

Who protected the Bhagwan? a question still unanswered

by Janine Benton

The Ultimate Game: The Rise and Fall of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

by Kate Strelley with Robert D. San Souci
Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1987
381 pages, hardbound \$17.95

Bhagwan: the God That Failed

by Hugh Milne
St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986
322 pages, hardbound \$15.95

The Golden Guru: The Strange Journey of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

by James S. Gordon
The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington,
Massachusetts, 1987
248 pages, hardbound \$19.95

In 1981, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh set foot on American soil and declared, "I am the messiah America has been waiting for." By 1985, this self-styled "rich man's guru" had been arrested by U.S. federal agents on 35 felony violations of immigration laws and flight to avoid prosecution. His personal secretary and top advisers were also under arrest for attempted murder, assault, arson, and wiretapping. Prostitution, drug-running, and sexual perversion were also part of the cult's stock-in-trade.

Three recently published books on Bhagwan provide ample documentation of the cult's criminal activities, including the murder of the German Prince Wilf of Hanover, Prince Charles's cousin. Bhagwan's days as the head of one of the world's largest and most dangerous cults have ended. But unanswered questions remain.

It is believed that the undoing of the Bhagwan resulted from a decision reached in 1984 by the Department of Justice

and certain Israeli intelligence networks, to dismantle the cult, at the same time that cases were brought against the Hare Krishnas, the Black Hebrews, and several other "New Age" Aquarian cults. One sticky question in the Bhagwan's case, was who would take control of his estimated \$350 million in U.S. assets, a question that seems to be still up in the air.

The other unanswered question is why, in the midst of the much-ballyhooed Reagan War on Drugs, the cult's well-documented drug trafficking has never been a law-enforcement target!

In 1984 a wealthy Hollywood-based Rajneesh follower, Françoise Ruddy, and her British medical doctor husband, Swami Devaraj, were sent into the Bhagwan's Oregon commune. Also known as Ma Prem Haysa, Ruddy is a former member of the Israeli military and also the former wife of movie producer Al Ruddy. Ruddy and Devaraj succeeded in destabilizing the cult command and placing her husband as the guru's personal physician. The cult was ultimately shattered, by playing on the guru's profile as a hypochondriac who was terrified of an AIDS epidemic among his "let it all hang out" free-love followers.

When five followers tested positive for AIDS in 1985, Ruddy and Devaraj began maneuvering to topple the guru's top aide, Sheela Silverman. Devaraj was allegedly poisoned by Silverman in the course of the faction fight, but he survived. A special cult task force of the FBI, Immigration & Naturalization Service, and other law enforcement bodies was formed in 1985. Grand jury investigations of charges of immigration violations, attempted murder, and poisonings were started in 1985 by the U.S. Attorney in Portland, Charles Turner, and Oregon Attorney General David Frohmeyer. And many destabilized followers and top aides eventually provided testimony.

While testimony from "defectors," obtained under these manipulated circumstances, has to be viewed with suspicion, indictments on immigration fraud, attempted murder, and criminal fraud were obtained.

Silverman fled the United States, but was arrested in a safehouse in Waldshut, West Germany, where the cult main-

tains ties to the top leaders of the West German Green Party. Silverman was extradited back to Oregon in 1986 by Baden-Wuerttemberg State Prosecutor Ernst Bauer. The guru was deported back to India.

One thing is clear: Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh enjoyed protection for his crimes at a very high level.

Murder of a prince

Two of the authors, Strelley and Milne, are defectors from Bhagwan's cult. Both suffer debilitating diseases as a result of enforced malnutrition, and both wrote their books to purge themselves of the hell they lived through.

Strelley joined the cult when she was 16. Six months later she was sterilized. At 17, she was appointed "Girl Friday" to Ma Anand Sheela, Bhagwan's personal secretary and chief administrator, a woman who later terrorized the citizens of Antelope, Oregon and directed the salmonella poisoning of over 750 people in the area.

Sterilization was mandatory from the cult's early days in India, even for those as young as 14. In its four years of existence, Rajneeshpuram (Rancho Rajneesh), a "city" of over 5,000 people in Antelope, Oregon, had no births. Doctors who subsequently left the cult report the continuing nightmare of receiving phone calls from hundreds of former followers worldwide asking for the specifics of their sterilizations, in order to try to undo them.

Strelley documents at least two murders: Ma Anand Sheela's first husband, a wealthy New Jersey man and sufferer of Hodgkin's Disease who held a sizable life-insurance policy, and Germany's Prince Wilf of Bavaria, cousin to Prince Charles.

She writes, "Vimalkirti," Prince Wilf's cult name, "was a samurai, who stood guard outside Bhagwan's door. Before he came to Poona [India] he had married Tariya and they had had a daughter named Tanya. . . . At its height, the Ashram [the cult's commune] attracted many high ranking people. . . . It struck us as only fitting that a smattering of royalty would be mixed in. One day the office found out that Prince Charles of Great Britain was going to be in Bombay. Vimalkirti and Charles were old friends who had grown up together, had spent summers together, had gone together to Gordonstoun, the English school traditionally attended by the British Royal family. Vimalkirti, had he lived, would have inherited his father's title. . . . The office decided it would be a great public relations coup to have Vimalkirti go down to visit Prince Charles. Vimalkirti was asked to come into the office. There, Sheela informed him, 'The suggestion is that you go down to Bombay and see Prince Charles, and talk to him. Tell him what a wonderful place we have here.' What they really wanted is for Prince Charles to get directly involved with the Ashram. . . . One of the requests was that he get Prince Charles to come to the Ashram for a visit."

Vimalkirti balked, but he went. He was ordered to spend several days with Charles. Instead, he came back in 24 hours,

without having asked him to visit. Three days later he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and slipped into a coma. He was dead a week later.

Bhagwan told his disciples that he had given Vimalkirti "permission to leave his body." Although the House of Hanover demanded an autopsy, none was conducted. Instead, the Prince's skull was crushed and his body burned before the family could intervene.

Hugh Milne notes that Prince Charles had given Vimalkirti a personal note for Rajneesh (Charles had wired Bhagwan ahead of time to get permission to ask him a question in this note). He wrote to Prince Wilf, "You know since Uncle Louis was killed, I have nobody to turn to for real advice. No one. You are so lucky, Wilf, that you have your guru. I wish I had your freedom to go see a man like that. It is the eyes of these men that are so fascinating. You can see it in their picture."

A week after Charles passed his note to Bhagwan, his cousin was dead.

Not long after that, Vimalkirti's daughter was in London to be one of Lady Diana's bridesmaids. The Hanover family then had her seized and taken from the cult.

Clearly, many questions about the Prince's death remain unanswered, among them: What had Charles asked of Bhagwan? Shortly before his death, the German government refused to allow Prince Wilf and his wife to give up their royal titles.

Milne, ex-chief of security for Bhagwan, draws a seamy picture of the cult's sexual perversions. For instance, at the Ashram in Poona, Bhagwan would have his followers copulate on the stage during his frequent lectures. He recruited the most attractive women to be his "mediums," at one point demanding only large-breasted women, saying, "I have been tortured by small-breasted women for many lives together." He became known as the "sex guru," who gave "gynecological lessons."

Not surprisingly, dozens, if not hundreds, of disciples contracted AIDS while in the cult.

Where was the 'War on Drugs'?

Cult followers were encouraged to turn to prostitution and drug-running in order to make money. Whenever a disciple was about to make a drug run, he would ask Bhagwan "whether it was a good time to go to Thailand." Bhagwan would answer, "Wednesday would be good," or, "Don't go until Friday."

Heroin, cocaine, and marijuana sales paid for Rajneesh's diamond and platinum Rolex watches, and his Rolls Royces. At one point, he had 93 Rolls vehicles. When arrested, he was carrying jewelry worth over \$400,000.

When the cult was in India, followers who ran out of money were told to leave the country (most members came from Europe and the United States), with the understanding that if they transported a drug-laden suitcase through cus-

toms, they would be paid enough to come back to the cult. Several people were sent to prison for this in Europe and India, but not a single individual was prosecuted in the United States.

When the cult moved to Oregon, federal authorities ignored their drug-running, preferring to spend years pursuing them on immigration fraud.

One of Canada's biggest drug smugglers, Robert Franklin Black, was reportedly given refuge in Rajneeshpuram for three years in exchange for \$1 million.

Although the FBI, Justice Department, and the Oregon Attorney General's office spent four years investigating the Bhagwan cult, they did not initiate prosecution until 1985. Finally, the "mayor" of Rajneeshpuram, a cult member, turned state's evidence. Shortly after that, Bhagwan, afraid of being exposed as the mastermind of the whole operation, pleaded that he had been victimized by Ma Anand Sheela (Silverman) et al., and demanded indictments of her and other followers. Ultimately, he was never tried for anything beyond immigration fraud. His only sentence was a 10-year deportation from the United States.

According to Strelley, federal investigators never pursued the tens of millions of dollars Bhagwan and Sheela hid in Switzerland. Milne notes that before he left the cult, he was witness to the massive drugging of thousands of homeless men imported into the commune to swing a local election. He also observed an attempt to manufacture the AIDS virus for use on Bhagwan's enemies.

Nazi-like techniques

The third author, James S. Gordon, actually engages in an exercise in guarded praise for Rajneesh. Inasmuch as the Bhagwan was an evil child of the "New Age," a mystical exponent of irrationalism and perversion, modeled to a striking degree on the mind-set of the inner cult of Hitler's Nazis—as Gordon inadvertently documents—his praise might be thought remarkable. However, since Gordon is a former psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), who in part professes to admire the Bhagwan's mind-control techniques (Gordon calls it "religious philosophy"), his praise may reveal the direction of the answer to some of the unanswered questions about Bhagwan and his cult. Was Gordon really simply doing "research" on the Bhagwan, as he professes, or was his own relationship—and perhaps that of others of his profession—to the Bhagwan something different?

Gordon, who says he began his research as the "cult expert" for the NIMH, reports that he was attracted to the cult by its association with the Eastern pseudo-religious philosophy of the early 20th-century Russian, G.I. Gurdjieff. Bhagwan proclaims Gurdjieff his most important mentor. Gordon does not tell the reader that Gurdjieff, a Russian-Armenian mystic with ties to the famous Rasputin, engaged in sexual perversions and mind-control techniques that were

reportedly used by the Nazis to condition the SS. In fact, Bhagwan often praised Hitler as a "genius."

Gordon seemingly desires a revival of Bhagwan's movement. At the end of the book, he states: "Rajneesh and his disciples have been mirrors and teachers for me. His teachings are, if not original, wise, well put, and easily understood. His commentaries have helped me to explore rich tradition and useful techniques. His meditations are accessible and elegant and have been useful in my life and my work. Rajneesh's ways of peeling the onion of our conditioning have contributed materially to my own and my patients' well-being. He has inspired me to take chances with, to celebrate, my life and my work in ways I might not otherwise have done. His and his disciples' projects, bringing together the ancient wisdom of the East and the material well-being and enterprise of the West, trying to create the new joyous, meditative man, Zorba the Buddha, forming a meditative community that is harmonious and in harmony with nature, are, cannot help but be, my own. . . . For me it is not finally a question of agreeing or disagreeing with Rajneesh. . . . It is rather a matter of learning from him and them, of appreciating his remarkable talents and gifts and recognizing his perverse uses of them, of seeing myself in him . . . of using his extraordinary story and strange, as yet unfinished journey as a mirror for my own."

Bhagwan, too, sees his journey as unfinished. Shortly after being chased out of the United States to Uruguay, then to Crete, where the Greek Orthodox church threw him in jail, and then back to India, he had this to say about his movement: "I do not ordinarily make prophecies, but about this I am absolutely prophetic: The coming 100 years are going to be more and more irrational and more and more mystical. The second thing: After a hundred years the people will be perfectly able to understand why I was so misunderstood, because I am the beginning of the mystical, the irrational. . . . I am a discontinuity with the past."

The American System:

Federal Aid for Research in New Manufactures

High-End Audio:

A Revival of the Spirit of Tom Edison
Manifested in the superb Modern Phonograph,
An instrument inconceivable to the Far East.

For the Balance of Payments—
And the Love of Music and Technology—
This fledgling industry deserves infrastructural support.

The Listening Studio

23 Stillings Street
Boston MA 02210

Service Economies Are for Servants