attending school in Rajneeshpuram, were re-located to Antelope. Locals and other district residents then refused to send their children there claiming that it was being run by *sannyasin* teachers who taught with a *sannyasin* bias. Instead, they elected to send their children to Madras, fifty miles away. As with most of these conflicts, there are vastly different views on what happened. On the one hand, it was “a bare-knuckle power play” by the *sannyasins*, which “caused maximum hardship for their neighbours.”<sup>244</sup> On the other, Rajneeshpuram reacted, “not surprisingly”, when they were legally “backed into a corner” where they had to pay all taxes for a school their children did not attend, by challenging the school’s board members and eventually filling all positions. It was,

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<sup>239</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 185-186 provides descriptive details. See also, Forman, 299.

<sup>240</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 186.

<sup>241</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 187; Brecher, 134-135; Braun, 153.

<sup>242</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 187; Gordon, 133.

<sup>243</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 181-182.

<sup>244</sup> See Fitzgerald, 328 -330. Also Gordon, 125; Carter, *Charisma*, 181-182.

“less a takeover, than an inheritance”.<sup>245</sup> The whole issue brought much media coverage, bringing the “struggle over Antelope” into much sharper focus. In effect, it helped change the perspective of those who were mostly neutral towards the *sannyasins* to a largely negative one and in so doing, further polarised the community.<sup>246</sup>

Towards the end of the year, opposition groups joined forces and became more organised in their efforts to prevent further expansion by the *sannyasins*. The most prominent at this time were the “Concerned Oregonians” who organised telephone trees, lobbying efforts and observation of town meetings. The conflict over the school became a focus, with many from both parties attending school board meetings that were often under the eye of the media. Animosity ensued and a number of defamation lawsuits were filed by locals.<sup>247</sup>

In September, further difficulties arose for the commune when procedures for the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram as a city were deemed flawed and a halt on all construction not already approved was ordered. *Sannyasin* leaders had already anticipated such a move, however, and another \$3.2 million in building permits had already been issued.<sup>248</sup>

Investigations of the movement concerning church-state separation laws initiated earlier in the year by the Attorney General’s office were continuing, and opponents

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<sup>245</sup> See Brecher, 135-136.

<sup>246</sup> Brecher, 136; Fitzgerald, 330.

<sup>247</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 187-189; Braun, 143-154 provides detailed descriptions of meetings during this time. See also Gordon, 125-126.

<sup>248</sup> See Braun, 164-166 for a description of the dispute. See also Carter, *Charisma*, 188 and Brecher, 133.

of the movement were gathering evidence that the city of Rajneeshpuram, the commune and the ranch were all being controlled by Rajneesh Foundation International under Sheela's direction, and through these organisations, the official policies and actions of the two city governments. Restrictions on access to the commune by non-*sannyasins* were also a moot point.<sup>249</sup>

On October 6, the Oregon Attorney General, Dave Frohnmayer, stated publicly that there were doubts about the legality of the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram that, if upheld, would restrict the city's access to state funds.<sup>250</sup> *Sannyasin* officials protested strongly any claims of a violation of church-state separation laws and challenged the state's accusations with evidence to the contrary.<sup>251</sup> They were unable to provide clear proof against the evidence gathered by the Attorney General's office, however, and in early November, a suit was filed against them in the state court challenging the constitutionality of Rajneeshpuram's status as a city. The challenge, if successful, would be a serious barrier to the continuation of the commune.<sup>252</sup>

Along with many other legal challenges, the activities of the community were subjected to closer scrutiny as oppositional tactics to discredit them gained momentum. Disputes over the school, land use issues, which had put a hold on new construction, investigations by the INS of immigration fraud, and investigations led by the state's Attorney General into possible violations of church-state laws, led to increased scrutiny of the community's organisation. As the conflict broadened,

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<sup>249</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 188-190.

<sup>250</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 191; Gordon, 127.

<sup>251</sup> Brecher, 137-140 discusses the flaws in the attorney general's argument.

<sup>252</sup> For details of the dispute see Carter, *Charisma*, 190-195.

media attention also increased and Sheela's provocative and confrontational style became a rallying point for those who opposed the movement.

In response to these attacks, the commune, under Sheela's leadership, was becoming increasingly regimentalised and defensive. Access to the ranch was restrictive and overseen by the community's "Peace Force".<sup>253</sup> Rather than trying to diffuse the situation, Sheela and most *sannyasin* spokespeople continued to make provocative remarks publicly, often personal insults. Several of their targets filed defamation suits.<sup>254</sup> Sheela herself was becoming more overtly confrontational:

In interviews with the press and on local and network television, she attacked anyone who disagreed with her, called them "bigots," "racists," and "fascists."...Popular antagonism escalated, and new attacks, verbal and legal, were launched against both her and the people she represented.<sup>255</sup>

Threats of violence from the Oregonian community were escalating and security on the ranch was upgraded with the purchase of equipment and an increase in the number of guards. Those visiting the Ranch had to undergo elaborate entry routines involving searches and guard dogs.<sup>256</sup> The possibility of compromise seemed more and more remote as both sides of the conflict continued to oppose each other at every point. Threats of violence and inflammatory rhetoric ensued from both parties.<sup>257</sup>

Although he was still "in silence", Bhagwan had been conducting daily "drive-bys".

Thousands of *sannyasins* would line the streets of Rajneeshpuram as Bhagwan drove

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<sup>253</sup> More for on the Peace Force see Gordon, 133.

<sup>254</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 195.

<sup>255</sup> Gordon, 126.

<sup>256</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 197; Fitzgerald, 335-340.

<sup>257</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 196-198 describes this period in terms of a "siege mentality" and "war rhetoric". See also Fitzgerald, 309.

by, waving, in one of his Rolls Royces. Now, he was accompanied by guards with Uzis and armed helicopters.<sup>258</sup>

Not long after increasing security measures at the Ranch, Sheela began installing wiretapping and bugging devices in key areas of the Ranch, targeting those whom she felt threatened her position. Although a few of her closest allies knew about this, it was not discovered until after she left the Ranch in 1985.<sup>259</sup>

*/1984/*

In the early part of 1984, the situation continued to escalate. Sheela's intervention in the running of the communes and centres around the world had backfired, creating uncertainty and chaos, donations had decreased, and a moratorium on further building on the Ranch and the numerous lawsuits being filed against them left the future of the commune uncertain.<sup>260</sup> At the same time, opposition to the movement was gaining momentum. The perceived "takeover" of Antelope and later the school, had resulted in more negative press coverage and reinforced the general public's view that the *sannyasins* were members of a dangerous cult.

Dissent within the commune was growing since many *sannyasins* disagreed with the direction the commune was taking under Sheela's leadership. Some left of their own accord; others were "expelled".<sup>261</sup> Later, it was discovered that a number of *sannyasins* had been medically mistreated.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Fitzgerald, 357. For more on drive-bys, see Gordon, 108-109.

<sup>259</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 197; Fitzgerald, 368.

<sup>260</sup> Fitzgerald, 370.

<sup>261</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 203.

<sup>262</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 204; Fitzgerald, 369.

In March 1984, Sheela issued a statement on behalf of Bhagwan about AIDS. Predicting that it could wipe out “two thirds of the world’s population” before the end of the century, he encouraged *sannyasins* to take precautions against it. The Ranch leadership immediately set up strict guidelines for the commune. The use of surgical gloves for foreplay and condoms for sexual intercourse was introduced, even for monogamous relationships. Oral and anal sex were prohibited, and fastidious handwashing after sex became mandatory. At first, kissing was prohibited in the belief that the disease could be spread by saliva. Later, after the discovery that this was false, kissing was again allowed. Other measures were introduced later, including spraying phones and toilet seats with alcohol before use and hands before dining. Neither stamps nor thread were to be licked.<sup>263</sup>

It seemed that all the encouragement to engage in wild abandon, break traditional social boundaries, live spontaneously and in the moment that had defined the movements early years had taken a strange turn. Boundaries were being reset in even more rigid ways and it seemed that for many, the idea of pursuing “life, love and laughter” was losing its momentum. Yet, for the *sannyasins* who continued to stay on the Ranch, this was generally not understood as a new kind of oppression. Rather, it was somehow an aspect of Bhagwan’s larger plan.

At the July summer festival, an important source of income for the commune, attendance was disappointingly low. Prior to the festival, it was announced that Bhagwan could “drop his body” (die). Some view this as a strategy to increase

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<sup>263</sup> Gordon, 131. For a description of the effects of this statement on the Medina commune in England see Tim Guest, *My Life in Orange* (London: Granta Books, 2005), 171-175.



numbers at the festival and as evidence that the commune was in a fragile and desperate state.<sup>264</sup>

In August, *sannyasins* changed the name of Antelope to the *City of Rajneesh* and changed street names, providing further fuel to the conflict.<sup>265</sup>

In late August, the commune leadership announced a new “humanitarian” initiative – “an experiment in communal living”. Called the “Share-A-Home Program”, it involved the bussing in of homeless people from all the big cities across the US to live at the Ranch. They were to be given free room and board, could work on the Ranch if they wanted, and would be free to leave when they wanted. A bus ticket to their chosen destination would be provided if they left.<sup>266</sup> By October, there were around two thousand homeless people at the Ranch.<sup>267</sup>

Although the *sannyasin* leadership denied it, many believed that the introduction of this new initiative was evidence of the degeneration in leadership and part of a larger plan to take over Wasco County where two of the three seats would be on the ballot in the coming months, by increasing the number of people eligible to register to vote in the November county elections. Initially, US *sannyasins* not living in Wasco County and non-*sannyasins* who had stayed at the Ranch had been encouraged to register in support of the commune. Responses to these initiatives were disappointing, however, and the “Share-A-Home Program” was introduced. Given

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<sup>264</sup> Fitzgerald, 346; Carter, *Charisma*, 201.

<sup>265</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 203; Fitzgerald, 338.

<sup>266</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 205-223; Fitzgerald, 346-351; Gordon, 138-149; Brecher, 186-190 and 212-213.

<sup>267</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 207; Fitzgerald, 347. Brecher, 185 claims there were 6,000.

the deteriorating status of Rajneeshpuram and communes around the world, this was viewed as the only option.<sup>268</sup>

In early October, in an effort to prevent the stacking of the election, the Oregon secretary of state, Norma Paulus, brought voter registration to a halt and set up a special hearing process for all prospective voters. All those wishing to vote in the election would be interviewed by fifty lawyers who would make their own judgement on each person's intention to live in Wasco County. Commune officials took the order to court but it was upheld and it became clear that the street people would not be certified to vote.<sup>269</sup>

By the end of October, less than half of the street people brought in for this extraordinary occurrence remained.<sup>270</sup> Many had left of their own accord, while many others were asked to leave. At first, return tickets were provided as promised originally. Later, however, those leaving were dropped off in nearby cities to make their own way, angering many local Oregonians. There were, however, reports of positive experiences and around 150 were still there in March 1985.<sup>271</sup>

In September, about seven hundred people became mysteriously ill with salmonella poisoning after eating from salad bars in eight restaurants in The Dalles – the main population centre and seat of Wasco County. The week before this, three officials who visited Rajneeshpuram, had become ill, allegedly after drinking water they were given at the Ranch. Many in the local community suspected that the salad bar

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<sup>268</sup> Fitzgerald, 348 and 371; Brecher, 182 and 185; Carter, *Charisma*, 201 and 205.

<sup>269</sup> Fitzgerald, 349.

<sup>270</sup> Gordon, 145.

<sup>271</sup> Gordon, 145-149; Carter, *Charisma*, 222-223.

incident was also connected to the commune and their perceived strategy to win the county election, although there was nothing to prove this at the time.<sup>272</sup>

In late 1985, investigators found strains of salmonella bacteria in a “secret laboratory” in Sheela’s basement that matched the culture used in The Dalles restaurants. Further evidence of Sheela’s involvement came to light when a *sannyasin* later admitted to having placed the bacteria in the restaurants.<sup>273</sup>

On October 30, 1984, after three years of silence, Bhagwan began speaking again to small groups of *sannyasins*. Lectures were videotaped and shown to the rest of the commune the following day.<sup>274</sup> While *sannyasins* on the commune were “jubilant” that Bhagwan had broken his silence, reportedly it was a problem for Sheela, who made several attempts to undermine his intentions.<sup>275</sup>

Interpretations of Bhagwan’s emergence from his “silent period” vary. Contrary to the popular belief that he was “preaching absolute faith and blind obedience to himself,” supporters claim that the focus of his talks was on demolishing “beliefs in all gods, religious scriptures, religious teachers and religious followers”:

In Poona he had stressed the way of the heart, trust, love and surrendering to the energy of the master. In Rajneeshpuram, he was encouraging *sannyasins* to sharpen the swords of their intelligence, to not accept any group truth.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 224-227; Fitzgerald, 348; Gordon, 138.

<sup>273</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 225.

<sup>274</sup> Brecher, 216-217.; Carter, *Charisma*, 227; Fitzgerald, 353; Gordon, 162-163.

<sup>275</sup> Brecher, 217.

<sup>276</sup> Brecher, 218-222.

In another view, the discrepancy between what he was saying and what was actually happening on the Ranch – the increasing regimentation and conformism being imposed by the leadership – was another example of him creating a “double bind” situation that some claim, later led to a kind of “madness...with all the traditional signs and symptoms that one might see in paranoid and schizoid patients”:

They suppressed their anger and doubt and rebelliousness that Rajneesh continued to urge on them. With an intensity born of increasing desperation, they focused instead on the pleasure they felt in doing their work well, in living with so many friends and lovers, and in being with their Master.<sup>277</sup>

By the end of 1984 the commune was faced with mounting legal and financial problems. More *sannyasins* had left the movement and financial support from world centres was dwindling as more businesses failed, largely due to Sheela’s standardisation attempts.<sup>278</sup>

/1985/

Following the failure to influence the Wasco County election in November 1984, the commune reportedly became more insular and less aggressive in relations with the local communities.<sup>279</sup> In early 1985, the only major initiative directed towards outsiders was a series of conspiracy and discrimination lawsuits filed against a number of key political state and federal figures and organisations. Most view this

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<sup>277</sup> Gordon, 163-164. See also Fitzgerald, 377.

<sup>278</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 227-228.

<sup>279</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 228.

action as having been an attempt to stall the possibility of any arrests being made in relation to INS proceedings against them.<sup>280</sup>

On June 30, Bhagwan began giving public lectures again in the meditation hall. The July summer festival, however, again drew a much smaller crowd than the year before and, reportedly, many of the worldwide communes and centres had closed down, leaving only a handful operating.<sup>281</sup>

After Bhagwan had started speaking again in late 1984, Sheela had spent much of her time away from the Ranch, “shouting ‘tough titties,’ giving the finger and getting bleeped in Europe, Asia and Australia.”<sup>282</sup> On the night of September 13, Bhagwan gave a talk that had previously been suppressed by “Sheela and her gang”. After speaking generally about the history of organised religious communes, he spent the last twenty minutes talking about Rajneeshpuram and the world *sannyasin* movement implying that the Ranch was becoming a “fascist regime” led by unreliable leaders. He specifically targeted Sheela as having become “unconscious”, claiming that she not only wanted him silent, she wanted him dead.<sup>283</sup> On the same day Sheela told several other leaders that the commune was about to collapse and that she was leaving.<sup>284</sup>

On September 14 and 15, Sheela and about fifteen others closest to her left the Ranch for Europe. On September 16, Bhagwan called a press conference to announce the departures, charging Sheela and her “fascist gang” with a list of crimes including

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<sup>280</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 229; Fitzgerald, 352; Brecher, 242-243.

<sup>281</sup> Fitzgerald, 353.

<sup>282</sup> Brecher, 250; See also, Fitzgerald, 371.

<sup>283</sup> Brecher, 222 and 250-251.

<sup>284</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 230.

attempted poisoning of several officials and *sannyasins*, financial mis-management of communes funds, and embezzlement. Over the next few days, more charges were added, including responsibility for the salmonella outbreak in The Dalles, a Wasco County planning office fire, harassment of people in Antelope, and bugging of rooms and telephones, including his own.<sup>285</sup>

Throughout the many press conferences held, Bhagwan maintained that he knew nothing of these crimes until he was informed by *sannyasins* after Sheela left. He invited journalists and law officials to the Ranch and made attempts to restore relations with the local community, promising to return Antelope to its original owners.<sup>286</sup> New management of the commune was organised, with a member of what Sheela was calling “the Hollywood gang”, Ma Prem Hasya, a former Hollywood producer, becoming the new secretary to Bhagwan and president of Rajneesh Foundation International.<sup>287</sup>

About two weeks after Sheela left, Bhagwan denounced the “religion of Rajneeshism”, claiming that the idea went against his whole philosophy and that it was part of Sheela’s attempts to control the commune. *Sannyasins* at the Ranch celebrated by burning all copies of *The Book of Rajneeshism* and Sheela’s “papal” robes, which she had been wearing over the last few years. He also told *sannyasins* that it would be optional to wear orange, the mala or to use their *sannyasin* names, to avoid being harassed. At the same time, he claimed that the church-state suit against

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<sup>285</sup> Brecher, 252-253; Carter, *Charisma*, 230-231; Fitzgerald, 360-361.

<sup>286</sup> Brecher, 254; Carter, *Charisma*, 230; Fitzgerald, 361.

<sup>287</sup> As Francoise Ruddy, Hasya and her former husband, Albert S Ruddy, produced *The Godfather*. For more on Hasya see Brecher, 255-256 and Fitzgerald, 362-363.

him could be dropped as there was no longer any question of the commune being a religious commune.<sup>288</sup>

Views on Bhagwan's actions after Sheela left and his overall involvement in the running of the commune remain polarised.<sup>289</sup>

Meanwhile, Sheela was also giving press interviews from Switzerland, claiming that Bhagwan was a drug addict and was bankrupting the commune with his demands for expensive cars and jewellery.<sup>290</sup> She also claimed that Bhagwan would send a hit team to kill her as she knew "everything" about him.<sup>291</sup>

While initially, after Sheela's departure, many *sannyasins* thought that the commune would be able to continue under the new management, it soon became clear that the problems – the many lawsuits, the ill-feelings against the community and so on – would not simply disappear in the same way. Investigations by the INS and state and federal police into the alleged crimes continued, and towards the end of October, enough evidence had been gathered to indict Bhagwan and several others on immigration and fraud charges.<sup>292</sup>

Although the decision to indict was not made public, word of the imminent charges reached the commune and attempts to strike a deal, whereby Bhagwan would be able to surrender in Portland if a warrant was issued, were made by commune

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<sup>288</sup> Brecher, 262; Carter, *Charisma*, 230-231; Fitzgerald, 363-364.

<sup>289</sup> See for example, Fitzgerald, 362-364.

<sup>290</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 231; Fitzgerald, 364.

<sup>291</sup> Brecher, 261.

<sup>292</sup> Brecher, 279-280; Carter, *Charisma*, 231; Fitzgerald, 364.

representatives.<sup>293</sup> In the lead up to this, many state and federal authorities feared the possibility of a “potential bloodbath” with the upcoming arrests and plans for a possible military invasion of the Ranch to ensure the arrests were underway.<sup>294</sup>

On October 2, 1985, two of the *sannyasin*'s Lear jets left Rajneeshpuram bound for Bermuda, by way of a changeover in North Carolina. Bhagwan, Vivek, his personal physician and another *sannyasin* were on one and several other *sannyasins* on the other. They were intercepted by federal customs agents at Charlotte airport in North Carolina and Bhagwan, along with several others, was arrested. Bhagwan was charged with unlawful flight to avoid prosecution of charges related to immigration fraud and his *sannyasins* with aiding and abetting his flight and harbouring a fugitive. Bhagwan stayed in several gaols for 12 days but was released on bail. He pleaded guilty to several of the charges, received a 10 year suspended prison sentence, a fine of \$400,000, and agreed to leave the country.<sup>295</sup> After returning briefly to India, he embarked on a World Tour, visiting and being rejected by 21 countries before eventually returning to Pune, which became known as Pune 2.<sup>296</sup>

After appointing an “inner circle” of twenty-one disciples to manage the commune and his administrative affairs, he died (or “left his body” as *sannyasins* refer to it) in Pune, not long after changing his name one last time to Osho (meaning oceanic), on January 19, 1990. Many *sannyasins* claim that he was poisoned with thallium by US

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<sup>293</sup> Brecher, 285-286; Carter, *Charisma*, 232; Fitzgerald, 365.

<sup>294</sup> Brecher, 264-268, gives a detailed account of the build-up to this through interviews with many of the key figures involved.

<sup>295</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 235-238, gives a detailed summary of charges against Bhagwan, Sheela and others.

<sup>296</sup> On his World Tour, see Carter, *Charisma*, 241 and Brecher, 362-375.



authorities while in gaol.<sup>297</sup> Others attribute his death by heart attack to prolonged illness and drug addiction.<sup>298</sup>

Sheela was extradited back to the US and convicted of attempted murder and illegal wiretapping, among other crimes. After her release, she married a Swiss *sannyasin*, obtaining a Swiss passport and immunity from extradition to the US on any further charges. In 2004, she was said to be running a number of “nursing homes” for “mentally disabled patients” in Switzerland. Most recently, several videos of interviews with her have been posted on the popular Internet website, YouTube®.

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<sup>297</sup> The most detailed argument on the alleged murder of Bhagwan is to be found in Sue Appleton, *Was Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Poisoned by Ronald Regan's America?* (Cologne: The Rebel Publishing House, 1988).

<sup>298</sup> On Osho's death see for example, Brecher, 392-395 and Fox, 35-37.

## Section Two: Sannyasins in Western Australia

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This section contains the results of ongoing research into the rise and fall of the *sannyasin* community in the small port city of Fremantle, Western Australia (WA). It is by no means exhaustive, and should be viewed as an excavation of events that unfolded based primarily on interviews with twenty-one informants, media reports and archival material on the movement. It also makes use of the only report done on the movement in WA by the Concerned Christian Group, although this is used largely as a means of tracing the chronological structure of the early years of the movement and is not given any theoretical validity.

There are four chapters in this section. Chapter three follows the establishment of the first *sannyasin* community in WA. Chapter four focuses on the early days of the Fremantle commune. Chapter five gives an account of the changes that occurred as events unfolded in the US, while chapter six relates the disbandment of the Fremantle commune and what has since happened to the movement and what is happening now. The section concludes with a synthesis analysing the movement as a whole.

## Chapter Three: Early years of the commune

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### Who were they?

One of the first questions I asked informants was what they were doing before they heard about Bhagwan and what attracted them to him. A sample of responses from several of them provides some insight:

I was a seeker, looking for something, all the things I thought were important weren't any more...wondered why I wasn't happier. In the 70s, it was a time of ferment. I tried yoga and other things...started meeting people on the same 'path'. Through a friend, I met a *sannyasin* in orange with mala. I was fascinated, but also disapproved intellectually. I thought it was self-indulgent, but I started to find out more...did meditation, did therapies, saw how that was changing me, then went to Pune. [s\_1]

I wasn't particularly looking for anything. A good friend of mine had borrowed a book from someone who'd just been to Pune 1977, called *No Water, No Moon*. I was in Perth and went for a walk by the river with her. She started telling me about some of the things she'd read in the book. I was in a situation in life where I thought I had everything I wanted – a husband, two children, lived in Margaret River. I had a pretty good life...Suddenly I realized how many 'shoulds' I had in my head...the conditioning from the past...get a job, have two children. I'd been taught that I should be doing 'that', 'the' way to be. Suddenly I was questioning this. It was brought alive by having these other people around me. We were searching for similar things. [s\_3]

I was actually not interested in spirituality or anything like that. I was on my way to becoming an engineer, about 19. ...basically ascribed to the rationalist, positivist point of view, that anything that is not given to us by our senses is not real, not worth even considering, that science will eventually explain everything...I was definitely hooked in on that. I can remember having arguments with other people about that in my late teens and I remember absolute sureness of my position and that lasted until, just on a whim, I was offered some LSD at university and I decided to take it. And it was a revelation, actually opened up this whole other side of the world, the other side of your eyes, which I'd put down to nothing there, or me I didn't want to look at. So that led to a period of experimentation... got interested in different states of consciousness associated with those experiments, but realised continued drug use was a dead end, so I got into meditation, eastern philosophy. At one meeting, someone brought a book by then Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and we read excerpts from it...all decided on the spot to visit him in Pune, in 1976. [s\_6]

I was doing anthropology at UWA (University of Western Australia) around that time, researching Eastern religions and their impact on Western countries... As part of my research I went and visited all the groups in Perth – Buddhist, Hindu, New Age – all forms of experimental groups. There were a lot of them at that time...I'd started preparing a Ph.D on a similar topic, then picked up a book by Bhagwan (*My Way: The Way of the White Cloud*), opened it and thought 'ah...something's happening here, this is different'. Within four days I was on a plane to India. [s\_8]

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To summarise, some were married happily with children but experienced certain unease with their situations, as if something was missing. Others were recently divorced or separated and putting their lives back together in one way or another.

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<sup>299</sup> (a). For more on what informants were doing before they became *sannyasins*, see Appendix 2

Some had been “seeking” some kind of spirituality through other means such as meditation, drugs or travel to places such as India, while others had encountered Bhagwan simply by chance through friends or relatives or an interest in religion in general. Some had come from religious backgrounds and had, at some point, realised the inconsistencies inherent in the various dogma and rejected it. Others had had no previous experience in religion at all or came from professional middle-class families or politically active families.

Evidently, there were as many reasons why one became a *sannyasin* as there were *sannyasins*. Although their paths might have varied, however, when they encountered Bhagwan, either through reading or listening to his discourses or through word of mouth, or meeting him, or even simply by chance, many of them experienced a similar kind of undefinable “kick inside” that spurred them onto further exploration of Bhagwan and his teachings. At some moment, wherever they were emotionally in their lives, Bhagwan and his teachings seemed to crystallise everything they had been looking for or felt had been missing from their lives into a fascinating alternative. It was as if they had all tuned into the same beat or pulse.<sup>300</sup>

Informants remarked that *sannyasins* often worked solely to save enough money to go to Pune and “replenish their energy” by being in close proximity to Rajneesh, described as being in the “Buddhfield”. Several informants expressed their experiences of being close to Bhagwan in quite extraordinary terms:

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<sup>300</sup> Several studies have shown a similarly diverse range of reasons why people became *sannyasins*. See for example, Mullan, 50-79 and Aveling, 181-190.

It was an incredible physical experience at darshan...there was light and vibrations all around and yet he was an ordinary human being. I went a little deaf, which often happens when I'm emotionally touched. It felt like a waterfall cascading. I was called up to Osho; the closer I got... I felt that someone was seeing me and hearing me for first time. I felt a love like never before, not even from my mother or father, which was big. But not like this. It was like Niagara Falls. [s\_2]

The most phenomenal thing on this planet...is living truth. First time I met it was when I came close to Osho. To come physically close...is a bizarre phenomenon for me and others. Within about 5/6 metres of his body...my mind stopped...you can go into a state of no mind or meditation automatically. I could only attribute this to his presence...it's a tremendous shock to your system...when all you've ever known is mind and the world of illusion...it was a shocking experience for that to all stop. I don't have much memory of the first meeting...I was in a state of awe, like looking at a beautiful sunset. [s\_14]<sup>301</sup>

Overall, informants, both male and female, often expressed this “relationship to the Master” in quite intense personal terms. Despite what had eventuated in the US, they spoke of their love for him, yet any attempt to define this love in rational terms – “like a father”, “like a brother” – tended to be inadequate for them. Rather, it was an indescribable “individual experience”. While Bhagwan was in many ways their “leader”, this was not understood in the form of a master/slave relationship. Rather, as one informant explained:

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<sup>301</sup> For more views see Appendix 2(d).

... everyone's individuality was stressed. It wasn't like the Moonies or Jonestown. You were on your own in relationship to the Master [Bhagwan]. It was up to you. There were no rules. [s\_1]

At the same time many were very wary initially of actually joining any kind of religion or cult. While at the level of feelings and emotions they felt undeniably attracted, intellectually they disapproved:

I was bound and determined that there was no way I was going to go into any uniform, or put beads around my neck with a picture of a mad, cheerful-looking Indian. I was a minister's daughter, don't forget. [s\_2]

I remember thinking that *sannyasins* were a friendly but misguided bunch of people... [s\_12]

No little old Indian bloke is going to tell me what to do... [s\_17]

I met a *sannyasin* in London...he wanted me to 'meet my guru'. But I wasn't interested in any 'daddy figure'. And I certainly wasn't going to wear orange. [s\_4]

But in each case, the desire to become part of this community of *sannyasins* won out in the end and each informant eventually took *sannyas*, most of them in the mid to late seventies or early eighties, although several others took *sannyas* much later.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> For a selection of informant's views and experiences on becoming *sannyasins*, see Appendix 2 (b).

## Commune beginnings

In 1976, University of Western Australia anthropology student, Shobha Cameron, then aged 29, made a sudden decision to take off for the Pune Ashram in India. She stayed for six weeks and summed up her time there as sometimes “terrifying”, yet in the end, life changing. This was due largely to her participation in groups, a practice that most people visiting Pune in the seventies undertook. The groups were “terrifying” in that, “everybody’s hang-ups were exposed”. Traumatic as they could be, though, for Shobha, and as later demonstrated for other informants, “if you go through those experiences and come out the other side it can change your life”. Although describing such transformations was difficult, Shobha attempted to do so, saying that during one group session, she had experienced a strange sense of “connectedness to life” that had been absent before, and a sense of wanting to “share that experience” with others. These kinds of experiences were common among informants.

Becoming a *sannyasin* was not a pre-requisite for visiting the Ashram or participating in Ashram activities. Many people visited simply out of curiosity, while others, like Shobha, felt somehow impelled intuitively. After taking *sannyas*, which, like many other informants, was something she had not intended to do initially, Shobha made plans to return to Perth with the aim of setting up a centre. As it turned out, another Australian, Jim Coventry, was also planning for a centre here.

Jim Coventry, who had taken *sannyas* in 1976 and become Swami Deva Indivar, was a clinical psychologist working for the West Australian Health Service. He was also a lecturer in psychology known for his unconventional, experimental approach to



psychotherapy and for his readiness to take on cases that others were ready to abandon. According to one informant, he had a reputation as being “pretty scatty, left wing and very unusual”. Despite his apparent unconventionality, however, Indivar was highly regarded and respected by colleagues and students alike.<sup>303</sup>

When Indivar first returned to Perth, however, many of his friends and colleagues were horrified by a seemingly radical transition from a highly individual character to someone wearing, “an outrageous red robe, with these beads around his neck and a picture of this guru on the front”. Yet, something about him intrigued them. As one informant describes her reaction:

It was just horrendous. But at the same time, his energy was his whole spirit, life-force, laughter, everything about him was like magnified times ten times and I went Whoa! Whatever’s happened to him, and I watched for awhile, I want that for me.  
[s\_2]

Sometime after returning to Perth, Shobha and Indivar looked for a place to set up a centre that would be called *Shanti Sadan*, a name given to them by Bhagwan. Through a friend of Indivar’s, Fritz Ameling, they were able to lease 100 acres of bushland in semi-rural Forrestdale, about 20 kilometres from Perth.<sup>304</sup> The property had a main building with a large hall and a number of small chalets. Though much of it has been sold off, many of the original buildings remain.

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<sup>303</sup> Van Leen, 41.

<sup>304</sup> Fritz was an eccentric Dutch immigrant who lived an alternative lifestyle. Although he never became a *sannyasin*, he was a close friend of Indivar’s and supported what they were trying to do. Conversation with current owners.

Reports on the worldwide development of the movement were often given in the Pune Ashram's publications. The 1977 edition of their magazine, *Sannyas*, describes the WA commune:

SHANTI SADAN (House of Peace) was established as a Rajneesh Meditation Centre in November 1976, following the return of Swami Deva Indivar and Ma Deva Shobha from Poona. For several months, the centre primarily operated on weekends with tapes and Dynamic Meditations, with monthly groups conducted in the padded room by Indivar. Following the return of other *sannyasins* from Poona, and the initiation into *sannyas* of a number of people here, the centre began to operate as a residential community, with intermittent meditations and tapes throughout the week...At present there are approximately thirty *sannyasins* in and around the centre, and two urban settings for meditation have also been set up....<sup>305</sup>



Forrestdale commune  
Private collection. Permission granted.

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<sup>305</sup> *Sannyas*, no. 5 (1977), 18.

For the first six months Shobha lived there on her own, organising meditations, celebrations and cooking meals for people who visited on weekends, many of whom were friends and colleagues of Indivar interested in what he was doing. For his part, Indivar conducted therapy



Forrestdale commune  
Private collection. Permission granted.

groups described in a newsletter produced by the commune as:

...a method of helping us on our inner journey...By coming together in a formal group we are able to explore what we are more fully. It is a chance to experience our own trust, openness and honesty with other people. A chance to look at our defences and games that we constantly use and to take an even deeper look into the fears and vulnerability these may be protecting...a wide variety of growth techniques are used but the main emphasis is on tuning into our physical, emotional, psychic and spiritual energy and to re-open feelings by working directly with our bodies to release tension and free breathing.<sup>306</sup>

As in Pune at the time, such groups were the focus for many visiting the commune and Indivar's groups were a major attraction. Informants spoke of their experiences doing groups in WA with Indivar:

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<sup>306</sup> Quoted from a newsletter produced by the commune, entitled *Rajneesh*, presumably published in the late seventies or early eighties.

Indivar invited me to do groups...One was a meditation for 19 days at the Boatshed in Crawley. It amazed me, changed my energy, brought out things. Repressed anger went away and I was able to put it in the past. [s\_10]

When I had time I would do groups by Indivar...it was exciting, different...worked for me. The group energy stuff was emotionally rewarding, intellectually not silly...Group work here was powerful...they could get heated. It was the practice of offering one's character to get picked apart. It left me peeled away, exposed, yet able to go past things that earlier seemed threatened. These activities left me in new and exciting states. I have some experiences of a 'spiritual' change, though these were less predictable, less obviously caused by these processes. [s\_7]

I did groups here, some encounter, with Indivar. He was instrumental in me taking *sannyas*...for a lot in Freo...He was very, very good. He created situations where we could see where we reacted to things. [s\_3]<sup>307</sup>



Forretdale commune  
Private collection. Permission granted.

To begin with there was only a small number of *sannyasins* in WA. As people heard about the commune, though, more visited and some also began to live there. Shobha commented that after only six

months, the centre had grown immensely, with hundreds going to meditate, dance, sing and do groups on the weekends and a core group of about a dozen people living there.<sup>308</sup> “It was an exciting time when it started”, she remembers.

<sup>307</sup> For other informants' views on groups, both in WA and in general, see Appendix 2 (c).

<sup>308</sup> It is not known if all those visiting the commune were or became *sannyasins*. Those who lived there were.

In the seventies it was easy to travel and stay in India for long periods, and when Shobha felt that the Forrestdale centre was established, she returned to Pune and stayed for five years. Like many *sannyasins* around the world, she wanted to get “as close as you can get” to Bhagwan since he had the “understanding” she was looking for.

Indivar, who had by that time become “pretty much the boss”, continued to run groups at *Shanti* and became a key figure in the WA *sannyasin* community, assisting many who were unable to travel to Pune to “come to an understanding of what *sannyas* was about through groups he offered”.

By 1979, there were about thirty to fifty people, including children, living at the commune. Many worked outside the commune in conventional jobs, often pooling their resources to develop and maintain the commune and commune activities.

Informants who knew the commune as it was then, described it as “one of the 5 most happening *sannyas* scenes on the planet in the late seventies and early eighties”, as “an alive, stimulating buzzing community”, formed by “common interests and devotion to Bhagwan” and cohesive in its determination to “live how Bhagwan said”, or alternatively as a “therapeutic commune” with a “shifting population”.

As *Shanti* continued to grow, more people became *sannyasins* and another centre, the Sahajam Rajneesh Meditation Centre (RMC) opened at 17 Saleham Street, Victoria Park in 1977. It became an alternative place for *sannyasins* to go and see videos of Bhagwan’s discourses, shown every Sunday night, to meditate, have meals together

and go to groups. There was also a library with videos and tapes of Bhagwan's discourses and a newsletter was regularly distributed.

Sometime in the late seventies/early eighties, *Soham* Meditation Centre opened in the Ferguson Valley, 18 miles from Bunbury in south-western Australia, offering groups and meditation, and running a successful herb farm called Rivendell, producing soaps, cosmetics and other herbal products. In a list of Rajneesh Meditation Centres published by the *Satprakash* centre in Sydney in early 1981, *Prem Kusum RMC* in Donnybrook is listed as the fourth centre in WA.<sup>309</sup> Two informants also stated that they were part of a group of *sannyasins* who settled in Margaret River, also in the south-west, sometime during these early years.

### Questions of leadership

All informants spoke of the importance of Bhagwan and his teachings in helping them to change their lives. For some, becoming a Rajneesh *sannyasin* was a way of releasing their unrealised potential. As one informant described it:

Osho used to talk about how people sit on their energy. You use a certain amount. We've been taught not to use it all because it's too dangerous. Children are taught not to be wild, not to be spontaneous, but we all unconsciously do that. He said that there are other layers of energy that you don't even know about. We actually tapped into that. You felt kind of unleashed; that's what I remember. Not that we did anything dangerous or silly. I felt more free, even if from the 'outside' it didn't look like that, within I felt more free. I had enormous amounts of energy. I still feel free,

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<sup>309</sup> *Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh*, (Darlinghurst: Satprakash Rajneesh Meditation Centre, 1981).

but there was something about living and striving for common goals that was fantastic. We loved it. [s\_1]

Another informant expressed it this way:

Osho was instilling the idea that we're only using 10 per cent of potential of who we are...that we have limitless energy, boundaries you can break your way through. The life I was living was OK, but only OK....you can be creative, you can move towards your true potential. [s\_3]

This idea that one can tap into one's unrealised "true" potential by breaking through the restrictions and limits constructed in mainstream society was common among informants, with some believing at the time that by doing so, they were on the road to becoming enlightened beings. As one informant laughingly remarked, "In those days I was convinced that enlightenment was imminent."

Bhagwan encouraged this idea that within each individual a "Buddha nature" lay dormant and that he, as an already enlightened being, could help them realise this potential. With this promise in mind, informants became bound in their determination to "live how Bhagwan said." As Gordon suggests:

His discourses and darshans, his gestures and actions, even the actions and words of those who represented him or were closer to him, were used by disciples as guides for living, signposts to wholeness.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Gordon, 59.

This relationship to Bhagwan as their Master, however, was not viewed as a form of “brainwashing” generally attributed to charismatic cult leaders and their followers, such as the Moonies or the People’s Temple. For informants, Bhagwan was different in that, while he spoke about numerous forms of religious thought, both Eastern and Western, mainstream and non-mainstream, throughout his teachings he refused to organise them into any specific normative system. Indeed, his assertion that he was “consistently inconsistent” was viewed in positive terms as it meant that one was not simply replacing one dogma with another. Rather, it was a matter of having to work out how to live “passionately” and “creatively” on one's own, on a moment to moment basis, without having recourse to any shared belief system or ideological apparatus. Several informants attempted to articulate how this worked for them:

I love Osho’s response to a question where he just said, ‘Yes I am washing your brains’. So in a way it’s about clearing. It is about getting rid of all the conditional rubbish that’s in the brain. It’s not brainwashing in the sense of falling under someone’s spell and following only what they do or say in a way that’s unconscious and I think from the outside that’s what people saw. People felt that they were all brainwashed. That’s how I saw them too initially. They’re just following this Eastern guru you know. And from outside it does look the same and it’s very hard because it’s an inner experience only and you can’t convince people. I found it very hard to let people know that it’s something...not to do with brainwashing in that sense but it’s to do with clearing your mind of crap to a degree or just knowing more about who you are...In a way I’m not too interested in having to convince people because that’s only of the mind anyway and I guess people will pick up from being around anyone who is meditative. They’re OK...perfectly normal people. But hard...because from the outside it does look the same so that got put into a cult basket and treated in the same way. Just like the article in the *West Australian*



yesterday. I just saw it briefly. Not that I agree with what Sheela said or did but she's put in the same basket as other cults so it just reinforces in people's minds that it was just one of those hypnotic cult things that people got caught up in. So it's very hard. It's an inner thing. [s\_12]

With Osho's words, the interesting thing was that on every subject he has agreed with both sides. He would use one or the other as a tool to make something clear...One month he would talk on the writings of Buddha, the next on Kabir or Gurdjieff. These people may be saying opposite things on the surface and both be true in the context of what they were saying and who they were talking to, but he would use them to elucidate on a point...it's dangerous quoting Osho because somewhere you'll find him saying the exact opposite on important points. [s\_14]

He would say opposite of what he said yesterday. ..the point being, if there is a rule and you just apply the rule, eventually you will get it wrong. You've got to see past regulations and rules. [s\_7]

Why contradict? Could be seen as confusing, but for me, no. I saw it as (1) He was in the moment. It was the truth about that thing to that person in that situation at that time. He might have talked about another aspect to another person, at another time...and that was also the truth. It was about seeing the Truth as multidimensional. His message is multidimensional. (2) It was to throw you back on yourself, not to set a line, although there was probably a party line on some points, but in terms of what his message was about, it was to find the truth in yourself rather than relying on what was set or written because then there was no ability to change. He wanted us to be spontaneous and responsive and you can only do that by responding to the moment. [s\_5]

I have never seen Osho as contradictory...he was a genius who had the ability to reflect different facets of the diamond as it was.<sup>311</sup>

On the other hand, while identifying this lack of a shared belief system as a defining aspect of the movement, critics of the movement often refer to it as a means of guaranteeing charismatic authority. Carter, for example, argues that a kind of ideological vacuum was created that could be filled with Bhagwan's charismatic authority.<sup>312</sup> Furthermore, it was a function that also defined the movement as a whole:

The Rajneesh movement appears to be totally "manufactured" in the sense that beliefs, practices, corporate identities, and physical location may be changed quickly to suit necessities and convenience of the moment. Just as *sannyasin* is urged to live in the "here and now," their social systems and legal identities are very impermanent.<sup>313</sup>

Like other *sannyasin* communes around the world at the time, the focus of the WA commune was on clearing away repressive social structures through intense group work and meditations and re-inventing alternative forms of subjectivity

### The media – early days

There seems to have been little in the local press about *sannyasins* during the late seventies. Isolated from what was happening in Pune and with only a small number of *sannyasins* in Perth at the time, this is perhaps hardly surprising. In the early

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<sup>311</sup> For more views on contradictions, see Appendix 2 (e).

<sup>312</sup> Carter, *Charisma* 32.

<sup>313</sup> Carter, *Renunciate*, 149.

eighties, however, after Bhagwan's move to the US in 1981, the "Orange People" were increasingly reported in Perth, in the Australian press and on television. As will be discussed later, these early reports were often either sensationalist, focusing on the perception of the group as a "sex cult", which promoted violence and the accumulation of wealth, or supportive and appearing to provide an explanation of the group's aim of meditation and spiritual growth. In most reports, though, there was a degree of ambivalence.

In September, 1981, for example, the *Weekend News* reported on a large festival to be held by Sydney's *Satprakash RMC*, led by Perth *sannyasin*, Indivar. It included a photograph of Indivar with a caption explaining that it was taken when he was a practising Buddhist in 1977, although he was clearly a *sannyasin* by then.<sup>314</sup> Although such inaccuracies are not uncommon in the media, they can also indicate a degree of disinterest, reflecting the dominant view at the time that all things Eastern were more or less the same – it is definitely worth reporting on but does not yet qualify as "newsworthy" to any large extent.<sup>315</sup>

### Early objections

In 1980, Adrian Van Leen, Director of the Concerned Christians Growth Ministries Inc. (CCG) became interested in what *sannyasins* were doing in Western Australia. CCG Ministries was formed in October 1979 and based in Nollamara, a northern Perth suburb. Van Leen set it up as a result of his long time interest in cults and his

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<sup>314</sup> Mario D'Orazio, "Orange sect lets hair down", *Weekend News*, 5 September 1981, 10.

<sup>315</sup> Van Driel & Van Belzen (1990), provide an analysis of the way treatment of Rajneeshpuram changed over time in the print media.

Christian beliefs.<sup>316</sup> The group's aim was and is to expose what they view as the destructive nature of cults and to provide support and guidance, from a Christian perspective, for any cult members wishing to leave a cult and to their family members. According to their web site:

The major concern of the Ministry is to encourage, and enable people to grow in maturity of understanding and discernment that will allow them to make informed faith choices and decisions without any emotional manipulation. We desire to see people develop sufficient awareness so that they be able to appropriately evaluate religious propaganda and avoid being deceived by the subtle seduction of any cults, the occult, or extreme Christian fringe groups.<sup>317</sup>

Van Leen and the CCG claim to have been “forced into action” around 1981 when they began to receive “enquiries and expressions of concern” about the Orange People. This was of particular interest to them since in their view, almost all Australian media coverage, “except for a few isolated articles”, presented the Orange People in “positive, if not glowing terms”.<sup>318</sup> Subsequently, in 1982, a panel of CCG supporters was formed to “inquire into the Rajneesh Religion/Orange People”.<sup>319</sup>

The establishment of this panel was reported in the *Daily News* in February, 1982, as being the result of “concern in some medical and church circles that the cult could have a possible detrimental effect on society, particularly the family”.<sup>320</sup> Besides Van Leen, it reported that the panel was said to consist of a doctor, a psychologist, an

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<sup>316</sup> The group continues to maintain their centre in Nollamara, which includes a significant library of information and research on numerous “cults”.

<sup>317</sup> *Concerned Christians Growth Ministries Inc.* <http://www.ccg.org.au/> (accessed 4 November 2004).

<sup>318</sup> Van Leen, 12

<sup>319</sup> Van Leen, 12.

<sup>320</sup> “Panel to examine Orange People”, *Daily News*, 26 February 1982, 10.

educational specialist from a local university and a religious minister.<sup>321</sup> Van Leen cites one main objection to the movement as being a member's "surrender and devotion to Bhagwan", and stated that the panel would be studying and documenting the movement's teachings and the affect they had on members and their relatives "in a bid to assess the implications for society". The article included a response from local *sannyasins* who denied that Bhagwan encouraged people to "surrender" in this way to him or treat him like a god, and that *sannyasins* and family relationships were contrary to Van Leen's view.<sup>322</sup>

An Eastern perspective of what it meant to "surrender to a master" for a *sannyasin* was never fully explained in the media, and for informants it was quite different to the popular Western notion that interpreted it simply as a master-slave relationship. Notwithstanding, one informant remarked in hindsight:

The idea was to surrender, to let go...but surrender is not to say 'yes' if someone says to chop off your head. It's surrendering ego on a different level. But I think people might have got mixed up, surrendering to things they didn't agree with. [s\_5]

### CCG investigations begin

In January, 1980, Van Leen had received an article by a Christian missionary in Pune at the time, which described Rajneesh as a Tantric Hindu philosopher who taught that the way to the realisation of God was, "through sexual intercourse". Rajneesh was an "evil" man who encouraged people to "abandon" their minds and selves to him. The author cited the incident of a young Australian man who had gone to Pune

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<sup>321</sup> In the final published report, acknowledgement is given to the panel that included a professor of education, a behavioural therapist, an obstetrician and gynaecologist, a music teacher, a psychiatric nurse and van Leen. A psychiatrist involved originally had discontinued his involvement.

<sup>322</sup> "Panel to examine Orange People".

after reading Rajneesh's writings claiming, "He was not able to cope with India, Rajneesh or himself and attempted suicide. He was in hospital with broken legs and a damaged back when we found him. Still worse were the effects on his mind as he was unable to escape the evil powers which were attacking him".<sup>323</sup> This was one of Van Leen's first impressions of the Orange People and it captured his attention enough to investigate further.

In early 1980, an Australian television station had broadcast what Van Leen viewed as "sympathetic coverage" of a group of *sannyasins* who had settled in Margaret River, in south-western Australia. Following that, a more "sensational" news report was aired by another station focusing on a *sannyasin* who was a teacher in the local state school there. It seemed that some parents in the area objected to the morality of the group – particularly its views on marriage and communal living.<sup>324</sup>

One informant interviewed, who was a part of the Margaret River group, gives a description of the commune that differs markedly from those of the movement's critics:

In the Margaret River commune there were about 7 to 8 adults and 5 to 8 kids. It was like an extended family or tribe. It was both gorgeous and ordinary. Everyone had jobs. Teeth got brushed etc. It was the same as everyone, but done as a group, shared. Kids were part of the whole thing. They might stay up late, but they climbed trees.... Once, a visitor made a huge tree house. The kids organised it, furnished it. Another person made vege gardens. There were husbands and wives there, but mainly it wasn't restricted. Kids were the number one priority. Freedom meant

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<sup>323</sup> Van Leen, 8.

<sup>324</sup> Van Leen, 8.

incredible creativity...it was loving, clean, caring. The kids were absolutely blossoming creatures. They weren't tortured, put to the stake, told to chant when they were meant to be having a meal. [s\_2]

As in the US, such interpretive differences were to become an important aspect of media reports on the movement here.

As part of their inquiries CCG Ministries placed an advertisement entitled "Have you been seeing Orange?" in the *Daily News* in March, 1982, calling for responses from anyone who had been "affected" by the Orange People and offering support for anyone who felt they had been adversely affected.<sup>325</sup> Information was gathered from visits to Rajneesh Centres around the country, and a number of *sannyasins* were interviewed. Original Rajneesh discourses were examined as was a variety of media from around the world and statements were taken from "former Orange People". Petition letters were sent to government agencies and public meetings were organised to inform people about the movement and its activities.<sup>326</sup>

The result of their investigation was a report, *O is for Orange...?* published in 1983. It continues to be the only study done on the movement in Western Australia. According to the report, the Rajneesh movement was, "a Hindu sub-cult with a large Western following, following the footsteps of their guru in his tantric path".<sup>327</sup> This, in itself, was perhaps not far from the truth. Given the report's religious fundamentalist perspective, however, which viewed all forms of Eastern thought as

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<sup>325</sup> See Van Leen, 19. Responses to the advertisement, both positive and negative, can be found throughout the report.

<sup>326</sup> Van Leen, 18.

<sup>327</sup> Van Leen, 128.

mystical or occultist, they logically reached conclusions such as claims that they believed there were aspects of the movement that were “evil and dangerous

Fundamental to CCG’s argument, is their positioning of Eastern thought as mystical or occult whereas Christian (Western) thought embodies Truth and Reason. In short, in theological terms, the report sets the immanence (“God” as totally synonymous with creation) of Eastern thought against transcendental (“God” as eternally transcendent “other” than creation) of Western thought, blaming the influence of humanistic (read liberal/Renaissance) philosophy as being the main reason that has led to, “confused thinking and to the adoption of alternative and syncretistic faiths”. It suggests that these two world views are incompatible and that this type of Eastern thought produces a “dogma of inconsistency and contradiction”, which in turn leads those who follow a guru such as Rajneesh to abandon their critical thinking faculties.<sup>328</sup> From this standpoint, it is easy to see how such logic produces claims that followers are simply brainwashed and misled. ”.<sup>329</sup> It is worth noting then, that the aim of their report was, “to make the truth of God known”, by exposing the “false gods” of religious cults, such as the Rajneesh movement.<sup>330</sup>

In May, Van Leen organised a visit to the *Sahajam* Centre in Victoria Park where he met with several *sannyasins*.<sup>331</sup> Later that month he spoke to the “Australian Orange People leader”, Indivar, who, “appears to have been quite an impressive personality with influence and charisma”. According to Van Leen, Indivar was “a driving force behind the Orange People that got the movement going and growing”. Indeed, he

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<sup>328</sup> Van Leen, 24-27 and 99-128.

<sup>329</sup> Van Leen, 25-27.

<sup>330</sup> Van Leen, 29.

<sup>331</sup> Van Leen’s visit is described in Van Leen, 8-9.



attributes the growth of the Rajneesh movement in Australia, not just Perth, to Indivar claiming that in early 1981, Indivar moved to Sydney under a directive from Bhagwan to help set up a large centre there. This centre became known as the *Satprakash Meditation Centre* and *sannyasins* from around Australia were encouraged to attend a large festival organised for September that a number of *sannyasin* leaders from around the world would also attend. It was also planned as a media event to inform people in Australia about the movement.<sup>332</sup> Van Leen makes a point, however, that Indivar was reluctant to talk about Orange People finances.<sup>333</sup>

After these initial visits to Rajneesh centres around Perth, Van Leen claims that most of 1980 was relatively quiet in relation to the Orange People in Australia – “There was little dramatic growth apparent and CCG Ministries received few inquiries about the group”.<sup>334</sup> He mentions one press report in July, 1980, about the possibility of a custody battle in Adelaide. The parents of a *sannyasin* who was in Pune were seeking legal advice to prevent their grandchildren from joining her.<sup>335</sup>

While the report discloses openly its fundamentalist Christian bias, and the intention is not to give it much theoretical validity, it is useful to include such an extreme view on the movement since, in many ways, it came to represent the local point of departure for critiques of the movement. With the lack of any real knowledge of the movement, apart from overseas media reports, Van Leen, as the local “cult” expert, achieved a certain legitimacy in the eyes of many. He was often quoted in the press

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<sup>332</sup> Van Leen, 42-43 and 202-209.

<sup>333</sup> Van Leen, 11.

<sup>334</sup> Van Leen, 10.

<sup>335</sup> Van Leen, 10.

and on radio, and later appeared on television as the locus of opposition to the movement.

## Chapter Four: The move to Fremantle

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### The early eighties

By 1981, the *Sahajam RMC* in Victoria Park had replaced *Shanti Sadan*, which nevertheless continued to operate as the main centre in WA. After Bhagwan left for the US in June 1981, however, the difficulty of gaining visas for the US and the cost of living there led many *sannyasins* to return to their home countries where they were encouraged to set up centres and communes. The Victoria Park centre was unable to accommodate this sudden influx of *sannyasins* and new, larger premises were soon found in Fremantle.

In late 1981, a wealthy York farmer, Kerry Marwick, became a *sannyasin* (Swami Dhyan Kerry). A few months later, he mortgaged his 800 hectare property in York to finance the acquisition of properties in and around Fremantle with the view to establishing a new commune and several business ventures.<sup>336</sup> When he purchased the old Oceanic Hotel at 8 Collie Street in the small port city of Fremantle, the local press reported an “uproar” in the community led by unionists and Labor city councillors. The hotel housed about thirty pensioners and low income earners who had lived there for some years. Labor councillor, Dr John Troy, reportedly claimed that there was a trend “for estate agents to sell to ‘Mr Moneybags’ for redevelopment and force people, who have lived here all their lives, out of the area”. Marwick counter-argued that another nearby boarding house had offered to accommodate the residents and that they were working with the City Council’s social worker to ensure the residents were looked after, extending their notices until they could find suitable

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<sup>336</sup> On Marwick see John McCourt, “Farmer puts future, life into ‘Orange’ sect”, *Daily News*, 5 October 1981, 7; Margot Lang, “Energy and Meditation”, *The West Australian*, 22 October 1981, 7; Hugh Schmitt, “Farmer finds happiness toiling for Bhagwan”, *The West Australian*, 1 April 1985, 9.

housing. He also claimed that the building had been condemned as unfit for human habitation and that an offer had been made to the previous owner by a company to demolish the hotel and build warehouse space.<sup>337</sup>

The idea that Rajneesh *sannyasins*, unlike the traditional *sannyasin*, did not shy away from wealth was another aspect of the movement often taken up by the press.<sup>338</sup> Arguments like the one above, which positioned the “wealthy” *sannyasins* against the “poverty” of the underclass, whether they be the poor in India or the low income earners of Australia, were typical at the time. It is worthwhile noting, however, that Fremantle was about to go through a major transformation as the buoyant global market began to impact on small towns like Fremantle, bringing with it a huge re-orientation of the property market. Stories like the one above were soon to become commonplace, although the players were cast differently. In some ways, the *sannyasins* were the first of the new breed of entrepreneurs to take advantage of the new global arrangements of capital.

About three weeks after this article, *The Fremantle Gazette* reported that there had been little difficulty in finding alternative lodging for the men. A Fremantle City Council social worker at the time did, however, express his concern with the development that was beginning to occur in Fremantle – “More low income earners will be displaced and it may cause problems when we can’t find enough cheap accommodation”.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Jody Robb, “Uproar on Orange People’s Freo buy”, *Sunday Independent*, 4 October 1981, 10.

<sup>338</sup> On the equating of wealth with spirituality as one of the “perversions” of the movement, see Van Leen, 241.

<sup>339</sup> “Ousted men have new homes”, *Fremantle Gazette*, 28 October 1981, 3.

The Oceanic Hotel was renovated and its name changed to *Ikkyu House*.<sup>340</sup> The Fremantle commune became the main centre and commune in WA and was largely financed by Marwick who set up Sahajam Holdings as an umbrella company for businesses run by the *sannyasins*.<sup>341</sup> Taking on the name of *Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram*, which included *Ikkyu House*, *Shanti Sadan*, *Sahajam Farm* in York and *Soham* in the Ferguson Valley, the Collie Street centre became a residential commune and the centre of commune activities.

Besides the purchase of the old Oceanic Hotel, a six year lease was taken out on what was then, the *Four Seasons* restaurant and function centre opposite the hotel, which was originally the Fremantle Trades Labor Council Hall. It became the first of several very successful *Zorba the Buddha* vegetarian restaurants and continued to run as both a restaurant and function centre catering for weddings, receptions and other functions, including the monthly dinner meetings of the Rotarians.<sup>342</sup> An article in the West Australian in 1985 estimated the value of these properties and businesses “conservatively” at \$1.5 million.<sup>343</sup>

Several months after the renovation of the Oceanic Hotel, a decision was made to



Zorba the Buddha restaurant. Private collection. Permission granted.

develop it commercially into luxury residential units for sale or lease.<sup>344</sup> The commune was moved to the function centre

tion was instigated by leaders from the Oregon  
sing money for the commune there.  
ectors from 1981 to 1983.  
e, 14 October 1981, 4.  
ng for Bhagwan”, 9.  
According to van Leen, 254 this decision was made after a visit by Arup, assistant to the  
managing director of the Rajneesh Foundation International, in December 1981.

above the restaurant and from April 5 1982, *Savita House*, located at 120 Wray Avenue in Fremantle became the centre for therapy and massage.<sup>345</sup> By November, 1982, Savita House had closed and moved into the upstairs section of the *Zorba the Buddha* building at 6 Collie Street. It included a session room, a large reception room, a dance floor, and stage which was to become a group room. It was also re-named as the *Savita meditation and Growth Centre*.<sup>346</sup>

In addition to the commune and the restaurant, other businesses included a stock feed business and plant nursery at Forrestdale, a demolition contracting business, a food stall in the Fremantle Markets, a building company called Oregon Builders and a farm sub-contracting operation based on Marwick's farm in York.<sup>347</sup> Rivendell Farm, which began in the Ferguson Valley south-west of Perth, produced herbs and herbal cosmetics and was run by *sannyasins*. According to Van Leen, there were also a number of businesses that may have been "Orange" or had "Orange" connections. These included a vegetarian restaurant, *Niggles*, at 104 Wray Avenue, Fremantle and a second hand clothing shop, *Fay Wrays* at 106 Wray Avenue.<sup>348</sup>

The commune also had its own team of painters, electricians and other trade workers who worked both in the commune itself as well as in the local community. Others worked in the local community as teachers, real estate agents, social workers and other professions, all contributing to the commune, either financially or in labour.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *April Programme*, Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram, April 1982.

<sup>346</sup> *Programme for Savita Meditation and Growth Centre and Newsletter of Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram*, Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram, November 1982, 3.

<sup>347</sup> Lang, *Energy*, 7.

<sup>348</sup> Van Leen, 232.

<sup>349</sup> Conversation with informant. See also, Van Leen, 211-212.

In effect, the commune functioned in much the same way as any large organisation, apart from, due to its “religious” status, it was listed as tax exempt.

### A commune is established - heydays

As with communes around the world, positions of leadership were filled by women. When asked about the role of women in the movement, informants’ comments varied. For example:

There were many women...Buddha refused to ordain women as nuns because he thought that his movement would only last 100 not 1000s of years. Earlier religions made women out to be devils or temptation. Osho felt that women were enslaved. History had to be righted. He consciously gave status that had been denied to us. He also spoke a lot about feminine qualities, that we all need them...he had great respect for feminine qualities... [s\_4]

When I went to Pune I felt like stepping back in time because of my feminist beliefs. Women were almost archetypal handmaidens to Osho, doing everything. Men were the dentists, the doctors, high up...women do the work, organise, always try to look beautiful, so they never got beyond that. But in terms of the community, it didn’t really matter...A lot of the time women who went to the top were like Maggie Thatcher. The *sannyasin* world was a complete reflection of what was going on in the rest of society. There were notions of women in power but they were not strong in terms of spirituality. They were bitches, like Thatcher. [s\_17]

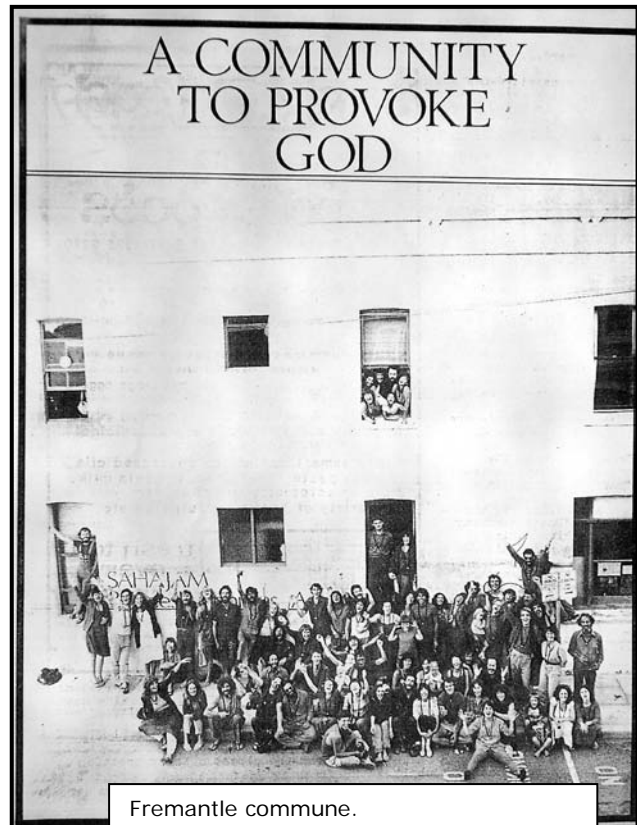
Osho said, in the beginning, that women fall in love with him, then men with the women. But then men with him. [s\_7]<sup>350</sup>

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For more views on the role of women, see Appendix 2 (f).

A female informant, who was the first coordinator of the Fremantle commune, described the early days of the commune as a time when the influx of returning *sannyasins* created a great injection of energy that was focused on setting up the Fremantle commune. She estimated that when it started there were around 45 people, including children, living at the commune.



People ranged in age from primary school children to those in their fifties, although most were in their thirties, and backgrounds were diverse.<sup>351</sup> A journalist for *The West Australian* visited the centre in 1981, reporting that commune members included doctors, teachers, lawyers, nurses, journalists, business people, architects, psychologists, mechanics and electricians.<sup>352</sup> Children in the commune attended a local primary school and were not taught Bhagwan's teachings. Religious instruction was received at school since being a *sannyasin* was "a way of life, not a religion".<sup>353</sup>

By 1982, there were reportedly close to 100 *sannyasins*, including 20 children, living in the commune and suggestions that there could be 400 to 600 *sannyasins* in Western Australia. A mailing list for literature had been set up, and a newsletter

<sup>351</sup> Phone conversation with informant.

<sup>352</sup> Lang, *Energy*, 7.

<sup>353</sup> Teena Mulligan, "The Orange People: blind faith or reasoned choice?", *About Town*, no.3, (May 1982), 4-7.



called *Yes* was published under the name, *Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram*. Typically, these newsletters contained excerpts from Rajneesh's discourses, advertisements for *sannyasin* businesses, letters or reports from *sannyasins* on the latest events concerning Pune and Oregon, and a program of local events, workshops and meditations. A meditation centre in Bunbury (*Soham*) was also operating and offering a variety of therapeutic groups.<sup>354</sup>

During these early years in the commune, there was a lot of dancing, many "celebrations" and numerous other social activities. A theatre restaurant opened above the *Zorba the Buddha* restaurant and later became a disco, a concept that had become popular in other centres around the world.<sup>355</sup> There were also weekly "Introductory evenings" or "Open nights" that anyone was able to attend and that typically involved dancing, activities, videos of Bhagwan and question time. These were occasionally advertised in *The West Australian*.<sup>356</sup>

As one informant remembers:

...in the old days Freo was one of the top places to be a *sannyasin* in the world in late 70s/early 80s. It was a strong community, bonded together by Bhagwan. There were about 400 *sannyasins* in WA....It was going and blowing and was a high time of the *sannyasin* community with lots of people coming and going." [s\_10]

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<sup>354</sup> Mulligan, 4-7.

<sup>355</sup> *Fremantle Gazette* published a very positive story on the theatre restaurant. "Theatre restaurant is getting it Wright", *Fremantle Gazette*, 25 November 1981, 6.

<sup>356</sup> See for example, "Rajneesh Religion", *The West Australian* (advertisement), 2 February 1983, 120.

The Fremantle *sannyasins* community thrived with relatively little negativity from the local population from around this time until around late 1984. Several informants spoke of reactions to them in the early days, many remarking that most people were curious rather than negative.

### More media coverage

From mid to late 1981, there was a marked increase in the number of reports emerging in the press. On the one hand, Van Leen maintains that a “concentrated effort at positive publicity was launched by Rajneesh followers” as part of their recruitment process.<sup>357</sup> On the other, informants insisted that they had no need to proselytise and that they were merely responding to the growing negative publicity.

In May, the *Weekend News* printed a story, “Orange people ask for understanding”, in which a Perth actress, Leigh Taylor, spoke about her views as a *sannyasin*:

The Press always pick up on the more outlandish aspects of things. Stories appear in the paper about wild sex orgies and outrageous behaviour, making it seem like that’s all we do. But that’s just not true. Which is not to say that some orange people don’t do these things. It’s simply wrong to say it is a way of life for an orange person.<sup>358</sup>

In the same article another *sannyasin* maintains:

I find mostly that my friends and colleagues don’t want to know about my religious beliefs. They don’t understand them, so are afraid of them in a sense. The

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<sup>357</sup> Van Leen, 12.  
<sup>358</sup> Quoted in Van Leen, 10.

Bhagwan's teachings are very misunderstood and misinterpreted. All the media ever reports is sex orgies.<sup>359</sup>

By this time, the German documentary *Ashram* and reports of the focus on the wild abandon encouraged in encounter groups in Pune had, given its sensational nature, reached a worldwide audience. For many lacking any direct experience of the movement, this information was the first they received and it functioned as the principal means of defining the movement for the general public, which in short was that the Rajneeshees were some kind of "deviant cult" who were only interested in sex and making money.

One could argue, given the focus on sexuality by Bhagwan and the ways in which the movement organised itself financially, that this was indeed the case. When one considers how any open expression of sexuality is normally hidden in society and how the accumulation of wealth is normally represented with a degree of restraint or austerity, however, the way in which Bhagwan and his *sannyasins* openly flaunted both could be viewed as an indication that, precisely because they were not hidden, they were not what was most important. Indeed, this is the view taken by most informants.

What Osho's prescription was, that basically he just took over the old hippy idea of free sex, you know if you're not with the one you love, love the one you're with...and any hanging onto a single partner, or ideas of fidelity, or ..that's basically a psychological trap... [s\_6]

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<sup>359</sup> Quoted in Van Leen, 10.

Sex – I think it was tame compared to suburbia, all the wife-swapping happening from the 60s in Aust. Scratch the surface of middle-class Australia or anywhere, you'll find...all notions of sexual abuse, church, all hidden. Whereas, *sannyasins* were just honest about it. [s\_17]

People were always talking about 92 Rolls Royces. For Osho it was a provocation – up the left nostril of Christianity – that 92 Rolls Royces represent just the tip of the tiny finger's wealth in the US...After Osho was kicked out, I was involved in closing down in the US...I was on the switchboard. An ad was put in the US press for the Rolls Royces. There were 45 independent offers to buy not one or two, but the whole lot. [s\_2]

Rolls Royces were a good technique...First to raise money. In the US, they give you money if you already had money...They were a symbol of affluence...If you have 100, you're seen as tops. ..It's like that in a materialistic society...100 are seen as excessive so it will get the attention of the press. ...It was a way to get people interested...He wanted to stir up society, out of our set ways of thinking, to see, 'what is really going on here?'. [s\_5]

On the other hand, other commentators on the movement viewed Bhagwan's accumulation of Rolls Royces as a fixation on excessive collecting stemming from his childhood, and his focus on sexuality, evidence of his own obsession with women, also reflected in the way he always surrounded himself with beautiful women and assigned most positions of power to women.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> For example, see Gordon, 115 and 79-80.

Van Leen cites an example of the kind of sensationalist reporting that the *sannyasins* in the article above are referring to as a report in a British tabloid about an “Orange happening” that took place in London a couple of months earlier. He concedes that such media coverage does not give an accurate picture of what the Orange People were about suggesting that, “most people who had personally met, or known, Orange People, would not have seen or regarded them as sex fiends or perverts”. He further suggests, however, that the difference between “the cheap sensationalist media coverage,” and “personal observation from contact with individual Orange People” would in fact “have helped to attract some to the group”.<sup>361</sup>

Interestingly, Rajneesh and *sannyasins*, held a similar attitude towards the effects of mass media reports, maintaining that any publicity was good publicity. Negative publicity could be confrontational and so function as a means of “waking up” people. At the same time, Van Leen argues that such publicity functioned to endorse the “persecution complex” that is “shared by the Orange People and most other cults”.<sup>362</sup>

Other press articles Van Leen mentions provide useful historical background to the type of media coverage at the time:

August 1981 – Two consecutive articles ran in the *Melbourne Herald*. One was of a Jewish girl who had been ‘deprogrammed’ from the Orange People. The other was a response by *sannyasins* to the claims the girl made.

September 1981 – Report of an “Orange celebration” held at the Sydney Opera House and at other venues around Sydney including the new Chevron hotel, the

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<sup>361</sup> Van Leen, 10. See also Mullan, 94.

<sup>362</sup> Van Leen, 10.

Sydney Town Hall and the newly established Satprakash Meditation Centre in Darlinghurst.

September 1981 – The *Weekend News* ran an article on the Sydney event – *Orange sect lets hair down* – mentioning Indivar.

October 1981 – The *Daily News* reported on a York farmer, Kerry Marwick, who had recently become a *sannyasin* and provided financial backing for the purchase of several properties in Fremantle including the then Oceanic Hotel.

October 1981 – a follow-up article in the *Daily News* on the concerns of the Fremantle Town Council and local unions about the eviction of aged pensioners from the Oceanic Hotel which was a boarding house at the time.

October 1981 – *The West Australian* runs a “favourable” story on *sannyasins* – *Energy and meditation*.

November 1981 – The *South Western Times* of Bunbury reports that *Orange people seek the ‘joy of living’*.

November 1981 – The *Melbourne Age* runs a story – *Orange people laugh their way to God*.<sup>363</sup>

### Sex and the commune

While informants interviewed did not deny the emphasis on sexuality, they all held to the view that the focus was not on sex as such. Rather, it was one part of the larger

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<sup>363</sup> Van Leen, 12.

process, loosely based on Tantric thought, of de-conditioning oneself and allowing the sexual energy to be transformed into spiritual energy. This could only happen by going completely into it, by refusing to repress it. Most informants blamed the media for hyping up and sensationalising the movement's focus on sexuality. A number of views and experiences are included here to elucidate on their views:

The mainstream view saw Bhagwan as a sex guru who had lots of women. The media jumped on it. Our focus on sexuality had a few functions: (1) wanting us to always be in touch with who we were, especially our sexuality. Because of restrictions in society, people were interested. In Indian society, there was no sex out of marriage. Although we were westerners, we were still repressed, especially in the 70s/80s. So for Bhagwan to talk about sexuality, it was inflammatory; (2) to get past restrictions and conditioning to get to who you are. Sex is one way into divine...Not to go out and make love a lot, but to bring awareness into the act. [s\_5]

Sex guru: was often the point in which people in the west came to hear about him. He used it effectively as a PR hook, with the view that all PR is good PR. True, he was telling westerners that at some point in the process they may need to engage in lots more sexual activity...but Osho wanted westerners to consider sex as not a big thing... just something people do. He wanted us to... get past the fascination with fucking...to focus on the spiritual...he recommended that people just fuck a lot, then move on. The ultimate intent was you don't need to fuck a lot. [s\_7]

I know that free love and sex had always been the connotation of *sannyasin* community, but for me it was having a closeness with other people...blowing off steam, dancing full blast, freedom without criticism..... Sex was no pressure ...no gang bangs...I had several different lovers in Pune but nothing kinky. Quite the

opposite – we were into sex as meditation. It became a lot more satisfying. I didn't really have too many one night stands. I wanted to find out what it was like, if it was any different... Didn't make a loose woman out of me. I do feel I have experimented with boundaries of sex and don't feel as if I've missed out on something...My husband probably had just as many lovers and sex in his life. It's not peculiar to *sannyasins*. [s\_3]

This openness towards sexuality was not hidden within the commune and as one informant pointed out “fucking was handled in practical ways in Perth”:

There was an STD chart on the wall. People with no STDS on one side...so and so's off limits today. It was practical, sensible. [s\_7]<sup>364</sup>

In 1982, the *Weekend News* published a story of a thirty year old mother who alleged that she was “pack raped” by a group of eight *sannyasins* at a local centre, who she said, claimed that the alleged assault was a way to spiritual enlightenment. She also stated that she was harassed and threatened by *sannyasins* after the alleged rapes claiming, “[T]hey said there were no witnesses and nobody would believe me. They also said that if I did tell anybody, they would get me, that they were not finished with me yet and to remember that I had children”. The article states that she had spent time with a doctor on the panel appointed by CCG Ministries and had also been questioned by a “medical specialist”, both of whom concluded that the woman was telling the truth. She decided not to press any charges, though, since she was concerned about the affect giving evidence in an open court would have on her family.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> For further comments on sexuality by informants, see Appendix 2 (g).

<sup>365</sup> “Mother tells of pack rape,” *Weekend News* (Perth, Western Australia), 26-27 June 1982, 14.



The article, overall, painted a sinister picture of *sannyasins*, who responded by denying that the event took place and that the newspaper treated the allegations of a crime as fact. They made a complaint to the Australian Press Council on the grounds that the newspaper had a duty to include their reply to the allegations in the same issue. The Press Council adjudicated on the issue in March 1983, concluding that:

[T]he Press Council supports unreservedly the newspaper's right to investigate, and report on a religious organisation which has been the subject of public interest and controversy. That right is not at issue.

What is at issue is point one in the Press Council's Statement of Principles which says that readers of a newspaper are entitled to have both news and comment presented to them with complete good faith.

In this particular case, the Press Council believes the newspaper's fear of possible litigation and/or injunctions against the publication could not over-ride its obligation to readers to present, or try to present, the views of the Rajneesh organisation on the serious allegations made against members.

The Press Council stresses that it is not making judgment on the truth or otherwise of the allegations and is not censuring the newspaper for investigating and reporting on the organisation, but it believes the Rajneesh members should have been given the opportunity to comment at the time. But the council does note the newspaper did feature prominently the following week letters from Rajneesh members denying the original allegations.

The Press Council believes that the paper concerned acted in the public interest.<sup>366</sup>

While, as Van Leen suggested, early media reports on the *sannyasins* and their commune tended to be ambivalent if not supportive, the atmosphere was beginning to change.

### Beyond the commune

While the Fremantle commune remained residential for some years, it could not financially or practically accommodate all local *sannyasins*.<sup>367</sup> At the same time, many *sannyasins* chose not to live there for a variety of reasons.<sup>368</sup> Often they lived in and around Fremantle, usually in shared *sannyasin* houses or in streets where groups of *sannyasins* lived. They would visit the centre for meditations, celebrations and other activities while working in the broader community. Many would contribute to the commune in other ways, by working in the restaurants or other jobs without payment.<sup>369</sup>

One informant, who worked as a social worker, describes her reasons:

I went to meditations and discourses. I saw myself as member of commune, though I wasn't living in it. I knew I was deliberately choosing not to live in it. I felt that after living in Pune and on the Ranch, being directly under Osho's influence...I didn't feel that those in charge were as connected to him, imbued with his energy. I didn't

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<sup>366</sup> "Adjudication no. 156", *Australian Press Council Adjudications*, APC 7 (March 1983) *Australasian Legal Information Institute*. <http://www.austlii.edu.au> (accessed 11 May, 2006).

<sup>367</sup> After the renovations to 8 Collie Street, it was no longer residential.

<sup>368</sup> Van Leen claims to have received reports from former spouses of *sannyasins* who spoke of tensions, power struggles and unhappiness within the commune. See Van Leen, 95.

<sup>369</sup> Van Leen, 93-95 claims to have received a number of reports from people living close to *sannyasin* houses complaining about the activities carried out by *sannyasins*.

feel confident to come in under their power. People in the commune had a lot of power. For example, you might come back and find that someone had ‘zenned’ your room, taken everything and moved you to another space... I felt unsure about ‘surrendering’ but was happy to support the commune. Also, I was saving up to go to [the] Ranch and if you were working in the commune you’d have to hand over your wages. As a social worker I was on a good wage comparatively. I was looking out for number one. [s\_5]

In a magazine article, a *sannyasin* pointed out that not all *sannyasins* made the total commitment to Bhagwan, so there were many who led reasonably conventional lives in Perth and did not wear orange or the *mala*.<sup>370</sup>

### Commune aims

In line with communes around the world, the community was clear about its aim. It was to be both self-supporting financially and one that aimed to live the teachings of Bhagwan. The focus was being “as much as possible, open and honest with each other”. There was a strong work ethic and it was claimed that *sannyasins* worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, with no time off. One informant, who had moved from *Shanti* in Forrestdale to Fremantle and later became the second female coordinator of the commune describes that time:

Bhagwan was interested in life, love and laughter, to squeeze the juice from life, not waste life, not waste time. The number one aim was to know yourself, to go in, to be true to oneself and each other. .... It was what drew us together. And also we worked very hard. There were a lot of talented people. We were pragmatic about whatever worked, made money – we had successful restaurants, a building company, lawyers. All the money was pooled. Jobs were rotated. It was easier than being individual. All

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<sup>370</sup> Mulligan, 4-7.

cleaning, cooking and other everyday housework was done by someone. Children were looked after...We lived at an intense pitch most of the time. There were extreme highs and lows, depending on what was happening with Osho. [s\_1]

Other informants commented on what being a *sannyasin*, living how Bhagwan wanted, meant to them:

Being a *sannyasin* was saving the world by saving yourself first...It was difficult to become a *sannyasin* because it was the most uncomfortable experience you could ever have in your life...*Sannyasins* are a difficult group of people. They are intelligent, have money, and are not always nice...as in any group. [s\_8]

You had to be brave to take sannyas...it was a new change, with a new name...Your family might be horrified...but you either had to say, yes or no...but there was always feeling a failure if you said no...the process was life-changing...it forces you to step outside of society, to look at things with different eyes...you become separate...My life felt richer, more meaningful...I was happier, more able to love myself, more open, more accepting...life was much nicer. [s\_1]

It was like taking us outside of ourselves, our conditioning, to see that what is in us is the very essence of life...It's hard to talk about in concrete terms...it was something you needed to experience...He wasn't wanting us to worship him or setting himself up as a god. Yet for a lot of people, they wanted to have someone to love, to elevate and he would allow that because for many people it was their path, they needed it. For others it was a different path. [s\_5]

Osho showed me I was my own entity. Before I was always linked to others. Suddenly I realised that I hadn't actually reached into myself and it was all to do with me. Suddenly I felt I had to be selfish...there was a huge expanse to explore...My world was part of a lot of other people's worlds...you had to be cruel to be kind...I've got to leave the nest for myself, to find out who I really am, to reach that potential for myself...things I never dared allow myself to think about.

[s\_3]

Osho talked about the mind as a screen...like when you're watching a movie, you watch yourself watching the movie... there was always this thing of standing back...don't be identified with your mind, or *see* that you are identified with your mind.<sup>371</sup> [s\_1]

An informant commented that there was less focus on doing groups in the early eighties and more on working to develop a self-supporting community. While meditation remained an important aspect of a *sannyasin's* lifestyle, it was not limited to meditation sessions. Rather, it extended to every aspect of living, including work. Bhagwan encouraged *sannyasins* to "live in the moment" and to put all their energy into whatever it was they were doing in that moment. Following what was happening in the US, the phrase "work as worship" was used around this time as a means of encapsulating this idea. This was generally interpreted popularly as indicating a blindness of followers to the real, more exploitative aims of Bhagwan, namely to increase his wealth at their expense.

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<sup>371</sup> For more informants' views on being a *sannyasin*, see Appendix 2 (h).

Although, as with communes around the world, “guidance” was provided by Rajneeshpuram, the first coordinator of the Fremantle commune maintains that it remained relatively independent and when it started, never donated money to the Oregon commune. In the January, 1982, edition of *Yes*, however, a visit is reported by the then managing directors of Rajneesh Foundation International, Ma Yoga Shushila and Ma Prem Arup. Shushila was reported to be responsible for, “coordinating the activities of Rajneesh ashrams, centres and disciples in Japan, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia.”<sup>372</sup> The visit resulted in a change in the direction of the commune as indicated in the report:

A long time ago we were told to develop our communes, if possible to the point of self-sufficiency, and this has obviously been happening in WA, at Sahajam in Fremantle, Forrestdale and York, and at Soham in the Ferguson Valley.

Now, though, we are asked to direct our energies towards Oregon as well, to help create a strong, vibrant centre for Bhagwan’s worldwide Buddhafield.<sup>373</sup>

This was clearly a result, some insist under Bhagwan’s directive, of Sheela’s move to rationalise and consolidate worldwide centres and *sannyasin* businesses.

In the November, 1982, issue of *Yes*, after a further visit by Arup, it is evident that the commune was experiencing some debt problems. Under Arup's direction, the centre was to “first get out of debt and then send money to Oregon”. They were encouraged to make the centre “a place for people to find out about Bhagwan,”, and to this end, the library and coffee shop were moved downstairs to be more publicly

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<sup>372</sup> *Yes*, Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram, January 1982, 4.  
<sup>373</sup> *Yes*, 4.

visible, while meditations and the group department were to operate upstairs at *Zorbas*. Further to this:

...Every centre's account structure was changed; Arup's direction was clear – every person in the commune must take their own responsibility and it's working beautifully, we're streamlining our support system, some people have left which has made streamlining happen on its own. Luckily *sannyasins* outside the commune have been helping with part-time work – thank you existence. The Commune is getting smaller and stronger, the highlight of Arup's visit was a gift from Bhagwan, a robe, which Bhagwan wore during the festival...All in all, we're being pulled and stretched – it's intense and beautiful and changing all the time. No sooner do we get fixed on one direction and it all changes.<sup>374</sup>

When the second coordinator informant of the commune took over in late 1983, she claims that the commune was doing well – making enough money to remain solvent and to send money to Oregon and that this was something that all communes around the world were now expected to do.

### Media – an overview

In the early eighties, press reports were largely positive, with obvious attempts at maintaining an unbiased perspective.<sup>375</sup> *The Fremantle Gazette* reported on the large and increasing *sannyasin* community who was planning to establish “a permanent home in Fremantle”, running business ventures, such as the restaurant, in order to create a self-supporting community. Wary of any “hippy” image, the spokeswoman

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<sup>374</sup> *Programme for Savita Meditation and Growth Centre.* .

<sup>375</sup> A number of *sannyasins* were journalists or had links to journalists. One informant observed that *sannyasins* would sometimes use their non-*sannyasin* names if writing for a paper. One can speculate that this may have happened, although I m unable to strictly determine this in this thesis.

for the Fremantle group, Ma Deva Anurago, is reported as saying that they discouraged any drug use or living on the dole. Rather, they saw themselves as “determined people who can and do work hard”.<sup>376</sup>

In late 1981, a reporter from *The West Australian* visited the Fremantle commune and gave an uncritical descriptive account of *sannyasins*' beliefs and lifestyle.<sup>377</sup> In May, 1982, a more in depth story was published in *About Town* discussing *sannyasins*' views of themselves, commune living and their commitment to Bhagwan, along with views of Bhagwan as a “false prophet” and an investigation into the movement launched by CCG Ministries. The article also states that *sannyasins* felt that Fremantle had been very receptive to them, with little negativity aimed towards them.<sup>378</sup>

In early 1982, the Fremantle Town Planning Scheme was amended to allow residential use of warehouses, marking the beginning of the major re-generation of Fremantle through redevelopment of property. One of the first applications under this new scheme was the renovation of the old Oceanic Hotel, lodged by Sahajam Holdings. The Council approved the project, and the design by the community's architects was completed not long after. The complex, called *Rivendal*, was built by Oregon Builders, comprised of *sannyasins* working without a salary. The leading architect for the company at the time pointed out that they were the first inner city block of apartments developed in Fremantle, a trend that was to take off in the years

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<sup>376</sup> “The Orange community”, 4. Van Leen, 231 claims to have evidence of *sannyasins* receiving government unemployment benefits that they gave to the commune.

<sup>377</sup> Lang, *Energy*, 7.

<sup>378</sup> Mulligan, 4-7.



that followed.<sup>379</sup> One informant commented that *sannyasins* never lived in them as they could not afford them.

In 1982 and 1983, several newspaper articles about Oregon Builders were published. Having received the Fremantle Award as an outstanding contribution to the city environment in 1983, the company had been in demand and is praised as being one of several very successful *sannyasin* business ventures.<sup>380</sup> By that time, the company had changed its name to Sahajam Rajneesh Builders and the director, Vimal, a qualified architect, accredits the success of the business to the attitude of the seven member team that was focused on enjoying everything they did. Working nine hours a day, six days a week, all the money earned was channelled back into the community. In 1984, the company again received the Fremantle Award for renovations to the old Boy's School that now houses the Film and Television Institute in Fremantle.<sup>381</sup>

## Van Leen and CCG investigations continue

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<sup>379</sup> Gavin Simpson, "Commune plan gives way to luxury living", *The West Australian*, 15 May 1982, 10 and "Old hotel lives again in style", *Sunday Independent*, 6 November, 1983, 5.

<sup>380</sup> Van Leen, 233 claims Oregon Builders had become the major source of revenue for the commune. On his view, as they were not paying union award rates to its workers it was able to offer very competitive services.

<sup>381</sup> Scott Symons, "Orange People believe in faith with work", *Western Mail*, 23 June 1983, 12.

It was precisely such positive press that concerned Van Leen who by this time had become more vocal in the press on his views of Bhagwan and the movement. His views, however, were not always supported.

As part of investigations into the “Orange People”, CCG’s Van Leen, intent on exposing what he claimed were “empire building” techniques used by *sannyasins* to recruit followers, discovered that a number of *sannyasins* held positions in several government organisations and other professions. The “authority and influence” such professional positions allowed, he claimed, were a cause for “considerable concern”, given that the people they would be coming into contact with were often “needy, hurting and vulnerable”.<sup>382</sup>

In early 1982, Van Leen contacted the Wasley Centre, a Community Health Services and Training Centre run by the Uniting Church, after receiving information that several personal growth and training groups were being conducted by *sannyasins*. Their response acknowledged Van Leen’s concern. They maintained their support of those in question, however, replying, “[a]fter considerable discussion, our Board agreed to affirm the work of the Wasley Centre, to express its confidence in the centre’s directors and the appointments they make and the supervision they give, and to inform you accordingly.”<sup>383</sup>

Van Leen was also concerned about the number of *sannyasins* working in the Mental Health Services, raising the issue on a local radio talkback show aired in April, 1982. A response from the then director of Mental Health, Dr Fred Ball, was reported in

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<sup>382</sup> Van Leen, 211-213.

<sup>383</sup> The Wasley Centre was located at 563 William Street, Mount Lawley. Letter re-printed in Van Leen, 216.

*The West Australian*, acknowledging that *sannyasins*, including Jim Coventry (Indivar), were working in the department. He maintained, however, that their professionalism was not affected by their religious beliefs, suggesting that, “[p]rofessional people should have the freedom to direct any patient to any organisation which is considered appropriate for that patient’s ongoing support and needs”.<sup>384</sup>

These were obviously not very useful responses to Van Leen, but it did not deter him. Further investigations came up with two examples of professional *sannyasins* supposedly exercising their influence. In the first instance, a young man contacted CCG claiming that a vocational psychologist working for the Commonwealth Employment Service discussed Rajneesh teachings with him rather than providing help with trying to find work. In the second instance, the mother of a 19 year old girl contacted CCG claiming that her daughter had become involved with the Orange People after discussing Rajneesh teachings with a social worker at a suburban office of the Community Youth Support Scheme, which aims to assist unemployed youth.<sup>385</sup>

Like *sannyasins*, Van Leen evidently understood how the media influences public opinion. He took the stories to the *Weekend News*, which, however, refused to publish them without further investigation. Consequently, the paper sent a cadet journalist undercover as an unemployed person, to both offices. In both cases, the

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<sup>384</sup> Norman Aisbett, “‘Orange People’ no worries – MHS”, *The West Australian*, 3 April, 1982, 4. For Van Leen’s views see van Leen, 218-219.

<sup>385</sup> Van Leen, 220.

reporter claims that Bhagwan's teachings were used extensively in their discussions.<sup>386</sup>

Later the *Weekend News* reported the story in a three page feature on the Orange People, claiming that unemployed young people seeking help with finding work through government agencies were being, "channelled to a sect that preaches free love and the destruction of the family unit". The feature included a response from the chairman of the Psychologists Board of WA pointing out that no complaints about *sannyasin* psychologists had been made to the Board, and there was nothing to lead him to feel greatly concerned about the group.<sup>387</sup>

*Sannyasins* laid a complaint against the newspaper to the Australian Press Council, which adjudicated on the matter in March 1983, dismissing the grounds for the complaint on the basis that, "a certain degree of subterfuge," is legitimate for investigative journalism and that the paper was not at fault as, "There were no comments of Mrs Cornish published as a result of the interview; only allegations about the topic of conversation."<sup>388</sup>

Van Leen goes on to cite several other examples of this so-called "missionary-mindedness" and "denials of 'evangelising'" of the Orange People, including a public meeting given to "promote" the movement and an instance where a psychology lecturer who discussed the movement in lectures gave out newsletters to students.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Van Leen, 220-223.

<sup>387</sup> See Van Leen, 223-224 for sections of the report.

<sup>388</sup> "Adjudication no. 156".

<sup>389</sup> Van Leen, 225-229.

Arguably in part due to Van Leen's interventions, less positive reports also began to emerge. In June, 1982, the *Weekend News* published a full page advertisement for their special report on the "Orange People". It showed a large photo of Bhagwan with the caption, "He wants your daughter. And your son". The by-line read: "Perth's Orange People alert – the infiltration has begun. Tomorrow a *Weekend News* exclusive reveals some of the recruiting and indoctrination methods used by the group".<sup>390</sup> The same day, in response, the Orange People took the *Weekend News* to court in an attempt to suppress the story. The injunction was refused, however, on the basis that there was not enough information available to the court. The paper reported on this the following day.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> "He wants your daughter. And your son.", *Weekend News* (Perth, Western Australia) (advertisement), 25 June 1982, 30. See also van Leen, 199-202.

<sup>391</sup> "Sect fails to stop articles", *Weekend News* (Perth, Western Australia), 26 June 1982, 4.

## Chapter Five: Karri Valley debacle

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### Changes in the commune

From the commune beginnings until 1983, it appears that the *sannyasin* community had established itself firmly in Fremantle and continued to thrive with only the occasional backlash in the press that its lawyers were ready to respond to without hesitation. The local Fremantle community seemed to have absorbed the *sannyasins*, their orange robes and *malas* as now quite commonplace. As one informant commented, “there was a kind of acceptance of *sannyasins*, as endearing, harmless, eccentrics”. Highly visible in their orange robes and *mala*, most people were mainly curious, asking them about their beliefs and often confusing them with other “cults”, such as the Hare Krishnas or the Scientologists.

Businesses continued to flourish. By 1984, there were now four *Zorba the Buddha* restaurants – the one in Collie Street, and three others in Nedlands, Perth city and Cottesloe. Sahajam Rajneesh Builders had established a good reputation and was in high demand. Other businesses such as cleaning services, car repair services, and Rivendell herb farm also prospered. A disco and theatre restaurant was popular and any number of workshops or weekend retreats was available if one wanted to “work” on oneself. The ‘freo people’ section of the *Fremantle Gazette* featured several stories on *sannyasins*.<sup>392</sup> There seemed to be no end to what the *sannyasins* were able to achieve.

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<sup>392</sup> For example: “–Deva Pramod”, *Fremantle Gazette*, October 13 1982, Freo People, 20 and “Pramod”, *Fremantle Gazette*, July 27 1983, Freo People, 20.

On the surface, there also seemed to be little concern over the increasingly volatile situation in Oregon. One could speculate, however, that the Fremantle commune leaders here were following the party line and giving the appearance that all was as usual. In the May, 1984, commune newsletter for instance, an advertisement on the July, 1984, Festival to be held in Rajneeshpuram promotes it as being “the biggest and most wonderful to date”, and claims that there had been “a most wonderful response from everyone here in the West towards our reminder to book early for the July Festival – and the bookings are pouring in”.<sup>393</sup> This contradicts the reported very low interest and eventual attendance that concerned organisers in Oregon.<sup>394</sup>

A number of informants commented that they knew things were changing and did not agree with some of the changes. Reportedly, it was a time when many left the commune. Those who stayed, however, did so because they believed that what was happening was “what Osho wanted”. Effectively, they found themselves in what some have described as a “double-bind”.<sup>395</sup> Others claim to have been quite oblivious to what was going on organisationally.

### Sheela visits WA

During 1984, hostilities between the local Oregonian community and Rajneeshpuram were gaining momentum and the commune was facing numerous legal and social challenges. In October, 1984, Bhagwan ended his period of silence and began speaking to small groups of *sannyasins*. While *sannyasins* on the commune were

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<sup>393</sup> *Newsletter of Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram and Programme of Events*, Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas Ashram, May 1984, 7.

<sup>394</sup> Fitzgerald, 346; Carter, *Charisma*, 201.

<sup>395</sup> See Fitzgerald, 377 and Gordon, 163-165. The concept of the “double bind” emerged in the work of Gregory Bateson and his colleagues in the fifties. See Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

jubilant that Bhagwan had broken his silence, it was reportedly a problem for Sheela, who made several attempts to undermine his intentions.<sup>396</sup> She began to spend more time visiting communes around the world, fundraising and looking for a place where Bhagwan might “take refuge” if it became necessary.<sup>397</sup> In early 1985, she visited the commune in Fremantle, setting up a temporary office in the Collie Street centre and staying for about four months. By all accounts, from this time on, negativity surrounding the group increased exponentially and contributed to its disintegration.

Already having a reputation for being brash and provocative when interviewed by the press, Sheela did nothing to change this perception here. Probably her most memorable moment was her response to the question, “How would you feel if the people of Australia did not want Rajneeshees in their community?” on a *60 Minutes* report aired on Channel 9 in April, 1985. Giving the finger to the camera she replied “[t]ough titties.”<sup>398</sup>

In another television program, *State Affair*, she stirred up local reactions by calling Mother Teresa “ugly”, the Pope “an idiot”, equating herself with Christ, insulting the other guest on the program, Adrian Van Leen, and swearing profusely. The station reportedly received hundreds of phone calls following the program complaining about her, with some calling for her to be shot, flushed down the toilet or deported. By this time Sheela had become, “the most talked about woman in WA” and the

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<sup>396</sup> Brecher, 217.

<sup>397</sup> Fitzgerald, 371.

<sup>398</sup> “The Orange People”, presenter Jeff McMullen, *60 Minutes*, Channel Nine (Perth), broadcast 21 April 1985.



peaceful relations the *sannyasin* community had enjoyed with the local community were becoming more hostile.<sup>399</sup>

The effects of Sheela's visit were beginning to be felt by the local *sannyasin* community. In April, the Sahajam Rajneesh Builders lost a contract to do renovations on the Fremantle Hotel because drinkers threatened a walk-out. The hotel owner claimed that he had nothing at all against the Orange People and that the work would have gone ahead but for the insulting and inflammatory remarks made by Sheela. A month before, he had commented, "if you'd asked people in this pub what a Rajneeshee was, they'd have said a brand of tea...but now there's rumblings, and drinkers threatened to walk out".<sup>400</sup>

Individual *sannyasins* also began to notice the change in reactions from the community. Several spoke of increased harassment. One informant spoke of how he had "copped it" in his Fremantle market stall and how he experienced an increase in verbal abuse and general harassment. Others commented that they had been targeted because of the red clothes they were wearing and that people had tried to rip their *malas* off in the street. On May 2, the *Daily News* ran a report, "Orange People get hate mail, abuse" with a *sannyasin* spokesperson claiming that *sannyasins* were receiving hate mail, insulting phone calls and abuse from passing motorists.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Diana Gordon, "Sect's leading light talks up a storm", *The West Australian*, 24 April 1985, 11.

<sup>400</sup> Sian Martin, "Orange builders lose job", *Fremantle Gazette*, 1 May 1985, 4. See also Linda Byrne, "Orange sect loses hotel deal", *The West Australian*, 30 April 1985, 5.

<sup>401</sup> Bill Long and Mike Edmundson, "Orange People get hate mail, abuse", *The West Australian*, May 2 1985, 14.

Within the commune itself, Sheela was also not ingratiating herself to everyone. Despite press reports that she was, “loved to distraction by her disciples”<sup>402</sup> almost all of the informants interviewed expressed their dislike of her and several pointed out that her attempts to pull the commune into line with the running of Rajneeshpuram resulted in not only alienating members of the community, but also in mostly bad business decisions and eventually the collapse of the commune.

One informant claimed that Sheela’s attempt to franchise all the *Zorba the Buddha* restaurants so they would all have the same menu as the ones in the US, lacked any business acumen and resulted in an “Americanisation” that did not take into account the different tastes in different countries and eventually contributed to the restaurants closing down.<sup>403</sup>

The same informant, who did not live in the commune but considered herself part of it, spoke of an increasing sense of an “us/them” attitude developing in the community, which she attributed to Sheela’s influence. It extended to people in the commune being told to shun and not fraternise with *sannyasins* who were not commune members, the idea being, “to force more people to join the commune”. Yet, in the informant’s view, “it wasn’t coming from the people here. It was imposed by the other ‘outside’ group. And yet the ‘outsiders’ were supposedly connected to Osho and what he was doing”.

Despite their distrust and dislike, however, they, like *sannyasins* in Oregon, went along with what Sheela demanded for fear of being “kicked out” of the movement

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<sup>402</sup> “Shocker Sheela Orange woman speaks”, *The Sunday Mail* (Adelaide), 28 April 1985, 31.

<sup>403</sup> For the views of other informants on Sheela, see Appendix 2 (i).

and of being ostracised – action that Sheela had taken a number of times in communes around the world.

### Pemberton – Karri Valley

The most significant and most reported event at this time, which served to consolidate negative opinion and criticism of the movement in WA, was the community's attempt to establish a school and resort in Pemberton, in south-western Australia. This move produced a near hysterical reaction in the local community there that more or less mimicked the situation of Antelope in Oregon.

A key figure in this conflict was Jay Harman, who, in 1984, as co-founder of the Perth based Energy Research Group (ERG) became an instant millionaire. Along with two other young inventors, Harman had formed a small company in 1982 to market their invention of a highly profitable electronic display system and had bought a third of the shares in ERG. In late 1984, ERG was floated and made millions for its shareholders.<sup>404</sup> By this time, Harman had become the majority shareholder of the company.<sup>405</sup>

Already a wealthy man, Harman had earlier become disillusioned with his life and after sailing around the world in search of new meaning, he ended up in Pune and eventually had become a *sannyasin* in 1981.<sup>406</sup> As principal shareholder of Annacherra Pty Ltd, a company linked to ERG, in 1984, Harman bought the Hopsheds Lodge, a small holiday resort in Karri Valley Park, Pemberton, with the

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<sup>404</sup> Duncan Graham, "The Electronic Orange", *The National Times* (Sydney) 14-20 June, 1985, 56; Geoff Easdown, "Free love sect in display of wealth", *The West Australian*, 15 April 1985, 8.

<sup>405</sup> David McCamey, "Clean folk of tiny town in fear of sex sect domination", *Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney), 31 March 1985, 14.

<sup>406</sup> Easdown, 8.

view to opening a *sannyasin* school and developing more holiday units as a commercial venture. At the time, Karri Valley was running at a loss with debts of \$1.2 million. Harman took over management of the property, staffing it with several *sannyasins* and later offered to buy out the other shareholders.<sup>407</sup>

When the township of Pemberton (population 1000) became aware of the changeover of ownership of Karri Valley, rumours that the Rajneeshees were planning to launch a “takeover” of the town circulated rapidly. Largely a “timber town”, many people in Pemberton at that time were threatened with job losses when conservationists attempted to intervene in the logging of old growth forests and there was encouragement from the state government to engage in other industries, in particular, tourism. From the start, the appearance of the Orange People in the area was met with a degree of apprehension.

In February 1985, a newspaper report claimed that tourists were “fleeing” from the Karri Valley Park resort when they saw it was staffed with “Orange People”. At the time, there were three *sannyasins* at the resort: the female manager and two others. The Pemberton-Northcliffe Tourist Bureau president at the time, Don Hancock, is reported as saying that he “had heard the Orange People had taken over Karri Valley,” and that “the bureau would become involved if tourists were being upset”.<sup>408</sup> 'Manageress' is politically incorrect these days – I would say 'female manager' or just 'manager'

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<sup>407</sup> Hugh Schmitt, “Rajneeshee offer looks in doubt”, *The West Australian*, 2 April 1985, 6.  
<sup>408</sup> Zoran Panzich, “Tourists see orange and flee”, *The West Australian*, 2 February 1985, 62.

By the time of Sheela's visit to WA, the "Orange People" were becoming a regular and controversial feature in the local press. News of the increasingly volatile situation in Oregon was spreading, and parallels were being made with the story of the "takeover" of the small town of Antelope and Karri Valley. Claims were made that the movement was using the same strategies to ensconce themselves in Karri Valley, buying up farms in the area, planning to take over the local hotel, and build an airstrip "able to accommodate a Lear jet".<sup>409</sup>

The press seized on the developing imbroglio, reporting arguments from both sides, but now clearly favouring the locals. Pemberton locals claimed that the movement had lied about how many *sannyasins* would be living in the area and many focused on Van Leen's information that the group encouraged violence and sexual promiscuity. The proposed development of a school and the fact that work had already begun on building fifteen more holiday chalets seemed to prove the validity of Van Leen's prediction that Bhagwan would soon be "kicked out" of the US and was planning to make Karri Valley his new home. "It is the Rajneeshee style to take over small towns," he claimed in one magazine interview.<sup>410</sup>

Public meetings were organised to protest the presence of the group. At one meeting, Van Leen was invited by local church groups to inform the townspeople about the movement and the beliefs and practices of *sannyasins*. Two thirds of the town's population, most of them religious themselves, attended the meeting and agreed to a motion calling on the government to buy the land at Karri Valley and lease it back to

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<sup>409</sup> "The Orange People". See also, "Invasion of the Orange People" *The West Australian*, 31 March 1985, 14-15.

<sup>410</sup> John Elder, "Orange Peril: WA town under siege from Rajneeshees", *People Magazine*, 20 May 1985, 5-7.

local groups. Before the meeting, police searched the town hall where it was being held and warned people as they entered that they had received news of a bomb threat.<sup>411</sup>

In a regional newspaper in June, Van Leen warned of the possibility of a massacre, similar to the People's Temple mass suicide in Jonestown in 1978. Addressing a public meeting at the York Church of Christ, he claimed that, for Rajneesh:

marriage was ugly and should be ended

lust is sacred and children should be encouraged to watch their parents and others engaging in sexual discourse

killing is acceptable if done meditatively and with consciousness

followers must surrender to him.<sup>412</sup>

At a news conference held at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) (now Curtin University), Van Leen again claimed that he had received information revealing that Rajneesh was planning to leave Oregon and there was a high possibility that Rajneesh would settle in Australia. He alleged that a "pattern of gradual infiltration" had been discovered in the US and predicted that it could be repeated in Pemberton.<sup>413</sup>

Later, one of the people who attended the meeting, Bev Laurence, was interviewed by the *Sunday Press*, a Melbourne tabloid, about the fears of the Pemberton people.

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<sup>411</sup> Kent Acott, "Shire's rebuff angers Orange People", *The West Australian*, 12 April 1985, 1; "The Orange People".

<sup>412</sup> "Van Leen sounds Orange Alert," *Beverly-York Express* (Western Australia), 19 June 1985, 2.

<sup>413</sup> Lyn Johnson, "Rajneesh exodus likely – Van Leen", *City Focus*, (Perth, Western Australia) June 1985, 17.

The story almost exactly mirrors the story of the “takeover” of Antelope in Oregon. Described as a small country town, “160kms from the nearest big town” and inhabited by a small community of mainly Anglicans, the Pemberton townspeople were worried that their town was about to become the “new world centre” of Bhagwan and his *sannyasins*. Claims of harassment by *sannyasins* and a build-up of arms by *sannyasins* living there led them to believe Van Leen’s prediction that there was “every indication that they are coming” to make Pemberton their new home. Street names would be changed, Bhagwan would be driving around in one of his Rolls Royces, and children would be exposed to immoral sexual behaviour.<sup>414</sup>

In July, *The West Australian* ran a full-page advertisement for Bob Maumill’s talkback radio show, showing a picture of Bhagwan with the caption, “Bhagwan speaks! Western Australia may become my permanent residence”.<sup>415</sup>

Following this and other meetings, local church organisations joined forces and produced a pamphlet, “Over Orange”, condemning the *sannyasins*.<sup>416</sup> A sub-committee of the Manjimup shire Ratepayers’ Association was formed to canvass public opinion with the view to having an independent government inquiry into the Rajneesh in Pemberton. Besides sending letters to various government ministers, they placed advertisements in *The West Australian* calling for support for their views.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Richard Shears, “Cult fear has town on knees”, *Sunday Press*, (Melbourne, Victoria) 18 August 1985, 5.

<sup>415</sup> “Bhagwan speaks! Western Australia may become my permanent residence”, *The West Australian* (advertisement), 26 July 1985, 25.

<sup>416</sup> “Invasion of the Orange People”.

<sup>417</sup> “Committee wants Orange data,” *Warren-Blackwood Times* (Western Australia), 1 May 1985, 7; “Pemberton WA – Rajneesh Debate”, *The West Australian*, 1 July 1985, 46.

On 11 April, a special Manjimup Shire Council meeting was called to examine the Rajneeshees' applications for building permits for the school and holiday chalets. A *60 Minutes* team televised the event showing *sannyasins* being ejected from the meeting and accusing the members of the Council of discrimination when the council voted to reject their proposals. The program included an interview with Sheela who called the townspeople "stupid", "idiotic", "prune faces" and "fruitcakes" and accused them of religious bigotry. She denied that Bhagwan had any interest in "retiring" in Pemberton.<sup>418</sup>

Townspeople argued that they had already accepted several religious communes, including a Buddhist settlement and the Balingup Brotherhood, who believe that God sends messages from space, as part of their community.<sup>419</sup> It was not, they claimed, a question of religious bigotry. Rather, they spoke of their fear about how their lifestyle would change with so many Rajneeshees in town. They wanted the town "to stay as it is".<sup>420</sup>

On their part, *sannyasins* denied any intention of launching a "takeover", insisting that they were only planning to set up a school for *sannyasin* children and run the Karri Valley Resort as a commercial venture where anyone could holiday.<sup>421</sup>

Previous to the Manjimup Council's rejection of the school, *sannyasins* had been granted approval for the school by the then Minister for Education, Bob Pearce, on the condition that the local authority approved. An inspector from the Education

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<sup>418</sup> "The Orange People".

<sup>419</sup> Shears, 5; Elder, 5-7.

<sup>420</sup> "The Orange People".

<sup>421</sup> Kent Acott, "Sect explains outlook", *The West Australian*, 12 April 1985, 10. "The Orange People".



Department had already visited Karri Valley several weeks before the meeting and had found no objection to a school, “in terms of services provided and the teacher-student ratio”. Provisional registration was granted and the 27 children who were receiving education “on a tutorship basis” while they waited for the school to be built.<sup>422</sup> When the local council rejected the application, *sannyasins* appealed the decision to the Minister for Education and submitted an application for an extension of the provisional application. This enabled them to continue operating the school as it was until the appeal had been heard.

By this time, Sheela had made several visits to the area and had demanded that all Australian *sannyasin* children be sent to the Karri Valley School since there was no Rajneeshee school in Australia. Arrangements were being made to send six children from the Eastern States to the school.<sup>423</sup> Sheela had also recently decreed that the Medina Rajneesh commune in England was to become a Rajneesh School and all European *sannyasin* children were to be sent there. Except for mothers of children under two, their parents were to stay where they were.<sup>424</sup>

Several informants commented that it was another bad decision by Sheela and the children fared badly:

When Sheela came she sent kids from all over Australia to Karri Valley. The kids arrived distressed...it was too much for them. It unsettled the whole mob. [s\_11]

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<sup>422</sup> Jim Magnus, “NSW influx to Orange school”, *Daily News* (Perth, Western Australia), 19 April 1985, 2.

<sup>423</sup> Interview with informant.

<sup>424</sup> Tim Guest, 222.

When news of this move became public, tensions between the local community and the *sannyasins* escalated, with locals airing their fears that such a school would mean more Rajneeshees in town, effectively end its potential as a tourist destination, and influence the behaviour of their children. On their part, *sannyasins* denied that they were running a school. They were simply waiting for a council permit and were not operating outside of the law.<sup>425</sup>

Pearce advised the *sannyasins* that he would close the school if numbers were increased in this way and revealed that he would visit the area in an attempt to resolve the growing conflict. In order to maintain the status quo, he offered to place the extra children, who had by this time arrived in Perth, in a state school near the Fremantle commune while the *sannyasins*' appeal against the Manjimup Shire Council was in process. Alternatives to allowing the school to continue were being considered including sending the children to the local Pemberton school. Pearce believed, however, that this would only add to the tension.<sup>426</sup>

*Sannyasin* representatives claimed that they had been the last to know about Pearce's warning and that they had a "binding contract" with the Sydney commune for the children to attend the school. They claimed to have already told the Education Department that around seventy children would eventually be enrolled for both primary and secondary schooling and had been granted provisional status based on this.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Magnus, 2.

<sup>426</sup> Paul McGeough, "Pearce's warning to sect on school", *The West Australian*, 22 April 1985,

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<sup>427</sup> McGeough, 3.

Pearce also criticised Van Leen's part in the imbroglio, describing his actions in speaking out against the group as "reprehensible and unhelpful," and claiming that his interventions had created much of the tension between the two communities. Furthermore, he saw no evidence that the *sannyasins* were planning to move from Oregon to Pemberton. Rather, it was Van Leen's assertion that this was a foregone conclusion that had created the disquiet in the town. Pearce's role now was to "bring down the tension and get some sanity on both sides."<sup>428</sup>

In late April, when the Rajneeshees refused to send the children to another school, Pearce ordered the school to be closed. When they subsequently refused to close the school, the Minister informed them that the teachers would be prosecuted on the grounds that they were not providing lawful education to their students. The problem had emerged, he claimed, due to a weakness in the Education Act that allowed a school to operate for a period without planning approval for the school building and he was considering amending the Act. *Sannyasins* stated that they were considering taking legal action against Pearce contending that he no had authority to close their school. The Liberal candidate for Warren at the time, Paul Omodei, joined the fracas, stating that there was some doubt as to the legality of Pearce's decision to close the school and suggesting that no further action should be taken until the *sannyasin's* appeal to the Town Planning Appeals Tribunal was heard.<sup>429</sup>

In late May, the situation was clearly becoming more heated and hysteria was brewing. Police raided the Pemberton commune in response to an allegation that "armed guards" were patrolling the Karri Valley complex. After searching the buildings and living quarters, they found nothing, claiming that they were acting on a

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<sup>428</sup> "Critic attacked as 'unhelpful'", *The West Australian*, 22 April 1985, 17.

<sup>429</sup> Kent Acott, "Pearce plans action on sect teachers", *The West Australian*, 16 May 1985, 2.

directive from Perth police headquarters. *Sannyasins* claimed that their water supply had been tampered with and that some people had maliciously damaged the property. Since then, they claimed the community was being guarded but they had no guns and there were no armed guards.<sup>430</sup>

In August, the Tribunal rejected the *sannyasin*'s appeal on the grounds that the site of the proposed school had been zoned for short-stay residential purposes, a fact that had previously been unknown, thereby making it an unsuitable site for a school.<sup>431</sup>

During this time, the question of religious status also emerged in the press. In April, 1985, an article, "Rajneeshees have the law on their side" was published debating the religious status of the Rajneeshees and citing a High Court decision that was handed down in Melbourne in 1983 concerning the Scientologists. The article comments that a state of "near hysteria" over the Rajneesh community had been reached in some parts of WA creating "a huge public brawl". Blaming the High Court decision, it opines, "Nobody can challenge the right of the controversial Bhagwan followers to their religious status and their place in society". For members of the High Court, all religions were equal in the eyes of the law. In response, Van Leen, who according to the report was "considered by some to be an extremist", claimed the High Court decision opened the door to cults "of the widest diversity and extremes" and allowed them to "practise psychological manipulation and control with little or no outside scrutiny or controls". Anglican Dean of Perth at the time, the Very Rev. Dean

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<sup>430</sup> Sean Murphy, "Police raid sect in search for firearms", *The West Australian*, 30 May 1985, 1.

<sup>431</sup> Kent Acott, "Tribunal bars sect school at Karri Valley", *The West Australian*, 1 August 1985, 2.

Robards, also criticised the ruling, claiming that it had “broadened the base of what constitutes a religion to the point of meaninglessness”.<sup>432</sup>

*Sannyasins* responded with letters to the newspaper, focusing on Van Leen and accusing him of religious bigotry. Van Leen reciprocated by pointing out that the movement only became a religion in 1981 after its move to the US and had until then, “vehemently denied it was a religion”.<sup>433</sup>

More positive stories, however, were published. In June, *The Western Mail* ran an article called “A Rajneeshees’s day”. By this time, *sannyasins* were no longer actually living in the Collie Street commune, but they continued to live a commune lifestyle. In this article, the “ordinariness” of a *sannyasin*’s day was emphasised.<sup>434</sup>

#### Children and the commune

In other stories that emerged at the time, a South Australian grandmother of a six year old daughter of a *sannyasin* was attempting to prevent her moving to the school, and allegations of child sex abuse in Oregon were reported.<sup>435</sup>

The report concerning the apparent “immoral” behaviour in the Oregon commune was based on a regular feature, “Rajneesh Watch”, in *Oregon Magazine*, a

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<sup>432</sup> Norm Aisbett, “Rajneeshees have the law on their side”, *Western Mail (Weekend)*, 27-28 April 1985, 20.

<sup>433</sup> “Shame on my critics, says Adrian Van Leen”, *Western Mail (Weekend)*, 18-19 May 1985, 40, “More letters” section.

<sup>434</sup> Jo McManus, “A Rajneeshee’s day”, *Western Mail (Weekend)*, 29-30 June 1985, 40, “Woman behind” section.

<sup>435</sup> Magnus, 2; Mardy Amos, “Child sex alleged in Rajneesh base”, *Sunday Independent*, 5 May 1985, 4.

conservative Christian publication.<sup>436</sup> The article claims that young teenage girls were frequently having sexual relationships with older men and that children were encouraged to watch their parents having sex. It also mentions, however, a study done by the Oregon Children's Services Division that found "no evidence of abuse, neglect or exploitation of children" on the Ranch, and of comments from two psychology professors from the University of Oregon who also visited and had formed "very favourable impressions of their emotional and intellectual well-being".<sup>437</sup>

In recent years, several works by children who were *sannyasins* at the time have indicated that some children were exposed to adult sexual behaviour and became sexually involved with adults. In *My Life in Orange*, Tim Guest writes that "it was common at the Ashram [Pune] to see girls in their early teens paired off with bearded Swamis older than their fathers".<sup>438</sup> He writes that, being a six year old boy, although "it was no big deal" to see naked adults or couples having sex, he escaped the "sexual pressure" prevalent in the Medina commune in England. Young girls there "talked about sex constantly" and told him about having sex with older men.<sup>439</sup> While staying at the Ranch in Oregon in the summer of 1984, he writes of how "many of the Medina kids lost their virginity; boys and girls, ten years old, eight years old, in sweaty tents and A-frames, late at night and mid-afternoon, with adults, with other children. I remember some of the kids – eight, nine, ten years old – arguing about who had fucked whom, who would or wouldn't fuck them".<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> I found a summary of the article in Van Leen's research material and considering his strong interest in the movement, it is quite possible that he was the source of the newspaper article.

<sup>437</sup> Amos, 4.

<sup>438</sup> Guest, 46.

<sup>439</sup> Guest, 129-130.

<sup>440</sup> Guest, 196.

In another instance, Maroesja Perizonius, a Dutch woman who grew up in communes in Europe, produced a documentary in 2002 about the difficulties of growing up as a child of the commune. She also claimed that there was a distinct lack of any sexual norms and that as a young teenager, she had had a long-term sexual relationship with a much older man.<sup>441</sup>

Although these instances did not take place in Western Australia, some informants admitted that there may have been instances of child sex abuse. They maintained, however, that they had never witnessed such occurrences, and were not willing to discuss the matter in any detail. Nevertheless, some conceded that, given the large number of *sannyasins* at the time, there was no doubt some *sannyasins* could have carried out such abuses. As far as children in general were concerned, apart from general agreement that the focus of being a *sannyasin* was to put their energy into their own personal growth and that kids always came in second to this, opinions varied. Some believed that there had been a good deal of neglect and that a number of children, including their own, had suffered from this. Others felt that their children had gained a great deal from their communal experiences and that the kinds of difficulties some may have experienced were probably not so different to childhood experiences overall.<sup>442</sup>

### Sheela and Jay

While the situation in Pemberton was playing out, Sheela and Jay Harman were also making news, often appearing together, in cahoots as it seemed. The intense media

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<sup>441</sup> *Child of the Commune*, DVD. Directed by Maroesja Perizonius. Amsterdam, Holland: Lemming Film, 2002.

<sup>442</sup> For a selection of informant's opinions, see Appendix 2 (j).

focus on the Karri Valley School had created unease in the boardroom of ERG and Jay's role

as managing director was being questioned by other board members. The chairman of the board at the time, high profile businessman, Sir Laurence Brodie-Hall<sup>443</sup> and two other directors, Dr. Michael McCall<sup>444</sup> and Geoffrey Nathan<sup>445</sup>, claimed that Harman had been spending too much time on Rajneeshee affairs and had "lost the confidence of fellow directors".<sup>446</sup> By this time, the company had thirteen employees, seven of whom were *sannyasins*, and in a bid to save the company, they called on lawyer, Peter Fogarty, to help sort it out as a struggle for control developed. Harman, along with several other employees, were effectively sacked in April and Brodie-Hall became the new managing director.<sup>447</sup>

Harman defended himself, accusing the board of religious intolerance and refusing to accept the \$55,000 settlement cheque offered to him.<sup>448</sup> Original director and ERG executive, Robert Davidson, who was not a *sannyasin* but was an old school friend of Harman's, voted against Harman's dismissal and in an attempt to help Harman

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<sup>443</sup> Sir Laurence was a highly successful and well respected businessman. Former executive of Western Mining Corporation and past president of the Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, he had chaired many other boards and became WA Citizen of the Year in 1974.

<sup>444</sup> McCall was a former associate professor in medicine at the University of Western Australia.

<sup>445</sup> Nathan was general manager of Atkins Carlyle, a large electrical and industrial group at the time.

<sup>446</sup> Duncan, 56.

<sup>447</sup> Tony Kaye, "A Faith Tested to the Limit", *Australian Financial Review*, 5 April 1991, 32. See also, Mark Drummond, "Long Tale of the Comeback Trail for ERG", *Australian Financial Review* (Sydney), 2 September 2000, 13 and Tim Treadgold, "ERG Writes its Own Ticket to the World", *Business Weekly Review* (Sydney), 17 December 1993, 65, which claim the company was in financial disarray at the time, the main asset, the liquid cell display system, having "flopped."

<sup>448</sup> Duncan, 56.



regain control of the company, sold his shares to Harman's nominees – mostly *sannyasins*.<sup>449</sup>

Predictably, Sheela became involved and vowed publicly to oust Brodie-Hall as chairman. Using a provision in WA company law that prevents anyone over the age of seventy-two holding a position on the board of a company without the approval of seventy-five per cent of the shareholders, the Rajneeshee camp began organising the means of obtaining a stronger interest in the company. If they were successful in doing so, they would be in a position to oust Brodie-Hall who was seventy-four at the time.

In an effort to reduce Rajneeshee influence in the company, Fogarty, Nathan and another director, Bernie Stephens, took legal advice and discovered that the appointment of four directors, including Harman and Brodie-Hall was invalid since it had been made by a single resolution and was, therefore, in breach of the Companies Code. This led to the establishment of an interim board chaired by Fogarty pending an election of new directors.<sup>450</sup> Viewed as an attempt to remove Rajneeshees and sympathisers from the company, Harman and Davison took legal action in the WA Supreme Court to try and get the old board declared valid. Although unsuccessful, they were able to stop an election of new directors.<sup>451</sup>

Sheela also threatened to take control of the company by flooding the market with ERG shares to depress the price – a move the WA Corporate Affairs Commission

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<sup>449</sup> Jan Mayman, "A Story of Money, sex, religion and power", *The Age* (Melbourne), 9 May 1985, 12; John McIllwraith, "Sect fights to control ERG", *Australian Financial Review* (Sydney), 3 May 1985, 6.

<sup>450</sup> Duncan, 56.

<sup>451</sup> Duncan, 56.

declared illegal at the time.<sup>452</sup> Harman attempted unsuccessfully to buy out the other two thirds of the shares owned by the other two shareholders. If successful, it would make him the largest single shareholder, since he already controlled ten per cent of the company. After entering into a legal dispute that continued until November 1985, however, his efforts failed and the company was wound up with shares sold to a number of institutional and private investors, with Harman receiving several million shares.<sup>453</sup>

Reports on the ERG fiasco continued to make the headlines alongside the Pemberton predicament. One report stated that the Rajneeshee attempt to take control of ERG signalled a need to “rewrite Australia’s securities laws”. Normally, the ultimate ownership of a company is traceable since any “associate” is required, under the Securities Industry Act, to declare their common interests, preventing the possibility of any unforeseen “takeover”. “Religious association”, however, was a new phenomenon and it had allowed Rajneeshee interests to remain effectively hidden as a common block, giving them control over a powerful block of shares.<sup>454</sup>

As one report predicted, “Perhaps the demonstration of Rajneesh corporate muscle is a sign of things to come and which other religious orders could study. Imagine the voting power of the Catholic or Anglican Church, each with three million members”.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Mayman, 12; McIllwraith, 6.

<sup>453</sup> Heather Killen, “Share dispersal heads Energy Research away from strife”, *Australian Financial Review* (Sydney), 6 November 1985, 30. See also, Charles Wright, “Orange People’s Purple Takeover”, *Australian Financial Review* (Sydney), 26 April 1985, 1; Kaye, 32; John McIllwraith, “Rajneeshees sell out of ERG brawl”, *Australian Financial Review* (Sydney), 28 October 1985, 17.

<sup>454</sup> One informant commented that she still had shares that Sheela had offered her on her visit to WA.

<sup>455</sup> Tim Treadgold, “All shareholders must be treated equally”, *Financial Mail*, (Johannesburg, South Africa) 13-14 April 1985, 29.

Despite their attempts to out manoeuvre the law, it became evident the *sannyasins* were fast losing ground. In May 1985, The *Western Mail* reported the impending departure of Sheela and Jay for the US.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> “Sheela and Jay going to US”, *Western Mail* (Perth, Western Australia), 4-5 May 1985, 2.

## Chapter Six: Then they were gone?

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### Fremantle commune disbands

It was only a few months after Sheela returned to Oregon that Rajneeshpuram met its downfall. As the numerous criminal activities undertaken there came to light and Bhagwan began publicly to speak out against Sheela and “her fascist gang”, many *sannyasins* left and the commune rapidly disintegrated, affecting the movement worldwide.

It seemed that, within the space of a few months, the *sannyasin* community in Fremantle, which had arrived in such spectacular fashion, had simply disappeared. With Bhagwan’s decree that *sannyasins* no longer needed to wear orange or their *malas*, most informants began wearing everyday clothes and, in their words, “went underground”. The orange hue that had become such a familiar sight around Fremantle streets was gone and there was no way of telling anymore if someone was a *sannyasin*. An informant spoke of the difference he noticed in the community in Fremantle when he returned from the Ranch around the time after Sheela left:

*Sannyasins* in Perth disappeared overnight... When I came back at the end of the ranch...what I’d known in 1981 was gone...people had left, and we were left with a shell of the former community....it’s basically died...a has-been state. [s\_14]

When asked about informants' thoughts on the matter, most believed Sheela was clearly to blame for the fiasco and demise of the movement. This view is shared by several commentators on the movement, one maintaining that Sheela “virtually destroyed the Australian movement by behaving in exactly the same way she

behaved in Oregon”.<sup>457</sup> Another suggests that in the space of a few weeks “she managed to alienate most of the people on the subcontinent, to poison many of the cordial relationships that local *sannyasins* had established...”.<sup>458</sup>

The commune coordinator at the time of Sheela’s visit maintains that the commune had been doing well, making enough money to remain solvent and also to send money to Rajneeshpuram, as did all communities. It was because of this independence, however, that Sheela wielded her power and “basically took over the commune”. She liked to “run things her way” and became involved in business with independently wealthy Jay Harman, making a great deal of money in the process.

The effects of Sheela’s visit to WA and the exposure of criminal activities in Oregon left many in a state of confusion, shock and anger. One informant commented that it was “an interesting time for *sannyasins*” with the Fremantle commune in a state of “almost psychosis” and that “a succession of whacked out, disturbed people went through our house on the way”.

Several who had been at the Ranch during Sheela’s reign maintained that, given the size of the Ranch, they were not aware of the “politics” being played out by Sheela and her coordinators but that there were indications that something was going on:

I was on the edge but without knowing it...except for the time I was in the townhouses and everyone was suddenly put into quarantine...they said there was an epidemic of conjunctivitis, whether you thought you had it or not. Everyone was

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<sup>457</sup> Fitzgerald, 371.  
<sup>458</sup> Gordon, 176.

isolated, kept in long rooms the whole day and no one was allowed out. People were angry. It seemed secretive and weird being segregated for some reason. Then we were let out. It seems, later, that that was when the bugging happened of the townhouses and hotels. The hotel had a whole room which I thought was a switchboard but it was where the bugging happened. [s\_5]

If you had views that weren't considered mainstream there was a sense that you were going against the common line.

Even before Sheela's visit, many *sannyasins* were already becoming wary about what had been happening in Oregon, gravitating towards their partners and close friends. Just as a number of *sannyasins* were leaving the Ranch due to the surveillance and restrictions enforced by Sheela and her offiders, *sannyasins* in Fremantle were noticing differences and leaving. They noticed a marked difference in the community compared to when they first arrived:

When we were first in Fremantle, the general reaction was, "Who are these weirdos in orange clothes?" But that changed when people saw how hard and how well they worked – running successful businesses...The "hippie image" had been replaced by one which saw *sannyasins* as hard workers with good business acumen...On the whole, we were "mostly well-liked", not doing anything to upset people and doing their best to "get along with people". We weren't controversial. Our kids went to local schools. We were "generally liked and loved". [s\_1]

One commented that Sheela and the bad press that emerged at the time was the only time she had felt any negativity from the broader community. Others remarked that

some *sannyasins* had been “burnt by the mess around Sheela” and a number had, “turned to new masters”.

Only one commented that the “Sheela thing” never worried her and she could not really see anything wrong with it. She was “appalled and shocked” by what emerged after Sheela fled Oregon, but what was most important for her was her “relationship with the Master”, which did not change. For most, it was their individual “relationship to Bhagwan” that had always mattered most and the Sheela debacle was viewed as just one more of Bhagwan’s “jokes” aimed at making people “aware”;

As he said, he was just giving people absolute freedom to play out their power. That’s my understanding of what he did or didn’t do. On reading M’s books, I understand there were times when he did say this or that will happen, but he just allowed things to be played out around him...it was an amazing freedom. [s\_12]

Quite a number of informants commented that they never liked Sheela or the way she was running things, but believed it must be what Bhagwan wanted. Their devotion to him and knowing that he often constructed unusual situations as a means “waking up” people was the value against which they made judgements. One informant described her confusion:

It was when Sheela was having a powerful influence here, sending her people here. It was pretty bad. I thought, it’s not right...I remembers the point when I realised I had a choice – ‘I can leave’, but then what? I felt that this was the path to be close to the master. I had to go through this. I didn’t really have to but I wasn’t strong enough to ...hold him separate from the religion. [s\_11]

Most other informants spoke of this split feeling towards the events that unfolded, both in WA and in the US. In retrospect, many have evidently tried to understand what happened in different ways. Interpretations vary, from those who view Sheela as a classic example of “power corrupts” with Bhagwan knowing nothing of what was going on, to those who believe that Bhagwan, seeing how *sannyasins* were reacting to Sheela, “allowed it to happen” as a way of getting people to understand the need to take responsibility for oneself.

There were, however, two commonalities among those interviewed. Firstly, there was little or no sense of regret. The idea of harbouring any guilt over what happened did not seem to be an option. Rather, it was a matter of being able to make some sense out of what happened by taking responsibility for one’s life. Secondly, while views on Bhagwan’s role differed, all informants expressed a sense of gratitude towards him. No matter what had transpired, there was an appreciation of the way he had somehow opened up what they viewed as a space for being oneself and his insistence on the need to take responsibility for one’s life.<sup>459</sup>

By the end of September 1985, the *Sahajam Rajneesh Sannyas* commune announced its intention to disband, saying that they would move out of Fremantle by the end of the year. Initially, they were looking for a 300 bed hotel or motel in North Perth, East Perth and South Perth.<sup>460</sup> In December, however, Jay Harman bought the historic landmark, Dalkeith House, at 160 High Street, in Fremantle, and the *sannyasin* commune leased it back off him.<sup>461</sup> The commune left the old Trades Hall in Collie

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<sup>459</sup> See Appendix 2 (k) for views on Bhagwan’s idea.

<sup>460</sup> “Rajneeshees seek a new home”, *The Western Mail* (Perth, Western Australia), 29 September 1985, 15.

<sup>461</sup> Conversation with informant.



Street and moved into the renovated building in mid December.<sup>462</sup> The commune was re-named *Rajneeshgrad Neo-Sannyas Commune*, and the new centre was planning for meditation and therapy rooms, a library-coffee shop, offices for the commune's businesses including publishing of the national *Rajneesh Times*, and a communal dining room.<sup>463</sup>

While on the surface it seemed that the Fremantle *sannyasin* community no longer existed, it is evident from the interviews with *sannyasins* that the downfall of Rajneeshpuram, while a major setback, was not enough for many to leave the movement. Plans were being made to re-establish themselves, though this time as an "underground" movement. Interestingly, one study claims that Australia showed the most dramatic growth of Rajneesh centres after Oregon and that the *Rajneeshgrad Neo-Sannyas* centre became the primary contact point in Australia, along with Rajneesh Foundation Australia.<sup>464</sup>

#### WA – after the demise

While Bhagwan continued on his World Tour, *sannyasins* in Fremantle were re-establishing themselves, setting up the new non-residential commune in High Street. Over the following years, several other centres opened and closed. Although the solidarity that had defined the community previously had dissipated and different

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<sup>462</sup> The Trades Hall/Zorba's was sold to the Aga Khan who planned to turn it into an exclusive Italian restaurant for when the America's Cup would be held in 1987. See Anne Burns, "Aga Khan sets up luxury HQ", *Western Mail (Weekend)* (Perth, Western Australia), 30 November – 1 December 1985, 6.

<sup>463</sup> See, Hugh Schmitt, "Sannyasins buy port landmark", *The West Australian*, 7 December 1985, 9 and "Orange People buy old port house", *Fremantle Gazette* (Fremantle, Western Australia), 10 December 1985, 11.

<sup>464</sup> Carter, *Charisma*, 103-104.

factions emerged, there were clearly attempts to continue in the way of which Bhagwan had spoken. Centres were offering the same smorgasbord of personal development workshops, counselling, meditation classes, video nights and various celebrations as before.

The period immediately after the demise of the movement was undoubtedly a difficult time for most *sannyasins*. They had become much more wary of the outside world, and indeed, as some informants remarked, of each other. Nevertheless as the years passed, the community managed to re-establish a support network that continues to this day.

In January, 1986, *The Western Mail* reported that, contrary to most people's belief that the movement was in disarray, Bhagwan still had a strong following in WA. While *sannyasins* may not wear orange anymore, it warns, "They could be your next-door neighbours. Or your doctor. Some are even government advisors". The article focuses mainly on Jay Harman and his life as a *sannyasin*.<sup>465</sup>

Between 1986 and 1990, there were only occasional reports in the media on the Orange People. Like any other celebrity, it seemed they were no longer front page news. Although rumours that Bhagwan still intended to settle in Fremantle continued to circulate for a few years, they were eventually quashed.<sup>466</sup> There were also occasional reports on what the *sannyasin* community was up to. Perhaps a good example is a report in *The West Australian* in late 1987 that reports on the *sannyasins*

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<sup>465</sup> Janine Cohen, "The Bhagwan's boy is back in town", *Western Mail Magazine*, January 24 1986, 12- 16.

<sup>466</sup> For example, "Freo next stop for Bhagwan?", *Daily News*, January 30 1986, 18 and Hugh Schmitt, "Bhagwan doesn't plan to call Freo home", *Daily News*, 15 February 1988, 8.

along with several other cults popular during the seventies – the Moonies, the Children of God and the Divine Light Mission. The article’s title, “Cults mellow in the 80’s,” seems to reflect the end of an era, not dissimilar to what is often referred to as the “failure of the sixties”.<sup>467</sup>

The death of Bhagwan, or Osho as he is now called, in 1990, briefly generated another flurry of media reports. Most notably, just days after his death, it also emerged that the once devoted disciple, Jay Harman, was now a bitter, disillusioned and bankrupt former disciple. His story is an interesting one in so far as it seems to provide clear evidence that all the hysteria and suspicion reported in the media was in fact true. Bhagwan was a charlatan and a hypocrite who had scant regard for those he called “his *sannyasins*”. For Harman, Bhagwan was no longer the enlightened mystic he had once adored, but “a very dangerous man” who “cleverly exploited vulnerable and insecure Westerners”, and reducing many to “emotional cripples”. “While verbally advocating the sanctity of individual freedom, he destroys individual independence and self-respect,” he claimed. Not only did Bhagwan and the movement “cost him two fortunes”, to solve the problem of their dwindling finances, they attempted to establish an International Academy of Science that, according to Harman, was largely responsible for the invention and distribution of the designer drug Ecstasy before it failed dismally. Harman’s own financial contributions were given easily and equally accepted gladly. The situation took a turn, however. When the Rajneesh Foundation of Australia (RFA) summonsed him to court over a \$500,000 debt he allegedly owed them. According to Harman, it was a form of trickery, a result of allowing Sheela and her nominees to act as his power of attorney

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<sup>467</sup> “Cults mellow in the 80’s”, *The West Australian*, October 17 1987, 35.

in Australia while he returned to the Ranch – all at the request of Bhagwan. Purportedly, a number of financial “gifts” were made to RFA, unbeknown to Harman. When Harman returned to Australia in late 1985, he sold his ERG shares for several million dollars and was then asked by a “Bhagwan emissary” to use this to pay off the bad debts of the international commune. Harman refused, but offered to spend \$500,000 on the local community, spending part of it on the purchase of Dalkeith House. He also agreed to pay the money promised by Sheela to RFA, but since it was defunct, he had paid for its ongoing annual expenses and “gave very substantial amounts directly to Bhagwan and his other interests”. Not long after this, he was sent a paper to sign, which he was told was to act simply as an acknowledgement of his gift. He duly signed it “without giving it much attention”, a fatal mistake as it later turned out, and returned it.<sup>468</sup>

In mid 1987, by which time Bhagwan had returned to Pune and was re-establishing the commune there, the Australian directors of the RFA were “encouraged” by Bhagwan to resign and leave the running of the company to several “personal assistants” of his who lived in the Pune Ashram. The intention was to use the company as a means of “furthering Bhagwan’s work”. Soon after this re-shuffling of power, Harman claims to have received a notice from the RFA demanding that he pay a \$500,000 debt he allegedly owed them. At that stage, not knowing how this had come about, he made numerous attempts to contact Bhagwan and his management to no avail. Eventually, he flew to India but was refused an audience with Bhagwan and received no reply to his requests to debate the issue with him.

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<sup>468</sup> Hugh Schmitt, “‘Betrayed’ millionaire sent broke”, *The West Australian*, January 23 1990, 3; Hugh Schmitt, “Search for new life with the Bhagwan”, *The West Australian*, January 23 1990, 11; Hugh Schmitt, “Harman bid to get back sect jewels”, *The West Australian*, January 24 1990, 5; Hugh Schmitt, “Guru’s aura eclipsed by sect’s cash crisis”, *The West Australian*, January 24 1990, 11.

Effectively, the paper he unwittingly signed several years earlier, had converted the “gift” promised by Sheela to a legally enforceable debt. As a result, he had put himself in a position whereby the RFA could sue him if they ever wanted, which is precisely what they did during the course of the next few years. According to Harman, they had completely destroyed his businesses, assets and interests, and he was now bankrupt.<sup>469</sup>

At least one article reported a response by members of the local *sannyasin* community to Harman’s public attack on Bhagwan and the Rajneesh organisation. A community leader at the time claimed that people were never forced to give money to the movement. If they gave it freely, as he maintained Harman did, any consequences of that, legal or otherwise, had “nothing to do with Osho” who was “separate” from the foundation hierarchy. Harman had promised the money to the foundation and was now not fulfilling his side of the bargain. The spokesperson also stated that Harman’s linking of Ecstasy to *sannyasins* was “unfair” since “not all *sannyasins* took drugs”.<sup>470</sup> Underlying this last comment is the idea, which informants also maintained, that while there may very well have been a certain amount of corruption in the organisation, there was nevertheless a large number of *sannyasins* who had little idea of the machinations of the hierarchy and focused rather on living as Bhagwan had described.

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<sup>469</sup> See also, Hugh Schmitt, “Victim’s tale of woe”, *Woman’s Day*, February 27 1990, 20-21.  
<sup>470</sup> Lise Colyer, “Rajneeshee hits out at Harman”, *The West Australian*, January 25 1990, 15.

Harman eventually re-established himself financially and now resides in the US as CEO of *Pax Scientific*, an engineering research and development firm.<sup>471</sup>

Since that time a number of other stories concerning the Orange People have appeared in the press. The following is a short overview of some of these:

July 30, 1995 – Bhagwan is back with new name and immortal words beamed into the world

In this report, the focus is on the unexpected survival and indeed renewed worldwide popularity of the movement:

Osho is available on cable television in the US and on satellite television in Asia. Mainstream newspapers and other magazines in India and other Asian countries print his ramblings verbatim.<sup>472</sup>

December 7, 1998 – Bhagwan followers party on

The media expressed its disbelief that the movement continued to function and grow, even in WA:

One could easily be forgiven for thinking the movement had fallen by the wayside...but nothing could be further from the truth. Worldwide the movement still lays claim to more than a million members, according to Prem Shusheela, co-

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<sup>471</sup> See *Pax Scientific*. "Homepage". <http://www.paxscientific.com/> (accessed February 16, 2005); Harman also maintains his own web site, Jay Harman. "Homepage". <http://www.jayharman.com/> (accessed February 16, 2005).

<sup>472</sup> Nick Cater, "Bhagwan is back with new name and immortal words beamed to the world", *The Sunday Times* (Perth, Western Australia), 30 July 1995, 4-5.

manager of the Osho Leela Centre in South Fremantle. More than 100 of them are in WA.<sup>473</sup>

March 20 2005 – Agent Orange

The publication of former “kid *sannyasin*” Tim Guest’s, exposé on the movement from a child’s perspective provided another opportunity to retell the story:

Now the children of the communities tell of their experiences of growing up Orange.<sup>474</sup>

June 17-18, 2006 – “It was a time of madness”

Most recently has been the return of Ma Shanti Bhadra (Jane Stork) to Australia after years of exile in Germany and who attempted to inject poison into another *sannyasin* during Sheela’s reign in Oregon:

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was certainly a guru who understood that era. A former philosophy professor, he blended Eastern mysticism, primal scream therapy and free love into a potpourri that proved irresistible to baby boomers searching for meaning in the post-hippie wreckage of the 1970s.<sup>475</sup>

**Fremantle sannyasins now**

More than twenty years have passed since the so-called demise of the Orange People.

Many observers believed that with the closure of the Collie Street commune, the

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<sup>473</sup> Louise Johnson, “Bhagwan followers party on”, *The West Australian*, 7 December 1998, 14-15, “Alternatives today” section

<sup>474</sup> Annika Priest, “Agent Orange”, *The Sunday Times (The Sunday Times Magazine)* (Perth, Western Australia), March 20 2005, 10-13.

<sup>475</sup> Richard Guillatt, ““It was a time of madness”,” *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, June 17-18 2006, 22-28.

*sannyasin* community in WA would simply die out, like so many other “cults”. This research suggests otherwise, however, that the group has gone “underground” and that the fundamental conceptual apparatus of the movement remains largely unchanged. On the other hand, its outward appearance has changed as has its acceptance by the general public.

According to informants, there are still several hundred people in and around Fremantle who consider themselves *sannyasins* to varying degrees. While there is no longer any main centre as such, many of these *sannyasins* maintain a loose yet strong connection with each other. Though in a much smaller and less public manner, “celebrations” of Osho’s birthday, death and enlightenment continue as do other social gatherings and meditations. Ideas central to the movement, such as dissolution of the ego, “witnessing” one’s thoughts, the value of spontaneity and laughter, and the belief in a kind of vitalism, also continue to have relevance for most of the informants.

It is true that for quite a number of *sannyasins*, the events in Rajneeshpuram were shocking and many could not believe the extent to which things unfolded and the affects it had on their local community. While many informants would argue that there is no longer, and indeed never was, a “movement” as such, they still consider themselves as *sannyasins* and their relationship to Osho, as they refer to him now, remains the most important one in their lives. Others are more reticent in their support of Bhagwan and in hindsight, view the downfall of the movement as symptomatic of what happens to a group or cult that attempted to position itself in any way that is radically different from “normal” society.



The potential for “enlightenment”, which had been their main aim, no longer holds the same significance for the informants I interviewed. Everything they were doing was understood as a part of the process of achieving this perceived heightened state of awareness. Encouraged by Osho’s assertion that “everyone was a Buddha”, informants spoke of the value they attached to this. Quite a number commented on experiencing strange moments, sometimes days, of what they could only describe as “bliss” or as one called them, “mini-satoris”. These may have occurred as a result of doing a particular therapy, group or meditation, or simply by being close physically to Osho. Great significance was accorded these experiences since they were viewed as glimpses into what “enlightenment” could be like. The belief in the existence of “enlightened beings” remains a strong one among this cohort, with several pointing out that there are many more appearing in the world, both in the East and the West, as we are now witnessing the emergence of a kind of “new consciousness”; one that would effectively improve the state of the world. This is something they also claimed that Osho predicted. In hindsight, though, most informants no longer believe that they will ever be enlightened and pursuing it is no longer a significant part of their lives. As one informant put it:

We were all on the fast-track to enlightenment. For me the whole thing totally dissipated. Quite frankly, I don’t care about enlightenment. If it happens great but I don’t think anything I do will affect it one way or the other, whereas before I felt that I had to do something... [s\_1]

Osho himself remains a key figure in all the informants’ lives to varying degrees. A number listen regularly to or watch his discourses. Others just keep images of him on

their walls. In retrospect, several were critical of some of his practices and behaviour but supported others. Some had moved on to other “masters” or modes of spiritual development. Yet all informants expressed some form of gratitude for having had the opportunity to experience what they did through their relation to Osho. Osho and the movement had been an “experiment” in creating new, more meaningful relationships in a world that, at that time, seemed to be “fermenting” with possible alternatives.

As with most community networks these days, an online forum specific to WA *sannyasins* has been functioning for several years. It is used for exchanging information, letting people know about upcoming events, buying and selling goods, finding out about other *sannyasins*, bartering and the occasional conflict of opinion. Seldom is there much discussion of Osho, his teachings or the movement. There is also a “little red phonebook” containing the contact details of WA *sannyasins* along with business advertisements.

To summarise, my interviews with local informants reveal that yesterday’s *sannyasins* seem to have dissolved quietly back into “normal” existence, and in WA today, can be found in all walks of life, apparently living and working like the rest of the population.

### **The global movement today**

The movement also continues to have a global presence, and while informants are generally now less transient than during the movement’s heydays, a number of them

travel regularly to the original Ashram in Pune. Now called the *Osho International Meditation Resort*, it continues to offer a smorgasbord of self-development therapies and meditations, though without the same degree of controversy, and reportedly attracts thousands of visitors from around the world, a significant number of whom are members of the young, professional rising Indian middle-class.

Additionally, an estimated 4,000 hours of video-taped discourse have been digitised and made available on the web, as have the entire works of Osho. There are also numerous dedicated websites, forums and other cyberspace entities. In the US, India, Asia and parts of the Middle East, his discourses air regularly on cable or satellite television, and his teachings are often printed in mainstream magazines and newspapers in India and Asia. Ironically perhaps, the entire works of Osho now sit alongside those of Mahatma Gandhi in the library of India's national parliament in New Delhi.

Evidently then, not only were there no monumental recriminations as usually follows such a spectacular collapse of a cult, Osho's legacy is apparently thriving. He may have "left his body", as most *sannyasins* refer to his death, but his presence continues to assert itself with the help of thousands of photographs and hours of video-taped discourses produced.

From a wider cross-cultural perspective, the emergence of the Rajneesh movement coincided with the emergence of what is generally called "postmodernism" in global culture and can be considered to be an element of it. While at the time postmodernism and the Rajneesh movement were considered avant-garde, today they

are accepted by many as mainstream. Indeed in many ways, the movement could be considered as a precursory microcosm to contemporary existence.

## Synthesis

What can be said about the emergence and dissolution of the public presence of the Rajneesh movement outlined in previous chapters? One way of explaining it all is to see it as an element of the change that is now described as postmodernism and nothing more. The era described as postmodernism is understood broadly as a time when the logic of multiplicity that tolerated contradiction and paradox began to be accepted as a viable alternative to the kind of logic previously associated with modernity – logical positivism, binarism or dualism. As it emerged, it produced a de-centring and decodification process across all multicultural, multilingual, global discourses. The need to account for these new complexities found expression in discourses such as art, literature, history, philosophy and science.<sup>476</sup>

At the same time, a broad de-centring process of the “self” also began to take shape.<sup>477</sup> Where once there had been identifiable and enforced social, cultural and political boundaries in everyday life, there was now the need to live increasingly with paradox and contradiction. Alongside a growing discontent with the normalisation of social and cultural institutions such as family, school and sexuality, a desire to work out ways of living in this new world surfaced. It seemed no longer possible to change things through a social revolution, but for many it might be possible to change things through an “inner” revolution. It was a shift from “I think”, “I speak” to “I experience”, ‘I feel’. The tension between abandoning oneself wildly to the multiplicitous universe versus re-creating form and structure, took on new significance and for many, concomitant life-style experimentation. With it, new

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<sup>476</sup> On the de-centring and de-codification process associated with postmodernism, see for example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>477</sup> On the construction of subjectivity, see for example, Michel Foucault *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970).

possibilities of expressing the “self” emerged on a much larger scale than in earlier periods.

This period was also a time when bridges between the East and West were being built. One could say that in the sixties and seventies, for thousands of young people in the West, all roads seemed to lead to India. The notion of a mystical or spiritual India, as opposed to a rational and materialist West, seemed to erupt from the Western imagination in force in unparalleled ways. India seemed to offer the possibility of expressing oneself and living in ways that seemed impossible in the West. It offered an alternative to the growing discontent with life that many in the West were feeling. It was now more possible than ever before to actually go there rather than read or hear about it.<sup>478</sup>

The informants in my project impressed continually upon me their desire to explore new forms of subjectivity along these lines and for similar reasons, was the underlying impetus for becoming involved in the movement. In this sense they were not doing anything very different to what many others were doing. Indeed, a number of them commented that they were not doing anything differently, just more honestly.

The meditations, like dynamic, the psychotherapeutic groups and the experimentations with the limits of sexuality and violence, could all be viewed on the one hand as techniques for liberating the “mind” from its repressive social and political structures by re-asserting the value of the body and sensation. On the other

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<sup>478</sup> A discussion of the emergence of India as a countercultural destination can be found in Julie Stephens *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48-73.

hand, there was nothing very unusual about this. Similar things were happening around the world. In abandoning themselves to chaos, it seemed that instead of trying to fill the gaps and ruptures that resulted, they were trying to affirm the existence of a different level of consciousness that could be described as pre-subjective or pre-conscious.

What allowed them to do this was Osho, who seemed to function as an embodiment, or performance, of the concepts of paradox and contradiction that were becoming the new paradigm for defining human existence. The de-centring process that had become dominant also meant a de-valuing of all that came before. Osho and the movement, while rejecting values, still needed to have other values to replace them. These were mapped onto Osho, effectively defining value for followers.

At the same time, he was an ambiguous figure who used a curious logic with the outcome of positioning *sannyasins* in a “double bind”: On the one hand, do not make me as centre, on the other, where else are you going to go?<sup>479</sup> The importance informants attached to Osho indicate that the balance seemed to fall mainly in favour of Osho. Yet many would also deny that he functioned for them in this way, maintaining instead that he simply allowed one to glimpse all the other possibilities. His own insistence that *sannyasins* should not form any father fixation or dependency on him was often mentioned and instead, there was a sense that he encouraged people to perform multiple identities by resisting “reacting” to the world according to the repressive structures of the mind and instead “responding” to it spontaneously by acting on natural impulses in the moment.

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<sup>479</sup> See Bateson.

As a charismatic figure, one could describe Osho's allure as being based around ideas that were specifically postmodern – contradiction and paradox. He seemed to embody the tension between polar extremities, being neither this nor that, and exhibiting rather a sense of “both...and...and”.<sup>480</sup> He was an “enlightened mystic” and a “clever charlatan”, an “anarchist” and a “madman”, a “spiritual terrorist” and a “cynical businessman” – all yet none of these. Perhaps, in the spirit of the global shifts of his time, one could say that Osho was neither an “enlightened mystic” nor a “charlatan”, but both. From the perspective of contemporary existence, one could say that such personages exist all around us.

### Capitalism and the media

Notwithstanding the relevance of changes that individual informants have experienced, it is evident that Osho and his movement seem not to have effected the changes it set out to. Rather, what was both individually and popularly viewed as extraordinary or revolutionary, is now very ordinary and mainstream. Indeed, several informants commented on how ordinary the previously extraordinary had become. In a sense, this suggests that it might be more useful to consider the Rajneesh movement as being symptomatic of, rather than incongruous to, or the monstrous opposite of, the process of global capitalism. This may provide some insight into contemporary existence.

It goes without saying that the primary force in contemporary existence is the unobstructed flow of capital. During the sixties and seventies, shifts occurred in the way capitalism could work. As the world opened up globally, in order for capitalism

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<sup>480</sup> On the idea of “both...and...and”, see “Introduction: Rhizome”, in Deleuze and Guattari, 3-25.



to continue, it became necessary to find ways of communicating across extremely diverse cultures that previously had only functioned within their own boundaries. The mass media played a significant role in determining how people might re-define themselves under these new conditions. Inevitably, there were changes in social, cultural and political domains. As mentioned earlier, the de-centring process also released the potential for forming new kinds of subjectivities that, following Foucault, are not so much an individual choice as a “discursive arrangement” constructed by the rules and restrictions of discursive formations.<sup>481</sup> As traditional values became untenable, new values were explored. Prior to this, however, comes the experience of what Deleuze and Guattari have called a “vacuum state”, understood not as a state of emptiness or an absence, but as a fullness or “over-presence”.<sup>482</sup> As Massumi puts it, “It is the state of indistinction of matter with what is normally mutually exclusive of it: the abstractness of the void.”<sup>483</sup> It is a kind of madness that capitalism has created but which it also needs for the continued unobstructed flow of capital that sustains it. It was the kind of madness that found its embodiment in Osho and that he encouraged.

The Rajneesh *sannyasins* were a group who were experiencing this transitional “vacuum state”. As pointed out earlier, however, there was nothing unusual about this at the time. By subsequently mapping their values onto Osho, however, they in some ways remained in a kind of suspended animation, not unlike the feeling one has

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<sup>481</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse”, In *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*, (trans. Ian McLeod) (ed. Robert Young) (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 48-78.

<sup>482</sup> See for example, Deleuze and Guattari, 3-25.

<sup>483</sup> Brian Massumi, “Cyber Sense Dispersal: Stelarc and Post-Human Evolution”, *5Cyberconf: Fifth International Conference on Cyberspace, 6-9 June 1996*, <http://www.fundacion.telefonica.com/at/emassumi.html> (accessed September 9, 2007).

when watching a film in the cinema. This ideal, however, was apparently short-lived, though enjoyable.

If capitalism gave rise, through its de-centring process, to the potential for groups like the Rajneesh movement to emerge, the mass media, its primary aim being to attract capital, is necessarily implicated in significant ways. Arguably, it interrupted and contributed largely to the downfall of the movement, a viewpoint many informants also took. As the mass media played an equally important role in providing the conditions for its emergence, however, it needs to be considered in ways not simply conspiratorial.

When the media began to show an interest in the movement, both in WA, in Europe and in the US, initial reports tended to exhibit curiosity rather than a committed bias. Even though some of the earlier German reports sensationalised the more controversial aspects of sexuality and violence, their effect was to initiate curiosity and interest rather than immediate vilification (except of course for those who had particular investments in religious morality, such as Christians). As Van Driel and Van Belzen point out:

Print media reporting in the Rajneeshees prior to 1985 was oddly ambivalent. On the one hand, due to their late emergence in the US religious scene, the Rajneeshees seem to have profited from the less negative climate of opinion prevailing there during the early and mid-1980s. Extreme criticism of the movement was uncommon. However, the movement remained suspect, and potential dangers were often pointed out.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Van Driel & Van Belzen, 80.

At the same time, it was not uncommon for “new religious movements”, as the Rajneesh movement was generally considered to be, to attempt continually, “to penetrate the media with their subjective definitions of their social reality”<sup>485</sup>; something that Rajneesh and his educated *sannyasins* were particularly adept at doing. Rather than viewing the media as simply an “instrument” of capitalism and thereby giving rise to the notion that it is in some ways conspiratorial and solely intended to maintain the “status quo”, by being representative of the diversity of opinions it can be viewed as being implicated in the de-centring process so fundamental to the continuation of global capitalism.

It was not really until the arrival of Rajneesh and the establishment of the commune in the US, that more negative publicity began to emerge. In many ways, it was at this point that the potential for creating a form of subjectivity that had more in common with the logic of multiplicity, while still in some ways present, began to lose its coherence and begin its backward journey to a situation where an either/or logic once again dominated, resulting finally in a tense face off between the local Oregonian community and the *sannyasins*.

Arguably Rajneesh was represented initially as a rather benign, albeit with a few controversial ideas, Indian guru not unlike other Indian gurus who were around during this time. As the events in Oregon unfolded, however, he (even if through Sheila) became more of a pariah who represented the “evil” end-product of de-codification. So, while on the one hand there was seemingly an acceptance of “de-centring/decoding”, on the other, this was not really the case. The media was able to

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<sup>485</sup> Van Driel & Van Belzen, 77.

deal with the primary operants, in this case Osho and Sheela, because it became re-centred on them, ascribing negative values to them.

Like capitalism, notwithstanding its capacity to “decode”, the mass media, again like capitalism, must at some point “re-code” to avoid the real “deterritorialised” chaos that would disrupt the flow of capital. This re-coding, according to Deleuze and Guattari, takes the form of an “axiomatic”: They suggest:

The true axiomatic is that of the social machine itself, which takes the place of the old codings and organises all the decoded flows, including the flows of scientific and technical code, for the benefit of the capitalist system and in the service of its ends.<sup>486</sup>

When one views these events in hindsight, and given the Rajneesh movement’s capacity to organise the flow of their capital in ways not dissimilar to a multinational corporation<sup>487</sup>, the role the mass media plays in “disappearing” such “rogue companies” becomes evident. They need to be eliminated as threats, not because they are a danger to the “status quo” or moral majority so much as they hold the potential to interrupt the flow of capital in significant ways.

The mass media is able to, and is primarily the principal means of organising and controlling this process by creating “media cultures” that are particular discursive arrangements, like any culture, but which also, in the end, serve the needs of the flow of capitalist production. Like any superstar of today, Rajneesh and his movement, as

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<sup>486</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 233.

<sup>487</sup> See Carter, *Charisma* and Urban, 161-182.

a unique person and group, passed in and out of this world. This indicates then, that while there is always a resistance to capitalism, in the end it will always appropriate the same values. Perhaps all one can say about Rajneesh and his movement is that it was a precursor to a new affliction of the contemporary world. Without a centre, people will attach themselves to things or people, even if in some ways Rajneesh, for whatever reason, was trying to avoid this.

Rajneesh and the Rajneesh movement were products of their time and so was their demise. While the movement rose and was then destroyed, neither did it go away. Nothing of significance has happened or changed because of it. There will always be resistance but because the logic of global capitalism is based on ensuring that there are unobstructed flows of capital, capitalism will always eventually appropriate these same values. Subjectively, on the one hand there is the vision of heaven and wonder. On the other, in most people's lives, there is the feeling of futility and emptiness. For capitalism to survive, it must maintain this distance in order to reappropriate it in new ways. This "merging" process continues. Although it may have become stuck by the East/West division during the rise of Rajneesh and his movement, for a while those bridges are now well constructed and the focus is on other divisions.

## Conclusion

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In this study I set out to document the rise and fall of the Rajneesh sannyasin community in Western Australia and to explore the role of the mass media in the construction of the movement. I did this through interviews with local *sannyasins* along with media and historical research. To conclude, I will provide a summary of this qualitative inquiry.

While an early small commune and several meditation centres were established in Western Australia during the late seventies, it was not until Bhagwan left India for the United States forcing many *sannyasins* to return to their home countries, that they became an obvious presence in Fremantle where a large commune was established in 1981. This commune was set up to operate as a satellite commune to the main spiritual centre that, by this time, had moved from Pune to Oregon. It was run by a series of female co-ordinators and comprised of the same diverse mix of people evident in all Rajneesh communes around the world.

Financed initially by a wealthy local *sannyasin*, the Fremantle commune appeared to thrive in its early years, supported financially by a number of successful business ventures including an award-winning building company and restaurants around the metropolitan area. While some *sannyasins* lived and worked in the commune, others lived in shared *sannyasin* houses scattered throughout the metropolitan and also regional areas, contributing to the commune by working voluntarily or with their own finances. Money was often sent to support the development of the US commune, and many *sannyasins* travelled there, particularly for celebrations such as

the annual festivals when they would have the opportunity to be in Bhagwan's "Buddhahfield".

The commune in WA was organised around a regime of encounter and self-development groups along with meditation practices, celebrations, regular video nights that took place where *sannyasins* watched and listened to Bhagwan's discourses, and other social activities. Informants spoke of their commitment to "live as Bhagwan said", and for many in the community the goal was to achieve "enlightenment" or a heightened "spiritual awareness" by doing this.

When Bhagwan left India, his notion of *Zorba the Buddha*, the "spiritual materialist", had become a popular means of explaining his vision of a "new humanity" unencumbered by the restrictive social and cultural forces he claimed had interrupted one's capacity to live "creatively".

Like many other Eastern religious thoughts, the underlying concept of Rajneesh's version was the idea that existence is ultimately indivisible and that is it possible to achieve a "crystallised" state of awareness to which it corresponds. The techniques and practices he formulated to reach this state, however, had more in common with trends emerging in Western society – specifically its inclusion of sexual freedom (as opposed to denial) and its acceptance of the accumulation of wealth (rather than a vow of poverty). Both of these differences were viewed as legitimate aspects of Rajneesh discipleship.

Although they were conspicuously present in their orange and red dress, informants claim that initial reactions from the local Fremantle community were largely inquisitive and supportive rather than hostile. Local media reports, too, seemed to be attempts to describe the Rajneesh phenomenon rather than disparage it. Since Bhagwan's move to the US, however, the movement had come under closer international media scrutiny that focused on the movement's promotion of "free sex" and its capitalist motivations; in short, equating sexual freedom with sexual perversion and accumulation of wealth with exploitation of its followers and of the larger community. Such reports eventually found their way into Australia's public imagination and it was not long before informants noticed that the local community's previous indifference and ambivalence had turned to negativity and hostility.

This response gained momentum as the fundamentalist Concerned Christians Group, by way of their spokesperson, Adrian Van Leen, became increasingly public in its condemnation of the movement and its so-called immoral activities, setting off alarm bells within the general community. Likened to other cults such as The People's Temple, the *sannyasins* also came under closer media scrutiny in WA. When they attempted to set up a school and resort in the south-western town of Pemberton, Van Leen's interventions had, by that time stirred up local discontent and antagonism between locals and *sannyasins* soon developed. The heated debates and disputes that ensued were duly reported in the media and the situation in Pemberton came to resemble what was happening in Oregon. The *sannyasin* community was clearly being targeted as one that needed to be eradicated if "normal" society was to survive.



The arrival of Sheela did nothing to dispel such negative attitudes. Her confrontational style was not appreciated and was reported in true sensational style. According to informants, however, many *sannyasins* in WA also did not warm to Sheela's interventions into the operation of their communes and, as in Rajneeshpuram, a degree of factionalism and discontent among *sannyasins* grew resulting in a number leaving the movement.

By the time Sheela and then Bhagwan left the Ranch and it became evident that all was not as it appeared to be, the commune in Fremantle had reduced dramatically in size and also eventually dispersed. Confusion, disbelief and shock were the most common responses according to informants, with many *sannyasins* leaving the movement completely while others set about establishing other smaller local centres to continue with Bhagwan's work. They were no longer visible since, under a directive from Bhagwan, they had discarded their colourful clothes and *sannyasins* in WA described the movement as having gone "underground". This was often not interpreted as a continuation of something secret, however, but rather an extension or "the next level" of what Bhagwan envisioned. The "Zen" challenge now was to re-enter the "marketplace", yet remain meditative – "To be in the world, but not *of* the world".

In the years following the commune's demise, the media continued to maintain occasional interest in what had become of the movement. The general assumption underlying such reports was that it had gone the way of other cults that had attempted to impact on society by re-defining normative discourses. They had simply disappeared. To a large extent, this is precisely what did happen. Like any other

celebrity, they had been given their fifteen minutes of fame and were now no longer of significance. In this study, however, I have suggested that in orchestrating such disappearances, the role of the mass media is not simply a conspiratorial one based on ideological differences. Rather, as an instrument of capitalism, it is implicated in the continual process of de-coding and re-coding necessary for its survival. The possibility of continually de-coding without re-coding promoted, even if ultimately unsuccessfully by Bhagwan and the movement, did not sit well within the logic of capitalism. For the Orange People it was a case of intensifying their experiences of sexuality, wealth and so on to the point where they did not matter anymore. By pursuing them to their limits, one would “come out the other side” and become dynamic rather than static beings. In relation to capitalism, such chaotic action was outside its boundaries and had the potential to disrupt the fundamental flow of capital. A re-coding was necessary and it was the media’s role to enable this process.

Finally, I have suggested that it might be more useful to consider the Rajneesh movement as a microcosm of postmodern existence and that the mass media is implicated in this process in significant ways. I have argued that it may be more illuminating to consider Rajneesh and the movement in relation to the broader cross-cultural perspective and to capitalism in particular, as the primary discursive element that produces and defines contemporary existence and the role of the mass media.

## Appendices

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### Appendix One: Interview questions

The following questions are leading questions. Some general subtexts have been included. They are not in any specific order, nor will all questions be asked of all interviewees. The responses received and some preliminary discussion beforehand will determine the direction the interview takes.

1. Could you tell me what was happening in your life before you came across Osho/Rajneesh?
  - Marriage/children/family?
  - Job?
  - Education/upbringing
  - Future plans?
  - Counterculture/feminism?
2. How did you first hear about Osho?
  - Books/videos/travels?
  - Word of mouth?
3. Can you tell me what drew you to him?
  - Teachings?
  - Other people's influence?
  - Personal history?
  - Essential message?
4. Can you explain why you took the actual step to become a *sannyasin*?
  - A particular experience?
  - Conscious decision?
  - Seeking enlightenment?
5. What did you do to become a *sannyasin*?
  - Break family ties?
  - Give money/possessions?
  - Where?
  - Who from?
  - Initiation?
  - Rules?
  - Clothes/*mala*?
  - Do you have any photos/memorabilia of this process?
6. Can you explain what '*sannyas*' means to you?
  - Particular way of life?
  - Any renunciation?

- Role of meditation?
  - What does 'living in the moment' mean to you?
  - Why Osho?
7. Can you tell me about any changes in your life after you became a *sannyasin*?
- Reaction of family/friends?
  - Lifestyle changes?
  - Major problems?
  - Communes?
  - Ideas about self/others?
8. Did you visit Pune or other communes?
- Daily life on commune?
  - How many ?
  - Restrictions?
  - Children/partners?
  - Work?
  - Relations with non-commune members?
  - Significant events?
  - Cultural differences?
  - Were you able to take photos/videos?
9. Did you meet/get close to Osho?
- First impressions?
  - Significant experiences?
  - Feelings about him?
10. How was community in Fremantle established?
- Key figures?  
Where?  
When?  
How many?  
Organisation?  
Seeking members?  
How long were you there?  
What kinds of things done everyday?  
Reactions of broader community?  
How long did it last?  
Significant events?  
Many who left?  
Did you use media. For what purposes?  
Any recordings – videos/newsletters etc?
11. How do you think it functioned as a 'community'/what united you?
- Key figure?
  - Gatherings?
  - Locations?

12. In the early eighties the Rajneesh were very visible in Fremantle. There was a lot of controversy concerning the arrival of Ma Anand Sheela. Can you describe how this affected the community?
- Reactions of community as whole?
  - Personal reactions?
  - Changes?
  - Media response?
13. Would you say that there is a *sannyasin* community in Fremantle today? How would you describe it?
- Who?
  - How many?
  - Centre?
  - Structure?
  - Interactions?
  - What kind of lives are people leading?
  - Relation to global communities?
14. Have you been to Pune recently?
- Impressions?
  - Any changes?
  - Any photos?
15. What has been your response to the negative press about *sannyasins*?
- Any changes for you?
  - Group cohesion?
  - Cult/anti-cultism?
  - Security?
  - Comments on point of view of press?
  - Steps taken?
16. Rajneesh/Osho was often referred to as the 'sex guru' in the press. He was also renowned for owning over 90 Rolls Royces. Do you have any comments on these aspects?
- Role of sexuality in teachings/community?
  - Personal experiences?
  - Gender roles?
  - AIDS?
  - Children?
17. Do you still consider yourself a *sannyasin*? If so, what does this mean now?
- Do people know?
  - Different perspective?
  - Difficulties?
  - Feelings about Osho?
  - *Sannyasin* friends?
  - Spirituality/other Masters/teachers?
  - World view?

18. Osho talks about the 'screen' of cosmic consciousness. Can you explain what this means?
19. Osho talks about '*sannyas*' as living life purposelessly, passively; that life is only the 'play' of outflowing energy. Can you give any insight as to what he means?
20. Some commentators have described Osho as a paranoid schizophrenic. Do you have any comment on this?
21. Can you tell me anything about the relation between Osho's teachings and traditional Indian teachings – Hinduism, Sufism, Buddhism, Tantra etc?
22. Can you say anything about Osho's views on Western traditions – religion, psychology, philosophy?
23. It is well documented that Osho contradicted himself a lot. How did this seem to you? In what way did it make sense? Why do you think he did this?
24. Do you have any photos/images of Osho, your life on communes?
25. Osho was well-known as someone who used the media well. Can you comment on this aspect?
26. Any other comments?

## Appendix Two: Informant responses

### (a) Before

[s\_12]

Before I met Osho...it was interesting because when it happened for me...I was in huge disarray. I was married, had a three year old girl, was six months pregnant with my second child, had left my marriage...had moved to Mosman Park. And I just started bumping into *sannyasins*...it was unbelievable...they just started appearing in my life. Even though I'd met a couple some years before in the Masters course I was doing at UWA in clinical psychology...I remember thinking that *sannyasins* were a friendly but misguided bunch of people and then when all this happened...And I just started going to meditations, my baby was born..my life was in such upheaval. I also had stopped working, stopped having a career, didn't have a marriage and suddenly I had two little beings. I had to find out who I was.

I remember going to Cottesloe library...looking at the shelves and I saw this book called *Death comes Dancing* by Ma...Bharti...I took it home to read. It was the first time I had ever read Osho. Everything it described...like life in the commune, relationships...the whole thing...I just went 'Oh my god'...and I just felt as if I understood. It was quite remarkable. This women's book was a really good one to come across. I was going down to the centre in Fremantle. I remember going down to meditation three mornings a week. I had a small baby and I got the girl next door to babysit at six in the morning for two hours. I just threw everything into meditation including \$100 a week babysitting money which I got from my pensions.

I do remember reading a book of Osho when I was still in my marriage and finding him really funny and also that he was saying the kinds of things that I felt deep down, that I probably wasn't saying out loud and all the stuff he was saying about organised religion I just felt an immediate 'Oh yes' and yet his deep love for beings who've helped seekers in the past. It wasn't that he was against Christians, Hindus...he was just for Jesus, for Buddha...and to some extent I'd had an affinity to Christianity. I guess that was how I was brought up. I wasn't a practising Christian but somehow it seems he included everything like that, but wider. And also, just his honesty about all the crap we'd been brought up with, all the conditioning that we've taken over the years. It was so refreshing to see and hear and he talked about meditation and that hadn't been part of my experience much except that for many years, while I was training as a Jungian analyst, I kept a record of my dreams and I can remember dreaming about books on meditation, opening them, looking at them, glancing at them and putting them to one side and sometimes feeling that meditation must be quite important but not knowing how.

I think that going down to the centre and starting to get involved in the active meditation in particular...it just brought me to myself more. It was a really scary time initially...that was hard leaving all that stuff, my known life behind and then also starting to look in and really see how deep the conditioning really was. I felt really worthwhile. I felt inadequate, I felt ugly and just letting me stay with those states and really experiencing them and seeing how I had tended to be a very busy person and great doer, to do anything to stop myself from looking at how I was and just enjoying meditation space too.

[s\_17]

When I first walked into the ashram I remember this huge wave of relaxation coming over me and the other thing I thought that was, as I walked into Buddha Hall...looked around thinking 'Oh, this is a place where it's OK to revere, to be reverent, to just...not bow down to...but salute the buddha in life, whether that was in the other person or whatever. I remember that that was my first impression as I walked through the gate. I would just attend meditation, did a few groups, discourse in the evening, just thought it was amazing...I loved the music group, the way it sent us all into a really high energy space of dynamism then bring us straight down into this absolute quietness and go from one to the other in the space of a few minutes. I loved what he said. I don't remember a word of it. I've got the first discourse I ever heard in his presence cause I figured...I do remember that because it was beautiful and because it was the first time in his presence. I felt it was really special and it was all about gratitude, all about allowing your unworthiness to become gratitude for life. So that's very special and I still play that every now and then so no I didn't meet him personally. You could write and I wrote occasionally and got answers.

While Osho was alive I appreciated aspects of the community...the Oregon Building Company, music, comedy...I resisted getting involved...some aspects were not for me..I would never do things a guru told me to do...I'm my own person – the thing about wearing orange and *malas* one day, then telling them not to wear them...I'm thinking these people are just obeying these guys...Don't know whether it was a cop out that I could only feel his love energy after he died because he couldn't tell me what to do any more. Even when he died, I didn't take *sannyas* immediately.

[s\_2]

I was 28/29. I had it all. I had all the awards I thought you needed in a lifetime. I was mother of the year. I was citizen of the year. I was wife of the year and at the same time I had an incredible sense of hey, you can't take any of this to the grave. What is it? I'd been kind of sussing the zen path for a while through a friend, had long since let go of the Christian path, not the inspiration, but the path – the formation of the church and so on. But some part of me, ever since I was little, asked, What's it all about? Why am I here? And Who am I? And that came up very strongly around 29, so by my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday I was very ready and a friend came back from Pune, a friend I totally respected and had know well for a long time, came back in this outrageous red robe, with these beads around the neck and this guru on the front. It was just horrendous. But at the same time, his energy was, his whole spirit, lifeforce, laughter, everything about him was like magnified times 10 and I went Woah! Whatever's happened to him and I watched for awhile. I want that for me. But I was bound and determined that there was no way I was going to go into any uniform, or put beads around my neck with a picture of a mad, cheerful-looking Indian. I was a minister's daughter, don't forget. My path had been very much 'get it right and rebel like heck'. So I was determined to be very cool, so I started doing meditations in short, in Perth WA. And the doors and windows just started flying open and just changes and insights, and absolute joy. I felt like 'Ah' had started to happen and I was determined that I was not in any way going to get involved in any club who all wore the same stuff. I thought that was quite wet. I had enough club in the church, not a good club person.



So I actually flipped out about nine months later. It was like, looking back now I understand what happened. My heart and my core was saying 'yes, yes, yes' and my head was going 'no, no, no. We're going to control this. We're going to keep it tidy and neat and acceptable to them'. There was a big argument and I flipped out through here (head) very definitely for ten days. My sister had had psychotic periods in her upbringing, so in some ways I was a bit familiar with what was going on inside myself...no need to sleep, visions all over the shop. I had three small children don't forget. And at one point, they were becoming quite disturbed and unable to sleep and I knew enough, that I needed to get away, from disturbing them. I could not speak, I was not speaking to anyone. It was a very intense experience. I ended up in a very beautiful, safe place in the bush...a good friend, who just made sure I was taken care of. I did not speak to anyone. In a way it was like I imploded, I did not explode. The two are possible with psychotic behaviour. I came back to myself. I also knew, when that happened that I wasn't going anywhere near a hospital or doctor. I'd seen what had happened to my sister. And I knew that whatever was going on, and basically I thought I was going to die. That is the bottom line of madness, you ask anyone. And I had to go to the bush and do it very quietly, and make sure that all the kid's clothes would be sorted, that they would be taken care of and off I went. I can clearly remember, that other part of my mind starting to click in with "Hey, you haven't died". I knew I had kids that I had left, but I had to take such a jump out of that reality, out of that part of me. Flipping out is when the energy goes up here (head), it cuts off down here (body). And then the person looking after me sat me down and it seemed harsh at the time, thought I didn't need it. 'So what are you doing? You do realize you've got three children in Subiaco and I remember thinking you don't have to speak to me like that, I just need a clue as to which direction I take now. I was utterly shattered, lost, but I was not catharting, I was not emotional, I was not lashing out. I remember saying, 'of course I know I have three children'. I also knew I couldn't drive and asked to be driven back...And he took me back there and it was so utterly gorgeous to see the kids again and it was weeks of basically staying at home, a lot of shame, a huge amount of fear that I would be branded and that...I must have taken six or seven showers a day, I felt that that would keep me grounded. I had been wearing orange during meditations, playing control the cosmos game, all in retrospect now that I saw what was happening. I threw out that was orange and red, and put on blue denim and green. I did this consciously, stayed home for weeks with the kids until I was better. I didn't fully understand what had happened to me. Osho explained it to me much later.

And one day I was going out to Shanti to do the meditations and I remember somebody saying, 'She'll go to Pune, that's for sure and someone else said 'oh no, she's above and beyond all that, she's too *special*'. And it was the absolute provocation, in the mirror, that stung and I needed it. And I remember thinking... when I can see Ohso, when I can eyeball him, then I'll think about becoming a *sannyasin*. I knew that night, that's the same controlling mind that led you down the path of madness...

... I had it all, but I knew there was something more...something more that made sense and meditation was the beginning of that, thinking 'a-ha!'

[s\_14]

I first came across *sannyasins* in England in the mid seventies. I left Perth after high school..went to the mountains in the north of Wales...People started turning up in orange dress...I went to London and lived in a house of *sannyasins*...I proceeded in a disorderly fashion to India...Got there in 1976...it was a slow magnetic pull...I had been co-running an Osho centre in London before becoming a *sannyasin*...it was the best thing to do...they were the most fun people, party all the time...cute chicks...rebellious...my type...I had been looking...it was the first sniff of something real.

[s\_3]

I wasn't particularly looking for anything. A good friend of mine had borrowed a book from someone who'd just been to Pune 1977, called *No Water, No Moon*. I was in Perth and went for a walk by the river with her. She started telling me about some of the things she'd read in the book. I was in a situation in life where I thought I had everything I wanted – a husband, two children, lived in Margaret River. I had a pretty good life...Suddenly I realized how many 'shoulds' I had in my head...the conditioning from the past...get a job, have two children. I'd been taught that I should be doing 'that', 'the' way to be. Suddenly I was questioning this. It was brought alive by having these other people around me. We were searching for similar things...Osho was instilling the idea that we're only using 10 percent of potential of who we are...that you have limitless energy, boundaries you can just break your way through...The life I was living was OK, but only OK...can be creative, move towards true potential...made me think...sort of like something in my heart exploded, like Ah ha!, of course, there is a huge world out there which I haven't even touched on. Something came alive for me from then on. She lent me the book and we both decided we'd better go and find out more about this...we'd got fever in this...neither of us had really been looking for anything (that we were aware of). So we went off to Pune together, left kids with our respective husbands.

[s\_7]

I first heard about Osho from S in 1977/78. I had known S at uni in 1973/74...he had long hair, a beard, and was talking about some Indian chap. He had always struck me as an intelligent person. Around that time, there was a lot of talk about ashrams, gurus...most of it silly, but S was recommending Osho. Two years later, my brother V was talking about this Rajneesh character...I had respect for their intelligence...Thought of the range of Indian teachers..but Rajneesh warranted something...I had spent a couple of years at uni but mostly hadn't enjoyed it...Was working for a couple of years with underprivileged kids, doing art and craft, educational theatre. In 1977/78 I stopped with the company I was working with. Then I did adult cabaret, clown theatre, crisis training. I wasn't ready to go back to uni...Not spending time overseas like other friends...there seemed to be things missing...The idea of spending time in an ashram in India...might broaden my horizon... Although others came into Osho for more out of their lives..I always had an interest in how religions work...I was educated in a church school but in my early teens, I developed a mistrust...Then I became interested in how religions generally work, almost an anthropological viewpoint...Then Osho, who was interested is the same kind of things...not wanting to push religions, rather undo them. He had a clever idea of the problems caused by structured religion. He was intelligent, well read, entertaining, theatrical and not wanting one to engage in dogma, but with what was actually happening in one's life, what was appropriate for that instant...no rule

book...Seemed to be a crystallisation of ponderings I had engaged with over the years. Although it seemed a religion, it was opposite. I was jaded being told 'yes' there are reasons. His words fell on fallow grounds in my case.

I went to Poona in 1979...Spent time doing groups, but was not a *sannyasin*...I was intellectual about it...it was all fun, interesting, but I was not prepared to say 'yes, I want to be a disciple'...a bit analytic about it...I organised it so that I had to go back to Perth...I was being safe about it...Came back a year later...went to the Melbourne ashram...took *sannyas* there.

[s\_10]

I had been a Sunday school teacher...as a teenager I was looking for God...I heard about Osho in 1976/77...when Indivar was the main man. G D gave me Indivar's book...I had had sessions with Indivar in 1974 when my marriage was over...when he came back wearing orange, a *mala*, he was dynamic...people were getting involved...not me...I was going to leave Australia... Indivar invited me to do a group...meditation for 19 days at Boatshed in Crawley...It amazed me, changed my energy, brought out things, repressed anger went away...put it past...I went to Pune to visit friends..had no intention of becoming a *sannyasin*...Didn't see myself as a *sannyasin*...It was OK for others...I actively resisted ...but once I was in the energy field of the master... it overcame me... Bhagwan...was a beautiful being, flowering on man..his teaching was mesmerising...it was a Buddhafield...6,000 in Pune 1...2,000 in the discourses... I fought hard to resist but it became mind versus spirit, both had compelling arguments...but spirit won out. Then I realised that I wanted to be there and chose to become a *sannyasin*....Osho was in a higher place than us...

[s\_6]

I was about 21, part of a small group consciously looking for a master or spiritual teacher...and we'd come to this by various routes...In my case via psychoactive drugs, particularly LSD...I got interested in a different state of consciousness associated with those experiments , but realized continued drug use was dead end, so I got into meditation, eastern philosophy. At one meeting, someone brought a book by then Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and we read excerpts from it...all decided on the spot to visit him in Pune, in 1976.

I can't speak for the others, but in my case it was the combination of modernity and Eastern spiritualism, that he has been on about... We had been seeking, looking at lots of different spiritual and psychological traditions... from Sufism to Tibetan buddhism, to Gurjieff's fourth way work, some of the human potential stuff coming out of Big Sur at the time, the Esalen Institute. Suddenly here was a place that spoke about all these..it seemed to be a concentration...he seemed to be a cross...he wasn't preaching narrow, dogmatic, Hindu or Sikh or Muslim viewpoints, he seemed to be escaping from that...he was extremely well read...he could quote Jean Paul Sartre and TD Suzuki in the same breath...a very overarching and syncretic understanding of the whole spiritual movement and I think that was what intellectually attracted me, but there was also an undefinable kick inside that said you've got to go and meet this guy.

I was actually not interested in spirituality or anything like that. I was on my way to becoming an engineer, about 19 years old. I probably had some tendency...I was a

guitarist and I had some interest in the arts as well but I basically squashed all that down basically ascribed to the rationalist, positivist point of view, that anything that is not given to us by our senses is not real, not worth even considering, that science will eventually explain everything, a viewpoint that still basically rules the world today, in western civilizations. I was definitely hooked in on that. I can remember having arguments with other people about that in my late teens and I remember absolute sureness of my position and that lasted until, just on a whim, I was offered some LSD at university and I decided to take it. And it was a revelation, actually opened up this whole other side of the world, the other side of your eyes, which I'd put down to nothing there, or that I didn't want to look at it. So that led to a period of experimentation, and it was experimentation. I read widely on the subject, people like Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary, Carlos Casteneda...and I also read what other masters had to say ...what he had to say about LSD and when we did these trips we structured them, had a goal, ...really wanted to explore these transpersonal states, where you kind of escape from the illusion of being trapped in this egoic entity you call 'me' and it gave us a glimpse of that. But it was extremely poignant coming down from the trip, I never had a bad trip in my life, the bad part was coming back in and not being able to do anything about it and seeing all these neurotic mind patterns starting up again and going oh no and I couldn't bear to do it after awhile, thought no matter how good it was being in the presence of the divine reality, or whatever you want to call it, it was not worth it if you had to come back and so I became interested in spirituality out of that, not because I was religious, but because I was interested in exploring, what were for me, these extremely concrete and real dimensions which had been sort of revealed to me, or which I had access to some extent. But in a way that I would be able to integrate them into my everyday life as a human being, but also be able to grow into them in some way. Looking back, I think I had a fairly mature mission. I don't think I was typical in any way of people who got involved in spirituality or cults back then. But there were a few of us like that...It was the synthesis of east and west that I found, and a lot of different parts of the east and of the west that he seemed to bring together, which I found very, very attractive.

[s\_8]

At 12 I had joined the local congregational church...I was very active in it..I wanted to be a minister. When I was 20 I reached the limits of theological inquiry...met a man, got married...he wasn't interested in spiritual things...this coincided with the end of spiritual questions I couldn't answer...so I married this lawyer, lived in Peppermint Grove, joined the Liberal party...but I didn't become conventional because I was a social worker at Royal Perth Hospital and wanted to change society. Even though I wasn't a Liberal, they were in power so I joined the party to get divorce and abortion reforms through...I played the game of respectable society for a while.

I was doing anthropology at UWA (University of Western Australia) around that time, researching Eastern religions and their impact on Western countries... As part of my research I went and visited all the groups in Perth – Buddhist, Hindu, New Age – all forms of experimental groups. There were a lot of them at that time...I'd started preparing a Ph.D on a similar topic, then picked up a book by Bhagwan (*My Way: The Way of the White Cloud*), opened it and thought 'ah...something's happening here, this is different'. Within four days I was on a plane to India...I told uni I was going. I knew someone else who was going so I went with them...It

happened suddenly...I didn't know anything about the ashram before going there...didn't know what *sannyas* was...had no intention of taking it...thought I was already a *sannyasin* on a spiritual trip.

[s\_1]

I was a seeker, looking for something, all the things I thought were important weren't any more, wondered why I wasn't happier...It was in the 70s...was a time of ferment...I tried yoga and that... started meeting people on the same 'path'...through a friend, I met a *sannyasin* in orange with a *mala*...I was fascinated, but also disapproved intellectually...I thought it was self-indulgent..but I started to find out more, did meditation, did therapies, saw how that was changing me, then went to Pune...I was married, had had a painful divorce, had children...I thought there must be something else, couldn't believe that life was so pedestrian, was always looking...with Osho, I thought there *is* something else...saw myself as feminist early on...didn't actively campaign, just argued with my husband a lot.

[s\_13]

Before I was living in Israel...had been there for 3 years...decided to come home, got a ticket that went through India (spending three days in Bombay was cheaper)...there were some Australians on the plane, going to Pune, they said to come too...I didn't know anything about Pune..I went to the ashram to see a friend...I immediately sensed something different...I stood in the entrance...was struck by the cleanliness, the people smiling, even the Indians...I closed my eyes and an arrow came out of the air, like lightening, and went through my heart...It had 'you've come home' written on it...I felt split in half..one half wanted to stay, the other half was practical... I fell into a blissful space which stayed with me...I wandered around, bumped into someone I knew from Perth...we went to have tea, she told me about it all...She was really broke...I asked her how come...she said "we want him to have it"... I thought, 'oh well, you know what you want'...I wandered more then went back to the hotel...I didn't have words for what I had experienced...The two people I came up with were completely unaffected by going into the ashram...I went back the next day...didn't go to morning discourse...he was talking in Hindi. I presumed it was someone in a suit giving a 'lecture' type talk...had had enough of that at uni...didn't see him at all...I bought books, magazines...I felt like a different person...on the train back to Bombay, someone had an English newspaper...The headlines read 'Bombay airport burned down'...I wanted to jump off the train...it was an excuse not to leave, but the train was already going...but I ended up getting out...It was a totally different world...I didn't intend to get involved with *sannyas*...just intended to stay a short time, do groups, then go...I wasn't into having a guru telling me what to do...but I had been thinking...it was so weird...but what if I did get involved....I had a sense that Osho was reading my thoughts...talking to *sannyasins*, they seemed to be more in touch with themselves, attracted me...back at the hotel I was talking to a friend and became transfixed by a photo of Osho...I went back to my room, read his book...it said 'you don't have to believe in me, just trust me'...it relaxed me...I went to the ashram office the next day to organise *sannyas*.

[s\_4]

When I was an adolescent I decided to see the world...to go to Calcutta to save the world. A friend, a nun, and I, a nurse, went off to save the world...I often asked

myself the question: What makes people happy?...When I was nursing...the very sick had a glow, others with everything going for them were not happy...I became interested in psychiatry, went to London, but became disillusioned...I got involved with the Humanistic Growth Movement, went to encounter groups, women's groups...I thought that there's got to be something more, but what?...None of my friends were asking this question...they were getting married, having children...I tried different things...went to a Tibetan monastery, a Sufi farm...I felt as though existence was nudging me rather than other way around... away from the physical in nursing, the mental in psychiatry...I met a *sannyasin* in London who said, come and meet my guru, but I wasn't interested in any 'daddy figure'...I certainly wasn't going to wear orange...but I went to Pune in 1974, and my life took a 180 degree turn...I met Osho when I was 27...In the first *darshan* with Osho, there was an instant feeling of familiarity...I had read his books ....he seemed to know the truth...had a feeling of 'this is it'...but nothing had prepared me for the feeling of 'I know you'...I'd never had it before, never since...I don't know what it was...I had no intention of taking *sannyas* that night...

[s\_5]

I first came in contact with Osho, through a girlfriend in the mid 70s...We were both social workers at uni...in a residential college on the same floor...I knew her well...The first time I heard Osho's voice was in 1978/79, discourses on tape...though I thought there was no way I would take *sannyas*...I also knew somehow at the same time that I would...being a determined person I wasn't going to do anything I didn't want to...I put down my friend's infatuation with Osho to a father fixation...it was early 1976...I went travelling in 1977...I had studied social work and worked as one for six years...had no desire to get married...it was the time of the pill...so there was no need to get married, or settle down...I knew I didn't want or need to have children at the time...People often feel a sense of coming home or belonging when they walk into ashram but there was no way I was going to take *sannyas*....

## (b) Becoming

[s\_2]

I just knew I had to become a *sannyasin*, so why not now? So, I was what you call a mail-order-bride. But I didn't tell anyone, not a soul...Sent a letter and a photo...said what had happened, how I couldn't get enough of hearing his discourses, hearing his words, that he's turned my life around, how I paid a pretty high price, paid for the process of saying no...four weeks later I became P...meaning full moon of love..My first hit was, oh no he thinks I'm mad too, full moon, you know. But years later when I met him and he talked about the power of reflection and I have understood that since then.

[s\_1]

You had to be brave to take *sannyas*...it was a new change, with a new name...Your family might be horrified...but you either had to say, yes or no...but there was always feeling a failure if you said no...the process was life-changing...it forces you to step outside of society, to look at things with different eyes...you become separate...My life felt richer, more meaningful...I was happier, more able to love myself, more open, more accepting...life was much nicer.

[s\_6]

Once I decided, I pretty much brought a ticket and went to India...I stayed for about three months the first time. The routine was that you met the master in an institution called *darshan*, and he initiated you...In those days it was very hands on. You actually sat in front of him and he put the beads around your neck, gave you a name, explained what the name meant, and how it related to you. And then he'd give you some groups to do because he had some Western therapists as disciples. Some fairly heavy hitters too, at the time, from places like Esalen...and these guys, for a 19/20 year old who'd never done any psychological work like that before, this was incredibly intimidating, these groups. But it was good. And he also did Eastern meditations. You could do a vipassna, za zen, sufi, as well. Like it was this huge smorgasbord and he basically tells you what you should do. Nowadays ...well he became less and less hands on as time went on until finally the groups were being allocated by people below him and in the end I think you could pretty much choose your own groups. But when I first went it was very, very immediate. You really felt that what was being offered to you was being tailored specially for you, whether it was or not. But that belief gave you a real commitment to try and commit to the process, or at least get the best out of it that you could.

[s\_12]

So I decided to take *sannyas*. I was quite excited about wearing orange and having the *mala*...being an orange person and just as I got my name Osho announced to everyone that they had to stop wearing the colours and it was going to be an inner thing and I thought 'No'...my chance to be orange and there it goes. So I just went along with that...It was in 1985.

[s\_17]

I was a strong feminist, saw *sannyasins* and Osho as male dominated hierarchy...appreciated them as part of our community but that was as far as I would go...I was given a tape – music and words, listened to it but still made no sense of

anything really. But a couple of months after he died, I woke up one morning and there wasn't one other thing I could do but to go down to the Centre and say I wanted to become a *sannyasin*...would have preferred it to have been in Pune...Felt I had to do it, that I had no choice...got the forms, sent it all to India...thought it was a bit impersonal...The names that are given are bit of cosmic joke and I'm not a great traditional meditator. The feminist in me says I'm not going to sit cross-legged on the floor and make my mind think nothing, detach from all earthly feelings and possessions. My answer to meditation is dancing, singing, even making love – sort of a bit of a feminist tinge to spirituality...to commit to my own spiritual path, not to Osho, who says "I'm pointing at the moon, don't look at the finger, but you look at the moon".

[s\_7]

I finally took *sannyas* in Australia...Seemed to become more of an issue that why I wasn't...not doing it for all these reasons...Think...to explain to myself, others. Not taking *sannyas* turned into a complicated, intellectual rationalisation. Maybe it was more sensible to take it. Reached a point after observing others take *sannyas* then reject it...Not one way...not the threshold...everything changes.

[s\_13]

When I took *sannyas*, in *darshan*, he was talking about old behaviours, it was spot on...he poured love on me. Like nothing I'd ever experienced. A love different to parental love...unconditional love.

[s\_4]

I was introduced as J from London. Osho asked 'How about your *sannyas*?' I was affronted... I told him 'I'm so fed up with thinking'. He said 'That's the kind of person I want'. I was given a name and *mala*.

[s\_5]

I was not going to take *sannyas* or change my name but I was wearing red...In a group, the group leader told me he had a message for me – 'you're to take *sannyas*'...I went out and put my name down...Taking *sannyas*...in front of Osho...I was feeling girlish, vulnerable, open...I was called up in front of him...he put his thumb on forehead, he said Ma Anand M...I knew that he was seeing a part of me deep inside...but there was absolute acceptance and rightness...it was electrifying.



### (c) Groups

[s\_14]

During the seventies I did most of the groups available. In the eighties I worked on the Ranch...I was always fascinated by therapy as the beginning of unravelling the ego structure...I loved pretty much everything on offer...from the gentlest through the gambit of drama on offer...to encounter groups...it was more like someone throwing you off a thirty foot board at Beatty Park...

[s\_3]

I did groups here, some encounter, with Indivar. He was instrumental in me taking *sannyas*...for a lot in Freo; he was very, very good. He created situations where we could see where we reacted to things.....there was dynamic meditation every morning. Then we had the “heavy” groups like Tantra and encounter and we all kind of (cringed). I wasn’t given any of those, just the kind of light ones – dance group, centring group, silent meditation group. Maybe I didn’t need them as much as other people.... You were pushed to limits in group work. We always felt we’d been given what’s necessary for each individual. He was so clever, so loving.

[s\_17]

There was always some kind of psychological or social expertise to help people jumping in over their head...On the one hand, they were free wheeling, rough and tumble emotionally and physically. There was a structured process to catch people being harmed. There was a strong ethic of non-harm. People were able to go further than normal. Strange psychologically. Risky, dangerous but knowing we had a safety net, so lots went through emotional boundaries, limitations quickly... It could manifest at times as unloving behaviour like shouting...Things were brought up and left cooking in the everyday...So group work could keep happening in non-group time. People were always being shown their habit patterns...It was intense...you were having to confront who you were most of the time. In my view, they were quite valuable...In the West, we are generally emotionally insulated....They were a tribe of people trying to help others out of constraints.

The group work here was powerful...groups could get heated...It was a practice of offering ones character to get picked apart...It left me peeled away, exposed, yet able to go past things that earlier seemed threatening...These activities left me in new and exciting states...I had some experiences of a “spiritual” change.

[s\_10]

When Der Spiegel published pictures of groups, with naked people...At that point Osho sent out a message that the violence was to stop...group leaders had to find other means...When I did groups...there were sixteen people, padded walls, nakedness, sexual activity...in Tantra groups it definitely went on...being animals...no rules...or you could sit and do nothing...wouldn’t call them orgies which implies intention...it was spontaneous thing, a process of clearing stuff...it was liberating...There was some physical violence...sometimes fights...no weapons...occasionally an injury, nothing major...When it became more global there was more scrutiny...we didn’t want to get thrown out of India...don’t know Osho’s reasons, but basically it was “cool it guys”.

[s\_6]

I think...It was a bit like good cop, bad cop. The combination of a confrontation, dealing with negative emotions, very in your face way that western therapy was exploring in those days, like with encounter group and so on...combined with the more introspective, having a look at what was going on inside yourself...the combination of those two was extremely powerful. And I had some very, very strong breakthrough experiences during that first visit.

He also talked a lot about Tantra and there was a group called Tantra, but it had nothing to do with the Buddhist, Hindu tradition of Tantra, which had a very prescribed, disciplined form of sexual meditation, it was more like a free for all, allegedly freeing up the sexual energy and one I must say, one valuable aspect of it, and this was also true to some extent of the whole hippy thing, was that by experiencing multiple partners, you did begin to realise the emptiness of that experience at a physical level, which if you were always with the same person, you might have it in the back, wouldn't that be nice. If you do get to experience that personally, then you do get to see that it's a dead end. It's not really much fun. It's actually more rewarding to actually explore the depth dimension with one other person

[s\_5]

It took me one and a half years to get to Pune, so I felt I needed to stay a while...I started doing groups...for six months...The therapy was designed to give you space to learn how to go inside but really was just a way of keeping you there. The real purpose was to be there in his presence...the Buddhafield very strong.

#### (d) Reactions to Osho

[s\_12]

I love Osho's response to a question where he just said, "Yes I am washing your brains". So in a way it's about clearing. It is about getting rid of all the conditional rubbish that's in the brain. It's not brainwashing in the sense of falling under someone's spell and following only what they do or say in a way that's unconscious and I think from the outside that's what people saw. People felt that they were all brainwashed. That's how I saw them too initially. They're just following this Eastern guru you know. And from outside it does look the same and it's very hard because it's an inner experience only and you can't convince people. I found it very hard to let people know that it's something...not to do with brainwashing in that sense but it's to do with clearing your mind of crap to a degree or just knowing more about who you are...In a way I'm not too interested in having to convince people because that's only of the mind anyway and I guess people will pick up from being around anyone who is meditative. They're OK...perfectly normal people. But hard...because from the outside it does look the same so that got put into a cult basket and treated in the same way. Just like the article in *The West Australian* yesterday. I just saw it briefly. Not that I agree with what Sheela said or did but she's put in the same basket as other cults so it just reinforces in people's minds that it was just one of those hypnotic cult things that people got caught up in. So it's very hard. It's an inner thing.

[s\_17]

I've had quite a lot to do with people who died since then...I think it's when you die, going from one state to another...he opened up that window to love energy for me. That's all I can describe it as, that suddenly I fell in love...nothing to do with the mind, no control over it...not with Osho, but with a sense of "loveness", or "isness", my mind could no longer make up reasons not to...I don't think he *could* have stayed alive...he seemed like quite an old man but he was only 56...He was one of the most learned men ever...with his capacity for reading, filtering, knowledge, power structures, he couldn't have lived for long in a world so full of corruption, he was too threatening with the potential to influence the thoughts of many...I'm not really into conspiracy theories...poison...could have been something similar to what happened to the women at Greenham Common...Wouldn't put it past them...He had the power to influence...he wouldn't kowtow to any particular power base, made jokes of everything...Even people within the community were there for lots of reasons...He used to say "Women come for meditation, men come for women". I think it was true...All sorts of motivations.

[s\_2]

Osho hit me hard...the first time I went to Pune for 3 weeks for *darshan*...an incredible physical experience at *darshan*...there was light, vibrations all around and yet he was an ordinary human being...I went a little deaf...often happens when I'm emotionally touched...It felt like a waterfall cascading...I was called up to Osho...the closer I got... He said, "Oh, P, you have come, where have you come from...would be good to do x and y groups...much has happened and will happen, don't resist, be open..."...I felt that someone was seeing me and hearing me for first time...Felt a love like never before, not from my mother or father, which was big but not like this, like Niagara Falls... I went away and did groups...The tradition was to

have a “leaving” *darshan* when you were going... I had expectations...thought that since I had been good girl, he would say “well, you’re there”...I sat down and the first question he asked was, “ah P, and where are you from?”...I was shocked, expected him to recognise me. Inside I was going “you only talked to me 3 weeks ago...I was dying inside...Then he asked “and what groups have you done?” Inside I said to myself – you gave me the fucking groups, fake. I cut off at that moment. I was polite on the outside but seething inside. Leaving him, he calls me back, chuckling and gave me the traditional “present box”...I kept waiting (you never leave the master until he signals you to)...Him laughing again...Again he called me back...I had planned to meet a friend to celebrate after...I wanted to get out...I was devastated, but no tears...I took off my *mala*, flew back to Perth, convinced it was the biggest sham...Went back to Subiaco, happy to see the kids, didn’t talk about it to people...Called friend, Indivar, who asked how it was.. I told him about last *darshan*. He started laughing. I wasn’t. I was pissed off. He said “Sounds like he pulled the last Daddy rug from under you!”...After I hung up...I started to understand it over the next few hours, giggled a bit...thought “you bastard!” No one had ever opened me up so totally before...the good girl, try hard girl.... I put my *mala* back on and wrote to Osho that I got it...Coming near to a master is like coming near to fire...Someone said to him that he had taken their mind and broken it, now he was taking their heart and breaking it and he said, you’re right.... Drop into your being...when you do that you become clear.

[s\_14]

The most phenomenal thing on this planet...is living truth. First time I met it was when I came close to Osho. To come physically close...is a bizarre phenomenon for me and others. Within about 5/6 metres of his body...mind stopped...go into a state of no mind or meditation automatically. Could only attribute this to his presence...a tremendous shock to your system...when all you’ve ever known is mind and world of illusion...shocking experience for that to all stop. Not much memory of the first meeting...in a state of awe, like looking at a beautiful sunset.

[s\_3]

I remember the first time I saw Osho...when he first came out onto the podium I was surprised he was such a tiny man...expected him to be huge, but as soon as I saw him, it felt like there was honey in me, it was just a honey pot dissolving. Just felt so surrounded by love, even if there was nothing else, he was a medium for a love, that’s what he was surrounded by and that’s what hit me. Besides that I had a wonderful time in Pune...it was a time of excitement, of expanding boundaries...Some of the ideas and things, I hadn’t even thought about before. Suddenly, yes! I felt myself expanding. Some of the things I didn’t know if I could handle all at once...I sat with Osho...he gave me one of his gowns, it was a humbling experience...I felt surrounded by love, can’t remember what he said. ...As far as what he said (shakes head)...Even when I listen to his discourse now, I don’t hear much of what he says. What struck me was when he said that what he was really saying was in the gaps between words. I’ve never been a very wordy person anyway.

[s\_7]

I sat in audiences when Osho spoke...Never met him...He was an individual...had a strong presence, charismatic...Impressed me with even silence...He used lots of props and rituals to augment his aura, but he was an impressive human being.

[s\_10]

I couldn't help but adore this man...At Pune 1 it was a waterfall of unconditional love...was hard thing to say no.

[s\_6]

Osho was a really amazing individual, a flawed spiritual genius. He helped many...there was warmth, an unspoken connection.

[s\_8]

*Darshan*; I was turned away the first time – perfume...The second time I wanted to take *sannyas* because I felt rejected. He gave a long talk...He had a beautiful voice...his eyes were a window into something indescribable, beyond.

[s\_13]

I couldn't believe he was a human being initially, he was completely different. He had a crystal clear aura...He was like a quantum leap above other people in manner, love and his behaviour towards people...To be in his energy field...was like a vacuum...no thoughts, clarity, another level of perception, everything was more intense....Can't categorise him...Something happens when you're around him, his ashes. Something changes in your being around a master.

[s\_4]

What kept me there...in my first discourse...Couldn't believe he was speaking spontaneous poetry. He was drawcard, beautiful to look at, graceful...Osho had extraordinary ability to tune into people...watching him in dialogue with people was amazing.

[s\_5]

The quality of being around him was much more than just the stage management of discourse...It was an experience of being met and known and accepted absolutely...It's life changing...More than being met by a lover, not physical in that way.

## (e) Contradictions

[s\_2]

I understood that they were contradictions, but never thought it was a load of shit...sometimes I'd have a chuckle.

[s\_14]

With Osho's words, the interesting thing was that on every subject he has agreed with both sides. He would use one or the other as a tool to make something clear...One month he would talk on the writings of Buddha, the next on Kabir or Gurdjieff...These people may be saying opposite things on the surface and both be true in the context of what they were saying and who they were talking to, but he would use them to elucidate on a point...it's dangerous quoting Osho because somewhere you'll find him saying the exact opposite on important points.

[s\_7]

He would say the opposite of what he said yesterday... The point being, if there is a rule and you just apply the rule, eventually you will get it wrong. You've got to see past regulations and rules.

[s\_6]

Contradictions. If you didn't like what he said wait. He regarded words as counters, not coins. Like Buddha, you can't have truth in words...One day Zen was superior, the next Sufi was better...He would completely inhabit whatever view...I loved that about him...It meant it was hard to make a set teaching, although people did. If you really listened, it was harder for organisation to get into you.

[s\_8]

Contradictions...So you would choose your own rather than depend on him.

[s\_13]

Contradictions: Would have been ridiculous for Osho to have a set dogma...it would have become antiquated...everything changes, is complex...was fascinating he could see things in so many ways.

[s\_4]

I've never seen Osho as contradictory...He was a genius who had the ability to reflect different facets of diamond as it is.

[s\_5]

Why contradict? Could be seen as confusing, but for me, no. I saw it as (1) He was in the moment. It was the truth about that thing to that person in that situation at that time. He might have talked about another aspect to another person, at another time...and that was also the truth. It was about seeing the Truth as multidimensional. His message is multidimensional. (2) It was to throw you back on yourself, not to set a line, although there was probably a party line on some points, but in terms of what his message was about, it was to find the truth in yourself rather than relying on what was set or written because then there was no ability to change. He wanted us to be spontaneous and responsive and you can only do that by responding to the moment.

(f) Women

[s\_3]

For Osho... Women are the first to jump into things...it's much easier for a woman to open up to truth...Men have to drop their macho...was run by women, female-oriented...didn't notice more women than men.

[s\_7]

Osho said, in the beginning, that women fall in love with him, then men with the women. But then men with him.

[s\_6]

Gurus were a recent idea in the West...in Eastern religions, women can't get enlightened...in Jainism, Buddhism...women are considered inferior spiritually...Osho said very much that man and woman should be equal...women running things was a way of redressing the balance...He did say that a guru needs a certain aggressive energy, a more male yang function...I have no opinion on the subject...Women today are doing powerful work...No reason why they can't be...there'll be more in the future, politicians, racing car drivers....

[s\_8]

I was working for Laxmi, Sheela, and Dutch...Being so close to the women running the commune was interesting for a social worker...They were powerful but I survived without any negative experiences. Some didn't...Bhagwan put a lot of women in charge as an experiment – we've had enough of men, let's give women a go...I don't think it worked very well...Some abused their power. I didn't always feel close to the women who ran it but running an organisation of that size would not have been easy...I knew most of the women in power on the Ranch...It was sad what happened.

[s\_1]

There were always more women *sannyasins*...true of every "cult" – women find it easier to surrender.

[s\_4]

There were many women...Buddha refused to ordain women as nuns because he thought that his movement would only last hundreds not thousands of years. Earlier religions made women out to be devils or temptation. Osho felt that women were enslaved. History had to be righted. He consciously gave status that had been denied to us. He also spoke a lot about feminine qualities, that we all need them...he had great respect for feminine qualities...

[s\_17]

When I went to Pune I felt like stepping back in time because of my feminist beliefs. Women were almost archetypal handmaidens to Osho, doing everything. Men were the dentists, the doctors, high up...women do the work, organise, and always try to look beautiful, so they never got beyond that. But in terms of the community, it didn't really matter...A lot of the time women who went to the top were like Maggie Thatcher. The *sannyasin* world was a complete reflection of what was going on in

the rest of society. There were notions of women in power but they were not strong in terms of spirituality. They were bitches, like Thatcher.



## (g) Sexuality

[s\_1]

Sex and Rolls Royces basically picked up by the press....

[s\_2]

Prior to doing meditation and with Osho sexuality was always absolutely naughty, forbidden fruits in a very convenient closet and I quite liked that because it was all I had ever known...I've always enjoyed my body...liked dancing ....did a lot of sport...so I "loved sex" before meditation and Osho...Looking back...I had a lot of lids and morals... Osho said, it was as ordinary as washing your hands, was a part of your life energy...In my thirties, I had the wonderful opportunity to explore my sexual response.....I guess all the bits that hadn't happened when nature says it should...The body wakes up around thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, if we're all "natural" and it's really cooking and going bazonka, up until your mid thirties...Well I was sitting on it...fantasising, hoping for the handsome prince...and all the movies...from my good training...so it didn't really happen for me until my thirties...that's not to put down what had preceded that time...I had a great sexual story with one man for nearly thirteen years, three babies...it's all sexual, I mean the whole of life is sexual...And I've just had four years where I haven't seen the backside of a bonk, if you want the truth... but it's fine too...I'm at another point in my life...but I don't walk around telling anyone that I'm celibate, that I'm going to love again...I don't know any of that...but I think there's a period in your life when the body wakes up sexually and then it goes to sleep...I think it internalises. To me, that's what the fifties, the menopause is like. I think if someone knocked on my door and touched my heart...you know, very respectfully, softly, slowly...I would be awake and rocking and rolling like I did at twenty-five...But the external signals go in...so I don't sit around thinking oh I'm horny, I hope someone drops by....can't be bothered. But I love my body, I like taking care of it, I also abuse it.....Sex is great.

[s\_3]

I know that free love and sex had always been the connotation of *sannyasin* community, but for me it was having closeness with other people...blowing off steam, dancing full blast, freedom without criticism..... Sex was no pressure ...no gang bangs...I had several different lovers in Pune but nothing kinky. Quite the opposite – we were into sex as meditation. It became a lot more satisfying. I didn't really have too many one night stands. I wanted to find out what it was like, if it was any different... Didn't make a loose woman out of me. I do feel I have experimented with boundaries of sex and don't feel as if I've missed out on something...My husband probably had just as many lovers and sex in his life. It's not peculiar to *sannyasins*...I don't know anything about any sexual abuse...There could have been instances...

[s\_6]

It's not a new idea. It's basically what Freud was talking about with Eros. Your life energy is basically sex. We come from sex... If you repress sex, if you repress your sexuality, you are repressing your life force and there will be in some sense in which you will always be stifled. People...geniuses and strong leaders, highly self-actualised people, are often very highly sexual people as well, and it often gets them

into trouble. And they often have, not always, have issues around society accepting their level of sexual potency and that kind of thing... What Osho's prescription was, that basically he just took over the old hippy idea of free sex, you know if you're not with the one you love, love the one you're with... and any hanging onto a single partner, or ideas of fidelity, or ...that's basically a psychological trap and jealousy is something you should work on. He did not at all value the mature relationship between a man and a woman, in a loving relationship and I think in himself, he had never experienced it, quite frankly. Due to the unique circumstances of his upbringing and enlightenment. I don't think he ever had that. He had lots of people who loved him, and people looking after him, but I don't think there was ever that mature man and woman one to one thing, where both parties are equal, and there's a mutual commitment to the love that surrounds the relationship. He didn't experience that, didn't value that and nor did the organisation, or the teaching. And I think it's been a legacy of great sadness for the cult. A lot of people have never been able to – not that it's very common that it happens anyway – I mean mostly what you get in normal society is a kind of caricature of that but every now and then you do get a genuinely happy marriage, it is possible. And it should be part of spiritual life, teaching people how to get that and I must say that my wife and I were helped – and she also was in the cult – greatly by the teachings of an Australian master called Barry Long, who recently passed away... it was like the antidote to Osho and he had a very trenchant critique of Osho's teachings in that respect... that would be my take on Osho and sexuality... He also talked a lot about Tantra and there was a group called Tantra, but it had nothing to do with the Buddhist, Hindu tradition of Tantra, which had a very prescribed, disciplined form of sexual meditation, it was more like a free for all, allegedly freeing up the sexual energy and one I must say, one valuable aspect of it, and this was also true to some extent of the whole hippy thing, was that by experiencing multiple partners, you did begin to realise the emptiness of that experience at a physical level, which if you were always with the same person, you might have it in the back, wouldn't that be nice. If you do get to experience that personally, then you do get to see that it's a dead end. It's not really much fun. It's actually more rewarding to actually explore the depth dimension with one other person... Bhagwan as a sex guru? People are obsessed with sex. In the west, you either had to repress it or give into it. On the one hand, censorship, on the other... internet: fascination/prohibition..... No reflection on Osho at all.

[s\_17]

Sex – I think it was tame compared to suburbia, all the wife-swapping happening from the sixties in Aust. Scratch the surface of middle-class Australia or anywhere, you'll find... all notions of sexual abuse, church, all hidden. Whereas, *sannyasins* were just honest about it... A friend of mine, a devout Christian was having an affair with a man she met at church, in his own home, while his wife and children were there.... I never went to any orgy... it was quaintly old-fashioned, compared to suburbia... I was a virgin when I got married/engaged, then on the pill in 1968. Then there was the sexual revolution so we were off having affairs... my husband was trying to organise wife-swapping, so *sannyasins* to me were very quaint, honest... *Sannyasin* male lovers were in general so incredibly amazing compared to others... there was a sense of being-in-the-moment... Having done a lot of meditation, experiencing the moment, silence, being witness to self, being able to be present, more aware of the interaction, slows it down, like eating a strawberry, *really* eating a strawberry... No lessons written or spoken, my personal experience... that it

stretched the moment, each touch stretched...it becomes meaningful...I thought Wow this is good, no matter where they came from...In India I had three lovers in three months...that's not a lot...from different parts of the world.

[s\_7]

Sex guru: was often the point in which people in the west came to hear about him. He used it effectively as a PR hook, with the view that all PR is good PR. True; he was telling westerners that at some point in the process they may need to engage in lots more sexual activity...but Osho wanted westerners to consider sex as not a big thing... just something people do. He wanted us to... get past the fascination with fucking...to focus on the spiritual...he recommended that people just fuck a lot, then move on. The ultimate intent was you don't need to fuck a lot. ..I think he was not so much a sex as an anti-sex guru...Fucking was handled in practical way in Perth. There was an STD chart on the wall. People with no STDs on one side...so and so's off limits today. It was practical, sensible.

[s\_10]

He was teaching "let go", "surrender", let go of the past, surrender to the moment...he was saying follow your energy...giving you permission to explore in a Tantric way...To the outside world it probably looked irresponsible...he taught that the best way out is through...Osho wasn't obsessed with sex but could see that we were repressed...sexuality and violence...had learnt them in culture...we had to unlearn...his message was that you are already it, but covered over...so there was peeling, knocking, scraping...Title of "sex guru" was kind of a media thing...as a guru, he was one of the first to address the issue. "You guys need help with sexuality, I can do that".

[s\_8]

Sex guru...The press grabbed hold of it...People who came to the ashram with worries about sex could do something about it...To me, it was no different to ordinary life...You go out on Saturday night...He wasn't urging people to just have sex...Very few religions see sexuality as a way to god...For *sannyasins*, sex can be spiritual.

[s\_13]

The title of sex guru...was created by Indians...Here was a new form of *sannyas*, it included women...In Pune, holding hands was very radical...You had to pay the police to allow it...In early Pune days it was dangerous at times...Indian men used to come into the ashram and hassle women all the time...It was one of the reasons it became expensive in the ashram...they were predatory...Osho saw celibacy as repression, damaging...Sexual energy is the same as other energy, you have to move it higher...To transcend anything you need to go into it deeply...At around forty-two, the sexual urge drops unless you haven't gone through it...To experience life deeply, including sex, you need to go openly...then you need to leave it when it drops away...It was the same as being in the west...It was OK to have sex, but not required...There were plenty of celibates...It was OK to do what you want to do as long as you don't hurt anyone else. There was lots of freedom...Guys didn't have to pretend they wanted deep and meaningful relationships...I've been monogamous for twenty years...It's fine...I'm more interested in going more deeply into the relationship...I see in young people confusion around sex, romanticisation,

expectations...I had a wonderful time having sex with a lot of people, but I'm not interested anymore...Osho's aim was to get us enlightened.

[s\_4]

I had tons of relationships...three long term ones for five years each...I want to write an article on post-menopause...I'm fifty-seven and have been celibate for six years...very happy...equating sex with life...people haven't lived out sexuality...I was able to live it out...I used to have migraines...Osho asked, "do you find it easy to have orgasms?". I said "no"...He helped me to get rid of blocks in the body...they dissolved, shifted...I became an exuberant person...I'd had the Christian tradition around sex...When he told sexual jokes I used to blush, was shocked...then I learnt to laugh at myself...As he said, sex is simply a play of energy, so I played...Osho as a "sex guru"...He always thought he should be called anti-sex guru...in *From Sex to Superconscious*...you need to be transcended, to get beyond sexuality...you can't repress it like monks do...it will lead to paedophilia...The way beyond is through...I was never invited to any "sex orgies".

...He has talked about homosexuality and lesbianism as a perversion, but also said that Socrates, who was homosexual, was fantastic, enlightened...However, whatever your sexuality, you need to go beyond...Loving the same sex, he saw as a kind of retrograde step...You need to go beyond that...But there were many gay and lesbian *sannyasins*.

[s\_5]

I was probably more sexually free, sure of who I was before *sannyas*...Probably the reverse for lot of people...In the seventies...I was a lot freer and had more sex before I became a *sannyasin*...For people who are repressed...Indians very much so, so when they heard about indiscriminate sex ...it just tickled their imagination...It wasn't advertised...We didn't need to do anything...the press just picked it up and ran with it...In reality sexuality is not about property...it should be an alive...a response to feelings...It makes relating into relationships...He always said relationships are dead...Was only titillating to those who were repressed...Osho said that if you totally go into something and allow yourself to be that, then it will drop away of its own accord...Now in my fifties sex is different but I have no regrets...In Pune 1, one person relationships were looked at a bit oddly...He didn't want people to get stuck.

The mainstream view saw Bhagwan as a sex guru who had lots of women. The media jumped on it. Our focus on sexuality had a few functions. (1) Wanting us to always be in touch with who we were, especially our sexuality. Because of restrictions in society, people were interested. In Indian society, there was no sex out of marriage. Although we were westerners, we were still repressed, especially in the seventies and eighties. So for Bhagwan to talk about sexuality, it was inflammatory. (2) To get past restrictions and conditioning to get to who you are. Sex is one way into divine...Not to go out and make love a lot, but to bring awareness into the act.

AIDS. First became aware of it at the Ranch...the first world festival in 1982...A lot of precautions were taken – AIDS tests and such...Osho said they didn't know how it was spread and as they were more sexually free, needed to be careful not to become conduits for it, so he instituted practices...First, no kissing (he thought it was passed on through saliva – now know it's not)...Was interesting because they was a

lot of kissing normally... Suddenly, without kissing, it felt like Pride and Prejudice... Made us more aware of other elements... Then, we used protection, condoms, surgical gloves... We had to get used to touching with gloves... If you were having oral genital sex, you used gladwrap or didn't do it... Putting restrictions where there had been none had effects... It didn't stop people making love, we just were more aware... We were certainly the first society in the world taking precautions... They started testing all the Indian workers... Some with AIDS were sent away, some women... Don't know if they were told they had AIDS or not... Here, there was some discrimination... Everyone was having tests before going to Pune. There was one question about homosexual experiences and I said yes... There was a delay getting the result... I had to phone several times... I think it was because we were *sannyasins*... Osho's view of homosexuality... He said different things at different times... I heard him being supportive but less so in the early days... He saw male/female relations as more natural... One gay friend of mine was cut up after a derogatory discourse... People often shared rooms in communes... three or four beds in a room... No inhibitions about others loving there... We were skilled at giving each other space... There was a sense of privacy even being with people... Often others or I was making love with others in the room....

(h) On being a *sannyasin*

[s\_17]

Wherever you go, through the network, you connect and meet *sannyasins*...It's not a spoken thing... To be a *sannyasin*...there are no rules...there's nothing spoken or written that says this is how you will be...no written dogma about how, what, who does it, it just happens...There are about five celebrations a year here...Someone will organise it, no one is destined to, it just happens...If I were a religious *sannyasin* I would say it happens because of Osho, and maybe it does but I don't know, not sure.

[s\_8]

Being a *sannyasin* was saving the world by saving yourself first...It was difficult to become a *sannyasin* because it was the most uncomfortable experience you could ever have in your life...*Sannyasins* are a difficult group of people. They are intelligent, have money, and are not always nice...as in any group.

[s\_3]

The idea of having to wear a *mala* and put on orange was really difficult for me to take on board but I could understand the whole thing about if you couldn't change your outside image, how could you begin to work on your inside image? I could see that that was what was meant by the whole thing. As soon as I accepted that and took it on board, it was quite easy. I could see it caused huge reactions with my family, those around me, but slowly they could see that there was no huge negative change so they took it on board...Took them awhile to adopt my name...Took a long time, but many of my friends' families never used their *sannyas* name and my family, they could see who I had become, so they accepted that.

[s\_2]

Whenever I get simple, or out of mind, busyness, all the things that trip us up, feel kind of pointless, aimless, cheerful and amazing things just happen around me, it is that reflection thing. I mean, for all the names that he gave, every name had an opposite meaning, the play with that, my name's opposite is dark night of spew. They're just plays, they don't mean anything but it was a technique of dis-identifying with the past...Using my legal name...doesn't matter, doesn't mean anything...Interesting though, over the years, how when we came back from the ranch after it shut down people who read the paper who thought they knew how Osho, Sheela and the whole thing worked, because they'd read the newspaper, a lot of them, when the ranch was over and Osho said to take off the orange, take off the *mala*, put on the colours of the rainbow and dissolve into the world...So a lot of people who heard about that thought 'it's over'...I was working a lot in real estate...knew a lot of people and all these people, who knew me for ten years, quite happily started calling me my legal name...I thought oh right, so that's how your mind goes...but the ones who knew me best, nothing changed.

(i) Sheela

[s\_1]

Salmonella poisoning – that was Sheela and others...She definitely went completely crackers. She had a very strong effect on those people. “We’ll follow you Sheela” and that’s what happened. Quite gruesome, really gruesome when you tell the story. It’s true, she was a terrorist...Problems started when Sheela came, then it went downhill from there...She was a horrible, ghastly woman, on an ultimate power trip...wanted to get her hands on the Fremantle community. My theory is that the community was doing well, was solvent, making money (all communities sent heaps of money to Bhagwan)...But because we were independent...Sheela liked things run her way...she became involved in the business of an independently wealthy *sannyasin* here (Jay Harman)...managed to get lots of money out of that. Basically, she took over the commune here, much to my horror as I was commune coordinator at the time. Sheela did ridiculous things, was grandiose, a very powerful woman, intimidating, rude to the media, got everyone’s back up, turned everyone against *sannyasins* in general. Not one *sannyasin* has a good word for “that woman”. It was a classic case of abuse of power, it went to her head...It was their own fault as well as they kowtowed to her, were split...it felt wrong, but thought it must be right...thought I was doing what Osho wanted. The smarter ones left. Others hung in. Sheela held the ultimate threat – “don’t do as I say and you can’t see Osho”...The Ranch was a closed community. She kicked a lot out of Oregon. This kept them in line through 1985...

Before Sheela’s visit in 1985, when we were first in Fremantle, the general reaction was, “Who are these weirdos in orange clothes?”. But that changed when people saw how hard and how well we worked – running successful businesses...We had our own friends in the larger community, were mostly well-liked, made a big effort to get along with people, weren’t controversial, kids went to local schools, generally liked and loved.

[s\_10]

In the old days Freo was one of the top places to be a *sannyasin* in the world, in the late seventies, early eighties. It was a strong community, bonded together by Bhagwan. There were about four hundred *sannyasins* in WA....It was going and blowing and was a high time of the *sannyasin* community with lots of people coming and going.”...Then Sheela came...I immigrated to US....Sheela pretty much trashed the whole thing.

[s\_4]

I didn’t get on with Sheela, and like many others, I was not aware of Sheela’s “politicking”...Given the sheer size of the ranch, 125 square miles, it meant that you could be quite happy in your own corner, “never really knowing what was happening elsewhere on the ranch”. Not everybody could get in... He saw in Sheela a rough diamond, a risk but she had potential...was strong woman, an organiser. He gave her a lot of power...and we all know power corrupts...it went to her head. She wasn’t a meditator by her own admission...She’d been a barmaid...given her background...a sudden rise in status...a sort of queen ...She mishandled her power...Sheela gave me a hard time because I was one of only twelve “energy people” which was considered to be a “privileged position” by many. Sheela was “jealous of people close to Osho”.

My first so-called “punishment” from Sheela was to clean the toilet and shower trailers. But, as it was the middle of summer, in the end the whole exercise worked in my favour... I was able to shelter from the extreme heat outside, “singing my heart out” and taking cool showers inside. I thought it was “a great lesson in making what you want out of life, even if you were receiving “punishment”.

[s\_17]

Sheela – Osho was a fool, going silent and trusting her. If a *sannyasin* thinks they’re different to the rest of society, they’re very disillusioned...Not any better, not worse, just a part of society, lucky to experience love connection on occasions. We’ve got all the foibles of the rest of society, no doubt about it.

[s\_13]

Sheela...doesn’t deserve a lot of air space. Osho gave her the space to work out her issues, she did a bad job. Somehow, whatever you need to deal with, they’ll be a space to do that in Osho’s Buddhafield. The whole thing of him encouraging her to be outrageous, don’t know what that was about, doesn’t matter to me.

[s\_5]

I met up with her here but never really liked her. Knew her in Pune 1 and thought she was extremely egotistical, very bumptious, out there, making all sorts of claims....I couldn’t really see why Osho thought she was so great...but it was a case of her being really special to Osho so I just had to accept what she was doing and who she was...I remember in Pune 1, Sheela was showing someone around the health centre saying this/ and that was hers. She owns this, she did that...I thought Where’s she coming from?...But Osho was building her up so that she could become a conduit for him when it came to moving to the US, because though they looked for a site in India, they couldn’t find one. Osho needed medical treatment that was only available in US, which is why he left...Sheela had US citizenship so she was useful...When Sheela was here, there were already negative feelings...At the Ranch Sheela was secretly getting more and more power...When Sheela was here on TV and said “tough titties”, I saw her as brash and uncouth, trying to be outrageous, trying to stir up the media, as Osho had done, as he had been so controversial, but she didn’t have the sense of how to do it. Not that it was ever going to be anything other than negative press ...alternative religions etc...were not accepted...Much more acceptance now but not in the eighties...Now alternative ways of thinking, spiritual practices are considered mainstream...I felt that Sheela was not a good choice, never felt connected to what she was doing...I think Osho actually allowed the whole Sheela thing to come to a head. People would say that it was a way for us to learn that we needed to take responsibility for ourselves and not put it on other people...That you could only ever make decisions about who you are and where you’re going yourself.



(j) Kids

[s\_3]

My children (they were five and three) became *sannyasins* in India, then went to schools in Germany and Medina in Britain...It was good and bad for them...who their father was...children sensitive, not all has been good...Their father had been diagnosed schizophrenic...Kids were affected by this...Their life was not ideal, but I think both have good memories, particularly of the school in Medina... I have the belief that all is meant to be as it is, of not beating myself up with guilt...For the kids, also positive sides... Hard to talk about children. Only because I know they've had a hard time with themselves.... I don't know how much of it is to do with background being *sannyasins*, or genes.... They both had a bit of struggle but they'll get there...Both in Freo, living close to each other...I have a granddaughter.

[s\_9]

Meditation and children don't go together...It was difficult to be a parent in the commune...I looked after kids in Oregon...Never heard of sexual abuse of children and wouldn't believe it...But I heard from the ranch...that children didn't get enough of their parents...some kids were OK, some not... Some kids did suffer actually...In some ways kids got treated better...Some were too little, wanting their Mummy and Daddy.

[s\_5]

Kids were secondary in Pune1...Lots of people had vasectomies performed in the health centre where I worked, voluntarily, and women were sterilised...It created a view – if you wanted to have kids in Pune 1, you were seen as being a bit anti-*sannyasin*...Though kids were accepted, they had a particular role...They were supported but not in the same way we support them here in society...I think kids got a bad trot...many were neglected...People had to put their energy into their own growth, working through their trips, conditioning and in doing so they would often take stuff out on the kids, or expect kids to be adults...As a social worker I saw things I thought were not good practice, or nurturing...But I'm not saying that all people were like that...there were a lot of young people in Pune, lots of Aussie kids They were starting to get into mischief...Because they felt it was safe there, they allowed kids freedom...Osho felt freedom had been stopped...Kids in the commune had more opportunity for it...I see *sannyasin* kids today have a sense of knowing who they are...Not that it doesn't happen for kids not in communes...Because they started getting into mischief Osho said kids had to be with an adult in the commune. So a school was set up... I never wanted to be sterilised, never liked an unnecessary operation but also never wanted to take time off work...grateful I didn't.

Karri Valley – K said she loved it but missed her mum...They got an early sense of the importance of knowing who they were...It's what was special about *sannyasin* kids...I don't think kids should have been sent down to Pemberton...Their place is in the family environment, they flourish more, get their sense of identity...the connection is going to happen much more in a family situation...We didn't really have family situations here in the communes because everyone was like an individual ...shared a room in a house with a lot of *sannyasins*, doing a job, going off to work and whatever... Was not so easy to be a parent and a commune member...When Pemberton was bought to start up a kids commune there...The

reason for having a kids commune, whether there, England or a section where kids lived on the Ranch was... Osho, although he loved kids, they were secondary to what his purpose was about and if we stopped and had kids and got involved in parenting, then where was the energy available for our own spiritual growth and helping the commune to grow and keep moving? I think kids were probably a bit of a hindrance and because our country and people get supporting parents benefits...I know a lot of *sannyasins* in Australia with children who travelled to Pune and the Ranch with children and we probably had more kids than other countries, probably because of social security laws (or not).

Pemberton. The people there were stirred up by Sheela and that meant that country people (don't want to generalise) can be a lot more conservative; like the "rednecks" in Oregon. They were concerned that they would all go down there and take over. Course we weren't – why would we go to Pemberton?? But there was that sort of fear and so people would drive past and there were guns. I don't know if there was shooting...might have been someone a bit drunk or...but not like anyone was taking deliberate pot shots at people.

[s\_11]

The commune here in Karri Valley...was a school...When it was just for WA kids, it went OK... Some little ones were too young to be without their parents... When Sheela came she sent kids from all over Australia to Karri Valley. The kids arrived distressed...it was too much for them. It unsettled the whole mob.

[s\_21]

I didn't like the way kids were being worked on the ranch.

[s\_12]

My daughter was pretty scornful up until her early teens. My son was easy going. I felt it was important not to impose any religious instruction on kids...Osho said it was always good to give children *sannyas*...it plants the seed...I didn't know what to do so I wrote to a woman in Pune, explained the dilemma...not sure what to do (twelve year old and eight year old). She sent back applications saying they're old enough to make a decision, let them decide. So I did. My son said "Yes"... We sent away the application, got a name, but he never used it until he left home about two years ago... suddenly he said "I'm going to be \_\_\_ now"...For ten years he didn't ask, but occasionally meditated...My daughter has maintained an interest but never applied to become *sannyasin*...It's up to her...She did ask the other day if I still had application form...she has occasionally meditated with me too...Left home a while ago...I think my daughter did find it difficult in the early years...when she went to school...her mother with a funny name..."why can't we be normal?"...she was a bit embarrassed...But I think teenagers usually find something to be embarrassed about with their parents so it might have been something else.

[s\_17]

Being a *sannyasin* is a private thing, an inner journey...It no real impact on my kids...I don't think it made any difference to them, except when I went to India...my oldest son wanted to go, showed interest...same with the rest of family...nieces, nephews like calling me Aunty N.

[s\_2]

Margaret River...it was loving, clean, caring...The kids were absolutely blossoming creatures. They weren't tortured, put to the stake, told to chant when they were meant to be having a meal...And I set out to be the best mum I possibly could... I was never more than two to three months away...that was the longest I wasn't there, but then they were with their father... I always felt...the commune was another way of talking about extended family...aunts and uncles...let it all happen...and that became my life in the commune...so glad I could offer my children that... I felt pretty sure all the way that it was a good experience for them...with its glitches, nothing's perfect...Of course, glitches happened...But, in the big picture, I think they had immense inspiration, immense support and they always knew who their mother was and they always knew who their father was...The nuclear family in short, I think is a very dangerous arrangement. I think it's a way of controlling people, of isolating people...I knew I wanted to have kids, I knew I wanted love but I didn't want the walls...My kids were in the ashram school...A spreading reality in ordinary creative terms...They did audiovisual editing in the US...did carpentry...There was high energy, for kids as well...S was into photography...M into graphic stuff...My daughter into secretarial stuff...They did school, this was after hours...They worked as adults...Parents took turns with looking after the kids, but if kids got sick, they stayed with them...Never got anything from Osho about having too many kids.

[s\_7]

I don't have children...Perhaps the view was expressed that one had a responsibility to oneself so as to get the most out of life...to have as few encumbrances as possible...Yet in the seventies kids were there...I never felt any dictum, thou shalt not breed...With me, the experience of working with underprivileged kids, as a late teenager doing that work, the prospect of raising children seemed daunting...I watched poor parenting...To be a good parent is difficult...I'm still not ready.

[s\_1]

Family – some people lived in “normal” situations, others like a kibbutz, parents together, children all together...Wasn't that different to “outside” really...Lack of family values?...absolute nonsense, they loved their children...My children didn't go...I admire my children...Many kids took *sannyas* without knowing what was going on, they were so young. My children were older when I joined, were quite against it, peer group pressure...were not interested.

[s\_4]

The story was that all women had to be sterilised. I got sterilised because I was clear that I didn't want kids. It was nothing to do with Osho saying so. He had an amazing high regard for individual freedom. It wasn't about telling us what to do or not to do...There was a school in Pune, but it is difficult to go through your own growth process and look after kids properly. But people did it.?

Kid *sannyasins*...articulate, able to talk about their feelings, loving, lovely easiness...Found this with a lot of *sannyasins* kids.

### (k) Bhagwan's ideas

[s\_1]

Bhagwan was interested in life, love and laughter, to squeeze the juice from life, not waste life, not waste time. The number one aim was to know yourself, to go in, to be true to oneself and each other. .... It was what drew us together. And also we worked very hard. There were a lot of talented people. We were pragmatic about whatever worked, made money – we had successful restaurants, a building company, lawyers. All the money was pooled. Jobs were rotated. It was easier than being individual. All cleaning, cooking and other everyday housework was done by someone. Children were looked after... We lived at an intense pitch most of the time. There were extreme highs and lows, depending on what was happening with Osho.

[s\_2]

It's the mirror phenomenon, and Osho just poured it on, for years – 'don't kid yourself, where are you'. He used to describe meditation as the windscreen wipers on the car...that's what a meditation does, it just clears the window, it doesn't bring up fairies and magic and goddesses and St. Pauls and blinding lights, it just...ah, that's how it is and thinking stops, smelling happens, seeing happens, wonder comes in, the phone rings, the phone doesn't ring, wow twilights happening...got a lecture, it's nine o'clock, well jump up now and get things ready...you know.... He also talked a lot about the difference between...you know that word 'responsibility'.... Osho talked in one lecture...responsibility is actually a very beautiful word, it means the ability to respond...He talked in length about the difference between reaction and response...big things like that have never left me and I'm constantly going, oh what are you doing? That's a bloody great reaction...the response is, I'm here...it's got nothing to do with habits and reactions and... being the robot. And I do watch it in myself...ask myself is that a reaction or a response and it's not analysis, it's just my little dialogue with me...when you're reacting there's not a lot of energy.... When I'm responding I feel quite wild, exuberant, light, dangerous, annoying....

[s\_14]

People are always of a certain type, attracted to a certain lifestyle. Osho attracted a certain type of human, very rebellious, people who exceeded the bounds of civilisation, who wanted more....rebels, adventurous, wild, crazy, alive, young and angry... Osho was interested in these people....we were so constrained by the conventions and morality of the day...Millions came...the way he set up his discourses...got rid of a lot...One in a hundred stayed...He got rid of them by speaking radically...saying stuff that would freak a person right out...he pushed boundaries, all the buttons. In one lecture he would attempt to push the buttons of society as quickly and as hard as possible. If you had investment, position, belief system, morality etc, he would upset you...Either you got very excited or very angry...time was short.

[s\_3]

Meditations... he said there's no point in sitting in a corner meditating on your navel because none of you have that kind of peace within to do that yet...just a whole lot of suppressed stuff...It was different...he said you won't find peace until you find the environment to express...This caused creative fear in other people...everyone

thought it was about sex, drugs etc. In the sixties and seventies, others were experimenting without being *sannyasins*.

[s\_7]

Rajneesh was not looking for traditional Hindu *sannyasins*...to follow a rigorous, ritualised path...He was offering something more fluid, or rapid like the Japanese Zen school of instant awakening, that it can happen...That appeals to people in the West... Underlying what Osho talked about was the concept that human beings could evolve in some spiritual sense (enlightenment). I would never say that I was enlightened...I came to experience the probability that people are not the same. In the ashrams, some people seemed qualitatively different...Lot of exercises and psychological work...to offer Westerners especially a taste of the actuality of this...Meditation...For me they were useful examples of different ways I could be experiencing the world...thoughts pushed out...extremes of activity...It was a practical illustration of problems caused by the mind...For me it was a large experience...Don't know if I would have had it if not with Osho...Possible it was Osho's emphasis to have that volume of emotion...He used to talk about if enough people were together, it would pressure cook itself...It was verging on psycho/spiritual, but it seems to work like that...Not wanting to reduce to physicality...Something happens to people...It's what's at core of all art, religion...Is wonderful, essential...This guy could put his finger on it...All other cults try to mystify it...that God's doing it ...But for Osho..it is you, I'm not doing it..It was expansion not power.

[s\_10]

Osho created situations, set them up, which would shake you...you could lose bits of yourself...but wake up and be a different person...like a space shuttle coming back...at the end of the process you're a different person...Before I was a lot more fear, I was boring, lacked courage and spontaneity...A lot of this came from being raised...Dad from the war...picked up, probably in the womb...Now I'm more of a risk-taker.

[s\_6]

I can't speak for the others, but in my case it was the combination of modernity and Eastern spiritualism, that he has been on about...we had been seeking, looking at lots of different spiritual and psychological traditions... from Sufism to Tibetan buddhism, to Gurjieff's fourth way work, some of the human potential stuff coming out of Big Sur at the time, the Esalen Institute. Suddenly here was a place that spoke about all these, seemed to be a concentrated...he seemed to be a cross...he wasn't preaching narrow, dogmatic, Hindu or Sikh or Muslim viewpoint, he seemed to be escaping from that...he was extremely well read...he could quote JP Satre and TD Suzuki in the same breath...a very overarching and syncretic understanding of the whole spiritual movement and I think that was what intellectually attracted me, but there was also an undefinable kick inside that said you've got to go and meet this guy.

[s\_1]

Osho talked about the mind as a screen...when you're watching a movie, watch yourself watching the movie, there was always this thing of standing back... don't be identified with your mind, or see that you are identified with your mind.

[s\_4]

Osho systematically knocked the pillars of society.. He was anti family, religion, politics....For Hindus, life was *leela*, play. Purposelessly means you create significance...in everyday things....Osho had a sense of humour...He said don't take things so seriously...Osho said therapists have missed me the most (that is, not understood) because they have the most crystallised egos...a feeling of being pretty 'evolved'. Osho was not just like coming to a supertherapist...but a whole other realm that hurt egos... Male egos were particularly hurt...Like they were in competition with Osho...He was adored by men and women.

[s\_5]

I think his vision and understanding was so huge...Was like taking us outside of ourselves, our conditioning, to see what is in us is the very essence of life...Hard to talk about in concrete terms...Was something you needed to experience...He wasn't wanting us to worship him or setting himself up as a god....Yet for a lot of people, they wanted to have someone to love, to elevate and he would allow that because for many people it was their path, they needed it. For others it was a different path...My path was meditation...I'm not a 'lover of Osho'...I would say I have a profound respect for him, that there is love in me that is him, but I'm not 'in love' with him...looking for the vastness and stillness within ourselves, in everything. When he talks about consciousness, it's not individual, but beyond to a wider consciousness.

He talked about the screen of consciousness. We're always throwing onto consciousness our own idea, or vision which comes from our own conditioning, our sense of right and wrong, our needs, desires, memories, hopes, fears, lusts...We throw it out onto a situation so you can't see a situation clearly for what it is. Only when you step back from your own ego, can you get your own sense of who you are, go beyond, can get a wider picture...consciousness...pure awareness, crystal clarity, vast, dissolving, a letting go...It was this that he wanted us to look at and not get caught up in our own very limited personal view of things...But you often have to work through that to get to beyond, so therapy groups were to help you see more clearly.

[s\_17]

Osho talks about being a "witness", part of which is having to observe everything about the self...bliss is the issue, but observing you see cracks, pain, hurt..You can't be blissful all the time if being "witness"...He said you're everything, holographically, saint and murderer. I'm a holographic representation of the whole of mankind and the universe so everything – good and bad – is in me...But you can't be blissful all the time.

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