

The Rise & Fall of Rajneeshpuram

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Seeing Red In Cattle Country

The Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (later known simply as Osho) was born Chandra Mohan in the village of Kuchwada in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on 11 December 1931. Due to the grace with which the young boy carried himself, his family began calling him “raja” or “king.” By his own account, he attained the state enlightenment on 21 March 1953, though he kept it a secret for many years after. He taught briefly at a Sanskrit university and began traveling the country teaching. By the early 60’s he was conducting large meditation camps at locations such as Mt. Abu in 1964. In 1970, Rajneesh settled in Bombay where he began to give regular discourses to a growing number. It was in Bombay that Rajneesh initiated his first disciples giving his twist on the ancient India tradition of sannyas.



In 1974, the movement, under the management of Ma Laxmi bought land in the Indian town of Pune, north of Mumbai (Bombay). Laxmi was the first in a line of powerful female “personal secretaries” that would hold despotic control over the management of the business of running the religious movement. Rajneesh and his group of early disciples moved to Pune compound, located in the Koregon park neighborhood, and established the Acharya Rajneesh Ashram.

At the ashram, Rajneesh gave daily morning discourses (alternating Hindi and English) and held evening meetings, darshans, where he initiated new disciples and answered personal questions. Throughout the 70’s, the ashram attracted increasing



numbers of international visitors and became one of the focal points of the spiritual tourism that flourished throughout the decade.

The topics of Rajneeh's talks ran the breadth of the religious spectrum—from Indian teachers, through Jewish mystics to the wisdom of the Zen Masters. He introduced several revolutionary “active” meditation techniques, designed specifically for the western mind combining exorcise and mindfulness. In addition to a wide and varied selection of meditations, a multitude of therapy techniques and workshops arose at the ashram. By the late 70's the “therapists” had become something akin to a priestly class within the movement.

In 1981, another female disciple, Ma Anand Sheela, displaced Laxmi as Bhagwan's secretary. Under Sheela's direction, they began searching for land large enough to establish a commune. Laxmi was effectively banished from the ashram, sent out to search for possible sites in India. Meanwhile, Sheela funneled several million dollars to a small New Jersey meditation center, Chidvilas. Later in that year, Rajneesh flew to the United States on a medical visa granted under the pretext that he was to receive treatment for his back. The group remained in New Jersey for a few months and then moved to Oregon where Sheela had purchased a defunct ranch known locally as “the Big Muddy.” The ranch consisted of 64,000 acres (126 square miles) of Oregon desert land and very few buildings. Though Sheela presented herself a shrewd business person, she paid \$5.75 million for land that was assessed for the previous year's taxes at only \$198,000.

Over the course of the next three years, Rajneesh sannyasins would transform this unpromising parcel into a city that supported at its height 7,000 regular residents with 15,000 annual visitors (mostly concentrated into annual July-August “World Celebrations”). The city, incorporated briefly as Rajneeshpuram, Oregon, had its own post office, school, fire and police departments, downtown malls and restaurants. Its state-of-the-art reservoir even won an award for its innovative ecological design.

Change of this scale, of course, put stresses on the local community. The commune residents, especially the management, were very quickly at odds with the nearby town of Antelope. The Attorney General of Oregon, David Frohnmeyer maintained throughout that the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram violated the constitutional separation of church and state. His action against Rajneeshpuram was still working its way toward the Oregon Supreme Court in 1985. An “environmental” group 1,000 Friends of Oregon also fought the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram from the first public hearing onwards. Due to the questionable standing of Rajneeshpuram and the objections of 1,000 Friends to commercial use of the Ranch, the Oregon Land Use Commission suggested that the



sannyasins locate their publishing and distribution business in the closest town, Antelope. The commune began to purchase real estate in the town and sannyasins registered to vote. Before sannyasins relocated there, the population of Antelope, OR was 40 mostly elderly and retired. Due to the influx of new residents, 3 sannyasins were elected to the 6 person town council. The 3 older councilors refused to sit in the same room with the newly elected sannyasins and effectively resigned their seats. Through default the Rajneesh followers took over the city government. Around this time the 40 original Antelope residents attempted unsuccessfully to disincorporate the town.

A similar chain of events occurred with the town school board. At the resident's request, the sannyasins had agreed to educate their children at Rajneeshpuram and not Antelope schools. The school tax the residents of Rajneeshpuram paid, however, continued to support the Antelope school. Sannyasins were then elected to the Antelope school board. The previous board had gerrymandered the school district in an attempt to keep Rajneeshpuram outside of its boundaries. The county invalidated the election of the non-sannyasin board members, because in the redrawing of the district they had mistakenly drawn their own homes outside the new district. Not residing in the school district they were no longer eligible to be on the board. Again, the sannyasins "took over" by default.

Both of these occurrences and the sannyasin purchase of real estate in Antelope—the mayor herself working as real estate agent for most of the transactions—were used against the Rajneesh sannyasins. Attorney General Frohnmeyer, state congressmen, state senators Hatfield and Packwood as well as the "concerned citizens" of Oregon viewed these actions as a take-over and argued that the aggressive sannyasins would not stop short of attempting to take over the county and then the state. The sannyasin presence was quickly characterized as a threat to the very way of life of eastern Oregon. Sannyasin control of Antelope was seen as a *coup de tat* and not the democratic process at work. By many of the government players, the taking over of the school board was the moment that the tide turned completely against the commune and its residents.

Throughout this period, Rajneesh himself was entirely silent. When he came to America, he had entered a silent period—never speaking publicly, instead, he said, teaching through his presence. As the Oregon battle began to hit the national media, first appearing on an episode of ABC's Nightline in 1983, the U.S. immigration service began arguing the invalidity of Rajneesh's visa. His medical visa had been renewed as a teaching visa and, the authorities argued, one could not be a teacher if one did not teach, i.e. talk publicly. Ironically at the same time Oregon's Attorney General was arguing that



Rajneesh and his followers were a religion and as such were violating the constitutional separation of church and state.

Rajneeshpuram exemplifies both the best and the worst of modern cult phenomenon. The collective activity of the commune residents gave rise to the greatest intentional community experiment the modern age has seen. In an article in *The New Yorker*, journalist Frances Fitzgerald detailed some of the accomplishments the commune had managed by 1983: cleared and planted 3,000 acres of land, built a 350-million-gallon reservoir and 14 irrigation systems, created a truck farm that provided 90% of the vegetables needed to feed that Ranch, a poultry and dairy farm to provide milk and eggs, a 10 megawatt power substation, an 85-bus public transportation system, an urban-use sewer system, a state-of-the-art telephone and computer communications center and 250,000 sq. feet of residential space.

On the other side, the commune was a complex business structure built to centralize absolute power in one person, Ma Anand Sheela. She and her band of loyal supporters ran the commune with an extremely heavy hand and provided a combative public face that was readily and appreciatively displayed by the media. By 1985 there was increased hardship and unrest within the commune itself. Sheela and her coterie of female managers, known collectively as the “Mas,” created what Rajneesh himself would later refer to as “a fascist concentration camp.” Upon entering the U.S., Sheela had established the religion of Rajneeshism, created a bible in the three volume *Book of Rajneeshism* and began to style herself a high priestess. By 1984 she had begun wearing “papal” style robes. Bhagwan’s own silence lent de facto support to Sheela’s transformation of the movement.

It is without question, that power corrupted Sheela. She described herself as Queen (and Rajneesh was her king) and started to speak of sannyasins as “her people.” She relished confrontation and pursued rather than backed down from a fight—whether with the media, local officials, INS inspector or a fellow sannyasin. When she spoke, it was taken as if Rajneesh spoke. She was the metatron speaking for the silent, remote godhead.

During the later period of Rajneeshpuram, a tension arose between Jesus Grove, Sheela’s compound and Lao Tzu House, Rajneesh’s residence. In late 1984 Rajneesh began speaking again to small groups of sannyasins invited into his house. When Rajneesh informed Sheela he would begin speaking, witnesses report, she begged him no to. When he finally did begin talking publicly again, Sheela spent days in her room crying. Rajneesh’s talks were video-taped and later played to the full commune. During the summer of 1984, Sheela attempted to cancel the public display of the talks, claiming



that they were interfering with the work of building the commune. A minor rebellion erupted and she relented, allowing the videos to be shown late at night when few of the exhausted sannyasins could manage to stay awake to view them.

Satya Bharti in her book *Promises of Paradise*, describes one night where the video was not shown. Sheela announced that the tape had been accidentally destroyed. In this talk called simply “number 20,” Bhagwan spoke out against Sheela and her management of the commune, saying that she had transformed paradise into a “fascist concentration camp.” He also outlined his concept of a world filled with autonomous communes where no person would have absolute power.

Ma Nirgun (Rosemary Hamilton), Rajneesh’s cook during the later commune period, relates her experiences of living in Lao Tzu House in *Hellbent for Enlightenment*. Under the pretext of security Sheela ordered the construction of a large fence, complete with guard towers, around Rajneesh’s residence. Guards armed with Uzi’s followed Rajneesh and his entourage everywhere. No one entered or left Lao Tzu without Sheela knowing about it. Nirgun tells of one day walking outside the house and realizing that the fence was not to keep attackers out, but to keep the residents in. “When I got back to LaoTzu, I suddenly saw it with new eyes: a prison. The high link fence, the gates that delivered a powerful shock; the guardhouse towering over us, manned round the cloke by two still figures holding guns—until this moment I had seen them as a deterrent to hostile outsiders. Now they seemed to be directed against us.” She also tells of a conversation she had with one of the sentries, a sannyasin who had previously been a friend of hers. She asked why the sannyasin attitude toward her had grown cold and distant. He replied, “Sheela’s orders.” Nirgun asked if Sheela had explained her order. “She says it isn’t good to get friendly with people you might have to shoot.”

During this time Rajneesh issued lists of “enlightened” sannyasins. These lists were interesting more for the people that they excluded rather than included. Sheela and her group were conspicuously absent. It’s my feeling, that Rajneesh was using these lists as a means of destabilizing Sheela’s power, which rested ultimately on her connection to the guru. Simultaneous with this, Rajneesh orchestrated a relationship between his personal physician Amrito and Ma Prem Hasya. The latter was a member of a wealthy clique of Hollywood-connected sannyasins. In this way, Rajneesh established a connection with an alternative to Sheela’s management team.

In September 1985, Sheela and a small group of core supporters abruptly left the commune for Europe. The day of her departure, Rajneesh held a press conference where he accused Sheela of stealing millions of dollars and attempting to murder him, several sannyasins and local politicians. He publicly repudiated Rajneeshism and his role as



guru. “I don’t give them any commandments,” Rajneesh in a 17 July 1985 interview with *Good Morning America*. “I insistently emphasize that they are not my followers, but only fellow travelers.” He also called on the FBI to conduct an independent investigation. The FBI quickly found an extensive eavesdropping system that was wired throughout the commune residences, public building, offices and even Rajneesh’s own bedroom. Authorities also uncovered a secret lab where, according to later testimony, Ma Puja, the commune nurse referred to by some as “nurse Men gale,” had run a poison lab experimenting with biotoxins—including HIV and salmonella.

It was later revealed in court testimony that Sheela’s group had attempted to poison two local communities by dumping salmonella into salad bars of several local restaurants. According to a report published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the true cause of the mysterious outbreaks would never have been discovered if it were not for the testimony of conspirators. Salmonella sample disks discovered at Rajneeshpuram were subsequently matched to the strain of bacteria isolated from the salad bars. This episode has the unfortunate distinction of being the first instance of modern bioterrorism in the U.S. Sheela’s group also allegedly fire-bombed a county records office in The Dalles. One of the charges most heavily investigated was the poisoning of Swami Deveraj (later Amrito), Bhagwan’s personal physician. After the July 6 discourse, Ma Shanti Bhadra hugged Deveraj and jabbed him with a needle. The syringe contained a still unidentified poison concocted by Rajneeshpuram nurse Ma Puja. Deveraj became gravely ill and almost died at the Madras hospital.

In October 1985, Rajneesh himself was on a private plane headed secretly out of the country accompanied by his physician Amrito and new secretary Hasya. The plane was seized while refueling in Charlottesville, North Carolina, and all on board were arrested. This began a long process of returning him to Oregon to face immigration charges for allegedly arranging sham marriages. Rather than flying him to Oregon, federal authorities opted for driving him across country. For several days during the journey, even his attorneys did not know where he was.

Within a month, Rajneesh was again on a plane headed out of the country having entered an Alford plea to two counts of immigration fraud. He briefly returned to India and then onto Kathmandu. This began what his followers term his “world tour” which included refusals from more than 17 countries and forcible deportation from two, Greece and Uruguay. He and his followers maintained that the resistance of countries to allow his entrance was due to secret behind-the-scenes pressure from the Reagan administration—a charge not entirely lacking in credibility.



By the end of the Oregon experiment 25 sannyasins were charged with electronic eavesdropping conspiracy, 13 immigration conspiracy, 8 lying to federal officials, 3 harboring a fugitive, 3 criminal conspiracy, 1 burglary, 1 racketeering (RICO), 1 first degree arson, 2 second degree assault, 3 first degree assault and 3 attempted murder. A complex series of plea bargains followed. Sheela was fined \$400,000 and ordered to pay \$69,353 in restitution. She was sentenced to concurrent prison terms of 20 years for the attempted murder of Sw. Deveraj, 20 years for first degree assault in the poisoning of county commissioner William Hulse, 10 years for second degree assault in the poisoning of commissioner Raymond Matthew, 4_ years for the salmonella poisoning, 4_ for wiretapping and 5 years probation for immigration fraud. She served only 2_ years in a federal medium security prison and was released for good behavior in December 1988. Ma Puja also received concurrent sentences: 15 years for the Deveraj murder attempt, 15 for the Hulse poisoning, 7_ for the Matthew poisoning, 4_ for her role in salmonella poisonings and 3 years probation for wiretapping conspiracy. Puja also served only 2_ years of her sentence. Like Sheela, she served her sentence at the federal prison in Pleasanton, CA and was released in December of 1988. Rajneesh was charged with one count of criminal conspiracy (RICO) and 34 counts of making false statements to federal officials (INS officers). He entered his plea on two counts of immigration fraud and agreed to pay \$400,000 fine. He was given a 10 year suspended sentence and ordered to leave the country and not return for a minimum of 5 years. Rajneesh corporations agreed to drop all appeals to the ruling that Rajneeshpuram's incorporation was unconstitutional, abandon all claims to the money and jewels impounded in North Carolina, to pay \$400,000 to the State of Oregon in compensation for investigative costs, \$500,000 to settle the claims of four restaurants who suffered losses due to the poisonings, an additional \$400,000 to the restaurant owners, \$5 million to the Oregon state victim's fund and to sell the ranch. In exchange Dave Frohnmeyer agreed to drop all RICO charges against the corporations. (Carter, pp. 236-238)



Sannyasins in India finally reached a settlement with the Indian government concerning back taxes on the Pune ashram and Rajneesh returned to his homeland. Through the late 1980's, Rajneesh dropped off the spiritual radar. He dropped the title



Bhagwan and, later, even the name Rajneesh. His followers began calling him simply Osho, a Japanese honorific used when referring to a Zen master.

In 1989 Bhagwan again stopped talking publicly due to his failing health. His final discourse ended with the last word of the Buddha, *samasati*, “remember that you are all Buddhas.” In that year he instructed his followers to build him a new marble bedroom following his detailed design. He spent only a short time in this new space, before saying he preferred his old bedroom. In January 1990, Osho passed from his body instructing his physician to place his favorite socks and hat on him. When asked what they should do with him after he died, he said simply, “Stick me under the bed and forget about me.”

Through the course of the 1990’s, Rajneesh, now packaged as Osho, became again an important figure in the spiritual and New Age landscapes. His ashram in Pune transformed into a meditation resort (complete with an air-conditioned modern hotel and tennis courts) is now, once again, a popular destination for Western seekers. His books are again available in U.S. bookstores. The Indian government, once his adversary, now respects the potential tourist dollars represented by Osho and his resort. The library of the Indian congress has established a separate Osho collection, an honor only held by one other, Mahatma Gandhi. The *Times of India* named Osho one of its 10 most influential Indians of the 20th century.

The events that comprise the rise and fall of Rajneeshpuram raise many more questions than can be answered in a single introductory article such as this. Rajneesh stated that he wanted everything that happens after a religious teacher dies to happen while he was still alive. He often spoke of the mechanism that led from a Buddha to the creation of a religion and how that process destroyed the religiousness of the teaching. I think that the Oregon experiment was an attempt by Rajneesh to facilitate this process through the simulated death of his silence and ceding control to Sheela. In this way he could himself short-circuit the development of a religious orthodoxy and protect his sannyasins, later termed “fellow travelers,” from the deadening of meditative/devotional religiousness.

This obviously leaves many larger questions unaddressed. Most notably among these is the question of the responsibility of a master for his disciples. Rajneesh himself asked pointedly after the departure of Sheela, why the sannyasin residents of Rajneeshpuram had not done anything to stop her.

Perhaps the facts, lies and enigma surrounding Rajneeshpuram will permanently occlude the full appreciation of what attracted thousands of people to him. All else aside, Rajneesh’s teachings represent a post-modern synthesis neither equaled nor paralleled in the 20th century. The breadth of his knowledge and his deft interpretation of ancient



masters is unique. His influence, mostly unacknowledged, has been wide spread throughout both modern devotional spirituality and the New Age movement. Many a Rajneesh therapist, dehypnoterapist, has become popular guru or teacher. When one reads in a biographical sketch that the teacher spent years in India studying under an unnamed guru, it is more often than not, Rajneesh to whom they refer.

The Pune resort is now run by a group called the Inner Circle, a body designed by Osho prior to his death. A second group of sannyasins have coalesced around the Delhi meditation center, led by Indian disciples Swami Chaitanya Keerti and Ma Yoga Neelam (Hasya's successor as personal secretary and form Inner Council member). A multitude of issues mark the divide between these two groups over the role of the guru, devotion vs. meditation ("path of love" and "path of meditation"), the copyright of his books and art, the access to his teachings, the management of the commune/resort, etc. The articles collected in this issue, reflect voices from across the spectrum of sannyasin experiences centering both on the ranch experience and the time that followed.

Better Dead Than Red

In the course of four years, the followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh did what no one thought they could. They raised a city from the desert. They established an almost completely self-sustaining community of several thousand on land that was though capable of supporting only nine head of cattle. Now almost 20 years later, it is evident that the episode of Rajneeshpuram stands for other things as well. The events of 1981-1985 expose the pervasiveness of American xenophobia and the potential for the American legislative and judicial systems to be used by a few, with the backing of the masses, to destroy a foreign, unfamiliar, minority.

Even before coming to the United States, Rajneesh was on the radar screens of the U.S. State Department. After the murders and mass-suicide at Jones Town, the U.S. government began to monitor gurus and religious groups that attracted a large American following. In the late 70's, CIA agents were often rumored to be among the visitors at the Rajneesh ashram. At the very least, the American consulate in Bombay sent reports to Washington regarding the activities of Rajneesh and his Pune ashram. Those reports contained specific references to State Department concerns that Rajneesh would try to relocate to the United States.

In 1981 Rajneesh and a small selection of sannyasins rented the entire first class section of a commercial airliner and flew to New Jersey. Notable for her absence was Ma Laxmi who had been left behind in India with a directive to look for land suitable for



building a large commune. At the time that Rajneesh traveled to the U.S., everything points to his visit being temporary and actually related to the medical concerns which had provided the reason for his visa. Ma Anand Sheela appeared to be the only person then working toward making Rajneesh's stay permanent. Soon after the group arrived at the New Jersey meditation center, the recently purchased "castle," Sheela set off to find land for a commune in North America.

From the moment that Rajneesh first stepped foot on American soil, he was a matter of "concern" for the U.S. government. By 1984, 17 different local, state and federal agencies were actively investigating the activities at Rajneeshpuram. White House documents show that Edwin Meese III, the "shadow president" of the Reagan administration, noticed the Rajneesh "situation" as early as 1982. The presence of the Rajneesh commune almost immediately created fear among the local Oregonians—especially the few remaining residents of Antelope. Destruction of the commune became a crusade for Oregon Attorney General David Frohnmeyer and the private activist group 1,000 Friends of Oregon (coincidentally founded by the Attorney General's brother). In a 1984 interview in *The Oregonian*, congressman Bob Smith stated he had begun "pounding" the INS to resolve the Oregon-Rajneesh "issue" in April 1982.

As the old saying does: Just because you are paranoid, does not mean they aren't out to get you.

From very early on, the town of Rajneeshpuram was tied up in a constant barrage of litigation. Numerous lawsuits were filed by 1,000 Friends, the Attorney General's office and private citizens. In April 1983, a horse owned by Harry Hawkins, a former Jefferson county sheriff who had been hired as Rajneeshpuram's first police officer, was killed by buckshot. On 29 July 1983, three bombs exploded at a Rajneesh owned hotel in Portland. Oregonians began wearing T-shirts that had a picture of the Bhagwan driving a Rolls Royce caught in the cross-hairs of a rifle scope while another shirt read "Not Wanted Dead Or Alive." The bumper sticker "Better Dead than Red" became a common sight throughout eastern Oregon. In 1985 several attempts were made to enact legislation that specifically attacked the legitimacy of Rajneeshpuram and sannyasin activity. The Oregon Secretary of State authored a ballot question, wording approved by Attorney General Frohnmeyer, that read "Shall City of Rajneesh (Antelope) charter be repealed, city cease to exist, and Wasco County assume city's assets and liabilities?" (*The Bend Bulletin*, July 3, 1985)

One of the most persistent myths of Rajneeshpuram over the years following its dissolution is the assumption that the commune blew apart from the inside. This notion,



that the commune simply disintegrated due to internal fractures and tensions, fits snugly within the popular conception of cults, that they are inherently fleeting, frenetic, fluid and unstable. The truth is that the commune suffered an unremitting and coordinated harassment from the local, state and federal government. This coupled with the tide of resentment and distrust in the local communities created a situation of extreme pressure on Rajneeshpuram and its residents. Sheela's tactics and combativeness rose in direct proportion to the pressure exerted on the commune from outside. Her reactions, increasingly ludicrous, were generally the result of new attacks from authorities. Her strangle hold on control of the commune also increased in relation to these external forces. These threats also, ironically, became an element in her power providing the important element of us-against-them paranoia necessary for the success of an absolutist regime. This was only exacerbated when Rajneesh began speaking again in 1984—a fact which immediately began to work against Sheela's power base.

Rumors and myths about the strangers in red began immediately after their arrival at the Big Muddy. The commune was spending tremendous sums of money on development and the creation of city infrastructure. This seeming limitless supply of ready-cash convinced federal law enforcement officials, that the money stemmed from illegal activity such as drug smuggling, gun running or both. In fact the cash was coming from a series of lucrative and highly successful business ventures abroad. Sannyasins operated almost half the vegetarian restaurants in Germany and Rajneesh discotheques were springing up all across Europe. These businesses coupled with the growing number of meditation centers and local communes were sending millions of dollars to support Rajneeshpuram.

Another persistent rumors of illegal activity at Rajneeshpuram remains that the sannyasins were stockpiling weapons. Media reports of the day often focused on images of Uzi toting sannyasins. By 1985 Sheela was always shown wearing a gun on her hip. The reports all failed to mention that the photographed sannyasins were members of the Rajneeshpuram police force—a state recognized law enforcement agency whose members had been trained at the State Police Academy. Sheela and other sannyasin spokespeople, such as mayor Krishna Devi, did nothing to dispel these rumors. Instead through 1984 and into 1985, they stepped up the rhetoric and counter-threats. Newspapers quoted Devi as warning that they would take 15 Oregonian heads for every sannyasin killed. Sheela repeatedly asserted that the residents of Rajneeshpuram were ready to defend themselves—use of the words “war” and “blood” were common. When federal agents searched Rajneeshpuram after the Bhagwan's departure, no stockpile of weapons was discovered. Divers from the Navy Seals were brought in to search the two



lakes at Rajneeshpuram. Media reports of the searches failed to mention that no cache of weapons was present. According to subsequent reports, the Rajneesh sannyasins did not possess any weapons inconsistent with a municipal police force.

In his book *Passage to America*, Max Brecher interviews two soldiers-for-hire who allege that they were offered money for killing Rajneesh. In both instances, the individuals were sure that the CIA was ultimately behind the payment offers. John Wayne Hearn, now serving three life sentences for three gruesome murders for hire, admits to working for the CIA on several covert operations, including running guns to Nicaragua and assisting in a plot to overthrow the government of French Guyana. Hearn claims to have been offered a significant amount of money to blow-up several trailers at Rajneeshpuram in an attempt to scare the sannyasins. The second man Don Stewart recorded his conversations with his contact who went by the name Wolfgang. In these conversations, Wolfgang specifically mentions government agencies targeting Rajneesh. Wolfgang's plan was to assassinate the Bhagwan during one of his daily drives. Once a day Rajneesh would drive his car along a commune road and sannyasins would line up to watch their guru drive by. For Wolfgang, and presumably his backers, the killing of a couple of hundred devotees was more than acceptable if Rajneesh was taken out. It is ironic that in both these instances, the soldiers turned down the offer due to the rumors they had heard about the commune being an armed camp. The prospect of being trapped by a couple of thousand armed zealots proved an unacceptable risk.

Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the President authorized the CIA to investigate foreign entities on U.S. soil, thus sidestepping the congressional mandate against domestic CIA operations. In December 1981, President Reagan signed Executive Order 12333 which authorized federal law enforcement agencies to hire outside people to conduct illegal break-ins for the purposes of obtaining evidence. The executive order specifically allowed that evidence thus collected could be in turn used to obtain a legitimate search warrant.

Beginning in 1983 and increasing through to the dissolution of the commune in 1985, military jets from Whidbey Island Naval Base conducted regular flyovers of Rajneeshpuram. In violation of FAA regulations, the planes routinely flew extremely low over the commune disrupting daily life and, in several instances, jeopardizing civilian air traffic at the Rajneesh airport. These flights were ostensibly routine training missions—at times even using the commune buildings as fake targets for bombing runs. The flights also included reconnaissance and surveillance. Twin-engine Mohawk surveillance planes from the reconnaissance unit in Boise, Idaho also conducted recon over the commune. In the taped conversations with Wolfgang, he also mentions



participating in aerial surveillance. Both the INS and U.S. attorney's office conducted aerial reconns over Rajneeshpuram in 1985 as part of their preparation for arresting Rajneesh.

On 13 May 1985, the police of Philadelphia, PA dropped a C-4 bomb onto the headquarters of M.O.V.E., a back-to-Africa movement. The police had attempted to serve warrants on members of the movement and they were allegedly fired upon during the attempt. After a brief siege, Philadelphia Police Commissioner Gregore Sambor ordered the dropping of a bomb onto the headquarters building—one of several row houses in the Philadelphia residential neighborhood. (*The New York Times*, 14 May 1985) The ensuing fire destroyed 61 row houses and left 251 people without a home. (CNN, 24 June 1996) Following the bombing, Commissioner Sambor was reelected and U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese III applauded the operation as a superb success for American law enforcement. By 1996 the city of Philadelphia had paid out almost \$30 million in lawsuits resulting directly from the M.O.V.E. operation.

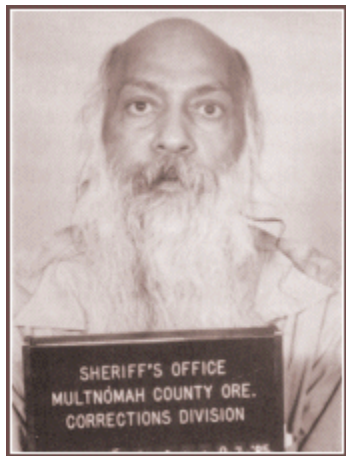
In the summer of 1985, Sheela retained a top immigration lawyer, Peter Schey, to represent Rajneesh in his ongoing battle with INS. Schey immediately began negotiating with U.S. District Attorney Robert Turner, who had already secretly convened a grand jury to investigate alleged immigration fraud at Rajneeshpuram. Schey wanted to insure that if indictments were handed down that the indictees would be allowed to surrender themselves to authorities at a location outside of Rajneeshpuram. Schey was confident that he had an agreement to this affect with Turner and that he, Rajneesh and any others indicted would be notified 24 hours in advance and be allowed to turn themselves in to the court house in Portland. Despite this, according to INS deputy counsel Mike Inman, Turner had no intention of allowing Rajneesh or anyone else to surrender peacefully. Instead, in Inman's words, Turner was set on "storming the Bastille." According to Inman, Turner wanted "to utilize the Oregon National Guard, the FBI and the Immigration Services Border Patrol, and storm the compound with force, and go through the barricades and fences." (Brecher, p. 275) Turner had developed a plan, according to Inman and others involved, of serving the warrants unannounced. INS agent Joe Greene testified under oath that Turner no intention of allowing the Bhagwan to surrender at a neutral location. According to the plan, state and federal law enforcement, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, would show up unannounced at Rajneeshpuram and on a bull-horn inform the residents that they were surrounded and that the indictees had 1 minute to surrender. National Guard troops would be concealed in the nearby hills to provide back up if necessary. Given the then generally accepted



rumors that the commune was a “militarized camp,” this plan would seem to have been intended to provoke an armed confrontation.

The government’s plan for Rajneeshpuram eerily foreshadows the later federal assaults on the Branch Davidian compound at Waco, Texas and Randy Weaver’s cabin at Ruby Ridge, Idaho. In these two instances, similar tactics, to those proposed by Turner, were employed with very tragic results. In these cases, the fear that stockpiles of weapons were present was used to justify the excessive force employed. Through the period leading up to the arrest of Rajneesh and again during the siege at the Branch Davidian compound, media pundits repeatedly raised the specter of Jonestown. The deaths of the Davidians is still often represented as mass suicide, rather than the consequence of the government’s assault. It is not difficult to imagine what would have happened, if Robert Turner had been able to proceed with his surprise entrance into Rajneeshpuram. One can also assume who would have been accused of “firing first.”

Turner’s plan was unexpectedly thwarted before it could be implemented, when on the afternoon of Sunday 27 October 1985, two privately chartered planes departed Rajneeshpuram Airport and began to make their way across the continent. Rumors were flying that arrests were imminent. In actuality sealed indictments had been handed to Turner the previous week. Rajneesh’s non-sannyasin attorney Peter Schey twice flew from Los Angeles to Oregon to discuss the rumored warrants and to arrange for the peaceful surrender of Rajneesh. On both occasions Turner denied the existence of warrants for Rajneesh or anyone other sannyasin. Turner claimed that he believed that a peaceful surrender was impossible and that by telling Schey he would be tipping



Rajneesh off and allow him time to flee. Sheela had departed the commune the month before under a cloud of accusation and suspicion—the Bhagwan, himself, her principle accuser. Despite the fact that no indictments had been announced nor warrants served, frantic calls went out to law enforcement agencies across the country to apprehend the “fugitives.” The planes landed at a small airport outside of Charlotte, North Carolina for refueling. Agents were waiting and the Bhagwan and his entourage were arrested without incident. Though they had been warned that the passengers would be heavily armed with automatic weapons and armor-piercing bullets, the agents found only one small handgun on the planes. At Rajneesh’s bail hearing the next day, prosecutors were unable to present an



arrest warrant from Oregon. Despite this discrepancy, the judge denied Rajneesh's bail. An unsigned, incomplete Oregonian warrant was later presented to the Charlotte court. Court records in Oregon hold a different arrest warrant, however, one that appears to have been forged after the fact and pre-dated.

In a jailhouse TV interview conducted by Ted Koppel and aired live on ABC's Nightline, Rajneesh asserted that he was not leaving the country or fleeing impending arrest. When asked by an incredulous Ted Koppel, if the Bahamas (their flight plans indicated North Carolina, but sannyasins were reported to have been inquiring about



renting a plane capable of over-sea flight) was now part of the United States, Rajneesh claimed to not know where the planes were headed. He said, instead, that he trusted in his friends and all he knew was that they were taking him to some place safe. Given Rajneesh's apparent lack of involvement in his travel decisions during his post U.S. "world tour," it is not out of the question that he did not know where the planes were headed. He would simply go where they were headed like a Zen sage, he was where ever he was. One thing is certain, Rajneesh's departure from Rajneeshpuram stemmed off the government's

plan for a major assault on the commune and, thus, likely spared several hundred lives. By late September 1985, 15 National Guard armored personnel carriers were positioned in the hills surrounding Rajneeshpuram. In addition to the many FBI agents investigating the allegations made by Rajneesh, the state was ready to commit 800 state troopers if conflict erupted and the National Guard had another 600 guardsmen on standby as backup. By September 30, the National Guard had three HUEY helicopters at Redmond airport ready to carry FBI agents and Oregon State Police SWAT teams into Rajneeshpuram. Turner also unsuccessfully requested U.S. Marshal's Service Fugitive



Investigative Search Teams (FIST) and Border Patrol from the U.S.-Mexico border to assist with “mass arrests.”

Even if one rejects his claim that he was not fleeing the country, one question does remain about this mysterious flight: why did they turn east rather than west? If they had chosen to fly out over the Pacific Ocean they would have very quickly been over international waters outside of U.S. jurisdiction. *A Passage to America* author Max Brecher asked this question directly to Rajneesh in 1989, “I left for Charlotte,” Rajneesh answered, “because for six weeks previously the National Guard was on standby around the commune, ready to enter the

commune. Obviously, if they had arrested me there, the 5,000 sannyasins would not have tolerated it. There would have been bloodshed. To avoid this, I went to Charlotte. It was just to avoid bloodshed of the sannyasins. There was no sannyasins in Charlotte to be involved if I was arrested there. And there was a beautiful house in the mountains there for me to stay.” (Brecher, p. 289) When



Weaver was asked about the government’s concern about a bloodbath of innocent sannyasins at Rajneeshpuram, if the commune was stormed by force, he simply stated, “It’s not the government’s job to make those guy’s jobs easier.”

In retrospect, Rajneesh's cross-country flight did not meet the legal definition of fleeing prosecution and he and the other passengers could not rightly be considered fugitives. U.S. District Attorney conceded in the Charlotte court that he lacked the evidence to support his claim that Rajneesh and co. were attempting to evade arrest. Despite Turner's contention to the contrary in court, the pilots filed flight plans that listed Charlotte as their final destination. According to account of the air traffic controller on duty that night, the pilots did not behave in a fashion consistent with someone who was either nervous or paranoid. Above all else, they could not be called fugitives since at the time of their arrests no warrant existed for any of them. The following morning, the federal indictment was unsealed but there is still no evidence that an arrest warrant was issued for Rajneesh or anyone else on the plane. The warrant that is currently on file in



Oregon, though dated Oct. 28, was not clerked into the court house until two weeks after the arrest. The warrant also lists the North Carolina arresting officer, a fact that could not have been known at the time the warrant was supposed to have been issued, since Rajneesh was still in Oregon at that time. Despite these facts, Rajneesh's attorney's conceded that a warrant existed, without having seen it, and the magistrate denied Rajneesh's bail on the grounds that he was a flight risk.

A theory proposed by Max Brecher, and supported by the account of deputy INS council Inman, is that the federal authorities--the INS and the State Dept.--wanted Rajneesh to flee the country. Then they could use the existence of indefinitely active warrants to keep him from ever returning. This plan would have effectively prevented Rajneesh from ever entering the United States again without having to go through the process of lengthy deportation proceedings and the possibility a court could rule in his favor. This would help explain why the INS pulled their support for the U.S. District Attorney's investigation and ordered their field operatives not to assist in the arrest of Rajneesh, despite the fact that all the charges against her were for immigration violations. Turner takes full credit for the arrest. He and a Charlotte INS agent, working against the directives of his superiors, coordinated the bringing in of the U.S. Marshals and the subsequent arrests. It appears that Turner in his zeal to prosecute Rajneesh may have thwarted the governments quiet solution to the Rajneesh problem.

In 13 July 1986 a monument was dedicated outside the Wasco County Court House. Beneath the statue of a stately Antelope read the inscription "Dedicated to all who steadfastly and unwaveringly opposed the attempts of the Rajneesh followers to take political control of Wasco County: 1981-1985." Below this, the plaque carries a quote from Irish politician Edmund Burke "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Above the statue flew a flag that had once flown above the U.S. Capital Building—a gift from Congressman Bob Smith. Were the residents of Rajneeshpuram really "evil" and were the Oregonians really "good"? What is true of erecting monuments is also true of history, they are constructed by the victors. The defeated almost without exception go down as villains within the orthodox historical record. Only two members of the commune could rightfully be described as "evil"—Ma Anand Sheela and Ma Pujā. A few others committed evil acts.

Studies like the Zimbardo experiment have shown that even red-blooded, all American college students can commit the most atrocious acts if given absolute power over another. In the experiment designed by Philip Zimbardo, a group of male college student volunteers were randomly separated into two groups—prisoners and guards. The guards were given uniforms and dark glasses and no one was permitted to address



another by name. A long list of petty prisoner regulations was provided to the guards. The experiment originally designed to last a fortnight had to be ended after only one week, due to an unexpected level of violence and humiliation inflicted on the prisoners by the guards. In his analysis of the experiment, Zygmunt Bauman observes, “clearly and unambiguously, the orgy of cruelty that took Zimbardo and his colleagues by surprise, stemmed from a vicious social arrangement, and not from the viciousness of the participants.” (Bauman, p. 167) In a separate study conducted by Stanley Milgram at Yale University, Milgram demonstrated that most humans possess the capacity of harming another if the instruction to do so comes from one that the subject holds as an authority figure.

Were all sannyasins indeed “evil”? This is certainly the explicit message of the Antelope monument. When the sannyasins first moved to Eastern Oregon, buying land that no one else wanted, they made serious efforts towards creating a positive impression on their neighbors. Sheela regularly held information meetings in 1981, where she presented a pleasant face and attempted to charm the wary Oregonians. The sannyasins went above and beyond in complying with local laws and state land use regulations throughout the creation of their city—a fact that infuriated their opponents in the 1,000 Friends of Oregon and the Oregon Attorney General’s office. Their comprehensive plan was even held up as an example for other municipalities to follow. At its outset the commune developers tried to get along with their neighbors and comply with all U.S. laws. They only moved into the neighboring town of Antelope when pushed by 1,000 Friends lawsuits and at the suggestion of the state Land Use Commission. At the time that the sannyasins began buying property in Antelope, the town was listed prominently on the list of Oregon ghost towns.

Throughout the creation of Rajneeshpuram, Sheela’s arguments and public appearances became increasingly vitriolic and provocative. Also through this time, the commune and its residents were the victims of an escalating bombardment of harassment and threats of harm. The threats and intimidation came from multiple directions and was fully supported by several arms of the federal government. Against this opposition and with the backdrop of the unwelcoming sagebrush desert, it is amazing that the Rajneesh sannyasins accomplished what they did—creating a sustainable, ecologically friendly city capable of supporting thousands of residents.

The history of the United States began with religious dissent—the puritans forging a life in the wilderness of New England to escape persecution. It is also a history of repressing religious difference. The same puritan pilgrims established a cluster of communities ruthlessly intolerant of religious difference—Cotton Mather and



the Salem witch trials being but one example extreme among many. Attorney General Frohnmeyer asserted that a city founded by adherents of one particular religion was unconstitutional. If American history is to suggest anything, the opposite would certainly seem to be the case. Many U.S. cities were established by religious followers in an attempt to establish their own area where they could freely practice their faith. The settling of Utah and the incorporation of Salt Lake City is an obvious example. The anti-cult movement has been an equal and counter-running force within the history of religion in the United States. Just as so-called “new religious movements” have been common since before the revolution, anti-cult movements have been equally ubiquitous. It was this strain of intolerance that necessitated the moves which led to the establishment of new cities based on religious communities. Philip Jenkins argues in his book *Mystics & Messiahs* that anti-cult paranoia has frequently taken hold of the American mass psyche. Phillips notes that the arguments of this reactionary movement were solidly in place by the late 19th century—lurid stereotypes, xenophobia, accusations of mind-control and stories of sexual scandal. We can see all these elements displayed in the concerned voices speaking out against Rajneeshpuram. “When a modern critic attacks a deviant religious group as a cult,” Jenkins writes, “the images evoked are ultimately a mélange of rumors and allegations variously made against Catholics, Masons, Mormons, Shakers, radical evangelicals, and others.” (Jenkins, p. 25) He further argues that the concern over cults does not necessarily correlate to actual threats posed by the cult’s activities. Jenkins observes that “the level of public concern about cults at any given time is not necessarily based on a rational or objective assessment of the threat posed by these groups, but rather reflects a diverse range of tensions, prejudices, and fears.” (Jenkins, p. 20)

So, again, one has to ask, were the Rajneesh sannyasins “evil” for attempting to build their City on a Hill? Or were they simply victims of a cyclic resurgence of the pernicious hatred of difference that has run through the darkness of America since it’s earliest days?



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