

# RAJNEESHPURAM

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*In January of 1983,*

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, accompanied by armed disciples in an escort jeep, drove seventy miles southwest to Madras, Oregon, every afternoon in one of his Rolls-Royces. He would stop at a weigh station just outside town, and at the nearest supermarket his companion, a young woman with long dark hair and a china-white face, would get out and buy him a soda; then the convoy would turn around and drive back where it had come from. Every afternoon around the same time, the Reverend Mr. Mardo Jimenez, of the Madras Conservative Baptist Church, would look out of his office window and see the convoy turning at the weigh Station. Finally, he could stand it no longer; he decided to demonstrate.

The first demonstration was not very big—just Jimenez and a handful of parishioners standing at the roadside opposite the weigh station praying and shouting such things as "Bhagwan Out of Madras!" and "Repent Your Sins" and "America Will Be Free!" But Jimenez persisted, and day by day the knot of people around him grew bigger and the shouting louder. One day, a group of Rajneeshee disciples showed up in a bus; arriving at the weigh station ahead of their master, the young people stood in a semicircle singing Christmas carols to drown out the noise of the shouting across the way. In the days following, the double demonstration began to attract all kinds of people: curiosity seekers, families from other churches, and tough-looking guys in visored caps hitching up their blue jeans. Jimenez stood at the top of a car holding a Bible in one hand and in the other an American flag so big it threatened to drag him away in high winds. "I love you!" he called, wind tears streaming down his cheeks, and "Believe in Jesus!" Day by day, the numbers of Rajneeshee increased, until there were four busloads of them at the weigh station. Then truckers began stopping, the drivers tooting their horns and making V signs as they pulled their big rigs off to the Jimenez side of the road.

What a motorist coming over the kill on Route 97 into Madras from the north would have seen was this: a hundred-mile vista of Oregon range-land flanked by the spectacular snow-covered peaks of the Cascade range; then, at the beginning of the first human settlement of any size he had seen in seventy miles, two groups of people standing on either side of the highway amid an assortment of vehicles. Passing by them, he would see on one side a group of people with banners reading "INS SAVE MADRAS" and "Jesus Is LORD" gathered around a car on which a preacher was holding down an American flag, like the figure on the Iwo Jima monument. On the other side he would see a crowd of young men and women all dressed in shades of red—red or orange or pink down jackets and red or orange or pink jeans or cords—playing guitars and singing. Through the car window he might hear a few bars of "Jay to the World" or "Love Is a Beautiful Feeling." Then he might continue through town into the open rangeland and see no other human being for the next

twenty-five miles.

Actually, if the driver was from Oregon, he would probably be able to Interpret the sight he saw, for by January of 1983 most Oregonians had heard of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the Indian guru with red-clad followers and twenty-seven Rolls-Royces. A year and a half earlier, "the red people" had paid six million dollars for the Big Muddy Ranch, in Wasco and Jefferson Counties, which was one of the biggest ranches in Central Oregon: a hundred square miles of dry hills and canyons sloping down to the John Day River. They had come from Poona, India, via Montclair, New Jersey. At first, just a few of them had come to farm the land; then more and more had arrived. Now there were six hundred "red people" living on the Big Muddy Ranch; and the town they had incorporated, Rajneeshpuram, was the largest town in the area next to Madras (population 2,260). The Rajneeshee had also taken over the tiny town of Antelope, twenty miles west of them, buying most of the properties and electing a city council of their own people, and creating a good deal of all feeling in the process. In addition, they had bought a hotel and a combined restaurant and night club in Portland. Many people thought they were some kind of sex cult, but this was not clear. The guru did not speak in public anymore. The ranch was run by a thirty-three-year-old Indian woman called Ma Anand Sheela, the guru's personal secretary, but most of the disciples were Westerners—Americans and Europeans—with a great deal of money and the best lawyers in the state.

I first heard of the Rajneeshee in March of 1983, while visiting at a university near Salem, in the Willamette Valley. Several of the professors were fascinated by them, and one had taken a bus trip, four hours out and four hours back, to visit the ranch. The Rajneeshee did not seem to fit any of the usual cult patterns; for instance, they gave guided tours. Moreover, they were not kids but adults, and many of them were well-educated professional people: accountants, doctors, lawyers, even professors. In the beginning, they were thought to be dirt farmers, but now they seemed to be building a model city for themselves out on the range. They were already farming some hundreds of acres with modern equipment, and they were building housing, roads, and an airstrip. The scale of the enterprise was extraordinary. The Rajneeshee said they had already put some thirty million dollars into the development and, apparently, that was only the beginning. They had seriously alienated their neighbors, but that—in the professors' view—was perhaps inevitable, for there were a lot of fundamentalists in Central Oregon, who couldn't be expected to take to an Indian guru.

On the other hand, they seemed to go out of their way to create publicity and to make trouble for themselves. For example, they had given the press a photograph of twenty-one Rolls-Royces standing all in a row. Then, Sheela had given an invocation before the state legislature, and that, naturally, had stirred some people up. It was not at all clear why the Rajneeshee did such things.

Controversy, I later discovered, had surrounded the Rajneeshee ever since their arrival in the

state. The main point of contention was Antelope. Just three months after they moved onto the ranch, 1000 Friends of Oregon, a public-interest group dedicated to maintaining the strict Oregon land-use laws, had told them they would fight any effort to construct buildings on agricultural land which were not intended for farm use. The Rajneeshee had responded by buying properties in the nearest township—or "city," in Oregon law—for residential and commercial purposes. The forty residents of Antelope, most of them retired people, had refused to give permits for commercial development. Sued by the Rajneeshee, they had tried to disincorporate the town, but the Rajneeshee had outmaneuvered them by bringing in enough of their own people to outvote them in an election. The disputes continued until, in the next election, in November of 1982, the Rajneeshee voted most of the older residents off the city council and replaced them with their own people. The Rajneeshee had acted legally - they were well within their rights - but what many people in the area saw was a large and powerful group imposing its will on a few elderly people who lacked the money and the legal sophistication to fight back.

The drama had not ended there. Since taking over Antelope, the Rajneeshees had been engaged in a new series of legal struggles. Wasco County had given them permission to incorporate a "city" on the ranch, but the local ranchers and 1000 Friends were now challenging the incorporation, on the ground that the county had not submitted it to state land-use planning scrutiny. If the Rajneeshee lost, they might have to tear their city down. Then, in late December of 1982, the Portland office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service had issued orders denying Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh permanent-resident status, and his disciples were now fighting his deportation to India. In addition, they were preparing their response to a suit, visible on the horizon, on the issue of whether the municipal status of their commune violated the religious-establishment clause of the Constitution. By mid-May, the Rajneeshee, for their part, were suing two of their neighbors for defamation and the former Antelope city council for discrimination. All in all, there were fifteen lawsuits in process.

After Antelope, too, the Rajneeshee had become a major political issue in the state. In another state—New York or California, say—even six hundred red-clad people might disappear into the variegated human landscape, and the fate of forty householders might be a day's story. But Oregon, though it covers ninety-seven thousand square miles, has a population of only three million; and it has a very well-developed sense of its own identity. Public spirited and relatively homogeneous, Oregonians behave in many ways like the citizens of a single town—or two towns, one in the Willamette Valley, with its green fields and its string of universities, and the other in the dry wheat fields and rangeland east of the Cascades. In the spring of 1983, every state legislator had to have a position on the Rajneeshee. They had many defenders, particularly in the universities, but their Antelope victory had turned many people against them. In the Willamette Valley, they

provoked interest and concern, but in Wasco and Jefferson Counties they were fighting the nearest thing to a range war.

Strangely, in spite of all this controversy the Rajneeshees remained quite mysterious to Oregonians. When I returned to Oregon to visit the ranch, in May of 1983, the press was running two or three stories a week on them. And when the stories were put together, they yielded rather little information about the nature of the group or the substance of Rajneeshee beliefs.

The guru apparently had many followers all over the world. (Ma Anand Sheela gave figures ranging between two and three hundred thousand.) In India, he had had an ashram, but not a conventional one. A documentary film about it distributed in Oregon showed orange-robed figures around the feet of the guru behaving like a lot of highly charged Pentecostals. It also showed groups of naked Westerners in "therapy" sessions, shaking uncontrollably, hitting one another, and engaging in various forms of group Sex. When the film first appeared in Oregon theatres, journalists had quoted Sheela as saying that these therapies were not practiced anymore. Apparently, no one had asked what these therapies had to do with Hinduism, or any other kind of Indian religion. "Bhagwan" meant "God" or "the Blessed One," depending on the translation. All the disciples had Hindi or Sanskrit names, but the ranch settlement was called a commune, not an ashram: the Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune. The Rajneeshee said that it was a "Buddhafield," in which a special energy flowed. Since the day the guru arrived in Oregon, the only thing he had said for publication was that a nuclear war would break out in the nineteen-nineties, and that only the commune would survive, its members finding shelter in caves in the hills.

Talking to journalists, politicians, and officials in Portland and Salem, I found that there were not just two views of the Rajneeshee but an extraordinary variety of opinions, crisscrossing political lines. Not only did the fundamentalists view the Rajneeshee with hostility but there were liberals who thought them a powerful and dangerous group, who would stop at nothing to achieve their own, possibly sinister ends. At the other end of the spectrum were people who saw the Rajneeshee as spiritual pioneers attempting to create a model cooperative society, and running afoul of religious bigotry. Between these extremes were liberals and conservatives who thought of the Rajneeshee as an original and interesting group with something to contribute to Oregon, and others who saw them as a laughable gathering of aging sixties dropouts who were making themselves a pain in the neck. Even those people who had visited the ranch (and by now quite a few had) could not agree on the nature of the enterprise—or even, sometimes, on what they had seen. Two agricultural experts, for instance, had visited the ranch on separate occasions, and one had seen a productive farm and a model of environmental planning, while the other had seen a farm that would never pay for itself and a potential threat to the ecology of the region. Most journalists now visited it as they might visit a Chinese commune, hesitating, weighing one thing against another, reporting the information given

to them by their guides, and then expressing some skepticism. All in all, it was as if the state had swallowed a large foreign body and were ruminating on it, wondering whether it would be digestible or not.

Of course, in the context of Central Oregon Rajneeshpuram was somewhat outlandish. Even the name was outlandish, since Madras, pronounced "*Mad-ris*," had lost whatever association it once had with the Indian city. Then, too, the settlement lay in cowboy country and the landscape of Hollywood Westerns. Ninety miles south of the Columbia River, the foothills of the Blue Mountains rear up out of the wheatland, and from there on it is open range, where deer and elk, and even antelope, roam. Rivers cutting their way through soft volcanic rock have left dramatic, towering cliffs, buttes, and tabletops. The dry hills are covered with sage and juniper, and the slanting afternoon light turns them purple and blue. The ranchers irrigate the land along the rivers, but it takes perhaps a hundred acres to feed a single head of cattle in the hills. On the main road through this country are signs for Shaniko, Antelope, Fossil, and Horse Heaven—towns that flourished during the gold rush and the short, ill-fated period of homesteading that followed. In the nineteenth century, the ranchers used to ride an hour and a half into their food stores, general stores, and blacksmith shops. Now that the ranchers can drive an hour and a half to the supermarkets and trucking depots of Madras, these towns are ghost towns, or almost ghost towns.

Antelope, I discovered, lay fifty miles northeast of Madras, in a small oasis of green trees. It was just two streets of frame houses with lawns in front, two churches, a school, and a cafe. A horse in a back pasture might be switching its tail against the flies, and a rank might be moving slowly over a far hillside. Otherwise, there wasn't ranch activity. The cafe, a low white frame building with an ancient gas pump beside it, looked like a study in Western realism except that it had a sign over the window reading "RAJNEESH ZORBA THE BUDDHA RESTAURANT." Inside were hanging plants and little handmade lacquered wooden tables around the old cafe bar; on the walls were shelves of herbal teas and organic preserves, shelves of mystical literature, and pictures of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, a man with large, liquid eyes and a long white beard. When I went in to ask directions for Rajneeshpuram, a young woman in a pink sweatsuit was standing behind the counter making an avocado-and-alfalfa-sprout sandwich while another young woman, in red denims, waited on tables. Both had long strings of wooden beads around their necks with wooden-framed pictures of the guru hanging from them. Two brawny men in jeans and work shirts were sitting rather uncomfortably at one of the little tables talking in low voices; they had come, I guessed, because there wasn't another cafe for twenty-five miles. When I asked for directions, one of the young women walked outside with me and pointed out a road winding up the hillside across the valley: "Four miles up there on the macadam, then take the dirt road to your right—you'll see the sign. Then go ten miles and make a left and keep on that road." She paused, and then said darkly, "The signs have bullet holes in them."

### *Rajneeshpuram turned out*

to be a full forty minutes' drive from Antelope, across a three-thousand-foot range of hills, four miles on macadam and fifteen on dirt roads. There were, I noticed, no bullet holes in the signs for Rajneeshpuram but plenty in the stop signs, where they usually are in this part of the country. At the crest of the range were two pillars with inscriptions on them, one in English, the other in Sanskrit. The English inscription read:

I go to the feet of the Awakened One

I go to the feet of the Commune of the Awakened One

I go to the feet of the Ultimate Truth of the Awakened One

A little farther on was a sign reading "WELCOME TO RANCHO RAJNEESH-VISITORS WELCOME." Above it, two Hags flew, one American and one Rajneeshee—two doves on a red-and-white background. A young man in a pink police uniform waved me on past a flatbed truck carrying a Caterpillar tractor. The road wound down the hill under a series of remarkable volcanic-rock formations, thin pillars of lava with heavy overhangs that looked like mushrooms sliced in half. The road narrowed, and another sign read "ESSENTIALLY A ONE-LANE ROAD." Circumnavigating a man-made lake, it came at last to the head of a large canyon—a valley, really—completely hidden away in the hills.

The valley was an astonishing sight in the midst of that empty rangeland. From some slight elevation above it, I could see two big Caterpillar Bulldozers and a backhoe at work, and, beyond them, a line of traffic—yellow school buses, trucks, and automobiles—moving around a system of roads. Driving down the canyon, I passed a dirt airstrip with a hangar and five aircraft sitting out in front of it: a DC-3, a Mitsubishi executive jet, and three light propeller planes. Beyond that was a machine shop, and next to it was a small factory under a shed roof, with a big pile of lumber beside it. Red-clad figures were carrying lumber, stacking wooden platforms, and lifting what looked like a small A-frame house onto the back of a flatbed truck. The roads converged on an old farmhouse and two big gray barns, clearly the original ranch buildings. The barns now fronted on what looked like the main street of a goldrush town. There were people everywhere and a near traffic jam of vehicles, their transmissions straining, plowing their way through viscous mud. Bearded men in red denims, along with women in red jeans and parkas, were rocking one of the trucks out of a rut. Down the street, past some trailers, were new wooden buildings in various stages of construction. There more red-clad people were pouring concrete for the floor of a building; others were putting up roof beams or nailing shingles onto a roof.

I stopped at a trailer marked "MIRDAD-INFORMATION," and found Veena, a sun-frosted blonde with big blue eyes and a soft English voice. I had talked with Veena on the phone before

coming, and she had sent me a press packet with slickly printed brochures and copies of newspaper articles favorable to the Rajneeshee. She and four or five other attractive young women, known as Twinkies, dealt with the press and the stream of visitors coming to the ranch. She offered to take me on a tour—her fourth of the day, it turned out. Before me, there had been two busloads of senior citizens and a busload of college students doing "in-depth" studies on the Rajneeshee. She had a phone call, and I waited while she told a journalist on the other end of the line that Bhagwan had never said there would be ten thousand people on the ranch by 1990; he did not speak, she said, so there was no way he could have said that.

She repeated this patiently four times.

"This is Jesus Grove," Veena said, negotiating her big Blazer jeep through the crowds on the main street. "Each part of the ranch is named after a saint. There's Buddha Grove, the Magdalena, Siddhartha, Zarathustra Drive, Alan Watts, and here's Walt Whitman Grove. We had some trouble finding an American saint." She explained that the old ranch house was a vegetarian restaurant for visitors and disciples—or sannyasins, as she called them, using the Hindi name. The settlement had begun just around it, with trailers and mobile homes. By now there were eight hundred sannyasins on the ranch, and more to come shortly. They were building out into adjacent canyons—on nonarable land within the city limits. "Most of the building you see going on here now is for the Master's Day Festival," she said. "We've expecting fifteen thousand people for Bhagwan's darshan in the first week of July."

Veena pointed out a post office and trailers housing a planning office and a city hall. At the end of the main street, another canyon opened up, its entire floor covered with construction. Four long wooden buildings were near completion, and foundations were being laid for two more; beyond them, a tent city was going up for the festival visitors. Sannyasins, perhaps a hundred of them, were laying out platforms for the tents, digging postholes, pouring concrete, and fitting windows. Most of them appeared to be in their thirties, but there were a few in their twenties and some older people as well—all of them dressed in various shades of red, with malas, or wooden prayer beads, around their necks. The men were bronzed and bearded, the women rosy-cheeked, with their hair flying. Handsome and healthy-looking, they appeared to work in a kind of good-humored chaos. Couples here and there were hugging each other and joking; a woman ran across the road and leaped, laughing, into the arms of a man there. "There's one of the architects," Veena said, pointing out a bearded man in jeans who was pounding a nail into the roof of one of the unfinished buildings. "We've got a lot of extraordinary people here. That one" she indicated a man carrying boards over his shoulder—"was a Professor of literature. And that one over there, with the notebook, makes the most beautiful dulcimers."

Veena's tour of the ranch proper began with the water-conservation projects. The lake I had



seen on the way down turned out to be a forty-five-acre reservoir held by a four-hundred-foot earth dam. In the summer, Veena said, the Lake would be used for swimming and boating—there was so much water around. Up in a nearby canyon was a series of open pits built as a natural sewage-treatment plant. The canyon lay in Jefferson County, however, and the county officials would permit them to use the plant only for the festival, and not the year round. "Bureaucratic snarls," Veena said. "So stupid. It would allow us to save hundreds of thousands of gallons of water for irrigation." Looking up from one of the pits, she waved her hand at a distant hilltop. "Over there well put our crematorium. Wasco County has just given us permission to build it."

We drove down the main canyon alongside a creek, Veena pointing out check dams that had been built to slow the course of the water, and juniper cuttings that had been put in to fortify the eroded banks. In many places, the banks were now thick with vegetation. "You'd be amazed how much greener it's got in two years," Veena said. Past the center of Rajneeshpuram, the canyon opened out into an expanse of irrigated fields along the John Day River. We passed several greenhouses and stopped at a dairy, where a row of sleek Holsteins stood in a concrete-floored milking shed. Across the road was a poultry farm with the same expensive, well-cared-for look. A large, airy shed housed two thousand Rhode Island Reds, and in A-Frame chicken coops beside it were a variety of exotic fowl, including several peacocks and two emus. The emus, Veena explained, were used to keep off the coyotes. Down the road, on the riverbank, was a fifty-acre market garden, with neatly plowed furrows. Like the dairy and the poultry farm, it resembled something conceived and maintained by an agricultural school. In the distance I could see several sannyasins working with a truck and a tractor; nearby, where the rows were already green with lettuce and spinach, several more were raking and weeding. "Work is our worship," Veena said. "We sannyasins work twelve to sixteen hours a day. But it doesn't seem like work. It's our meditation. And Bhagwan taught us that work is play."

Veena did not speak about the spiritual aspect of the ranch very often on our trip—possibly because visitors found the material achievements easier to assimilate, and certainly because water and land use were now the main issues for the commune in state politics. Most of her remarks, I later discovered, fitted into the Rajneeshee counterargument against charges from the local ranchers and 1000 Friends of Oregon. Veena did, however, point out where the guru lived; it was a compound with several buildings in a grove of juniper and newly planted deciduous trees. "We've built an indoor swimming pool for him, so he can exercise his back," she said. "He has asthma and allergies and a disk problem, and we try to keep him comfortable." In front of the compound was a long, low aluminum building with its doors closed and locked: the garage for the Rolls-Royces.

Our next stop was one of the new housing developments for the sannyasins—a group of small A-frames set into the hillsides of a subsidiary canyon. With space for just two single beds, each

A-frame was neatly with a window, a heater, air-conditioning, and carpeting on the floor. The structures, Veena explained, were an invention of a Rajneeshee designer. After the previous summer's festival, the Rajneeshee had hundreds of tent platforms but no housing for the new permanent residents, and someone had figured out a way to put three tent platforms together to make a house. In this complex, the A-frames had electricity but no water, so there were bath and toilet facilities in a central building at the mouth of the canyon. In the newer complexes, the designers had put four A-frames together on a single platform and added two bathrooms in the middle to serve the four.

We went next to the Magdalena, a big building, on the main street, that housed a communal kitchen and dining room for those who worked on the ranch. Commune members took all three meals there, coming in from their sleeping places or workplaces in the yellow school buses, which plied regular routes around the ranch. When we arrived, twenty-odd sannyasin cooks were setting out the evening meal: ratatouille, meatless lasagna, fresh asparagus, tofu, cheese, homemade bread, and a variety of salads. The head cook, an ebullient young woman with a mass of curly blond hair, said that the asparagus had been bought from a local supplier but all the other vegetables were homegrown. She showed us around the kitchen, pointing out a creamery and a professional baker's oven. "We make everything," she said. "Brioches, croissants, cheesecake—you name it." Opening the oven, she showed us dozens of loaves of bread—nut bread, oatmeal bread, whole-wheat bread, and one particularly good-looking loaf that had a ticket on it marked "Bhagwan." As we left, the sannyasins were just beginning to come in for dinner. Leaving their coats and shoes in a mudroom outside, they joined the chow line and then took their plastic trays to long Formica refectory tables in the dining room. A young woman served three kinds of draft beer, and against one wall were containers of coffee, tea, and fruit juice. On another wall was a shelf with a few dog-eared magazines, and a bulletin board with recent newspaper clippings on Rajneeshpuram. There was also something that looked like a suggestion box but was, Veena explained, a mailbox where sannyasins could drop their letters for the guru. I asked if they got answers. Yes, she said, often they did.

Back on the main street, we came into a new building with a wood-panelled interior. One side of it was occupied by a boutique selling fashionable and fairly expensive sports clothes — jumpsuits, jogging suits, parkas, sundresses, and so on, all of them, of course, in shades of red. "Sannyasins love to dress well," Veena said, fingering a delicate little jersey. Now that she mentioned it, I remembered that quite a few of the sannyasins had been wearing designer jeans. Just outside the boutique was a gift shop with post-cards of the ranch and trinkets of various kinds, most of them decorated with the Rajneeshee symbol—two doves—or pictures of the guru. "We call him Bhagwan, not the Bhagwan," Veena said. There were also many books for sale—almost all of them books by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. On the other side of the building was a large, handsomely appointed room

with a bar and a dance floor. In the daytime, it served as a Lounge and a snack bar; at night, it was a discotheque. "Visitors always ask me what we do for entertainment up here," Veena said. "They mostly want to know what we do without television. I tell them that we don't have any leisure time—and it's true. If you work twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours a day, all you want to do is go to bed. But now that we have this disco, it's full almost every night. Sannyasins love to dance, and there's a lot of energy here. You can just feel it."

At that moment, only two people were using the room: a man and a woman drinking Perrier and laying out tarot cards.

*In the next ten days,*

I commuted between Rajneeshpuram and Madras, talking both with the Rajneeshee and with their neighbors in Central Oregon. The state of hostilities between the two was now such that driving between them was like commuting across Belfast. The faceoff between the Rajneeshee and the Jimenez group had not ended in violence, but, according to Michael C. Sullivan, the district attorney of Jefferson County, it had come very close to doing so. For four days, the police had watched the truckers gather and the pickup-truck cowboys stalk about spoiling for a fight. Finally, the Rajneeshee leaders had come to Sullivan for help, and he had negotiated a settlement: the Conservative Baptists would stop demonstrating if Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh would stop driving to the weigh station every afternoon. Sullivan, a graduate of Washington University, in St. Louis, and a man of unusual intellectual detachment, could find no humor in the situation, even now. The Jimenez group, he said, did not speak for most people in Madras. A Methodist minister and a Catholic monsignor had spoken out against violence and religious intolerance while the trouble was going on. All the same, the demonstrations testified to the degree of emotion in the two counties. Since then, there had been no incidents, but the opposition had taken shape politically. Three separate citizens' committees had formed to organize against the Rajneeshee, and one had brought a thousand people to a protest meeting. Most of the local politicians had turned against the Rajneeshee, and in Jefferson County, smaller and more rural than Wasco County, Sullivan was now the only elected official who kept the lines of communication open with them, always in the hope of averting trouble.

The Rajneeshee explained this welling up of hostility toward them as "mere bigotry," and there was no doubt that religious intolerance played a part in it. One of the citizens' groups was circulating a petition for a Ballot initiative asking state officials to drive this "alien cult" out of Oregon. The Reverend Mr. Mardo Jimenez, when I went to see him, told me he thought that the guru was possessed by the Devil. Jimenez, a Honduran by birth, who had come to Oregon in 1978 to minister to Hispanic migrant workers and just the year before had gained citizenship—the status so much desired by the guru—said, however, that this was a purely theological formulation, which he did not expect everyone to accept. He had other objections. In the first place, he said, the Rajneeshee were

immoral people, who engaged in orgies and wanted to destroy the Institution of marriage; in the second place, they were cultists, who surrendered their personalities and mental powers to a man they called God; third, they had political and territorial ambitions in the two counties, and perhaps in the state.

Like Jimenez, other people in the area had more than religious objections to the Rajneeshee. The Rajneeshpuram city plan now projected a population of three thousand seven hundred by 1995. That was a lot of people, given the fact that there were only twelve thousand people in all of Jefferson County and twenty-two thousand in Wasco County. The ranchers would have objected to the creation of any settlement that size: water was scarce in the rangeland, and they liked the country the way it was. But with the Rajneeshee there were political problems as well, almost all the disciples were of voting age, and in the last election the three hundred Rajneeshee voters had voted en bloc for all candidates. With three thousand-odd voters, they could influence, if not dictate, the result of any election in one or, perhaps, two counties.

A number of the ranchers told me that they couldn't care less what the Rajneeshee believed in, but that now, after two years, they did not trust them and did not like them. In the beginning, the Rajneeshee had said that they were a rural commune and all they wanted was to farm the land. Then they had said they would not move their people into Antelope. Then they had said they had no interest in staying there. Now you had to wonder whether they did not want to bring more than three thousand seven hundred people to live at the Big Muddy Ranch. There were a lot of broken promises, and, beyond that, the Rajneeshee had treated the Antelope people badly, insulting them—they called them "rednecks" and "ignorant old people"—and harassing them in all kinds of ways. They had photographed them, videotaped their meetings, taken down the license number of every car that came into town. They had said these were precautions against election fraud, but you wouldn't treat older people like that unless you meant to drive them away.

Mike Sullivan told me that he got along very well with the Rajneeshee he had met, and would defend their rights to the end, but that he did not approve of their tactics. He had advised them not to sue their neighbors for libel, and he had advised them to make some gesture of good will toward the community, but they had not followed his advice. Instead, he said, they kept making aggressive demands and acting like big-city people and getting everyone's back up. "Their style is to come in and bang on the table and say, 'If you don't do what we want, will sue you.' Well, the county judges here are in their seventies. They're tough old birds who've been through the Second World War, and their attitude is 'So perhaps you confuse me with someone who cares.' "

A few days later, in a Madras restaurant, I ran into Helmer Wallan, one of the judges Sullivan had talked about. A big man, he had powerful arms, which hung at some distance from his torso. One of his hands was bandaged, and there were small unbandaged wounds on his arms and face. A

propane-gas tank on his mobile home had blown up the other day, and he had simply walked away from the explosion. Of the Rajneeshee, he said, "They think they can do anything, and so far they have. But we'll find a way to beat them, don't worry." It seemed reasonable to believe him.

The brochures Veena had sent me about Rajneeshpuram were quite specific on certain subjects, such as agricultural production, and quite vague on others, such as the purpose of the whole enterprise. In one of them, Ma Anand Sheela had written:

*Rajneeshpuram is our attempt to give expression to the religious vision of our beloved Master, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. It is our offering to him, and also a reflection of the love and wisdom which He showers on us.*

*... The work that we are doing here is a united effort by those who love Him to create a beautiful oasis—both material and spiritual—where anyone can come and drink from the fountain of His love, and quench their thirst forever.*

The brochure also quoted the guru as saying:

*The idea of the commune is beautiful: people living together in a non-possessive way, neither possessing things nor possessing persons; people living together, creating together, celebrating together, and still allowing each one his own space; people creating a certain climate of meditateness, of love, of living in that climate.*

The prose reared up like the bright wall of a glacier without a single handhold. The only two suggestive details were Sheela's capitalization of "Him" and "His" and the guru's Californian use of the word "space." When Veena had tried to explain the commune, steering her jeep between potholes or picking her way through the road by the dairy farm, her words were a reflecting glass. "The ranch is a Buddhafield," she had said, "You can just feel the energy here." And "He teaches us to be conscious, to be aware." How do we feel about Him? "Well, it's like being in love with someone, only more so." When I asked her how decisions were made on the ranch, she said, "There's no system, really. We work together and things happen spontaneously."

The odd thing about it was that Veena was otherwise wholly articulate and down to earth. Furthermore, the ranch was anything but a spaced-out flower-child operation. The Rajneeshee had achieved an extraordinary amount in less than two years—and with very little outside labor. They had begun with sixty-four thousand acres and some federal land, most of it of very poor quality; overgrazed by sheep in decades past, the ranch had not been worked profitably for twenty years. (For the past ten years, it had belonged to a real-estate trust.) Since July of 1981, the Rajneeshee had cleared three thousand acres and, they said, had planted winter wheat, sunflowers, vegetables, vines, and fruit trees. They had built a three-hundred-and-fifty-million-gallon reservoir, fourteen irrigation systems, with underground pipes taking the water to the fields, and several artesian wells for drinking water. Their truck farm now provided ninety per cent of all the vegetables consumed on

the ranch; their poultry farm and dairy produced all the necessary milk and eggs. The infrastructure for the City now included a ten-megawatt electrical substation, an urban-use sewer system, a telephone and computer communications center, and eighty-five school buses—or the fourth-largest public transportation system in the state of Oregon. They had started with a single farmhouse, and now had a quarter of a million square feet of buildings. With thirty-eight new residential quadruplexes, they could house a thousand people over the coming winter. The tent City they were building would accommodate fifteen thousand people for the week of the Master's Day Festival.

For all the speed of this development, the Rajneeshee had clearly done a good deal of careful environmental planning. One of the main worries of the local ranchers was that the Rajneeshee would use up so much water they would lower the water table throughout the region. According to the Oregon State Water Resources Department, however, the ranch had its own aquifer— independent of those of the neighboring ranches—and the Rajneeshee had done enough water-conservation work that it would be adequate to their needs for the foreseeable future. In addition to the big dam, the Rajneeshee had constructed a hundred and forty small check dams on the major creeks and had built up the creeks' eroded banks so that vegetation and wildlife were returning to the canyons. On their farm, the Rajneeshee were experimenting with crop rotation to minimize the use of chemical fertilizers; they had acquired eight new types of legumes from the University of Idaho College of Agriculture to rotate with winter wheat. On their truck farm, they were alternating rows of vegetables and flowers to reduce the need for pesticides. They had also put a good deal of effort into waste disposal. Every day, teams collected bottles, aluminum cans, paper, and other waste materials from all the buildings and took them to the ranch recycling plant. And, in spite of the fact that all the construction made the city alternately a mud hole and a dust bowl, the Rajneeshee kept all the buildings and the equipment remarkably clean. In the first year, the buildings had been makeshift and the housing crowded and uncomfortable, but now the Rajneeshee were giving more attention to the amenities: the new buildings were carpeted, and varnished wood panelling gave them the look of ski-lodge condos.

According to the Rajneeshee, the total cost of their operations in Oregon now hovered somewhere around fifty million dollars. Where all this money came from was, of course, the question. Ma Prem Savita, the head accountant for the ranch, told me that the Rajneeshee had a financial structure consisting of three major elements: the Rajneesh Foundation International, or "church," of which Sheela was the president; the Rajneesh Investment Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of the foundation, run by Sheela's husband, Jayananda, the former John Shelfer, of New Jersey; and the Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, whose officers were all commune members. According to Savita, only the foundation was tax-exempt, but it had few assets; its main economic activity was the sale of Rajneeshee books and tapes. From this it had grossed a million

dollars in the past year. The Investment Corporation owned all the long-term assets, including the Portland hotel and restaurant and the ranch, and paid taxes on them. The commune was a uniquely American cooperative structure of a type that had been created initially for the Shakers and subsequently used by groups whose members did not receive wages and did not make profits. Though not-for-profit at the corporate level, it was taxable through its members—something like a partnership. The commune ran all the businesses, on and off the ranch, and paid the running expenses, including the lease of the ranch from the Investment Corporation. The commune was now bringing in some fifty million had come from non-tax-exempt loans to the Investment Corporation and donations to the foundation and the commune. The donations, she said, were usually between five dollars and twenty-five thousand dollars, but some were much larger.

Savita, who had created this rather elegant structure, was an accountant by training. Most of the Rajneeshee managers were professionals in their fields. For example, the City planner, Swami Deva Wadud, had been a successful practicing psychic for six years before coming to the ranch, but before that he had been a city planner in San Mateo and San Luis Obispo, California. He had a B.A. from the architecture school of the University of Michigan and an M.A. from the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The farm coordinator, Neehar, was an Australian with a Ph.D. in linguistic philosophy. He had run a farm in Australia for a number of years and, along the way, had picked up a working knowledge of plant biology and riparian ecology. The head of the dairy farm was a former dairy Farmer from Wales, and the head of the kitchen was a professional nutritionist. The coordinator of the water systems, Swami Anand Videh, told me he was strictly an amateur at what he did—he had had to learn on the ranch what he knew about sewer systems. But he had a degree from Harvard in visual and environmental studies, and his office was staffed by professional geologists and engineers. The head of the personnel department and president of the commune, Ma Yoga Vidya, was a former systems analyst for I.B.M. and Univac. A South African, she had graduated from the University of South Africa with honors in math and then had studied computer science at the University of London.

The other departments on the ranch, publications and so on, were staffed with people of equally impressive credentials. Swami Prem Niren, who headed the legal team, had been a partner of the influential California firm of Manatt, Phelps, Rothenberg & Tunney, in Los Angeles. He was thirty-seven years old, charming and intelligent, and was teaching him-self constitutional law. His wife, Ma Prem Isabel, who ran public relations, might, most journalists agreed, have done P.R. for any large corporation. A Chilean of French extraction, she had gone to college and then worked her way around the world, spending two years with the Polynesian tourist bureau in Tahiti. The chief lobbyist for the group, Ma Mary Catherine, was an Oregonian with a Ph.D. from Yale and a decade of experience in Portland city politics.

That the Rajneeshee were a fairly rarefied group of people might have been deduced by any visitor from the sign "ESSENTIALLY A ONE-LANE ROAD." Just how rarefied they were the mayor of Rajneeshpuram, Krishna Deva, gave me to understand the first time I talked with him. A tall, handsome man in his mid-thirties, with a trimmed black beard, Krishna Deva, known as K.D., was the former David Knapp, of Santa Monica, California. He was, he told me, a clinical psychologist by training; he had an M.A. from Lone Mountain College, in San Francisco, and had worked with handicapped students at Santa Monica City College. For his Ph.D. dissertation, at the Fielding Institute, in Santa Barbara, he had done a study on three hundred American Rajneesh disciples in Poona. "There are various myths about us," K.D. said. "People think that a master-disciple relationship is like a master-slave relationship. They think we are dependent types, avoiding life, avoiding stress and decisions. But I studied three hundred sannyasins, using Abraham Maslow's criteria for the self-actualizing person, and the group rated very high on the independence scale. By and large, the people here on the ranch are people who have had success in worldly terms, and who see themselves as successes. When they came to Bhagwan, they were people in transition. There was some change involved—some openness happened. But they're not dropouts. They're what I call drop-ups."

K.D. went on to explain that this was only natural. "Bhagwan says, 'Religion is a luxury.' That means that your stomach must be full and you must have a sense of self-worth and self-esteem before you can be a truly religious person. Otherwise, prayer is only a plea. To Bhagwan, Mother Teresa is a hoax. The priests and the politicians create the poor."

K.D. did not exaggerate the "success in worldly terms" of the sannyasins. While I was at the ranch, two psychologists from the University of Oregon were completing a survey preparatory to a study they would be doing on the Rajneeshee in Oregon. The results of their survey matched the results of the survey K.D. had done three years before. Then the average age of the disciples was just over thirty; now it was about thirty-four. According to the surveys, eighty per cent of the disciples came from middleclass or upper-middle-class Backgrounds; their fathers were, overwhelmingly, professionals or businessmen. Some eighty-three per cent of the Rajneeshee had attended college; two thirds had bachelor's degrees, and twelve per cent had doctorates. Before coming to Rajneeshpuram, their median income had been twenty thousand dollars. (The sum would have been greater if the survey had excluded those who were working without pay for the guru in Poona.) In addition, K.D.'s survey showed that, by background, a quarter of the American sannyasins were Jewish, a quarter were Catholic, and the rest Protestant. Almost all of them were white, and two-thirds of them had been living on the West Coast.

Making my own informal survey during my first week on the ranch, I gathered that the Rajneeshee included a few former businessmen—notably Sheela's husband, Jayananda—but



proportionately fewer of them than one might find on, say, the Los Angeles-San Francisco Shuttle. There seemed, on the other hand, to be a fair number of professional people—doctors, lawyers, architects, and the like. One doctor I met was a specialist in pediatric allergies who had taught at the Stanford Medical School. When I asked Veena to introduce me to some-one who had recently joined the Rajneeshee, she found me a lawyer who had just quit the William Morris Agency. A lot of people seemed to have come from the so-called caring professions—social work, psychotherapy, and so on. The mayor of Antelope, Ma Prem Karuna, had a Ph.D. in adult education from Boston University. The Rajneeshee included a number of musicians (there were a rock band and a country-and-Western band on the ranch), some dancers, some theatre people, and a good many craftsmen—potters, weavers, silversmiths. An editor of the Rajneesh Times was a former Fleet Street Journalist, and one of his officemates was a professor of literature from Brandeis. But it seemed to me that there were fewer literary people than visual artists and designers. One afternoon, in the wake of the guru's daily drive through the city, a woman came up and introduced herself as the former art director of the magazine Ramparts. Then, there was, I discovered, a large contingent from the world of fashion. One of the few black Americans on the ranch was a young man of striking height and beauty who had been a successful model in New York.

### *While the backgrounds*

of the sannyasins went some way toward accounting for the caliber of Rajneeshee operations, they only magnified the larger question of what these people were doing in the wilds of Oregon with a silent guru who had twenty-seven Rolls-Royces. In fact, the sannyasins never saw the guru except when he sallied forth from his house in one of the Rolls-Royces for a drive, as he did punctually at 2 P.M. For these passbys, the sannyasins would line up along the roads and greet him with a namaste, a Hindu greeting that looks like prayer, palms pressed together and beatific expressions on their faces. During my first few days on the ranch, I met parents of three sannyasins who were visiting the ranch and clearly wondering the same thing I was.

One couple, whom I met while they and I were touring the ranch in a jeep with Ma Prem Isabel and their son, were on their way back home to Westchester after a trip to China. The man wore a form-fitting white shirt, white slacks, and natty white shoes. A retired businessman, he asked Isabel a good many questions requiring numbers for answers: the cost of the farming operations, the yield of the dairy cows, and so on. Isabel gave him the numbers, and he fell silent. His wife said nothing. Finally, he made a remark about China, but when no one took it up he lapsed into silence again. Isabel, undaunted, rattled on about water tables and the way so many parents complained about their children's gaining weight on vegetarian food. The son, aged twenty or so, looked like a prospective yeshiva student; squinched down in the back seat and sweaty with embarrassment, he said nothing for the entire trip.

The second couple I met in the parking lot in front of the information trailer; they had just taken the tour and were on their way to dinner at the ranch's Zorba the Buddha restaurant. They were from Cleveland; the man was a banker—very Wasp, very old-school-tie. Their son was the water coordinator, Videh, who had joined the Rajneeshee just after graduating from Harvard. They talked with nervous enthusiasm about what they had seen on the ranch: Wasn't it amazing what they'd done in so short a time? The woman showed me a pretty purple stole she had bought at the boutique "just so I'll fit in a little bit better." But they seemed not at all anxious to leave the only other person on the ranch who was not wearing pink or red or purple head to toe.

The other parent I talked with was the chairman of the board of a large metropolitan newspaper; she came and went, rather tight-lipped, with a member of the board of 1000 Friends of Oregon.

It was the indefatigable Veena, my first guide at the ranch, who began to make some sense of the Rajneeshee for me. Veena told me the story of her life, just as she told it to all journalists and tourists who asked her about it. Born in England, she had been brought up in South Africa by her divorced mother in Church of England Sunday-school style. She had worked her way through college as a fashion model and then left for England, where she worked on and off as a teacher and an educational psychologist for disturbed kids. That was in the late sixties, and she had hung around with rock groups and fashion people and smoked some dope. "Actually, I was always a little rebel," she said. "There were always a lot of boys, a lot of parties. But otherwise I kept the lid on tight. Finally, I just quit." A boyfriend asked her to go to India with him, so she packed her jeans and went; she dropped him somewhere along the way and hitchhiked through Afghanistan by herself. She didn't much like India (there were so many poor people, so many beggars), but she found another boyfriend and stayed. While she was sitting on a beach in Goa—her hair how down to her waist—an Italian film crew came by and asked her to be in a film about hippies in India. "I could have told them about hippies," she said. "They didn't know very ranch." One of the women in the crew wore a mala around her neck, and Veena found her extremely nice. "She told me about this extraordinary guru," Veena said. "I didn't pay much attention, because India seemed full of weird gurus and Westerners on strange trips of one sort or another. But sometime later my boyfriend and I were in Bombay on our way back to London with an afternoon off, and he persuaded me to go and see this one. I didn't especially want to go. We went to this high-rise apartment, and I thought, Gurus don't live in high rises. But then there he was—the most fascinating, the most compelling man I'd ever met."

The guru asked Veena to come to a meditation camp he would be holding in a Hill Station above Bombay within a few weeks. She debated the offer and said no. But later, on the train to New Delhi with her boyfriend, she re-considered and turned back. Initially, she didn't like the meditation camp. "There were about two hundred Indians there and about thirty white people, and in the

meditations people were dancing around and doing all this shouting," she said. She was on her way to the train station when the guru sent a messenger after her asking her to come back. She went back and tried again, but it was no good. Again she tried to leave, and again the guru sent a messenger after her. He talked to her, and urged her to take sannyas—to accept discipleship. She resisted, but he was compelling, and he offered her a new name—Veena, or "the instrument the gods play on." She had never liked her own name, Sheila Fisher, so eventually she accepted. That was in January, of 1972. In March, she went back to England, at the guru's request, to set up a Rajneesh meditation center. She had worked for him ever since.

Veena's story recalled a time and place far removed from the Oregon rangeland in 1983. In the late sixties, an Afghan rifleman standing on the heights above the Khyber Pass would have seen the beginning of a decade-long procession of Westerners on their way to the East. The hippies came first, hitchhiking and backpacking their way to the hills of Nepal, where the sacred monkeys played around the stupas, and pungent herbs grew within the sound of temple bells. Having passed through Tibetan Buddhist realms, they turned in a caravan south to the subcontinent, where yogis sat naked on hillsides, and smoke from the funeral pyres by the rivers blew around monks chanting the Vedas. Behind the hippies came the photographers and the models, the designers and the rock stars, the filmmakers, the priests and the psychoanalysts, and, behind them, the whole parade of middle-class drifters and luftmenschen, losing or finding themselves in the dense, luxuriant exotica. Americans, Germans, Italians, Australians turned up in dhotis and wearing flowers in their long hair. These magical-mystery tourists discovered sitar music, yogic asanas, and Zen koans; they learned sutras, mantras, and the Upanishads; they developed a taste for mandalas and cultivated the Third Eye. The subcontinent was a vast spiritual marketplace; with its thousands upon thousands of gods, saints, and holy men, it had something for everyone. Austere Freudian analysts found ashrams where they could fast, remain celibate, and sit still for six hours at a time. Jungians found shamans exorcising Technicolor demons from women writhing on the floors of temples. Arica graduates found Sufi masters, neo-Reichians found the Tantra, and hippies found blind holy men with begging bowls. A Time-Life photographer found a descendant of Sai Baba, the bhakti mystic, to materialize a roll of color film unavailable in India. The tour was largely unmapped, and for all practical purposes endless, but there were some well-marked stations along the way: the beaches of Goa, the American Express offices, hospitals that specialized in intestinal disorders, and several large, famous ashrams.

The new Western invasion of India was remarkable both for its duration and for the size of its forces. In the mid-seventies, the French consul in New Delhi estimated the number of French in India at a quarter of a million; the consulate, so the Anglo-Indian writer Gita M reported in her book "Karma Cola," had a permanent staff of doctors and psychiatrists to pick up the casualties and fly them back to France. How many Americans went could be calculated roughly by the booty they

returned with: the joss sticks, the wind chimes, the chakra diagrams, the vegetable curries, and the books of occult lore. Of course, whole sectors of American society remain quite innocent of even the hatha-yoga asanas. Karmic calculations are rarely made in Rotary Clubs, the Council on Foreign Relations, or the Southern Baptist Conference. But "Kundalini" and "zazen" are common parlance elsewhere, and to most college students the Bhagavad Gita is more familiar than Beowulf.

What was puzzling about the Rajneeshee—what made them so difficult to place—was that their commune bore no resemblance to a monastery or an ashram. American adepts of Eastern religions tend to be particular about the authenticity of their appearance and their practices. In Zen centers, for instance, loose-robed figures pad about, their eyes downcast, their legs slightly bowed from long hours in the lotus Position. But the Rajneeshee all had the rugged, healthy allure of California skiers. True, they all wore shades of red and pink and orange —"sunset colors," they called them, but their down coats, jumpsuits, and velour sweatshirts could have walked out of any Marin County boutique: there was a kind of high-touch sensuality about the clothing. Then, instead of meditating in any formal sense they were building—and building, among other things, data-processing systems and discotheques.

The work schedule at the ranch was a rigorous one. Sannyasins went to breakfast at the Magdalena between six and seven in the morning; they then went to their workplaces, returning for lunch at midday and for dinner at seven in the evening. In addition to the meal breaks, there were tea breaks, morning and afternoon, during which tea, juice, fruit, and cake were served in tents near the work sites. At two in the afternoon, the sannyasins would line up along the roadside to watch the guru drive by in one of his Rolls-Royces. Apart from that, they worked all day long, and there were no holidays in the week, Sunday being the day for meetings. The system was that each person had a job to do, and the commune took care of the rest. A kitchen staff prepared the meals each day, and there were people assigned to clean the A-frames and the trailers, and people who washed and ironed clothes. A farm worker or a posthole digger could thus come back each night to a clean room with clean clothes—and no errands.

Toothpaste, soap, and other toiletries were provided; so, I was told, was clothing—jeans, T-shirts, and so on—for these who needed it. These who went off the ranch on business could pick out clothes from a special public relations wardrobe and could take a commune Car.

The fact that each sannyasin had only one job made the work schedule somewhat less onerous than it sounded. Still, sannyasins had very little time to themselves, and because the number of people moving in always seemed to run ahead of the housing available most of them had little privacy. The commune had movies every week or so, and, during the year, a variety of other kinds of entertainment. But there was no television on the ranch and, as yet, no library. Sannyasins could order newspapers, magazines, and books by mail, but most of them read very little, if at all. Apart

from Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the most popular author on the ranch was Louis L'Amour.

In the beginning, virtually all the commune members had done manual labor on the farm or on construction sites. Now that the commune was larger and its functions were more diverse, a number practiced the professions they had been trained for: lawyers worked as lawyers, art editors as art editors. But because there were rather more professors than, say, plumbers among the sannyasins, many people still had to do jobs they had not done before. Another psychic, Wadud's wife—was air-traffic controller for the ranch, and an acupuncturist was coordinating the truck depot. The ranch now had a riding stable with a dozen horses for rent to visitors. The wrangler, who sat his horse as well as any local cowboy, told me that he had been a martial arts instructor and, before that, a novitiate at a Catholic seminary in New York state, having spent an intermediate year studying philosophy and literature at the Sorbonne. Another New Yorker I met, a former Marxist historian, now spent most of his time on the ranch operating one or another of the earth-moving machines. He preferred that, he said, to teaching school—his first assignment at Rajneeshpuram—and was getting pretty good at it. So were his six women colleagues, one of whom also worked as a belly dancer in the Portland night club.

While most sannyasins picked up their new tasks quickly, a few of them had to go to some lengths to learn the skills required by the commune-city. When it was decided that a police force was needed to protect the ranch, six men and four women went for a ten-month training course at the Oregon Police Academy. All the recruits graduated in the top ten per cent of their class, and one of them, a droll young man named Swami Deva Sangeet, was picked as the best of seven hundred Oregon police trainees. Rajneeshpuram now had a police force or a Peace Force, as it was known sporting police revolvers and pink uniforms.

One thing that surprised me, given the apparent egalitarianism of the commune, was that there was no system of job rotation. Dishwashing was the sole exception: sannyasins took turn washing dishes according to a monthly schedule. Sannyasins did change jobs, and now that the commune had indoor as well as outdoor work many changed jobs temporarily; Office workers, for example, would spend one day a week cutting junipers or would fill in at a construction site for a week or two. But there was no question of right involved, and no democratic practice. The personnel department, headed by Ma Yoga Vidya, assigned the jobs, and sannyasins took what they got. When I asked Isabel whether people assigned to menial jobs—cleaning, say—did not get bored and resentful after a bit, she laughed, and said, "Of course not. Here all work is play and all work is meditation." She went on to explain that having a cleaning job in the commune was not like having the same job outside, since one's job—one's worship —had nothing to do with money or status. When I persisted, she introduced me to two women in their thirties, both of whom had been cleaners for eight years, first in Poona and then here. One of them, a South American married to

another sannyasin, was ironing a jacket for Krishna Deva when I met her. She told me she loved her work, and there was no doubting her, for as she went about the trailer picking up clothes she seemed to glow with a deep and serene enthusiasm. The other woman, formerly a dancer, had just left her cleaning job—after eight years—to join Veena and Isabel in the public-relations department. But she, too, said she had loved her work: "When I was cleaning a room, or clothes, I felt I was cleaning myself as well." She laughed. "It could be that I got a bit too attached to my cleaning. It will probably be good for me to do something quite different."

Changing jobs, or doing a job other than that for which one was trained, had, I gathered, a spiritual or psycho-logical value for the individual (in addition to whatever practical value it had for the commune). Before going to the ranch, I had visited the Rajneeshee hotel in Portland; formerly the Martha Washington residential hotel for women, it had been renamed the Hotel Rajneesh. The manager, a sleek young man in wide-wale corduroys, a button-down shirt, and a tie, could have been the manager of any hanging-plant restaurant in the city, even with his mala on. He turned out to be a former student at the Union Theological Seminary, in New York, and a massage therapist who for a period in the seventies had practiced the Alexander technique out of the Chelsea Hotel. He had worked, he said, at many different jobs in the ashram, and all of them had been "great opportunities" for him. "My main concern now is getting rid of this Y.M.C.A. furniture and finding something a little less tacky," he said. By the bye, he told me that a former architect was working in the kitchen of the hotel, "because he needed it." The architect had not been consulted on his current project.

Later, Swami Anand Subhuti, the editor of the Rajneesh Times, explained this concept of "need" to me. "Awareness requires spiritual detachment," he said, paraphrasing the guru. "The attachments of the ego to role, status, and achievement must be dropped, for, like all other kinds of programming, they stand in the way; they are obstacles." At one point, he said, he himself had become too attached to his own creation—the Rajneesh Times. "I had a powerful claim on it, and my possessiveness became apparent. So someone came to me and said, A-frames for a bit. So we are going to have an untogether paper for a while. So what?' So I did A-frames for a week." Apparently, a week had sufficed to detach him, for he was back on the job. How long it took the architect to get out of the kitchen I did not discover. But it took a long time, I was told, for some people to drop their programming.

The doctrine of nonpossessiveness, I discovered, also applied to love and marriage in Rajneeshpuram. The guru, Subhuti said, did not object to marriage per se—though the press would never understand this—but only to marriages that were institutional structures without meaning, that were the product of social conditioning alone. In practice, many sannyasins were married (Subhuti was one of them), but the idea was that if one partner was not happy the marriage should

be ended. A lot of marriages, so the guru said, involved only guilt, pretense, and neurotic dependency; thus, faithfulness was not a virtue to be cultivated for its own sake. The one who was left might feel miserable or jealous, and should not suppress those feelings but, rather, watch them and come to detach himself or herself from them. As for sex, there were no fixed rules about it. There were certainly no rules about celibacy, but Bhagwan believed that the truly detached might transcend sex, and that enforced celibacy led only to frustration and obsessive thoughts of sex rather than to detachment and awareness.

What these doctrines meant as a matter of practice was difficult to tell, for the Rajneeshee were making a de-liberate effort to rebut charges by Jimenez and others that they were a "sex commune." The doctrines, how-ever, had their own intrinsic interest. Communes, and particularly religious communes, tend to have rather strict rules about sex and marriage. But here the doctrines were entirely permissive in matters of behavior—so permissive that they might have been invented to accommodate people of the Rajneeshee's age and background all over the country. They were matters of attitude, principally, and as such they seemed to provide a psychological solution to the problems so many people were apparently having with "relationships". The idea, it seemed, was to reduce the coefficient of emotional friction between people by an act of transcendence, a detachment from self.

Among the various suspicions har-bored by the local ranchers was that the commune separated children from their parents. This suspicion was justified to some degree, for in respect to children the commune operated much like a traditional kibbutz. The babies lived with their parents, but children over five—or so I was told—lived with other children in the same housing complex as their parents. The ranch had a day-care center, where some of the mothers worked, and a school, kindergarten through twelfth grade. The children spent half of each day in school and the other half playing or working in different parts of the commune. In the afternoon, the smallest kids would help feed the cows and the chickens; the eight- and nine-year-olds would run messages, paint signs, or help on the construction sites. The older children would spend somewhat more time with the working adults, helping out and learning carpentry, accounting, or whatever interested them. They would also do an hour a day of dance, theatre, or mime. They would see their parents at mealtimes, and after dinner before bed. The children I met were a pink-cheeked, rambunctious lot, not at all shy of adults. The only strange thing about them was how few of them there were: only fifty children among eight hundred or a thousand adults. Given the average age of the sannyasins, the number seemed to testify to an almost Shakerite restraint or, since this was not the case, to an anti-procreation policy, such as the nineteenth-century Oneida Community, in upstate New York, had for its first twenty years. The Rajneeshee, however, said that there was no such policy.

What the Rajneeshee were teaching their children seemed to me an important question. But

on visiting the school I found that they had not put very much thought into it. Anabodhi, the sweet and slightly diffident woman who taught the younger children (she had taught adult education and worked with disturbed children in Los Angeles), told me that she and the other teachers were following the guidelines laid down by Bhagwan. These guidelines were remarks the guru had made on the subject in the course of his lectures to sannyasins in India, and most of them were rather general observations about "education" in the largest sense of the word. More specifically, he had once said that universal education was criminal and undemocratic, since not all children wanted academic training: some wanted to be carpenters or fishermen. He had advocated education in practical things, and he had quoted Ivan Illich, without attribution, to the effect that "man can be saved only if society is de-schooled." The sole curricular guidance he had given was that children should learn math and languages but not history, since "history is meaningless bunk" (no attribution to Henry Ford). The schoolteachers were thus working out a curriculum on their own, and for the moment it was an informal one. Using commercial textbooks, they were teaching the younger children basic skills; and they were teaching the older children science, environmental studies, math, and social studies—the last with an emphasis on comparative cultures. They were also tutoring one older boy to pass his S.A.T.s for college and looking for books to put another teen-ager (there were only a few of them) through a business-English course. What made their system of education different, they said, was the opportunity children had to work on the ranch with the adults, learning sculpture or computer programming by apprenticeship. The following year, when Rajneeshpuram joined the public-school system, they would, they said, set up a formal curriculum in accordance with state guidelines and incorporate the work-study program into it.

The Rajneeshee education program struck me as surprisingly unintellectual, given the number of Ph.D.s in the community. (Later, one professor told me he saw no reason his children should go to college—they had so many accomplished people on the ranch to learn from.) It also seemed relatively indoctrinaire. But the same was true of the Rajneeshee approach to urban planning and agriculture. With all the efforts in the direction of environmentalism, Rajneeshpuram was no Findhorn: the cabbages were manured, not talked to. On the question of pesticides, Neehar, the farm coordinator, told a wildlife biologist, "I have no philosophical problem with the killing of millions of aphids, but we want what's here to live in harmony. We want to find out where the balance lies." Videh, the young water-systems coordinator, told me that a rough balance existed on the commune between those who worried about the detrimental effects of technology and those who thought about economics and practicality. The technology was eclectic as a result: the ranch had a natural sandfilter sewage-treatment plant, but it also had a big electric-power substation. Videh told me about the efforts he was making to determine what effect the detergent the Rajneeshee were using had on the streams. Then he said, "But, you know, a lot of New Age technology-ecology



people are a bit neurotic. We're more interested in consciousness than in those kinds of priorities."

Rajneeshee spokesmen and Rajneeshee literature proclaimed "love, lightness, and laughter" to be the theme of the commune. To the local ranchers, this self-advertisement struck a discordant note, but any short-term visitor to Rajneeshpuram would notice a remarkably high level of good humor among the sannyasins. On the streets, people called out to each other gaily and walked with their arms about one another's shoulders. In offices, you might find one staff member teasing another and the whole group howling with laughter. Also, a great deal of hugging went on. Tourists looking out of the smoky windows of their buses would see people embracing in the tea tents, in the vegetable garden, and behind the trash mashers, and wonder what was going on. In the three weeks I spent in Rajneeshpuram, I heard very few cross words exchanged, and very few downbeat remarks. People tended to be positive about everything, including the unpredictable weather, and, hard as they were working, they made the work look like fun.

The most obvious explanation for all this good humor was that work on the ranch was fun; it was play in the ordinary sense of the word. Where else, after all, could a professor (or a belly dancer, for that matter) get to tool around on a bulldozer and build a road? Where else could a Young architect design a housing project and then get to bang in the nails? Picking lettuce and digging postholes had undeniable satisfactions if you weren't doing it for a living and if you were doing it with a lot of attractive people your own age. The work was hard, but there were no bills, no phone calls, and no child-care responsibilities. "It's like a second childhood," the pediatric allergist from Stanford told me. "It's like a big game. Even treating patients is like that, since you're treating the people you live with. I never used to see my patients. Here it's ranch more flowing. Plus you can be alone with yourself when you want to be. All the old connections just aren't here." What was more, the commune did not have to subsist on what it could grow. If a bulldozer broke down, there was money enough for another one; if the tomato crop failed, tomatoes would be bought. And where else could you find such a high concentration of attractive, well-educated young adults with an ideology of nonpossessiveness and sexual laissez-faire? Guru or no guru, the ranch was a year-round summer camp for young urban professionals.

But it was also something else. Visitors to the ranch did notice a good deal of hugging, but what they would notice if they stared was that there were two kinds of hugs in Rajneeshpuram. One was of the spontaneous, affectionate sort and the other a long, studied embrace followed by deep eye contact —the "growth movement" hug. Isabel and her colleagues did not mention this aspect of the commune in their briefings, and, indeed, they rather steered visitors away from it, but the ranch was awash in the human-potential movement. Walking about, I found, after a week or so, former Gestalt therapists working tractors, Laingians in the kitchen crew, Reichians digging ditches, and post-Reichians in the A-frame factory. According to the University of Oregon survey, eleven per cent

of the commune members had graduate degrees in psychology or psychiatry and another eleven per cent had 13.A.s in the field. But, with all the years of academic training represented, there was not, as far as I could determine, a single straight Freudian or behaviorist on the ranch. The sannyasin psychologists had done their university work and then gone off to study with such people as Fritz Perls, Alexander Lowen, and Carl Rogers. In addition to the qualified psychologists, there were a number of other people on the ranch who practiced growth-movement therapies: rolfing, primal screaming, bioenergetics, and encounter therapies. Added to these were practitioners of every kind of New Age specialty, from shiatsu, through acupuncture, to past-life readings.

A number of the therapists were now giving courses at the Rajneesh Institute for Therapy and the Rajneesh Institute for Meditation and Inner Growth. These Institutes were new to the ranch; in May, a new building was just going up to house them, in time for the influx of summer visitors. The catalogue distributed to Rajneeshee centers around the world advertised such therapies as Rajneesh Bodywork ("This one-month intensive emphasizes enhanced aliveness and awareness of the body and includes intuitive body work, sensory awareness, work with breath and bioenergy, movement, dance and touch"); Rajneesh Energywork ("an exploration of our unrealized potential for consciousness"); and Rajneesh De-hypnotherapy ("ways of opening up the unconscious part of our minds to see and then drop patterns which were formed in childhood and which restrict our development in the present"). The institutes also offered instruction in various forms of meditation—from Kundalini to Zazen—and such practical courses as Buddhafield Construction and Buddhafield Businesses.

These courses were not for the Rajneeshee living and working on the ranch; they were money-making programs designed for visitors. Growth movement therapies, however, played a fairly central role in the life of the group. The ashram in Poona had offered all kinds of therapies, and virtually all the sannyasins on the ranch had been through at least one of them —there or at Rajneeshee centers elsewhere. Now that the guru was no longer speaking, and no longer giving sannyas himself, the Rajneeshee required all prospective sannyasins to go through courses of therapy and meditation before joining the group. On the ranch, most sannyasins continued to practice growth-movement techniques among themselves. Each workplace, for example, was also an informal group where people helped one another work out their problems. If someone came to work in the morning depressed over a love affair, or just depressed, his or her co-workers would try to get to the source of the depression by whatever means was at hand: head massages, psychic healing, or simply talk. If two people in a department did not get along, they would, with the help of others, try to figure out why not. One woman told me that while working in the laundry she had helped one co-worker get over a bad love affair and had been helped by another, who "mirrored me and showed me how to drop my garbage and programming." (The two had apparently fought.) The Rajneeshee

were thus not just having a good time but working at it.

Curious about these therapies and how they fitted into the spiritual enterprise of the ranch, I went to see Swami Prem Siddha, a senior therapist at the Institute for Therapy. Siddha told me that he was a graduate of the U.C.L.A. School of Medicine and the U.C.L.A. Neuropsychiatric Institute. He had had a private practice and had done consulting work for a number of organizations, including the American Dental Association and the National Institute of Mental Health. In the sixties, he had become involved with the growth movement and had studied Gestalt with Fritz Perls, bioenergetics with Alexander Lowen, and rolfing with Ida Rolf. "I feel as if I live in the maddest City in the world," he said when I asked him about the therapies. "It's mad because it supports joy and happiness. You have to work at being unhappy here—and that's the reverse of the way the rest of the work' is. It's a mad city in that people bow down to earth twice a day in the name of truth, and to each other in recognition of a common interest in learning the art of living, in learning that life is beautiful." Siddha, under his given name, Leonard Zunin, had written a pop-psychology book called "Contact: The First Four Minutes," and how to meet people. He went on, "It's a mad city because people bow down every day to the Enlightened One, to a self-realized being. It's mad because people work twelve to eighteen hours a day for someone they love, and they call their work worship and meditation." He had met the guru when he went to India to learn about Tibetan Buddhism. "It's a mad city because people are letting go of their conditioned beliefs, all their programming about right and wrong, all their conditioning about how the world should be. They're helping each other experience life. They're learning how to be, not how to become."

Siddha might have puzzled the people of Antelope, but he would have been an altogether recognizable type in Los Angeles. "I'm flashing on something," he said at one point.

When I asked him whether he was not bothered by the elite nature of the enterprise, and its withdrawal from the larger society, he responded, as Krishna Deva had, by quoting the guru: "Rich people are seekers. The poor are merely survivors. True religion is a luxury which can come only after one's survival needs are met." Then he said, "We're a community of seekers, not of enlightened beings. We have to learn—to go to school. Society doesn't consider school a waste of time, but when someone takes the time to find himself, to find the true nature of joy—that they find a waste of time."

### *Clearly, I thought*

after leaving Siddha, the ranch was some form of hybrid between an Indian ashram and the Esalen Institute. It was—to put the matter bluntly—a place where the privileged few could work on enlightenment and their relationships without at the same time giving up any of the ordinary pleasures of life. It was the ultimate Me Generation boarding school, and, in addition, a rather exclusive bomb shelter, where the chosen few would survive the holocaust to come. This I thought

until I met Wadud, the city planner.

"People say we change our minds every six months," Wadud said when asked him why the Rajneeshee had first represented themselves as building a rural commune. "And that's pretty much the case. When we came here, Sheela didn't know what she wanted of this place. That fall, we hadn't even thought of a religious festival. If we'd said we wanted eight hundred people when we came here, people would have freaked. Anyway, the whole argument is irrelevant. There's a perception that we deceived people in the beginning, but the fact is that we simply grew much faster than even we could imagine. Now we have a comprehensive plan quite as detailed as the plan for Portland—and we put it together in three months."

Wadud had come to the ranch a year earlier, with his wife and their two-year-old daughter, giving up a successful New Age center of his own in Berkeley and leaving the house with the hot tub and the Mercedes-Benz. Now he was wholly engaged in his new work, and was full of enthusiasm. Lean and wiry, he spoke quickly and with a hint of impatience, as though he were already two or three thoughts ahead. "There's the plan, over there," he said, pointing to three large paperback volumes. "What it says is that we'll have a population of three thousand seven hundred sometime between now and 1995. We could grow faster, of course, but then we'd have to amend it. The major economic development will be in resort and education facilities, but there will be some light industries—mostly crafts. Right now, we're planning a hotel and a university for religious education and education in general."

Wadud drove me up into the hills to the proposed site of the hotel and the university; it was near the entrance to the ranch, at a height of three thousand feet, with an extraordinary view of three ranges of hills. He described in some detail what he had planned—luxurious materials, low buildings following the contours of the land. When I asked whether the hotel would be for Rajneeshee disciples only, he said, "No, I suspect many others will be coming. Some will come for the education, others will come as tourists because of the unique social experiment going on here. One of our purposes is to be studied—already, two professors from the University of Oregon are doing a study on us. Eventually, this city should become something like the new Disneyland in Florida. Epcot is a model of the technological future; this will be a model of humankind's social potential. We're perceived as being self-centered, but our concern is to create an alternative model of society for mankind."

This, I thought, would come as yet another shock to the local ranchers. Most of them had read Wadud's plan and knew the projected population figures. But they assumed that the Rajneeshee were building a town for themselves; the notion that they might be constructing a type of Disneyland out there on the range had not occurred to them. What occurred to me was the reaction a friend of mine had when he read in his tenth-anniversary Harvard yearbook that a

classmate had joined the Jesus people and was speaking in tongues. "There's a Harvard man for you," he said. "He joins the group one day, and the next day he's in the front row with glossolalia."

Even after I had spent ten days at the ranch, however, the nature of the Rajneeshee social experiment remained somewhat mysterious to me. To ask how the ranch was organized was to elicit answers having to do with spontaneity and awareness. When I asked Videh, the water coordinator, how decisions were made in his department, he said, "Technical decisions are made by technical people and whoever else is concerned. It's a personal thing. It's how it feels to you. If you're clear about something, you're usually right. It's a matter of intuition. Here a tone is set, a flavor, that affects the work we do. There are no rules or rituals. From time to time, we get pep talks to remind us of why we're here—to remind us again that we're a family. Yesterday, for example, someone on the pipe crew accidentally cut through a major phone line. So we had a meeting, and he was criticized—but in good spirit, the point being that we can all screw up. We all have to watch for carelessness and be aware of what we're doing." How policy disputes were resolved and whether the rank-and-file sannyasins had any say in them were not questions that Videh or any of the other managers answered with any clarity.

What they did say was that Ma Anand Sheela was the "mother" of their family and made the major policy decisions in consultation with Bhagwan. So much was clear. Sheela was—observably—the queen of Rajneeshpuram. She and her husband, Jayananda (he was her second husband), lived at the very center of the commune, in a luxurious prefab house that served as the ranch headquarters. All day long, a procession of sannyasins would file through her house; ranch managers, lawyers, and so on would come to discuss their work and ask her advice while a young male sannyasin served meals or prepared fresh fruit juices and tea. Sheela, dressed in a pink or red velours sweatsuit, would curl up on the couch like a cat, shake the bangles on her wrist prettily, and laugh and laugh. "It's no good to be serious," she would say, making a seductive moue. Over the couch was a map of the world with innumerable red and white pins stuck into it. "They're the Rajneeshee centers around the world," she said once of the pins. "I put them there in a housewifely way, but then I never finished. I have no idea how many there are." Sheela preferred flippancy to "dreary" discussions about numbers, and she liked to create impromptu little dramas centering on herself.

The second time I met her, she told me a bit about her background. She was born in Baroda, in Gujarat province, she said, and had been brought up there and on the family farm in Madhya Pradesh; her father belonged to one of the great industrial families of the region and, as a young man, had been a dose supporter of Mahatma Gandhi. At Gandhi's suggestion, he had gone to Oxford, and had returned to make a fortune in cotton ginning and real estate. This, I later discovered, was not quite the case: her father was a relatively small businessman and a farmer (he had managed the farm in Madhya Pradesh); as a young man, he had fought for Indian independence and had travelled

to England, but had then returned to live quietly in Baroda. Sheela was the youngest of six children and, she said, "the spoiled child of the family." Two of her older brothers and a sister emigrated to the United States, and in 1967, at the age of seventeen, Sheela followed them. She enrolled in Montclair State College, in New Jersey, and there met and married an American. (He died some years later, of Hodgkin's disease.) On a trip home in late 1972, she was taken by her father—an admirer of the Indian religious philosopher Krishnamurti and of the poet Kahlil Gibran—to see Rajneesh, and a month or so later she became a sannyasin. Her husband followed her to India, and both of them joined the ashram in early 1973. Gradually, she rose to positions of more and more responsibility there, but she continued to visit the United States, and in 1975 she incorporated a Rajneeshee meditation center in Montclair. In June of 1981, she accompanied the guru to the United States as his secretary, putting him up at the Chidvilas Center, in Montclair; a month later, she made a down payment of a million and a half dollars on the ranch in Oregon.

"I looked in many different states—Arizona, Texas," Sheela told me. "I was looking for somewhere dry, for Bhagwan's health, and I came on this by chance. Once I saw it, I knew it was right. I just knew." Sheela believed in her own woman's intuition; she also believed in the stars. "Just by chance, I found it a year to the day after my husband's death. And then, quite by chance, I signed the lease on the day of his birth." In addition, Sheela believed in acting on impulse. She would give a sudden gift, delay an airplane others were waiting for, change her mind about a project, express her anger on national television. "I think you need to shut up for a while," she told the former mayor of Antelope, Margaret Hill, on ABC's "Nightline." Only thirty-three years old when I talked with her, she seemed an unlikely sort of person to be running a commune full of psychotherapists and Ph.Ds.

The commune, I gathered, had no formal hierarchy, but it had, along with the department heads, a group of people called coordinators, who met with Sheela once a week and made the major decisions for the commune. These coordinators then passed the decisions along through departmental meetings. Anyone could criticize or object, but no votes were taken at any meeting. Within the departments, the coordinators acted as personnel managers in a rather extended sense: their charge was to see not only that their departments were properly staffed but also that people worked well, individually and as a group. If someone was unhappy or careless or if two people fought over turf, the coordinator would try to work out the problem often by group criticism sessions. Most of the coordinators were women, apparently because the guru thought that women were more intuitive than men and less attached to roles, status, and their own ideas. In a commune where such values were paramount, the difference between the coordinators and the department heads seemed to be analogous to that of "red" and "expert" in Mao's China.

The system, as it was described to me, seemed very original and high tech: Maslovian management several generations beyond the original. But how it actually worked for the individual

and where final authority lay I found difficult to pin down. The head coordinator, Ma Yoga Vidya, told me that she had just taken over the legal department, because two lawyers were not communicating. "We advised them to do something about it," she said. "But finally they seemed to need a stronger person, so I moved in. One of the lawyers blew up at the other, saying that something was his idea and he hadn't been given credit. I said, 'Who cares whose idea it is?' It's been O.K. since then." A tall blonde of striking good looks, Vidya seemed to me a very strong person—someone you would hesitate to cross. "I work by intuition," she said. "Sometimes I roam around the commune. I look at faces, and I can see when someone's unhappy. I saw a young woman last night looking very down, so I asked her coordinator what the trouble was. She'd had a fight with her boyfriend. Occasionally, people get very caught up in themselves." In certain cases, Vidya said, she would ask people to change the kind of worship they did, or recommend meditation and therapy courses. No one had ever refused—they were always grateful in the end—and she had never thrown anyone out of the commune. "We just ask people if they really fit in, and people are honest," she said. This was worrying to me. Previously, I had asked Wadud whether coordinators could be criticized, and he had said they could—and they were always grateful in the end. But neither he nor Vidya could or would describe what would happen if they were not. "We're always watching for factions and cronyism, and trying to stop them—or, rather, to unlearn those old patterns," Wadud had said. "We're developing a very loving and beautiful way of dealing with each other. This is the Buddhafield, and one of its qualities is that we don't become ingrown and institutionalized."

### *Watching the guru*

drive through the ranch, with his sannyasins lined up on the roadside greeting him with a namaste, I supposed that one of the keys to the Rajneeshee social experiment lay in the philosophical connection between the guru and the growth movement. Siddha, along with the other therapists I met, convinced me, however, that there was no way they could explain this syncretism analytically. There was yogic "energy" and growth movement "energy;" the two notions were vague to begin with, and in Rajneeshee philosophy they seemed to have melted and fused beyond recovery (and the same went for "conscious-ness" and "awareness"). The only solution, therefore, seemed to be to trace the historical connection between the two and to discover what the therapists and the guru had had in mind when they met.

Siddha had been one of the first therapists to meet Rajneesh, but the very first was Teertha, an Englishman with a Birmingham accent, now the head therapist on the ranch. Tall, gray-haired, and slightly stooped, Teertha spoke slowly and would fall into silence when he felt that a question was too alien. When I asked him about the guru's prediction of nuclear war, he said that the planet earth was working off its karma, but that in the end it would surely be saved by immaterial beings from another planet. He had, he said, no academic training in psychology; he had studied at Warwickshire

University and had worked at a variety of jobs, one of them in photo advertising. On a trip to the United States, he had wound up, somewhat by accident, at the Esalen Institute, at Big Sur—then the center of the growth movement. He spent a year there and then returned to London to set up his own growth center, the first in England, at the request of the Esalen directors. His center had flourished, but after a while, he said, his therapists had "ceilinged and got stuck." They had tried meditation but found most of the Eastern techniques unsuitable, since people just couldn't sit still that long. Then, one day, in the process of looking for a new acupuncturist, he ran across an Indian who told him about a system of "dynamic meditation" taught by a man who called himself Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Shortly afterward, in the spring of 1972, Teertha—then Paul Graham Lowe—went to Bombay to see Rajneesh. He found the guru's dynamic meditation, which involved a great deal of physical activity before the sitting, well suited to his purposes. But beyond that he found an enlightened master. He became a disciple and went back to London to turn his center into a Rajneeshee meditation center. A year later, he moved his entire center to Bombay.

After Paul Lowe came Leonard Zunin and then Michael Barnett, another English therapist and the author of a book called "People Not Psychiatry;" and after them a steady flow of growth-movement therapists found their way to Rajneesh. Because of Teertha's connections with Esalen, a lot of Californians came, and from Esalen the word spread to various other movement circles: to the Reichians, to the group around R. D. Laing, and so on. Then, as the growth movement itself spread from England to the Continent, the talk about Rajneesh followed it. Eventually, hundreds of therapists and other growth-movement enthusiasts came, many of them to go home in red clothes and malas, with new names and new identities. Others stayed permanently with Rajneesh, or later went home at his request to found Rajneeshee centers, giving up their independent practices and putting into the movement the money they made.

In a sense, this rush of therapists to Rajneesh was not difficult to account for. In the nineteen-seventies, Esalen and the other big growth-movement centers were periodically swept by enthusiasm for one or another exotic religion or technique. One year it was Sufi dancing, another year Soviet experiments in parapsychology; one year it was Arica, a mind-control system invented in Chile, and another year it was Tibetan Buddhism. Why not, then, one year Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh? In a different sense, however, the attraction of the therapists to the guru required some explanation—as did their attraction to Arica, tarot cards, and the like. Psychology was, after all, a scientific discipline, and Freudian psychology, the tradition from which they came, harbored the most thoroughgoing suspicions of such enthusiasms. While psychotherapists as a group might be no less spiritually inclined than, say, lawyers or architects, their profession gave them solid grounds for skepticism about any system that demanded the shedding of identity and the surrender of the ego to someone else. The growth-movement therapists were, however, a special case; the spiritual ferment



at Esalen merely reflected what had been a tendency in the movement since its inception.

In the nineteen-forties and fifties, a number of psychologists in the United States broke with both Freudian and behavioral psychology to form what they called humanistic, or third-force, psychology. They were rather a mixed group of people, ranging from Gestalt psychologists, through "sensitivity trainers," to neo-Reichians, and the awkward names they took betrayed the awkwardness of gathering them all together under one rubric. But the name "human-potential movement" did identify the belief they held in common: the belief that psychology had the potential not just for curing the sick but for improving humankind. Freud, they complained, saw all human beings as more or less neurotic and more or less hoist with the petard of their—inevitably—neurotic civilization. Such pessimism about the perfectibility of human nature was unacceptable to these psychologists. It was intuitively alien, and they did not so much reject it as brush it off. Idealists and romantics, they had something in common with Rousseau, for they could imagine man outside the context of any particular civilization. They believed that by stripping off the repressions layered upon him man would come to his full flowering in something like the state of nature. Social institutions did not much concern them—that was not their field. But then, rather than intellectuals, they were, in the main, practitioners—hands-on people, uninterested in theory. What they did was to create a series of powerful techniques and approaches that had immediate, observable results. What the observable results meant was not clear at all, for, typically, the psychologists were people in a hurry. (One of the things that drove them to invention was their impatience with the slow, archeological methods of Freudian analysis.) Thus, few of them bothered to give their techniques a theoretical foundation. The books written by such people as Arthur Janov (father of primal-scream therapy) or Alexander Lowen (creator of bioenergetics) were more or less pop psychology, marked by carelessness and lack of concern for the scientific method. This lack of concern, however, lurked in the very nature of the enterprise, for in their view "humanistic psychology" stood in opposition to "scientific psychology." But if psychology was not a science—or was not based on scientific method—what was it? The question went unanswered.

The difficulty is most readily apparent in the works of Abraham Maslow, the only one to make any sustained attempt to define "humanistic psychology." A research psychologist rather than a therapist, Maslow found in the course of writing a book on abnormal psychology that what interested him was not the sick but the very healthy—not mental illness but mental health. His idea was to study people who were exceptionally healthy—people who made "the full use of their Talents, capacities, and potentialities," or, in his phrase, "self-actualized people." His method was this: He made a list of people he considered self-actualizing, among them Jefferson, Schweitzer, and Spinoza (but not, for some reason, Washington, Goethe, and Bach). He then made a list of the characteristics he thought these people had in common, among them courage, humility, creativity,

and altruism. After that, he constructed a series of tests to determine who among the living were "self-actualizing" and who were not. He started first with students at Brandeis University, since that was where he taught. Among his tests was one K.D. used on the sannyasins—a test for "inner-directedness." The enterprise was rather less scientific than many party games, and the results were predictably solipsistic: the "self-actualizing person" was someone Maslow happened to think highly of, for one reason or another. His next enterprise was a "theory of basic needs." His theory proposed a hierarchy of "needs," beginning (at the bottom) with physiological needs, such as food and shelter, and ending (at the top) with "growth needs," such as truth, beauty, and "meaningfulness." According to his theory, the human being had generally to satisfy each level of needs before graduating to the next one; that is, one had to fulfill, say, "belongingness needs" before one could graduate to "esteem needs" and, above that, "growth needs." Now much quoted in business-management texts, this theory would, among other things, rule out the possibility that someone could be a fine mathematician, or, for that matter, an interior decorator, without a healthy love relationship and high self-esteem. K.D.'s statement that only the rich could be truly religious was a quotation from Rajneesh, but it was also pure Maslow.

Such vagaries went largely unnoticed. The academic psychologists and the members of the great analytic Institutes found these growth-movement musings too far beneath their intellectual dignity to criticize. And the growth-movement people weren't interested. One result was that practice ran so far ahead of theory as to become quite independent of it. Another was that, as the movement grew, it split and went off in different directions. Some of his practitioners moved into mainstream psychotherapy; others went into business management; still others went into pop psychology, spreading the language and adapting the therapies so that entrepreneurs like Werner Erhard could package and mass-market them. The purists—those around Esalen and the newer growth centers—continued to experiment, venturing along the paths indicated by the first generation. These people, the real inheritors of the movement, were distressed by the popularizers and the accommodationists. Idealists, they came into the movement not to learn more sophisticated forms of life adjustment but to seek higher forms of consciousness. They were radicals, but radicals of a different sort from their neighbors in Berkeley. While the political radicals denounced "elitism," distrusted all forms of authority, and paralyzed themselves trying to make their organizations perfectly democratic, the growth-movement radicals looked for teachers and sought an elite of "the self-actualizing." They went to sit at the feet of Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, Ida Rolf, and the other Star therapists. (They had to; since there was no theory, they had to watch.) They became disciples, but in the end they were always disappointed.

Swami Anand Rajen, the most reflective and articulate of the Rajneeshite therapists I talked to, described the general trajectory of these therapists in talking about his own experiences. An

Englishman, Rajen had begun his career by working as a schoolteacher. He had moved on to do experimental psychology at Oxford. But Oxford psychology had frustrated him, "because it was not about human beings." Having read a book by Carl Rogers, he went off to a growth center in La Jolla, California, and found what he was looking for. He returned to London to join a growth center called Community, where Michael Barnett, among others, taught. "Like many therapists, I was into doing my own thing," Rajen said. "But all of us were in some sense looking for masters—for people more aware, more loving, and more open than we were. From Carl Rogers what I got was a recognition that I wasn't my personality that I could slip out of it. In groups, I had glimpses of a way of living that was not so constricted by what we want and what we're afraid of. And the therapists seemed to be more willing to live in these spaces than the rest of us. In all therapists have their limitations. There is always a discrepancy between their demonstration of how to be in groups and how they are in their private lives."

As Rajen suggested, the problem was not just that the therapists went home from their "loving spaces of being" and snapped at the dog and the children but that in the end they were only therapists, only human. And their disciples were looking not for therapists but for personifications of whatever they meant by "authenticity" and "awareness;" they were looking to get high on "peak experience" and stay there.

Even at Esalen, the growth-movement solutions proved inadequate. "A lot of people felt there was something missing," Richard Price, one of the directors of Esalen, told me. "Alan Watts introduced us to Buddhism in the mid-sixties, and it seemed to put what we were doing into a more inclusive framework. After that, Esalen was a mix of therapy and interest in Buddhism."

In fact, it was Alan Watts who constructed what would be the intellectual bridge between the therapists and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. In his "Psychotherapy East and West," published in 1961, Watts proposed common ground between the therapists and the sangha, or Buddhist clergy. His opening paragraph read, "If we look deeply into such ways of life as Buddhism and Taoism, Vedanta and Yoga, we do not find either philosophy or religion as these are understood in the West. We find something more nearly resembling psychotherapy." On this extraordinary reduction the therapists proceeded: they travelled to India and went from ashram to monastery in the hope of finding what Watts had seen. But again they were almost always disappointed, for in addition to meditation the ashrams and monasteries taught religion and philosophy, much as these were understood in the West, and, on top of that, exotic systems of rites and rituals and a social morality—in fact, a whole civilization—and all this did not suit the therapists a bit. What was more, many groups put a very high threshold in front of the higher consciousness. The Tibetan Buddhists, for example, required Sanskrit and memorization of the five thises, the thirty-four thats, and the ninety-six qualities of something else. The priests of the Vedanta were equally demanding; moreover,

they were, in the eyes of the therapists, male chauvinists, and they believed that celibacy helped. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh turned out to be the exception. He spoke perfect English; he demanded nothing except surrender and trust in him. Like Krishnamurti, he was a modernizer and an iconoclast, and yet he was, so he said, an Enlightened Master willing to take responsibility for the surrender of his disciples. In India, he was something of a paradox. He was, as one Anglo-Indian writer later christened him, "the Progressive Guru."

In 1972, when Teertha and Veena first met the guru, Rajneesh was living in an apartment in Bombay and conducting meditation camps outside the city. According to his biographer, an Indian-born disciple named Vasant Joshi, he was just beginning to move into the third stage of his career. Born in 1931 in a small town in Madhya Pradesh, he came from a family of doth merchants of the Jain religion. His full name was Chandra Mohan Jain, hut his family called him Raja or Rajneesh. As a child, he was bright, rebellious, and something of a Toner; he did well in school, but often got into trouble for leading his classmates in all kinds of pranks. During the struggle for national independence, he joined the youth branch of the Indian National Array and became a socialist and an atheist. He read a great deal and became a formidable debater. Graduating from high school in 1951, he went to college in Jabalpur to study philosophy; according to Joshi's biography, his propensity for debate so annoyed his professors that they threw him out in mid-career. After being admitted to another college, he went through what Westerners would probably call a nervous breakdown. Depressed, full of fears, and suffering from headaches that his family doctor told him were psychosomatic, he ran ten to sixteen miles a day and meditated for hours at a time—sometimes to the point of unconsciousness. At the end of this period—or so he announced twenty years later—he became enlightened, after meditating one night in a Jabalpur garden, under a maulshree tree.

Rajneesh graduated from college in 1955, took an M.A. in philosophy, and was given a teaching position at the Raipur Sanskrit College in 1957; three years later, he was appointed assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Jabalpur. In 1960, he began to give public lectures in which he took and defended various controversial positions: he criticized Gandhi, criticized socialism, and tore into orthodox Hinduism. Many years later, he said that he had had no stake in any of these positions, "but when the entire population of the country was absorbed in these tensions there seemed, even if just for fun, a necessity to create controversies." For him, it was "just like the acting of an actor." But his polemics brought him attention, and his audiences grew. In 1966, he was able to quit his university job and Support himself by lecturing around the country. The positions he took marked him: apparently by force of defending them, he adopted most of them permanently. Gandhi, he argued, was a reactionary and a man who worshipped poverty; he was worshipped, in turn, because, like all politicians, he followed "the Indian mob" instead of leading it. India, Rajneesh argued, needed capitalism, science, advanced technology, and birth control, for without them it

would be doomed to poverty and backwardness. In 1968, he gave a series of lectures on love and sex, in which he maintained that the primal energy of sex was divine, and that sexual feelings should be not repressed but gratefully acknowledged. Only by acknowledging his real nature could man be free. In the same vein, he attacked religions that preached withdrawal from life; true religion, he said "is an art that shows how to enjoy life to its utmost."

Rajneesh's views shocked and repelled many people, but they attracted others—principally groups of wealthy and progressive businessmen in Bombay. In 1964, he had begun to hold meditation camps for these men and their families in mountain resort towns. His first real disciple, a woman who took the name Ma Yoga Laxmi, came from one of these families. Her father, a wealthy Jain businessman, had been an important supporter of the Indian National Congress Party during the struggle for independence, and had close ties to many political leaders — Gandhi, Nehru, and Morarji Desai. Laxmi had gone into social work and politics; in her late twenties and unmarried, she was the secretary of the Bombay branch of the All-India Women's Conference when she met Rajneesh, in the mid-sixties. After attending two of his meditation camps, she adopted Rajneesh as her master and began to travel around with him, making the practical arrangements for his trips. In 1970, she became his secretary and raised the money that permitted him to stop his travels and settle into the Bombay apartment, where people could come to him. From 1970 to 1981, when Rajneesh left for the United States, Laxmi handled all the practical affairs of the guru, raising money, administering the ashram, and running political interference.

Rajneesh's biography accounts for the new phase in Rajneesh's career in spiritual and esoteric terms: the master moved from the rajas guna, the active and passionate quality in human nature, to the sattva, the quality of serenity and wisdom. A Westerner reading his biography might imagine that Rajneesh Chandra Mohan at this point went through a rather abrupt change of career. Until 1970, he had been a philosopher lecturing on politics, sex, and society; now he was a religious man teaching spiritual disciples. But in India such distinctions are not so absolute. Rajneesh had been teaching meditation for some time. He continued to do this, but instead of lecturing he gave a regular evening discourse on spiritual and other matters to those who came to his apartment. Nevertheless, his approach had changed. That spring, at a meditation camp, he introduced a new technique he called "dynamic meditation." Instead of simply sitting, the participants would begin by jumping about and shouting whatever came into their heads; they would then dance quietly for a few minutes and then hyperventilate by shouting "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" as loud as they could; after that, they would relax and watch their thoughts go. In the fall, he founded what he called the Neo-Sannyas International Movement and initiated six disciples as the first step in creating a spiritual awakening around the world. He gave his disciples new names and, at the request of Laxmi, a mala with a Photograph of him on it. It was Laxmi's inspiration that the disciples should wear the traditional

orange robes of holy men. The next year, Rajneesh changed his own name as well. Until then, his supporters had called him acharya, or teacher: Acharya Rajneesh Chandra Mohan. Now he took the title "Bhagwan," from a list drawn up by a disciple who knew Sanskrit, and called himself Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Eighteen months later, he revealed the fact and the circumstances of his enlightenment, twenty years before.

### *In Bombay,*

Rajneesh began to attract some of the Westerners along the spiritual tourist routes. Given his views, it was extremely likely that he would. Here was a guru unencumbered by tradition, an Enlightened Master who could quote Heidegger and Sartre, and who, furthermore, believed in technology, capitalism, and sex. Rajneesh was unique along the ashram routes. And he liked Westerners. One of his first six disciples was a young American he had taken on to teach yoga classes; it was he who had found Rajneesh the name "Bhagwan." In 1971, he took a young English woman, Christine Woolf, to live with him; this was the woman who drove in the Rolls-Royce with him into Madras, Oregon, in 1983, her name now Ma Yoga Vivek. By all accounts, he gave Westerners special attention, talking to them about their personal problems and aspirations, and encouraging them to take the plunge and become his disciples. He sent them back home—when they really had to go—with instructions to start Rajneeshee centers wherever they lived.

Rajneesh's disciples did not question this attention; they considered it perfectly normal for a guru to surround himself with young Westerners—they considered it only their due. The fact was that many of the Westerners did not particularly like India. In Rajneeshpuram, not only Veena but almost all the other people I talked to told me how happy they were to have left India for this healthy, beautiful place. They had gone for the spiritual country, and in the real country they had seen only poverty, inefficiency, and underdevelopment. Rajneesh encouraged them in this view. When I asked Teertha why it was that Rajneesh had ended up with so many Western disciples, he said, "*Bhagwan went all over India lecturing and couldn't find enough people suitable for the Buddhafield. There were some beautiful Indians, of course, but not enough of them. Indians, you know, are still looking for prosperity, while Westerners have it and know that it's not enough. Bhagwan used to tell Indians, 'If you came face to face with God, you'd ask Him for a Chevrolet.'*"

Rajneesh, though his disciples never knew it, learned a great deal from the Westerners he met in Bombay and in Poona. Teertha brought him his entire library, and many other sannyasins brought him books. Rajneesh was a voracious reader, and quite a good listener as well. His English became colloquial, and he learned how to do the more profound work of translation. When he explained his "dynamic meditation" 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 lodged in the body as physical blocks, and, releasing this body energy to the brain. The conception was still Tantric, but in English it sounded like Wilhelm Reich, "I read his 'Book of the Secrets,' " Price, the Esalen director, told me, referring to one of the guru's early collections of published lectures, "and it fitted very well into the Gestalt framework. Rajneesh put Indian philosophy into a digestible form, so that it was available to a wide range of people. He reminded me a lot of Alan Watts." That the guru might have read Watts did not seem to occur to Price.

According to Teertha, Rajneesh showed immediate interest in what the therapists were doing, and promised to incorporate some of their therapies into his own enterprise. Teertha took the promise for mere politeness at the time, but three years later Rajneesh did just that. The Westerners in his ashram first taught primal-scream and encounter-group therapies, and later, when there were more of them, branched out into Gestalt, bioenergetics, rolfing, and so on. What the guru made of these therapies is difficult to say even now. On occasion, he would relate them to the Tantric tradition: "These are not new experiments. These have been tried by seekers of Tantra for centuries. For ages, Saraha and Tilopa and Kanahpa tried it. For the first time, I am trying to give these experiments a scientific base. These experiments were conducted in secrecy for so long." At other times, he would explain them on their own terms, but as the means to meditation: "They will help you to unburden the garbage that you have repressed within yourself. They will clean you, and only in a clear, clean heart is prayer possible." At still other times, he would explain them in purely secular terms, as cures for Western neuroses. The Western therapists, for their part, had no interest in the question of how their therapies might fit into any Indian tradition. "I am not on any ancient path," the Master told them. "I am the beginning of a tradition, not the end."

In 1974, Laxmi moved Rajneesh from Bombay to Poona, a city in the hills. The guru's health was bad: he had developed diabetes, asthma, and allergies to almost everything. The climate was better in Poona, and, he-sides, Rajneesh now had enough disciples to warrant an ashram. Establishing a foundation for him—the Rajneesh Foundation—Laxmi bought a villa with six acres of land and several outbuildings in a rich suburb of the city. The guru, who had formerly spent a good deal of time talking with individual disciples, now saw his flock only twice a day. In the morning, he would lecture, and in the evening he would hold darshan, answering questions submitted to him, giving sannyas, and talking with those who had just arrived and those who were going away.

One month, Rajneesh would lecture in Hindi and the next in English, and his lectures became widely renowned. Sitting on a low platform in a white robe and sandals, he would speak for two hours without notes, his voice soft and sibilant, and he motionless except for an occasional gesture of his long, fine hands. His essential message was the central one of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition: 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 One-ness and Suchness of existence. Like Krishnamurti, he admitted Christ, Lao-tzu, and the great mystics of other traditions into his panoply of Enlightened Beings. His early lectures were more or less thematic: he would do a series on the Upanishads or the Tantra or the New Testament. Later, he adopted a more personal, eclectic style, telling Zen parables, jokes, stories from the life of Buddha or the Sufi sages, and citing, for example, Gurdjieff, Socrates, and Bob Hope in a single lecture. When he joked, his expression would turn foxy or puckish, and his eyes would tease.

By 1976, the Shree Rajneesh Ashram had become one of the major stopping points along the guru route. In "Seeking the Master"—a kind of Guide Michelin to spiritual India, published in 1980—it rated the longest entry and the equivalent of at least three stars. Thousands of Westerners poured in—so many, in fact, that the ashram could not house them, and they had to find lodgings elsewhere in the city. Many, of course, came out of sheer curiosity, for Rajneesh's advocacy of sex as a means to divine transcendence made him the most controversial of the Indian masters. But, having come thus lightly, many stayed—if not for Bhagwan's lectures, then for all the other activities going on at the ashram. Under Laxmi's direction, the permanent workers and residents in the ashram (there were six hundred of them in the end) created an arts-and-crafts center that turned out clothing, jewelry, ceramics, and organic cosmetics (all for sale at the ashram boutique), and put on performances of music, theatre, and mime. The residents offered visitors at least nine types of meditation—dynamic to zazen and classes in yoga, karate, T'ai Chi, acupuncture, Sufi dancing, and shiatsu massage. In 1975, the ashram offered two kinds of Western therapies; by 1979, it offered some sixty of them, including several invented at the ashram. Like an octopus, the ashram reached out and embraced everything that came its way; eventually, it included almost every booth in the entire holistic New Age marketplace.

Of those who stayed more than three or four days, many took sannyas, changing their jeans for ochre robes, putting on the guru's mala, and accepting the names he gave them. Most of them did so because the guru was quite insistent that they do-and there were no conditions attached. Just try it, Rajneesh told them, just trust me, take the risk and see. He explained that neo-sannyas was different from sannyas, in that it meant only the beginning of a search, only the readiness to try to become a new being. He also explained that though he gave sannyas to just about everyone who came to the ashram and just about everyone requesting the mala by mail, he did not give sannyas indiscriminately. He told a disciple:

*If you think that whenever someone comes to me I just give him sannyas, it is not so. I may say that I will give sannyas to anyone who comes, but this does not mean what it seems to mean. It may look as though I just give sannyas to anyone, but what is really happening is something quite different.*



He went on to say that he could not explain everything in the beginning or all at once:

*Everything is meaningful, but it may not be obvious and it may not be possible to explain it to you. Many things will have to remain unexplained for a much longer time. The more receptive you become, the more I will be able to explain. The deeper your capacities to be sympathetic, the deeper the truth that can be revealed.*

*The more rational the discussion, the less truth that can be revealed.*

Many accounts exist of life in the Poona ashram, for the visitors included a number of writers, filmmakers, and journalists. The accounts of those who took sannyas and those who did not often differ quite sharply in certain respects, but they are consistent in describing a madhouse-carnival atmosphere. Each day, hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Westerners in ochre robes would flood through the ashram—and, incidentally, the city of Poona. The Westerners who had just changed, or were about to change, their names and their clothes lived in highly charged emotional states their emotions enhanced by a good deal of discomfort and culture shock. Getting to Poona had been confusing enough. The trains from New Delhi and Bombay left at odd hours, and the times when one could buy tickets were unpredictable. At the stations, the crowds were enormous and the heat was intense. After you finally pushed your way through and got on the train, you would sit on a hand bench for four to eight hours with nothing to eat or drink (at least, nothing that was safe), looking out at thatched villages where men drove bullocks before wooden plows and women did their laundry in muddy streams. Poona was a modern city, but it, too, was crowded, hot, and greatly exotic. Getting into the ashram had its difficulties, for although many of the staff members were Westerners, they did not work by Western routines, and it was never quite clear who ran what or how decisions were made. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was allergic to any form of perfume, so a guard at the gate would sniff you for scented soap or shampoo. If smells clung to you—or if the guard thought, they did—you might not be able to get into the guru's lectures or darshans for days.

Instead, a staff member would shunt you off to "dynamic meditation," where hundreds of people would be screaming, singing, or moaning to themselves as they shook their bodies about; then, together, they would yell "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" at the top of their voices. "I'm going to bring your insanity out," Rajneesh had said. "Unless you become consciously insane, you can never become sane. When your insanity is pulled out, thrown to the wind, then sanity will happen to you." So there were therapy groups and meditations, though the distinctions between them were not always clear. In one meditation, you had to sit and answer the question "Who am I?" for two days or until something happened, and in some therapies people would end up gazing for hours at a picture of Rajneesh. People were experimenting a lot with Tantric sex, in and out of the therapy groups, either on general principles or in the hope of having some experience of the divine.

Just whom anyone was sleeping with seemed to have less importance than normally, for

there were all kinds of love and energy going around, in some therapy groups, people holding hands in a circle would actually feel an electrical charge. Then, too, with a thousand people in ochre robes, who knew who anyone was? You or your friend might one day wake up Joanie and go to bed, say, Ma Prem Shakti. The problem was to lose your mind and be completely spontaneous—to live in the present, not the past or the future. Bhagwan thought chaos helped.

The ashram was not, of course, for everyone. It was certainly not for Hindu purists. A German visitor quoted in "Seeking the Master" said:

*I do not see the point of Neo Sannyas. Most Hindus wait for the best part of their lives before they feel able to take initiation and accept the holy robe. But here, many kids who don't even know the meaning of the word sannyas, are given the ego-inflating title of Swami this-and-that, and then freak the average Indian by going about arm in arm with hip chicks, while wearing renunciate's robes.*

The ashram was also not for people who worried too much about what discipleship and surrender might mean—or what the therapies did. Rajneesh said, "The ego has to drop.

The mind has to disappear for God to be. You have to disappear," and so on. An American bioenergetics therapist who spent three months with the guru in Bombay thought this unhelpful. "Rajneesh encouraged the letting go of one's own responsibility," he said. "And that's where I left. It's one thing to ask people to drop the obstructive chatter that goes on in the head and another to ask them to drop the process of discrimination. Bhagwan made no distinction between the two, and when I asked him why not he answered cryptically, 'Why do you care? What is it to you?'"

The therapist had taken part in the guru's "dynamic meditation" and was not impressed. "What I saw from the Esalen perspective was a series of cathartic techniques. I had become inured to them by then. So when I saw three or four hundred people doing the 'dynamic' I saw nothing happening but mass autosuggestion. There were people all around me in states of regression. They had become infantile and were relating to a father figure. People were attached to him as to a god. He himself disavowed it, but it was a simpleminded devotion as to a god. This doesn't happen with just Rajneesh. In my view, it's a problem inherent in Hinduism."

### *The therapist's analysis*

would have infuriated the Hindu purists—but even more the Rajneesh. Many of the guru's new disciples experienced this surrender differently. In September of 1983, on my second visit to Rajneeshpuram, I met Ma Satya Bharti, a woman in her early forties who had spent some years working in the Poona ashram and had written two books about her experiences there. In one book, she described taking sannyas as "a return to innocence and a liberation":

*To surrender to a master isn't to surrender anything that's real. On the contrary, it's to surrender, to give up, all the dreams, all the peripheral accumulations that the ego is made up of. We can't surrender anything that's real, Bhagwan says, because as we are we don't have anything that's*

*real. Everything about us is false, borrowed. inauthentic.*

Satya Bharti had taken up "dynamic meditation" in order to get rid of that madness—or that sanity. The first time she really got it, she wrote, she felt as if she were walking for the first time, and she wanted her mother there to watch her. In subsequent sessions, she had what the guru explained were past-life experiences: she became a baby kitten learning how to kill a mouse, and she saw her son—though it wasn't her real son, Billy—hanging with a rope around his neck. In the quiet part of the meditation, she would always feel floating and blissful.

After the "dynamic," Satya Bharti wrote, she would go to Bhagwan's lecture:

*I would sit silently on the floor in front of him. I would drink him. His hands danced their eloquent dance while he spoke, hypnotizing me, mesmerizing me. Sometimes, for no discernible reason, I would feel a flood of tears pouring down my face....*

*Bhagwan would glance at me for an instant while he spoke. Suddenly the energy would rise up in me like a violent storm, an earthquake. My body would begin shaking. Violent tremor after violent tremor. It was as if I were a riveting machine...My body was doing its own thing, but another part of me stood outside the body, watching what was happening as if it had nothing to do with me.*

Satya Bharti had become a sannyasin in the United States not long after getting divorced. She had married a New York stockbroker when she was in college, and had three children. Though she had been a math student in college, she had always wanted to be a writer, and while she was married, she had written a market newsletter and, later, speeches for Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm. In the sixties, she had become "radicalized," she told me; she had gone back to college — to Sarah Lawrence—and had worked in politics and taken up yoga. Finally, she had rebelled against the conventional life she and her husband were leading, and against all his conventional views. She started doing meditation informally with some Rajneesh disciples in New York and took sannyas after that. She decided she had to go to India to live, even though it meant leaving her three young children with her ex-husband. In one book, she wrote of that decision:

*I had always wanted to save them from their father's world, and he had always wanted to save them from mine....*

*To suddenly, willingly, hand the children over to their father's influence was hard. But it seemed inevitable.... How could I wish for them as I did, most of all, happiness, freedom and continual growth if I didn't allow myself to have it? How can you share with others what you yourself don't have?*

The children, she wrote, had finally adjusted to her absence. "Life is a school," her son, Billy, said a few years later, when he was eleven years old. "I guess being without Mommy is one of the lessons I have to learn." She herself, she wrote, found the attachment more difficult to give up. At the ashram, she would rock back and forth crying, "I want my baby back, I want my baby back."

The pain is incredible. I relive scores of past-life experiences, all connected with this same feeling of loss: my children dead, dying, killed; taken away from me in one way or another. A loss that's irretrievable, a pain that's unending. In this lifetime, no one has killed my children, no one has taken them away from me. I've done it myself; the choice was mine. The pain is no less real because of it.

Finally, she went to Bhagwan for help, and he said to her, "Why are you worrying about them? Everything is perfect with them. Everything is happening as it should. They're not your responsibility anymore, I told you that before. They're my responsibility now; I'm taking care of them. They'll come here, don't worry. When the time is right, when they're ready to come." Satya Bharti left the darshan "feeling as though a weight had dropped from me." Bhagwan, she wrote, "had told me the same thing before, but I hadn't been able to trust him enough to believe it," She added, "I suppose trust grows. I trusted him enough now."

In Rajneeshpuram, talking to me, Satya Bharti brought up the subject of her children, now aged seventeen, twenty, and twenty-one. They had never come to the ashram, and they had not yet come to the ranch to see her. "They love me," she said, "but they feel that I'm copping out on life — that I've left the real world. But I'm quite sure that at some point they'll come to see me—just to visit, of course." Some months later, they did:

A slight, pretty woman, Satya Bharti was sitting in the outdoor cafe of the ranch wearing a pink tank-top jersey and pants when I met her. She looked younger than her age, and she spoke as rapidly as any New Yorker. She seemed happy.

Between my two visits to the ranch, I had asked the American bioenergetics therapist who had left Rajneesh what it was that happened between the disciple and the Master. He said, "For the disciple, there's something akin to a transference—on the theory that there's a spark of divinity in everyone and that spark can be projected onto a guru. It's like the transference onto a therapist, only it's far more powerful. If the guru acknowledges responsibility for it, he holds it for a while, as a therapist does, until the disciple moves on. It took me two years to resolve my transference on Bhagwan. I did it in dreams. I became him."

Rajen, whom I spoke with on my second visit, told me much the same thing, but in different terms and with a different ending. "There's an analogy between taking sannyas with Bhagwan and the growth groups," he said. "The guru mirrors back facets of our own personality—the series of masks we wear that are culturally acquired and conditioned. Taking sannyas confronted me with all my attachments. In the six and a half years I have been with him, it's been more and more fun to let go. I live in the here and now, and before I never could have accepted this simplicity. Once, left the ashram in Poona. I was scared to stay on, and I ran away to do my own workshops in Europe. There was some residue of wanting to do my own thing. During that time, Bhagwan went into silence, and

that caused a good deal of inner turmoil for some of us. I thought I had cut the cord, and I lived for a year with that, but it turned out not to be so. I realized that something had happened that wasn't under my control. I wasn't estranged from the energy of the Master. I couldn't think myself out of being open and imbibing what Bhagwan was all about."

I asked Rajen whether this would qualify as a transference.

"Yes," he said. "It's a transference, but a transference onto a master. The final attachment, Bhagwan says, is onto a master."

In Poona, Rajneesh had said that he would go into silence once his disciples had formed that attachment to him. "He said this so many times," Rajen said. "I am only entertaining you long enough for something to happen to you just by being in my presence.' Now we can see what he meant." The step was not without precedent. In India, it is customary for holy men to go into silence at some point in their lives. But in an ashram full of growth movement therapists there was some small irony to this: by going silent, Rajneesh became the guru equivalent of an orthodox Freudian analyst.

Where Rajneesh differed from most other gurus was in his pragmatic approach to the question of spiritual disciplines and practices. The people of Buddha's time, he said, developed techniques of meditation that worked for them, but these traditional methods did not work for modern man. For twentieth-century people, new techniques had to be developed. By this reasoning, he turned the Poona ashram into a kind of spiritual garage for anyone with a method and, at the same time, into a laboratory for experimentation of all sorts. His test of legitimacy was merely what worked, or what seemed to work. The Western therapists thus came in with the growth-movement techniques they had learned, and, from there on, experimented, adapting their techniques to the particular purposes of the ashram. Some of the therapies they invented played a direct role in establishing the master-disciple transference; and in the case of certain individuals they may have played the deciding role. In one of her books, Satya Bharti quoted Karuna (now the mayor of Antelope) on this point. In the therapies, there was an "almost tangible sense of Bhagwan's presence," Karuna said, continuing,

*Teertha worked with that a lot in the encounter group. When he felt that someone was open and vulnerable, he would tell them to sit and look at a picture of Bhagwan. It was very powerful. Just by sitting and looking at Bhagwan's picture, found that I could go beyond the point where I had always gotten stuck before when I was in groups. Bhagwan was there giving me the permission to go ahead, to transcend all boundaries.*

Satya Bharti had asked Karuna to describe how the ashram therapies differed from the growth-movement therapies practiced in the West, and that was a part of her answer. The other part was this:

*There's a sense of total acceptability in the groups here. Nothing is condemned. There are no*

*limitations, no restrictions; you can take things to the extreme. Group Leaders in the West place limits on what happens in their groups because of their own limitations, their own fears. Their self-image is constantly at stake. Here the responsibility is Bhagwan's, so the therapist can allow things to happen; he or she can afford to take risks.*

This freedom—or absolute dependency—was apparently what many of the therapists had been looking for all along. In their practice, a number of them took tremendous risks—only, the risks were not to them but, rather, to the people in their groups, whose mental health they had not tested and could not vouch for. The film "Ashram," made by the German filmmaker Wolfgang Dobrowolny in 1978, documents some of the risks they took with cathartic techniques, group groping, and so on, for at the time the Rajneesh thought of these therapies as advertisements for the ashram. (They went far as to stage some of them for the film.) Among the other boundaries some of the therapists "transcended," both on screen and off, were the usual strictures against sexual aggression and physical violence. This was only logical. The theory behind "dynamic meditation" was that people should give physical expression to their repressions and frustrations in order to get rid of their "emotional blocks." Teertha and Somendra—the English therapist Michael Barnett—merely extrapolated this notion in their groups; being rather literal people, they encouraged participants to act out all the emotions they felt (however briefly) for each other, including the desire to inflict grievous bodily harm. No one was actually killed in these encounters, but a number of people, naked and weaponless, gave a good deal of time and energy to the attempt. There were several cases of rape in the sessions; there were also a broken leg, several broken arms, and various other injuries. In 1977, Richard Price, the Esalen director and a Gestalt therapist, visited the ashram, observed one of Teertha's groups, and subsequently wrote a letter of protest to the ashram staff and to Rajneesh himself. In the letter, he said:

*My experience in my first two weeks at the ashram in the "meditation camp" was excellent. I felt a deepening, an enrichment, an attunement. During the last two weeks, my experience was quite the opposite. I had softened and opened only to be confronted with Teertha's autocratic, coercive, life-negating style of "leadership;" a style reinforcing violence and sexual acting-out of the most unfeeling kind; a style negating soft emotion and emerging sensitivity, and manipulating group pressure to force conformity. Is this what Bhagwan is about?*

Price, who died in an accident in November of 1985, had more than the usual interest in the ashram therapies. Not only had the Esalen Institute given Teertha the only therapeutic training he had ever had but it had sent a great many people to Poona. Price himself had become a mailorder sannyasin two years before he visited the ashram, on the strength of his friendships and his reading of Rajneesh's books. He was thus personally and institutionally involved:

*Any decent, responsible leader knows how easy it is to protect against most injury—and not*

*at the cost of suppressing the genuine expression of anger, sexuality or aggression—quite the opposite. Teertha actually works to suppress that expression. It is as if the worst mistakes of some inexperienced Esalen group leaders of many years ago have been systematized and given the stamp of "God."*

In 1983, Price told me much the same thing; he also said that eventually he had reluctantly come to the conclusion that "Rajneesh was in the karma of Esalen."

At the time, Rajneesh wrote a reply to Price's letter explaining, among other things, that it was only "objective compassion" to allow these obsessed by violence to get it out of their system. Laxmi apparently saw the matter in just this light. Gita Mehta, in "Karma Cola," describes "the matriarch of the ashram" talking "with only a hint of malice" about the visit from California of "the father of one of the most advanced touch therapies." She then quotes the matriarch as saying:

*We have a meditation in the ashram where the disciples beat each other. Hai ram, what simple pleasure they get from hitting and thrashing.*

*I tell you only yesterday one boy had his wrist smashed. but he is happy and it is very beautiful. Today, poor chap, he is in the massage meditation, he is having oil rubbed over the broken parts.*

Violence in the ashram therapies ended in January of 1979, a year after Price's intervention but only a short while after the Jonestown mass suicide. ("Jones was rather more influential than I was," Price said ironically.) A press release from the ashram explained that Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh believed that violence "had fulfilled its function within the overall context of the ashram as an evolving spiritual commune" (a phrase that any American foundation executive might have appreciated). In the same statement, Rajneesh announced that there would come a point in the development of the commune when therapy groups would be discontinued altogether. In the words of the press release, "He explained that it was a question of intelligence. Psychotherapies were needed only because the thousands of people coming to his ashram from the West were not yet intelligent enough to heal their own psychological wounds." This was a nasty jab at his disciples—underhanded, one might say. But perhaps it was only fair for Rajneesh to blame his disciples when the therapists were laying all the responsibility on him.

A similar confusion of responsibility was, it turned out, the main reason for the remarkable dearth of children among the Rajneeshee in Oregon. The guru was a great exponent of birth control for India. According to Laxmi, he had once met Indira Gandhi, and had taken the opportunity to tell her that she should assume dictatorial powers to enforce a program of sterilization so that no family in India had more than one child. (The advice, as it happened, fell on deaf ears, since Mrs. Gandhi had just lost the only election she ever lost, in part of her sterilization program.) At the ashram, Westerners would come to Rajneesh and ask him whether or not they should have a child. The guru

would—quite naturally—tell them that they should not if they had any question about it, and that they should look to their own growth first. What many Westerners heard him say, however, was that they should not have children. Possibly, this was what they wanted to hear, because they had come to Poona precisely to "work on their own growth." In any case, Teertha and his colleagues passed the guru's message on unadulterated to their groups. The result was a great many abortions and a good many sterilizations as well. The abortions continued at Rajneeshpuram, in part because of this legacy and in part because in the early stages of the commune Sheela and her associates wanted a work crew, and not a lot of pregnant women and babies. There was no law about babies, but if you had one it was far more difficult to get into or to stay in the commune.

By January of 1979, the Poona ashram had changed decisively in character. In the first two or three years of its existence, it had an Indian flavor. Westerners would meditate side by side with Indian sannyasins, and on Master's Day the gates of the ashram would open to a procession of men in white robes and women in colorful saris leading white heifers with garlands around their necks. Because ashrams in India tend to be for people with the leisure and the maturity to reflect, a lot of these who came were middle-aged and eminently respectable people from the business world in Poona. There were many ashrams in the city, and for the first few years seemed not very different from the rest. As time went on, however, more and more Westerners came to the ashram, and fewer and fewer Indians. Finally, the balance tipped, and by 1981, when the guru left for the United States, there were four to six thousand Westerners in his audience every day, and only a few hundred Indians. The ashram was surrounded by long-haired Westerners walking arm in arm and blissing out or freaking out in the streets.

Rajneesh clearly bore some responsibility for this. Not only did he give Westerners special attention and appoint them to all but the top positions on the ashram stall; he also instituted the Western therapies and—despite them though he might—filled the ashram schedule with them for twenty-one days out of every month. And he barred Indians from the therapies. When Rajneesh was asked why he did not permit Indians to join the groups, he explained that Eastern psychology was different from Western psychology: Easterners were "introverts," who needed only to meditate, whereas Westerners were "extroverts," who needed to know how to relate. (Rajneesh had remarked in darshans that "a hundred per cent of their problems are relationship problems." He did not, however, say that if Westerners came face to face with God they would ask Him for a "meaningful relationship.") It was probably true that Indians did not need the therapies. But it was also true that the Westerners did not want Indians in their therapy groups; they did not want Indians unblocking their own sexual energies around them, and they told the management that. Rajneesh thus barred Indians from Sufi dancing as well. In any event, the very idea of the therapies shocked the respectable Indians who heard about them.



*By 1979,*

the ashram was having public-relations problems in India. The citizens of Poona objected to the crowds of young people holding hands and hugging in the streets. Years later, Laxmi berated herself for not having foreseen and forestalled this provocation. But the hugging was probably the least of it. Among the Westerners who came to the ashram, there were some borderline psychotics, and since the ashram provided no screening procedures for sanity, some of them went over the edge and ended in Poona hospitals on Thorazine.

Then, too, some of the young Westerners were financing their sojourns at the ashram in unorthodox ways. A fair number were smuggling drugs—opium, hashish, and marijuana—to Europe, and a few young women were found to be working as free-lance prostitutes in Bombay. While ashram officials claimed ignorance of these activities, the drug smuggling, at least, was fairly common knowledge in Poona. Then, there were the rumors about the therapies. Finally, the guru himself was becoming a public-relations problem.

As the ashram's constituency changed, Rajneesh seemed to change with it. His lecture style altered. His lectures became less and less focused, less and less thought through. By 1979, they were often little more than collections of quotations, jokes, and anecdotes combined with obiter dicta and attacks on political and religious figures. The jokes were now generally ethnic or scatological, and as vulgar as farmer's-daughter or travelling-salesman stories can get. His sannyasins furnished him with these and howled with laughter when he pronounced the vulgarities—like little boys hearing their first dirty joke. His attacks on people were mean-spirited and not at all inventive; in the end, they consisted in calling just about everyone a "Polack," beginning with Pope John Paul II. Then, as the quality of his lectures declined, the techniques he employed, or authorized, at the ashram became more and more extreme. After the violent therapies came "energy darshans," in which Rajneesh, touching the forehead of a young woman, would make her and the person she touched and the next six or eight people jump and twitch like galvanized frogs. The guru, apparently, could not shock his audience enough. His disciples wanted the most extreme forms of experience. Even those women who had been raped in "therapy" said they had found the experience valuable.

But while the disciples laughed and applauded, the guru's verbal abuse apparently did not sit well with a great many people in Poona and outside it. The ashram began receiving threatening letters, and several sannyasins were assaulted in the streets. In May of 1980, a young Hindu stood up in the middle of one of Rajneesh's discourses and started running toward the guru, shouting a protest; before the ashram guards could reach him, he threw a knife in Rajneesh's direction. He was arrested, charged with attempted murder, and tried, but was eventually acquitted.

Though most sannyasins remained unconscious of it, the ashram was having not only public-relations problems but difficulties with the Indian government as well. The election of 1977 had

brought a surprise defeat to Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party, and a victory to the Janata Party coalition, led by Morarji Desai. Laxmi, because of her background, had contacts at all levels of the Congress Party. She had introduced Rajneesh to Mrs. Gandhi and, according to *Der Spiegel*, had contributed large sums to her campaign. She had fewer contacts in the new coalition. Her father had been a close friend of Desai's, but the new Prime Minister was a Hindu conservative, and when she went to see him he told her that he disapproved of Rajneesh and his ashram. If there had been any hope of an accommodation, Rajneesh ended it by adding Desai to his list of "Polacks." The timing was unfortunate, because at that point the ashram stood in particular need of government cooperation.

As early as 1976, Rajneesh had talked about founding a "new commune" in the countryside, where ten thousand sannyasins could live. As the ashram became more and more crowded and the tensions between it and the city of Poona grew, the procurement of new quarters became, increasingly, a necessity. Laxmi took to the road. Looking for a large, isolated property, she found a prospect in northwestern Gujarat and two more in the mountains along the northern border of India. But each time she applied for the necessary permissions—in the first case to build on farmland, and in the others to move large numbers of people into military-security zones—the government turned her down. She next found an arid and barely adequate property just twenty miles from Poona, but then the Desai government removed the officials she knew in the state, and again the permissions did not come through. At around the same time, income-tax officials ruled that the ashram did not qualify as an educational institution or as a charitable or religious organization, and would therefore have to pay taxes on all donations—back taxes as well as current ones. The Rajneeshee took the case to court and believed they could win it, but they were threatened with a bill of several million dollars if they did not. When Mrs. Gandhi was returned to office, in January of 1980, Laxmi went to her for help with the national-security regulations. But by now the reputation of the ashram was such that the Prime Minister refused to intervene on its behalf.

On May 31, 1981, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh left abruptly for the United States with eighteen of his disciples; of the thousands of people in and around the ashram at the time, only a handful knew of his departure until after he had gone. In late March, his lectures had been cancelled—owing, it was said, to an outbreak of chicken pox in the ashram. Sannyasins had assumed that he would resume lecturing once the outbreak was contained, but in April Ma Anand Sheela, then Laxmi's first assistant, announced that Bhagwan had entered the ultimate stage of his work: he had gone into silence and would lecture no more. For the month of May, he sat with his disciples in silence for an hour out of every day. Then he left.

Just why the guru came to the United States became a matter of pressing interest to the Portland office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service six months later, when he applied for permanent residency. His Bombay application for a tourist visa stated that he required medical

treatment in the United States. Laxmi had written the American consul that he required an operation on his back, and in conversation with the consul Sheela had stressed the emergency nature of the request: she said Rajneesh was about to die. It is true that Rajneesh had fallen ill in the spring of 1981. His allergies, his asthma, and his diabetes had worsened and sapped his energies; finally, persistent coughing began to affect an old back injury—a prolapsed disk—and this caused him severe pain. Indian doctors and one of the world's leading orthopedic surgeons, brought in from England to treat him, testified to his condition. On his arrival in the United States, however, Rajneesh did not go to the hospital or seek any outside medical treatment, and at no time was he seen by any but sannyasin doctors. Rajneeshee lawyers later explained this apparent discrepancy by saying that his doctors had determined that while there was a significant concern that he might require surgery—though it would be dangerous—in the United States his condition had improved so much that he did not. The I.N.S. contended, however, that the guru had a preconceived intent to remain in the United States, and that false statements had been made on his application.

Whether false statements had been made was the legal question at issue, and I.N.S. officials never proved their case. (In the end, they did not have to.) But they did have significant evidence that Rajneesh and his followers had a preconceived intent to remain in the United States. In the first place, Sheela had asked the American consul in Bombay about the guru's eligibility for permanent residency. In the second place, Rajneeshee envoys had begun to search for land in the United States in April, and by October—when the guru asked for, and received, an extension of his tourist visa—they had bought the ranch and sunk a good deal of money into it. In the third place, the Rajneeshee had begun to ship ashram property to the United States two weeks before the guru left India, and shortly after he left some thousands of sannyasins also left, many of them bound for the United States. Laxmi, whom I met in Woodstock, New York, living as a sannyasin but apart from the commune, inadvertently added to this evidence when I talked to her by blaming herself for the guru's removal to the United States. She said she had failed to find a property in India adequate to his needs, and thus, when the medical emergency came, the initiative had passed to Sheela. According to ex-sannyasins, Sheela, who had become Laxmi's first assistant in 1975 and director of the business arm of the ashram in 1978, had moved to center stage while Laxmi was away looking for a commune site. Having been married to an American for many years, and being a frequent traveller to the United States, she had proposed that the guru move to America. In April of 1981, her Chidvilas Center bought a castle, in Montclair, that served as the guru's first residence in the United States; around the same time, she took over from Laxmi as the guru's secretary.

Rajneeshee doctors and lawyers later testified that the guru had recovered slowly in the salubrious air of America. An ex-sannyasin who had accompanied him told the I.N.S., however, that the guru had insisted on taking a limousine rather than an ambulance from Kennedy Airport to

Montclair, and that a week after his arrival he was walking around the garden at the Chidvilas Center and driving a Rolls-Royce. This testimony —combined with the fact that the guru never consulted an outside doctor in the United States—understandably caused I.N.S. officials to suspect that Rajneesh had never been as sick as he had said and was certainly not near death. To read Rajneesh's official biography was, however, to learn that there had been similar crises in the guru's life and other visits to death's door.

According to his biographer, Rajneesh thought a great deal about death, and had since he was seven years old. At seven, he had watched his beloved grandfather, with whom he lived, die a slow death next to him on a bullock cart as the family made the thirty-two-mile journey into town. Of that experience he told his biographer:

*When he died, I felt that it would be a betrayal to eat. Now I didn't want to live It was childish, but through it something very deep happened. For three days I remained lying down. I would not come out of bed. I said, "When he is dead, I do not want to live." I survived but these three days became a death experience.*

At another time, he said:

*His death freed me forever from all relationships. His death became for me the death of all attachments. Thereafter I could not establish a hand of relationship with anyone. Whenever my relationship with anyone began to become intimate, that death stared at me.*

The feelings of the little boy were the classic symptoms of survivor guilt. And these feelings, according to Rajneesh, did not go away. An astrologer had predicted that Rajneesh would face death every seven years, and would most probably die at age twenty-one. So at age fourteen he asked his school principal for a seven day leave from school, saying that he was going to die. He spent seven days alone in the ruins of a temple near his village and had, he later reported, another experience of death and the sense of detachment that comes from contemplating it. But this was not a unique experience for him. He was reckless as a boy; he would jump from a seventy-foot bridge into the river by his village, according to his relatives and friends, and would dive into whirlpools, which would suck him under and expel him just when he had no breath left. His biographer wrote that he used the river to bring himself face to face with death. At age twenty-one, he went into a severe depression, and felt once again "the bottomless abyss." On March 21, 1953, at the end of a seven-day period of Meditation, he had the experience he later called Enlightenment: he felt that he was exploding, going mad with bliss. "That night I died and was reborn," he said. "But the one that was reborn has nothing to do with that which died, it is a discontinuous thing.... The one who died, died totally; nothing of him has remained."

After that "death," Rajneesh entered into a period of great activity. His depression was gone, and his psychosomatic headaches vanished. But exactly twenty-one years later, in March of 1974 (his

biographer reports this but does not seem to attach significance to it), Rajneesh announced that he was withdrawing from all activities, "just as the sun withdraws its rays in the evening, as the fisherman withdraws his fishing net." He moved to Poona on March 21st, suffering from allergies and acute asthma—illnesses often thought to be psychosomatic in origin. After giving a course of lectures on the Bhagavad Gita in Hindi, he went into almost complete silence and, to everyone's amazement, asked to be returned to Bombay. At the end of April, however, he recovered and began to stroll in the Poona gardens, seeming to like his new surroundings. But he stopped giving meditations in person and thereafter gave only lectures and darshans.

Rajneesh stopped speaking to his Poona audiences on March 24, 1981, precisely seven years after this last event (the coincidence again unremarked by his biographer). According to Laxmi, he had sat quite still in his room for months before that, not reading and paying no attention to her when she fussed around him, and emerging only for his public appearances. In March, four specialists pronounced him very ill with allergies, asthma, and the prolapsed disk. On May 31st, he left for the United States, and a week later he was walking around the gardens of the castle in Montclair. The authorities of the Immigration and Naturalization Service either did not notice this pattern or thought that it went beyond their jurisdiction.

Rajneesh had always said he would never leave India, because, although he disliked modern India, the very earth was sacred—so many Buddhas had walked upon it. Not long before leaving, however—at the beginning of March, just before he went into silence—he delivered himself of a bitter attack upon his country and his countrymen. India, he said, was "an old, ancient, rotten country" and "many rotten parts of this goddamned country have to be removed." Of his colleagues, he said, "Their hysterical experiences have been called samadhi. Their madness has been respected.... Fools have been worshipped, masochists have been thought to be ascetics, sadists have been thought to be great saints. Perversions of all kinds have been given a spiritual connotation...This country is a country of pretenders, and I am hurting them. And want to hurt them, because that is the only way to pull the pus out of their centuries-old wounds." Rajneesh also spoke of the "thousands of people writing against me, shouting against me," and of the threats on his life. But he said he would continue "to expose this whole lie of thousands of years," and added, "I have nothing to lose. At the most they can kill me."

Conceivably, Rajneesh was ready to leave India.

### *Before Rajneesh went into silence,*

he spoke on a number of occasions about "the new commune" he would create. Man, he said, had outgrown the family; it had served its purpose but had exacted a heavy price in neurosis. The institution of marriage had been founded on a desire for security. Some marriages were spiritual ones, but, as love could not be legalized, most marriages were held together merely by guilt or fear

or a sense of dependency. Families stunted children as well as adults, for children grew up obsessed by love or hate for their parents: men spent their lives looking for the image of their mother in women, while women searched endlessly for their fathers. Families demanded obedience from children and thus enforced mediocrity. They taught children to accept religious and political dogmas blindly, and they taught them aggression, competitiveness, and possessiveness. Private property and its attendant ills of jealousy and conflict were the creation of the patriarchal family.

The "new commune" was therefore to be a "liquid family," where men and women would stay together only as long as they loved each other, and where children would belong to everyone. Children would have mothers, but they would not know who their fathers were. Women would run this commune, because they were more intuitive and down-to-earth than men, and less involved in their own egos. This commune would have no churches, no orthodoxies, and no rituals. People could discuss all forms of religion and philosophy, and children could learn from all this accumulated wisdom. The commune would give birth to a "new man," who would not need a high position or a big bank balance but could live joyfully, playfully, knowing how to dance and sing. He would be not a fixed "character" but an "authentic being" with a commitment to "the scripture of nature." He would love others and in consequence be honest and trusting. There would be no ambition and no politics in this commune. "Politics are neurotic and will disappear," Rajneesh said.

Rajneesh's proposals for the commune were widely read in Central Oregon, and widely presumed to describe Rajneeshpuram. For the Reverend Mr. Mardo Jimenez and others, they were proof that the Rajneeshee were "a foreign cult" out to destroy the American family. But the source of these proposals was hardly Indian. In Buddhist philosophy, man must live with institutions, just as he must live in the world of appearances: to "transcend" them is not to do without them but to see them for what they are. Rajneesh's "new commune" was, in fact, one of those mirrors the guru hung up before his Western disciples, for it reflected exclusively the ideals of the American counterculture and the human-potential movement. Rajneesh, after all, had learned everything he knew about communes from his Western sannyasins. In 1973, he had sent thirty-five Westerners off to a dirt-poor farm in central India without any instructions except to learn how to surrender. A South African disciple he put in charge of the farm had made up all the rest of it himself, including the idea of work as meditation—a notion he took from Gurdjieff. That commune did not last very long, but it was the prototype of the Poona ashram and the Oregon commune.

In Oregon, at the time of my first visit, the Western sannyasins had clearly been struggling with the problem of how to do away with all dogmas and rituals. The struggle was comical, philosophically speaking, for the more they talked about "spontaneity," "playfulness," and "authenticity," the more they etched the words into doctrine. In September of 1982, the Rajneeshpuram City council had passed an ordinance stating that a joke must be told at the start of

every meeting; the ordinance might have been conceived in a spirit of playfulness, but the joke became a ritual formula and the laughter became expected behavior. A command to "spontaneity" could not, logically speaking, be obeyed. And the commune could not, practically speaking, do without rules. The only way out of this dilemma was self-deception—a state that many sannyasins seemed to have achieved.

Wadud, among others, had insisted that the Buddhafield would not become institutionalized; yet in Rajneeshpuram, as any newspaper reader in Oregon might have pointed out, institutions were growing up like thickets. There was a school, there were the institutes, there were the businesses on and off the ranch. There was a financial structure of some complexity; there were also two city governments and the police force, with the regulations to go with them. (In theory, the businesses and the governments were independent of the Rajneesh Foundation International and the Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune.) AM there were a number of commune rules. Some of the rules had to do with fire prevention and safety; others had to do with cleanliness and dress. For example, sannyasins could not wear just anything they liked: a color chart drawn up by one of the designers showed them which purples, pinks, reds, and oranges went together and which did not. Then, too, for all the laughing and hugging that went on, the residents worked twelve hours a day by schedule and could not leave the ranch as they pleased. And the number of rules kept growing. In the wake of a nasty incident—a stranger who was possibly deranged, possibly an extortionist, brought a bomb into the Rajneeshee's Portland hotel and accidentally blew himself up—the commune instituted an elaborate security system. By the time of my second visit to the ranch, in September, uniformed guards checked everyone going on and off the ranch; visitors were body-searched and their cars sniffed by police dogs; residents and visitors alike had to wear plastic identification bracelets, and the Twinkies wore uniforms. These security procedures reduced by an important percentage the number of times the guides to the ranch spoke about playfulness and spontaneity.

That the commune had created certain institutions and adopted certain rules was hardly surprising—though the number and stringency of these rules seemed incompatible with the atmosphere the Rajneeshee wanted. More surprising was the fact that in certain fundamental ways the commune seemed to be evolving in a direction quite contrary to the countercultural model the guru had outlined. A new design was emerging, and at the time of my second visit that design was much clearer than it had been earlier.

In May, Wadud's building plan had seemed wildly ambitious, but by September his "resort and education facilities" had begun to take shape. Over the summer, the Rajneeshee had paved the streets in the center of town and had built three new restaurants and a shopping mall of boutiques. They had added a good many more A-frame housing units, and one complex of them was now a

hotel for visitors. The building I had seen going up for the meditation and therapy institutes was now completed, with flagstone paths and a flower garden; it housed the Rajneesh International Meditation University. A structure that the Rajneeshee had apparently been building for a greenhouse was now a two-acre hall with a sound system and a speaker's platform—much like Rajneesh's hall in Poona. For visitors, the Rajneeshee had put swimming and boating platforms on the Lake, and they had turned part of the lounge into a blackjack parlor, and had built a discotheque specially for children. Wadud told me that for the moment he had abandoned the idea of building on the mountain site but was starting construction on thirteen new buildings, including a theatre, a health spa, a factory to make prefab-building components, and a hundred-and-twenty-eight-room hotel. According to Savita, the head accountant, the Rajneeshee had now spent a total of about sixty million dollars in Oregon.

In May, the idea that the commune might one day pay for itself had seemed wholly fanciful to me. The restaurant-night club in Portland was no hot spot, and few non-Rajneeshee guests stayed at the Portland hotel. As for the ranch, it was a four-hour drive from Portland or Salem, and while tour buses did come there, the tourists paid three dollars for a guided tour and went away. But then in July the Oregon press had reported that fifteen thousand people had come to the ranch for the week of the Second Annual Rajneesh World Celebration. Most of them had come via the Portland airport, where Rajneeshee buses had picked them up and taken them to the ranch or the Portland hotel. Their travel had been arranged by the Rajneesh Travel Corporation, and in addition to travel costs each of these fifteen thousand people had paid five hundred dollars for the week in Rajneeshpuram. For that sum, a visitor had got meals and the space in a tent for a sleeping bag; all else was extra. Some thousands had stayed on longer, paying eleven hundred dollars apiece for three weeks or three thousand dollars for a three months' stay. Many of them had taken courses at the university, paying as little as a hundred and fifty dollars for a three-week program and as much as thirty-five hundred for a three-month course of therapy or meditation. In addition, the ranch had sold a good deal of beer, wine, and Perrier, a good many pink jumpsuits, and hundreds of books by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. The commune had even sold chances to win one of the Rajneesh Rolls-Royces, at twenty-five dollars a chance. (The winner had returned the car to the guru.) According to Savita, the commune was now breaking even: it would make the million dollars it needed to cover its running expenses for the year. The great influx of sannyasins surprised Oregonians—even those who now considered themselves expert Rajneeshee-watchers—for there were not that many sannyasins in the United States. There were groups of them scattered across the country, but the major centers had always been in California. These centers had been thinned out in 1982 by recruitment for the Oregon commune, and they had been further thinned in 1983 when Rajneesh, in his second public statement since his arrival in Oregon, announced that there would be an earthquake along the San



Andreas Fault that would devastate much of California but spare Rancho Rajneesh. The announcement had spread panic among California sannyasins, and a Rajneeshee discotheque in San Francisco had closed. Now the only large and visible center was in Laguna Beach, where a minister had turned his church into a Rajneeshee center and started a hullabaloo among his former parishioners, and an interesting court case over the church building was in the works. In other countries, however, the movement was much larger; there were sannyasins in Japan, Germany, Australia, and Canada, and elsewhere as well. In Europe—unbeknownst to most Oregonians—the movement had coalesced and flourished since the guru moved to Oregon. Later on, in a cover story of February, 1984, *Der Spiegel* reported that the Rajneeshee communes across Europe were developing a series of remarkably successful business enterprises. They had started a chain of discotheques and a chain of Zorba the Buddha restaurants, and were now planning a chain of hotels. The disco in Cologne was turning over three million Deutsche marks a year, and the businesses in Zurich four million Swiss Francs. The Rajneeshee communes were financially independent of one another, and in each city the commune operated the local disco and restaurant on what amounted to a franchise. Most of the communes had meditation and therapy centers, also franchised, and a variety of other businesses as well: natural food stores, health clubs, cleaning and catering services—even a company manufacturing plate-glass windows. The communes did whatever their members were good at doing, and generally they had a reputation for giving clean, courteous, and efficient service. (An American journalist in Paris ran into two prostitutes wearing sunset colors who said they were Rajneeshee and were happy with their work.) The starting capital for these enterprises came from their memberships, and the income they made went into their communal expenses—or into the Oregon commune. Rajneesh Services International, with branches in London and Zurich, sold bonds for the ranch and provided a conduit for gifts and other moneys coming from Europe. In addition, the communes reserved some of their funds to send their members to Oregon for the festival.

Thus, Rajneeshpuram was not, as the Rajneeshee had first described it, a commune of some distinct number of people trying to make a go of it on their own. It was the center for a worldwide community of disciples. In that respect, it was like the Poona ashram, but in other respects it was something quite new. The emphasis was now on money—on primary accumulation—and the aim, apparently, was to mold the worldwide community into 5 disciplined work force with all disciples in every country working directly for the Oregon commune. Gone was the permissiveness of Poona, and gone, too, were the most radical forms of experimentation with sex and consciousness. The therapies, for example, had changed. Aneasha, a neo-Reichian therapist who had gone to Poona because Esalen was "too intellectual" and "not on the radical fringes of consciousness," told me, "It's different here. Something new is emerging. There's a lightness and a gentleness; it's about love, care,

and simplicity—not about all those skeletons in the closet. The energy groups focus on the subtle and delicate spaces of being." Whatever this meant precisely, there did seem to be less emphasis on cathartic techniques and less group groping. Then, too, among the courses listed in the new university catalogue were quit-smoking programs, weight-balancing programs, and courses in stress management— courses that would have fitted into any health-club program. In addition, there were courses in such things as Buddhafield agriculture, Buddhafield businesses, and Buddhafield construction. These were three-month apprenticeships quite practically designed to provide the commune with laborers at some considerable expense to the laborers.

With respect to sex and "relationships," the Rajneeshee had gone through a definite embourgeoisement since Poona. According to the 1983 University of Oregon survey, seventy-four percent of the commune residents were married and sixty-seven per cent had spouses living in Rajneeshpuram. Furthermore, some fifteen couples had been married on the ranch in the past year, their announcements and wedding photographs duly published in the Rajneesh Times. What these figures signified was not entirely dear, for most of the new Rajneeshee marriages were between Americans and foreigners, and immigration officials believed that ninety per cent of them were fraudulent—attempts to gain permanent-residency visas for foreigners. But some of the marriages were not just instrumental, and to spend any time in the commune was to observe a pairing-off process going on. Whether sannyasins married or did not, they were developing long-term attachments (some of them in spite of instrumental marriages). On my second visit to the ranch, I attended the wedding of a couple who appeared to be in their early sixties. The bride wore a corsage on her dress; the bridegroom, whose third marriage it was, wore a white suit with a red carnation in the lapel. Arup, who was Dutch and a former Gestalt therapist, and who coordinated the Rajneeshee therapy and meditation centers around the world, conducted the ceremony in the lounge, in front of a small altar with a picture of the guru on it. She made some remarks about the couple, and read from the guru's works; then she put garlands around the necks of the bride and the bridegroom. After the ceremony, there was a party with drinks and a wedding cake. It was much like any nondenominational wedding in Santa Barbara or Asbury Park.

Of course, there were still elements of Rajneeshee social life that would not have found favor with Mardo Jimenez. There was still, for example, a good deal of enthusiasm for Tantric practices; and for visiting sannyasins Rajneeshpuram was still a great place to get a date. But the ranch was not the sex commune Jimenez imagined. The resident sannyasins were working twelve or more hours a day, and the coordinators disapproved of all distractions—even blissing out on Bhagwan. Visitors, for their part, had to wear a special bead on their mala and observe a sexual quarantine for the first week of their stay. Venereal disease had travelled quite naturally around the Poona ashram, but here efforts were made to control it, for it threatened the work force.

In May, the Rajneeshee had told me that they had no religious observances —that work was their worship. One evening toward the end of my stay, however, a sannyasin I was talking to over a beer in the lounge broke off the interview to gather a group of people around him and kneel down facing in the direction of the guru's house. The group then chanted a prayer in Sanskrit—the prayer that was inscribed on the gates to the ranch. Not everyone in the room knew the prayer or even knew that one was supposed to chant it. The observance, it turned out, had just been instituted by the commune, and my interlocutor, a long-term sannyasin, was teaching it by example. When I returned in September, everyone in the commune was chanting this prayer at the beginning and end of every workday. By then, the commune had also instituted a regular Sunday-evening darshan, where visitors and others could go and meditate or listen to Teertha reading from the Master's works.

But that was not all. The Rajneeshee, I discovered, were developing all the institutions of a church. For some months, the editors in the publishing department had been codifying the guru's works; that is, making a subject index for all the lectures and darshan talks, so that Rajneesh's dicta on any given topic could be retrieved at will. In May, I learned that the guru had given some people the title acharya, or teacher. Ma Prem Isabel told me that she was an acharya had had never officiated at anything and had no precise idea what the title meant. Teertha was an acharya, and so was Arup. Sheela was also one. When I asked her about the invocation she had given, earlier in the year, at the Oregon state legislature, she told me that she was "not really a religious person" and had decided on the wording of the invocation just moments before giving it. In May, even Sheela was insisting on the informality of it all. But in July the commune published a booklet called "Rajneeshism," which explained the religion in some detail.

According to the booklet, Rajneeshee worship was meditation and the meditative attitude in work and play; the message of Rajneeshism was contained in the lectures of the guru; and Rajneeshee education was a lifelong process of learning self-awareness. The booklet gave the whole text of the Sanskrit chant the gachchhamis, and explained the ceremonies of satsang (or being with the Master) and darshan. It named four religious holidays in the year and described ceremonies to be used on the occasions of birth, death, marriage, and caring for the sick. The birth ceremony, interestingly, involved natural childbirth at home, with both the father and an acharya in attendance. Thus was the patriarchal family established in Rajneeshism. As for funerals, the booklet prescribed cremation, with the whole community gathered to celebrate with dance and song. On the organization of the church, the booklet was quite specific:

*The ecclesiastical organization of the religion is overseen by the Academy of Rajneeshism.*

*There are three categories of ministers: Acharyas, Arihantas and Siddhas. The category into which a candidate is placed depends on the particular type of energy he or she possesses: introverted,*

*extroverted, or a synthesis of the two...*

*To be eligible for the ministry, a person must have the following experience and training: a minimum of*

*—two years as a Neo-sannyasin*

*—two years of participation and practice in meditation*

*—two years of participation in Religious Discourses and Teachings with guidance*

*—one year of worship-meditation or apprenticeship in Rajneeshism*

*—specific orientation for the ministerial duties.*

In explaining the creation of a religious organization at this juncture, the booklet said that the formation of a doctrine and an organization around Rajneesh was inevitable, and that since this was the case, it was far better that it should be done while the Master was alive and could give spiritual direction to his disciples, for the alternative was to have it done by "well-meaning but unenlightened followers" after his death. It did not point out that Rajneesh had often said this could not and should not happen: "It will not be possible to make a dogma out of my words. . . Every institution is bound to be dead.... I am destroying your ideologies, creeds, cults, dogmas and I am not replacing them with anything else."

The appearance of the booklet and the final codification of Rajneeshism—might have been a cause for celebration at Rajneeshpuram. It was not. The long-term sannyasins I talked with about it seemed to have no very positive feelings about it. Ma Satya Bharti, who had been one of the first Westerners around Rajneesh, told me that she had always thought a religion would form around him, but "it's not anything I can connect with." She and others admitted that there was something contradictory about it. "Bhagwan is like Gurdjieff," Rajen said. "His function is blowing preconceptions. The idea of religion is disturbing to me. Those of us who came from religious backgrounds were disillusioned with religion and found freedom in a situation defined only by being with a religious master. Bhagwan talked about religiousness, not about religion. Of course, he did also talk about the development of a religion while he lived, but it was like his talk of 'the new commune'—it seemed to us to be a land of myth." Yet Rajen and the other long-term sannyasins on the ranch accepted Rajneeshism, just as they had accepted every other contradiction the guru had presented them with. "I would have been indignant about the creation of rituals before," Rajen added. "But not now. We have to accept the paradox of it. We have to give up trying to get at it intellectually. The fact is that this is a religion. It's probably true that it would have evolved into one anyway after the Master is gone."

Many Oregonians, of course, suspected that the Rajneeshee had created a formal religious structure simply as a legal ploy to claim all the rights and privileges accorded to religion in the United States. As it turned out, the Rajneeshee had considered the legal advantages; all the same,

Rajneeshism was a far more elaborate construction than was necessary for external purposes. The booklet was most obviously a plan for the perpetuation of the community of believers after the guru's death. In May, before it was issued, I had asked a number of resident sannyasins what they would do if the guru died. To a man and a woman, they said they would leave the commune and start new lives elsewhere. When I asked them whether they were building a ghost town, they replied in Zen terms: they were living in the present—the moment that was all moments and not thinking of the Future. But clearly someone was thinking of the future. Reading the booklet, I wondered if any of the Rajneeshee leaders had ever read Max Weber, for here was a textbook attempt to "routinize charisma."

Rajneeshism seemed, in fact, merely part of the whole enterprise taking shape at Rajneeshpuram. In Poona, the Buddhafield had been a realm of free play—a kind of psychic sandbox—but here it was becoming more and more formalized, businesslike, and institutional. In attempting to locate themselves within the American tradition, the Rajneeshee now compared themselves to the Mormons rather than to the Puritans or the Oneida Community. Just why this transformation was taking place was not entirely clear: no one could or would explain it to me, and many Rajneeshee did not seem to grasp precisely what was happening. Possibly, I thought, it was a natural, organic process. Such transformations, from the ecstatic to the routine, were not unknown in the history of religions; also, it accorded very well with the changed temper of the times and the fact that the Rajneeshee, now in their mid-thirties, were of an age to harness the chakra energies and put them to work for profit. If this was the case, then the chances for success were good, because the Rajneeshee had all the talents necessary to make their enterprise work.

### *Seeing the guru*

—a white-robed figure with a long beard—issue forth from his compound every afternoon in a Rolls-Royce with a beautiful young woman beside him, one found it quite possible to imagine that Rajneesh had simply retreated into passive Buddhahood, content now to live in some comfort and watch these odd creatures, his disciples, work their will on the world. Similarly, watching the Rajneeshee at work building their city, one found it possible to imagine that the guru had become for them nothing more than an emblem—the modern equivalent of a totem pole or a sacred rock—around which they now organized their considerable energies. The difficulty of drawing a conclusion of this sort was that although the Rajneeshee had all kinds of institutions, they did not seem to have an institution of government—or, at least, not one they were willing to describe.

Isabel and others had told me that the major policy decisions for the commune were taken at the weekly coordinators' meetings or at general meetings of the commune members. On my second visit, Isabel invited me to attend a coordinators' meeting at Sheela's house one Sunday morning. At the meeting, in an L-shaped living room, Sheela, in a velours warmup suit, curled up on a couch with

twenty or thirty sannyasins crowded around her. Most of them were women, and I recognized some: Savita; Vidya; Prabodhi, the treasurer of the commune; Kavido, K.D.'s sister and a member of the Antelope city council; K.D. himself; Neehar; and Devaprem, the construction coordinator. Some of them sat on sofas and chairs, but since there were not enough of these most sat on the floor. Sheela talked a good deal of the time. She talked first about an Indian some of them had once known—a very boring man, according to her, who, having taken courses in yoga, EST, and Silva Mind Control, was now publishing books on "experiencing the self." Everyone laughed. She then talked about taking one or two of the therapy-group leaders with her on her next shopping trip to Portland, just to get them off the ranch for a bit; she also described what had happened on her last Shopping trip when one of her companions—one of their number—had tried to eat all the French Fries in the restaurant. She talked about how much she liked to play blackjack, and how it might be possible to keep the lounge, with its new blackjack tables, open until mid-night so that she could play for an extra hour. Savita, always the practical one, objected that a late closing would mean that many people would have to change their work and sleeping schedules, but Sheela persisted. She talked for perhaps fifteen minutes about her great love for blackjack, and finally Savita gave in. That accomplished, Sheela launched into a long story about her appearance on a locally produced television-serial pilot, then another long story about herself and the mayor of Portland.

Some of the people in the room fidgeted a bit during these narrations, but no one tried to stop Sheela, and many people urged her to go into more detail. When she told a joke, everyone in front of her laughed, hilariously. They laughed particularly hard when she mocked local Oregonians for their lack of style or their fantasy that the Rajneeshee wanted to take over a town called Dufur. Dufur! Oddly, the humor did not always seem to reach those people sitting around me at the back of the long leg of the L-shaped room.

Occasionally, Sheela did bring up some commune business: people were talking on the telephone too much; everyone had to have flu shots; people left their bags around; and some people looked so raggedy and badly dressed that she was thinking of issuing everyone uniforms. She spoke like the housemother of a boarding-school dormitory, and the sannyasins, packed together on the floor in their jumpsuits and sweatshirts, giggling and interrupting each other to urge her on, responded in kind. They did not seem like people in their thirties with graduate degrees. At one point, Sheela asked them to consider the need for more showers at the work sites, and started half an hour of "brainstorming" on ways of getting people dry without using more towels. Suggestions of human car washes and body blow-dryers brought general hilarity. The only solemn moments in the meeting were those in which Sheela criticized two of the coordinators in the room. One of them was her husband, Jayananda, who had apparently blamed someone unfairly for something; the other was an unnamed person who had—she had found out—listened to another person's telephone

conversation. To this second person, she said, "Why do you feel so insecure here? This is your home, so you have no need to feel insecure. The point is not to repeat mistakes, but you have. So, big deal, we've made a mistake, and well correct it. We'll find an appropriate place for you."

The meeting lasted for four hours. After it, Isabel assured me that coordinators' meetings were not always like that—that sometimes, as just after the bombing at the Portland hotel, serious matters were discussed. But these semi-public coordinators' meetings were clearly not the place where important policy decisions were made. Sheela, presumably, had her own way of doing things. The meeting was nonetheless revealing, for it showed that Sheela—with the guru somewhere behind her—was as much in charge of the commune as Laxmi had been of the Poona ashram; it also showed the quality of the relationship between her and the Western sannyasins.

At the time, I knew there had been some defections from the commune: a number of sannyasins had left in anger over policy decisions and over how these decisions were made. One group of them, in February of 1983, had written an open letter to all Rajneeshee denouncing "the so-called leaders' [of the Rajneesh Foundation International] Sheela and her ruling oligarchy" and signing themselves "The Wild Geese." An editorial in the Rajneesh Times denouncing the letter and some of the probable signers confirmed the existence of this group. After my second visit to the ranch, I met some of the sannyasins who had left the ranch—people who, unlike the residents, were willing to talk about how it was run.

A woman I'll call Jocelyn Roberts was by profession a psychiatric social worker. Now forty-one years old, she had spent eight months in the Poona ashram in 1980 and 1981 and three months in the Oregon commune June through August of 1982. She (along with a number of other sannyasins) had contracted amoebic dysentery on the ranch, and because it was of an exotic sort she had ended up at the San Francisco Tropical Disease Center. She did not return to the ranch, because by the time she recovered she had decided that there were a lot of things she didn't like about the place. She had worked on the farm with many people who, in her view, knew a great deal about ecology and farming techniques. She had expected "interesting discussions, where people would exchange ideas, sort things through, and come to decisions;" she had expected "participatory democracy." But that was not what she had found. "I never went to a meeting where there was any discussion or helpful criticism or evaluation on the part of any sannyasin," Roberts said. "There's no vote on any decision. What happens at meetings is you're told what to do. Instead of discussion, what you get is directives and scoldings—scoldings with the implication that you're not working hard enough."

According to Roberts, all decisions came from the top down. "There's an appearance of collegiality," she said. "But the department heads and coordinators have an absolute say in how things are handled. It's a very hierarchical system, and the ultimate authority is Sheela." The department heads, she said, often knew much less about what they were doing than their

subordinates, because there was no system of promotion by merit. "It's all politics. It's for political reasons that they've got the position, and they can make gross errors." The other side of the coin was that "you could get stuck with menial work for the whole time you were there, and never get a chance to do upper-echelon work."

Roberts had had a great many friends on the ranch, and she thought highly of some of the coordinators she had run across. She liked Isabel, as most people did. But some of the coordinators she had worked with, she said, had very authoritarian personalities. They would order their subordinates around harshly, and then flatter their superiors. In her view, there were a lot of people who were unhappy with the way things were done on the ranch. "I heard a lot of criticism of Sheela while I was there," Roberts said. "She's strongly disliked by many, many people, only they'd never say it publicly. The appearance when you go there is that people are so happy, but there's an invisible stick held over everyone's head, and that's the threat of expulsion: if you don't like it, leave. I've heard Sheela say that over and over again in public meetings: 'I want to remind you don't have to be here.' So people are very afraid to speak out about any of the differences of opinion that they have. They're very afraid to challenge or to question or suggest improvements. So there's a lot of role-playing and pretentiousness."

Not only did people criticize Sheela, Roberts continued, but they questioned whether she truly represented Rajneesh. When she quoted from her private conversations with him, they wondered whether he had really said what she said he had. Roberts herself doubted it. There was obviously no way that lower-echelon sannyasins could determine what the guru said or didn't say. For the first two years in Oregon, Rajneesh had spoken only with a few high-level sannyasins, and in the fall of 1983 he announced—or, rather, Sheela announced—that he would speak only with Sheela. One thing was certain, however, and that was that Rajneesh had created the system they so disliked. His responsibility was obvious—yet he had hidden it from them in plain sight.

In Poona, the ashram had been run by Laxmi and her assistants, with the ultimate authority resting with Rajneesh. It was not a democracy. Rajneesh had once said so explicitly in answer to a woman sannyasin who questioned him about what she saw as an arbitrary and unfair decision of a guard in turning an Indian sannyasin away at the gates. The question had prompted Rajneesh to give a lecture on the necessity of surrendering to his authority. "This place is to change you; it is not to be according to you," he said. "Your votes will never be taken." This was hardly surprising, since Indian ashrams are by their nature not democracies. But he went on to warn his disciples never to interfere, never to complain, and never to mention anything that appeared to them unjust. "Not a single thing happens here which is not known to me," he explained. "Whatever happens here is happening with my knowledge.... Whatever happens is happening according to a plan, a device. There is some hidden pattern in it. And nobody except me knows what that hidden pattern is." In other words, to



be a disciple you had to believe that everything that happened was literally or mystically the guru's doing. If something appeared to be wrong or unjust or foolish, that was only your myopia; it was otherwise in the guru's encompassing vision.

In Poona, Rajneesh put women in charge of practical matters—women who adored him and therefore naturally fought with one another. This did not make for the most efficient sort of organization, but it did ensure that his authority would remain unchallenged. He himself told his disciples, "The open secret is that you can be free only if you have put too many women around you. Then they are so concerned with each other that they leave you absolutely alone. . Their jealousies, their envies are enough to keep them occupied." The creation of jealousy and envy might not seem to be the proper work for an Enlightened Master, but Rajneesh explained that he was teaching these women—through their constant confrontations—to recognize their ugly emotions and drop them. He gave the same rationale for anything that went wrong in the ashram, whether it was the result of sheer disorganization or deliberate policy. Whatever it was, it was for the good of his disciples—to teach them detachment and the surrender of the ego. Many sannyasins believed this. In one of her books, Ma Satya Bharti wrote, "Ashram Hie continually forces us to live in a state of insecurity. . All kinds of crisis-situation are created, until finally there's an explosion. And in its wake, a transformation." The strategy was brilliant. While maintaining his control over the ashram and shielding his assistants from any blame, Rajneesh also maintained a reputation for infallibility. Now you see it, now you don't.

In Poona, Rajneesh had gone as far as to tell his sannyasins what he would do when he eventually retired from the system. "When the new commune happens you will see: I will put so many women in charge that even if I die it will take you years to discover that the man is no longer there!" he said. "They will make so much fuss and dance and love and all kinds of foolish things that you will not even come to know whether I am still here or gone." In 1983, this was precisely the situation that obtained: only a handful of sannyasins knew for certain whether he was directing the commune or not. To an outsider, it was unimaginable that Sheela had made up all her conversations with him and was running the commune singlehanded. But to dissident sannyasins this could be the only explanation for what was going wrong.

Given the nature of the system, things were bound to go wrong, no matter who was running it, for the trouble, as Jocelyn Roberts had observed, was systemic. Rajneesh had created a traditional Oriental despotism, and this form of government—as he said—inevitably gave rise to resentments, rivalries, cliques, and factions: the very things that the Rajneeshee (who were in some way conscious of this problem) had said they were learning to do without. In Poona, this had not mattered very much, since the ashram was merely a stopping-off place for Westerners. In Oregon, however, it mattered a great deal, for the commune was an enormous enterprise involving millions of dollars

and the livelihoods of thousands of people on and off the ranch. Also, it was not in India but in the United States, where sannyasins' ordinary reflexes about their rights and freedoms might be expected to reassert themselves. Even if Sheela were the most capable of administrators, she would have to make some mistakes, and, because the guru was silent, there would have to be some disagreements over policy. When these occurred, sannyasins would blame her and question her legitimacy—since the only alternative was to blame Rajneesh himself. As a corrective, the Western sannyasins (psychologists all) had introduced the system of coordinators—Maslovian managers—to reduce interpersonal friction on a day-to-day basis and to suppress dissent. Watching for "negativity," the coordinators might have become an efficient thought police except that they, too, were a part of the system—a system that taught its members the habits and attitudes of Persian courtiers: obsequiousness to superiors, imperiousness to subordinates, and suspicion of everyone. Given their own insecurities, the coordinators could see only the most obvious signs of discontent beneath the pervasive role-playing. The real irony was that they could not see how they themselves were being "programmed" and "conditioned" by the guru's style of governance—even though the guru had explained it to them. This was surely one of the best of Rajneesh's jokes.

According to those who left the ranch, the resident sannyasins put up with a great deal of hardship during the first two years—more of it than any visitor knew. There were always more people on the ranch than the Rajneeshee spokesmen told the press or the state authorities, and there were always more people than the trailers and A-frames could comfortably accommodate. For the first year or so, most lower-echelon sannyasins slept six or eight to a room, and the children lived in a separate dormitory without much supervision. There were not enough toilets or showers, and the medical care was inadequate. There were doctors, but not enough beds or equipment in the infirmary to accommodate the sick. The Rajneeshee leaders were in a tremendous hurry. The rule was that those who could not work had to leave; thus, many people continued to work twelve hours a day with more or less serious ailments—bronchitis, dysentery, and so on. Then, when the managers made errors, as they sometimes did, the ordinary sannyasins ended up paying for them. Satya Bharti told me that one day she and another woman had had to do the wash for the entire commune—a job that normally took ten people. Satya Bharti, of course, found the experience valuable: it was yet another spiritual lesson emanating mystically from Bhagwan.

Life was not all hardship, and people did have fun—certainly a good deal more fun than most marines have in basic training. The extraordinary part was not that they weathered its vicissitudes but that they did not notice the most obvious warning signals flashing up around them, for while the pressure to work was intense the pressure to give money was even stronger.

In Poona, there had always been enough money. Over the years, the Rajneeshee had developed some extremely effective fund-raising techniques. The usual tactic was to argue that

surrender to Bhagwan meant the surrender of everything—including all worldly goods. You had to take the risk, you had to give it up, they said, or no transformation would occur. At some point, a group leader or an ashram staff member would find out about a new disciple's assets in some detail, and if the disciple did not immediately rid himself or herself of these obstacles the staff member would pass the information on, so that in the future others could request the specific assets that were being held back. Sheela had managed to take a good deal of money out of India one way or another, but the ranch was an expensive proposition, and now there never seemed to be enough. Sheela and her main fund-raiser, Sushila, visited rich sannyasins in Europe and the United States and asked them for stocks, bonds, jewelry, or paintings—whatever they had—to build the Buddhafield. They also raised money from their worker sannyasins. They told those from wealthy families to go home, make up with their parents, and ask for money—money to have an operation, perhaps. They asked the parents who came to the ranch to make over money to them. And they told sannyasins with little money to give what they could. Not all those who worked on the ranch gave money, but many of those who came sold their houses, sold their cars, and emptied their bank accounts into the Rajneeshee treasury. Still the fund-raising did not stop. Several former sannyasins remembered a meeting at which Sushila, bracelets jangling, asked the working disciples to contribute the cash in their pockets, the watches on their wrists, and the rings on their fingers. Many sannyasins had all their savings tied up in Rajneeshpuram. And the leaders, needless to say, made no accounting to them. The money could have gone anywhere. It was, as the Rajneeshee said, a gamble.

In Poona, sannyasins—even ashram workers—had been free to come and go. But in Oregon "the organization," as it came to be known, demanded total commitment to the building of the commune. Sheela, K.D., Niren, Isabel, and others travelled a good deal on business, but most sannyasins never left the ranch: they were told that they could not leave temporarily except as a matter of dire necessity. Their families could visit them, but there was never much time to spare; and since there were only a few telephones available for private calls (and all of them in public places), people did not generally call family or friends just for a chat. The work schedule gave sannyasins little time for objective reflection and little time to themselves. Then, too, the ranch was so isolated in its bowl of hills and so different from its surroundings that it seemed to be a foreign country. The tourists went through in their buses. Other sannyasins came in for the festivals. But most residents had little contact with outsiders—least of all with their neighbors in Central Oregon. And by the fall of 1983 the tensions between the Rajneeshee and their neighbors had gone up a notch.

### *Just who was responsible*

for the state of hostilities between the followers of the Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and their neighbors in Central Oregon was for me an open question when I first visited the commune, in May of 1983. The eight hundred red-clad followers of the guru were involved in the nearest thing to

a range war with their neighbors. At the same time, in the rest of the state the variety of opinion about the Rajneeshee was so wide that any given opinion seemed to say more about the observer than the observed. Clearly, the breakdown had begun during the battle over Antelope, a pretty little town of forty people, most of them elderly retirees, which lay twenty miles from the commune. That battle was a complicated one—more complicated than most outsiders knew. In October of 1981, just three months after the Rajneeshee had bought the ranch, they had acquired several properties in Antelope to use for extra housing, and had asked the city council for a permit to build a printing plant and an office complex large enough for a hundred workers. They wanted the properties because Oregon land-use laws forbade them to put "urban use" facilities on agricultural land. They had already been warned of this restriction by 1000 Friends of Oregon, an environmental group concerned with the land use laws. The Rajneeshee had also asked the Wasco County commission for permission to hold an election to incorporate a town (or "city," as Oregon law defines any incorporated community) on their own ranch. They received permission in November, and as soon as they did 1000 Friends challenged Wasco County's decision on behalf of four local ranchers, on the ground that the land use laws forbade the creation of a new city on agricultural land unless the plan for it had first been submitted to state land-use re-view. In a brief before the state Land Use Board of Appeals, 1000 Friends proposed that the Rajneeshee build all structures not intended for farm use in Antelope, and said that the Rajneeshee "may not rely on the 'hostility' of Antelope residents" to excuse their failure to do so. They made this argument to show that not all avenues of development were cut off, but they were in effect suggesting that the Rajneeshee push into Antelope over the residents' objections. And the residents did object; they objected specifically to the printing plant and the office complex. The Antelope city council refused to issue a permit for these, on the ground that there was not enough water for a hundred new people. And in fact there was not enough water. The Antelope city plan prohibited further development until the water supply could be enlarged. However, because the City council had neglected to pass an ordinance implementing the plan (the town, with its forty people, did not always observe such legal niceties), the council had no legal reason for refusing the permit. And the Rajneeshee sued.

By mid-March of 1982, the Ante-lope residents had decided that the only way to save their town from Rajneeshee building projects was to disincorporate it, thus barring urban-use development. A special election on this issue was scheduled for April 15th. On that day, there were hundreds of people in town, many of them reporters but many of them people who had come to vote in the election. By Oregon law, any state resident (and American citizen) could vote in a city election if he or she had "an intent to reside" there and had spent at least one night in the town. Oregon's secretary of state, Norma Paulus, came to oversee the election herself, because of the problem the "intent" clause was bound to pose. When the votes were tallied, the Rajneeshee had

won, fifty-five to forty-two. Most outsiders who came in to vote with the Antelope residents were disqualified, either because they had not spent the night there or because they clearly had no intention of residing in the town. The fifty-five Rajneeshee, however, qualified, because they had spent at least one night there and had done so in Rajneeshee-owned buildings. "All they needed was a sleeping bag," Paulus said. Later, she assured me that all the Rajneeshee votes were legal, unfair as that might seem to the long-term residents. The law, she added, was passed in the early sixties, during Mark Hatfield's term as governor, "at a time when social mores made it less problematic,"

By June, there were a dozen lawsuits outstanding between the Rajneeshee and the Antelope city council. Rajneeshpuram had been incorporated by then, but 1000 Friends' suit still held the incorporation in jeopardy. A number of mediators, including one from the federal government, came in to try to resolve the Antelope-Rajneeshee disputes, and finally an agreement was reached permitting the Rajneeshee to develop their existing properties in Antelope but prohibiting any future development there. The agreement soon broke down, however, with each side accusing the other of bad faith. In a city-council election in November, the Rajneeshee once again outvoted the older residents, and with their own people on the city council, thus resolving the issue for good. They never built the printing plant, but in the months that followed most of the original Antelope residents pulled up stakes and left town.

A professor from a university in the western part of the state who had sat in on most of the negotiations between the Rajneeshee and the Antelope residents told me he thought of Antelope as "a Greek tragedy," in the sense that the outcome was inevitable, given the character of both groups. He added that the disaster might nevertheless have been averted if there had been any coherent political power in the state that a governor as popular and as powerful as the late Tom McCall, who held office from 1967 to 1974, might have imposed a compromise settlement that seemed fair to all. As it was now, Oregon politics were both extremely clean and extremely fragmented. As it was, every issue went to court, and in court the Rajneeshee's money and legal sophistication gave them an overwhelming advantage. As it was, the law and the local people's sense of justice did not coincide.

To talk to the Rajneeshee and the long-term Antelope residents was, however, to get a different picture of the struggle—one colored by the emotions involved. On my first visit to Rajneeshpuram, I talked with the mayor, Krishna Deva, who was known as K.D., about the Antelope affair. A former psychologist, K.D. had been, with Ma Anand Sheela—the personal secretary to the guru—a principal actor on the Rajneeshee's side. K.D. said that they had tried to cultivate good relations with Antelope but that the city council would not give them a single building permit until they sued. They had not wanted to take over Antelope, but the residents, out of fear that they would, held the disincorporation election and broke the subsequent agreement, forcing the Rajneeshee to vote themselves into the City council. "Now because the new council is there people

feel helpless, and because they feel helpless they assume were unreasonable," K.D. said. "Some have threatened violence, but that's just the usual redneck talk." When I asked K.D. why he, as a psychologist, could not have foreseen and forestalled such a reaction, he said there wasn't anything he could do about it—it was just bigotry stemming from fear and ignorance.

K.D. sounded defensive when he talked about the Rajneeshee's behavior. All the same, it seemed quite plausible to me that the Antelope residents might have exaggerated the threat from the Rajneeshee and thus precipitated exactly what they feared. And there was some religious bigotry floating around the area. In a letter to a local paper, a former Antelope resident, Donna Quick Smith, had quoted an Indian correspondent of hers as saying that the Rajneeshee were criminals and ought to be slaughtered. The Rajneeshee had sued her for defamation, and they had sued Rosemary McGreer, the wife of a local rancher, for making some unpleasant (though not, as it turned out, defamatory) remarks about them on television. The result was that people in the area were now being very careful about what they said to reporters, and were keeping their feelings to themselves.

Still, most of the older Antelope residents and local ranchers I met were solid people and did not exhibit defensiveness, as K.D. did. Margaret Hill, a retired schoolteacher and the former mayor of Antelope, and Don Smith, a retired Marine colonel, and a number of others told me their side of the story in impressively precise detail. Mrs. Hill, an intelligent, even-keeled woman, told me that the local people and the Rajneeshee had got along quite well in the beginning. The Rajneeshee had thrown a party for everyone in the arca, with lots of drinks and live music. She had begun to wonder about them, she said, only when, in the course of a conversation about a routine permit, Sheela talked of recourse to legal action if the council did not issue it. People did not often threaten legal action in that part of Oregon. Then, when the council refused the permit for the printing plant, the Rajneeshee had sued. Mrs. Hill had discussed the issue with council members on a local television program. The Rajneeshee, she said, had broken into gales of laughter every time she made a point, and had called her "ignorant and stupid." After that, Sheela, K.D., and others had taken to calling her and her neighbors all manner of names—"rednecks," "bigots," and so on. In an open letter to the governor, reprinted in a local newspaper, Sheela had written, "Oregon can hardly prosper if it is to be filled with stagnant, dilapidated little towns like Antelope—a place where unproductive, indolent old people go to mark time until they die." K.D. had once come to Margaret Hill's house and called her "a liar and a hypocrite" to her face. "I tried to keep the lines of communication open," Mrs. Hill said. "But it was no good." During the period surrounding the two elections, the Rajneeshee had gone about Antelope noting down car registrations, photographing people, and videotaping every city-council meeting. "They didn't do anything," she said, "bitt they were always at you. It was harassment. A lot of people got very nervous and, being elderly people, they just couldn't rake it." When Mrs. Hill refused to go to the ranch, lest she incur some obligation to the Rajneeshee, Sheela

sent her a letter by courier every day, then came to see her personally and threw a fit. Mrs. Hill finally lost her temper. "They could have done eighty or ninety per cent of what they did without all the rancor and ill feeling," she said.

The Rajneeshee's nearest neighbor was Jan Bowerman, a rancher whose fields sloped down to the John Day River just opposite the Rajneeshee truck farm. The evening I went to see him, he and his wife—she was pregnant with their first child—were walking around the pastures looking at Brahms bulls and bucking horses he raised for rodeos. Narrow-hipped, wearing faded jeans, a sweat-stained Stetson, and scuffed boots, Bowerman looked like the quintessential cowboy: the genuine article. He was in fact the son of Bill Bowerman, the great track coach and one of the inventors of the Nike track shoe; he himself had coached the American Olympic ski team for three years in the seventies. As we walked toward his house—it looked like a nineteenth-century ranch house, but he had just built it—he told me he was the fourth generation of his family to farmland in the region. "It gets me hot to hear the Rajneeshee talk as if religion were the issue," he said. "Ninety-nine per cent of the people around here couldn't care less about their religion—though, unfortunately, there are a few very vocal people who do. One of the serious issues is water. It's a semi-arid country, and deep wells sucking groundwater could put a lot of their neighbors out of business in a dry year. Then, a lot of people are concerned about land use. We don't want a City in our back yards."

The Bowermans' living room had bare floors and not muck furniture: an old couch, some straight chairs, and a table with an ancient typewriter on it. "I took a very casual attitude toward them until Antelope," he continued. "I used to go and visit. There are some fine people there. But they turn out to be bad neighbors, and I don't like the attitude they have: 'If I want it, I'll buy it.' They're like the worst kind of American tourist—loud, boisterous, demanding, waving fistfuls of dollars. I remember sitting in a cote in Chamonix when a group of Americans came in and started shouting at the waitress in English, demanding service. That's what they're like."

Bowerman was now upset about the community church in Antelope—the church his wife's family had attended for as long as he could remember. Because the church had no resident minister, the town of Antelope had held the title to the building, but just before the Rajneeshee took over the city council the old council had given it to the Episcopal diocese. And now the Rajneeshee were suing to get it back. Bowerman had written many letters to local papers about the issue.

### *In September of 1983*

—the time of my second visit to the ranch—the Rajneeshee took over the school in Antelope. The move was abrupt; it came just a few days before the school year began, and it surprised everyone, including state and county education officials. In November of the previous year, the Rajneeshee had told officials in Wasco County that they wanted a public school for their children in Rajneeshpuram. The officials agreed, but warned them that the creation of a new school district could take two years.

Sheela pointed out that Rajneeshee voters already controlled the Antelope school district, in the sense that they could outvote the ranchers whose property lay within it, and could, if they wished, slap a half-million-dollar tax levy on the district. The Rajneeshee proposed to redraw the school district so that it included only the town of Antelope and the Rajneeshee ranch; all the other ranches would be put into the neighboring school districts of Madras and Maupin. Because Antelope had a primary school, this redistricting would force the ranchers to send their primary-school children, along with their older kids, to school at distances thirty to fifty miles from their houses. But it would get them out of a Rajneeshee-controlled district, and it would take only a year. The ranchers therefore agreed to the plan.

A few months later, the Rajneeshee decided that they did not want to wait a year for their public school. In the summer of 1983, they voted down three school-tax levies for the transition year: they would not pay for the ranchers' children, Sheela said, when their own children were being kept out of public school. In August, the ranchers decided to close the Antelope school and to use fifty thousand dollars they had in leftover funds to help pay the cost—sixty-two thousand dollars of sending all their children to Madras that year. At this point, Swami Deva Wadud, the commune's planner and the one Rajneeshee member of the school board, proposed a deal: the Rajneeshee would vote a tax levy and pay the tuition for the ranchers' kids in Madras and Maupin on the condition that they be allowed to reopen the school for their own children, employing volunteer teachers. Wadud wanted an immediate answer, but none was forthcoming. The other members of the board said they wanted to think about the plan; meanwhile, state education officials raised problems having to do with teacher certification and drew up conditions that the Rajneeshee would have to fulfill if the school was to be certified as a public rather than a religious school. While some education officials felt that the only solution was to give the Rajneeshee the school, the school-board members were in a bind. On the one hand, they were terrified that the Rajneeshee would play their trump card and tax them out of existence; on the other hand, they were furious, and were under pressure from people throughout Central Oregon not to give an inch to the Rajneeshee. Over the next two weeks, they offered a number of alternative proposals, one of them being that the school be reopened for all primary-school children in the district, Rajneeshee and non-Rajneeshee alike, and that all secondary school children be bused to Madras. Wadud turned these proposals down.

In the end, the issue was resolved by a legal technicality. It was discovered that by law those petitioning to get out of a school district—as the ranchers were—could not vote on school matters or pay school taxes in that district. This suited the ranchers, but then the Rajneeshee lawyers found out that the ranchers could not legally sit on a school board, either. The Rajneeshee demanded the resignation of the old board in mid-September; they then got authorization from the county to appoint their own board, and, a month later, opened the school with Rajneeshee children and



Rajneeshee teachers, all of them wearing red. As a concession to the religious-establishment clause of the First Amendment, the teachers wore their malas—wooden-beaded necklaces with the guru's picture hanging from them—tucked inside their shirts.

There was one further piece of business. Now that the Rajneeshee had set up a school, kindergarten through twelfth grade, they refused to help pay the sixty-two thousand dollars it cost to send the ranchers' children to school in Madras. When I asked Wadud about this, he said, "They backed us into a corner. We have only fifty thousand dollars for fifty of our kids and twenty of theirs. So the board decided not to pay their tuition. We say, "Come to the Antelope school—or perhaps Madras will pay the tuition." What he neglected to say was that the fifty thousand dollars in carryover funds came not only from Rajneeshee pockets but from the state and the other district taxpayers. But Wadud was angry. "We pay all kinds of levies to the county for Sheriffs and roads and so on, and we get no services," he told me. "More and more, they try to stop us, to screw us. So we don't give a damn anymore. We're about to launch a lot of lawsuits. The former board was incompetent. We could have passed a bond issue of a million dollars, but we had no intention of doing that. They lost fifty thousand dollars out of this. They would have got more if they had cooperated with us."

Wadud thought the Madras school board would pay the tuition charges. But if it did not "their children can come to our school," he said. "It will be good for them. They have no idea what a really good school is like."

The Rajneeshee's behavior concerning the school issue brought the entire struggle over Antelope into sharper focus. Here was no "Greek tragedy," as the professor had suggested. The Rajneeshee had reneged on an agreement and had taken over the school in a bare-knuckle power play, causing their neighbors maximum hardship. They had taken the fifty thousand dollars in carryover Funds, and they now assumed the state subsidy for the coming year—about thirty thousand dollars—but they refused to pay anything toward the schooling of the ranchers' children. Wadud said the ranchers had "backed us into a corner," but, as he well knew, the ranchers did not have the power to do this, and the county education officials had raised only the appropriate legal and educational considerations and then bowed to Rajneeshee demands. Explaining Rajneeshee tactics in previous battles, Swami Anand Subhuti, an editor of the Rajneesh Times, the commune's weekly newspaper, and a sweet man, had told me, "We're ruthless where our real interests are concerned. We have to be." I had understood him to mean that the Rajneeshee would be ruthless when it came to life-and-death issues for the commune. But the school was hardly a life-and-death issue for them: they would have had it anyway a year later, and their own school at Rajneeshpuram did not cost them very much. Jon Bowerman's assessment of them now seemed accurate to me.

### *Wadud's antagonism*

but more surprising was his lack of concern about the political consequences of this new battle with the neighbors. The Rajneeshee now faced two separate legal and administrative challenges to the very existence of Rajneeshpuram: an Immigration and Naturalization Service threat to deny their guru permanent-resident Status and deport him from the United States, and 1000 Friends' case against the incorporation of their city. Not only that but they needed the cooperation of county and state officials to continue building their city, educating their children, and so on. As the Rajneeshee knew very well, the first Antelope ballot had alienated a good many state legislators and turned many officials in Wasco and Jefferson Counties against them.

In late May of 1982, six weeks after the Antelope disincorporation election, the I.N.S. office in Portland had received a call from an aide to Senator Mark Hatfield. An I.N.S. memo of the conversation reported the aide as saying, "Mr. Hatfield is very concerned about the Operation of this religious cult which the Senator believes is endangering the way of life for a small agriculture town in Oregon, as well as constituting a threat to public safety." In December of 1982, the Portland office of the I.N.S. issued two orders, one denying the guru permanent-resident status and the other denying him classification as a religious worker. The Hatfield call may have had nothing to do with this, but congressional delegations often do have influence on Immigration decisions, and some of the statements made in the two orders suggested that I.N.S. officials were not without Feelings about the guru. "It could be argued that the beneficiary does not teach religion, rather the antipathy of religion, and thusly not the kind of religion intended by this regulation," the second document read. "However, there is no need to address this issue."

The I.N.S. had not only no need to address the issue but, under the religious-establishment clause, no right to. Its two documents were also almost contradictory, in that one contended that the Rajneeshee had lied about the guru's ill health when, several years before, they said that the guru was gravely ill and required medical attention in the United States, while the other contended that his ill health and his self-imposed silence—rendered him incapable of performing his job as a religious worker. The documents were flawed in a number of other ways, but operatively they were flawed by the fact -that the I.N.S. did not give the Rajneeshee the derogatory evidence on which the decisions had been made. Recognizing this, the legal counsel for the I.N.S. had told I.N.S. officials to withdraw the orders, hand over the evidence, and give the Rajneeshee time to rebut it. A year later, the I.N.S. gave the guru the priority classification he had asked for but not a green card.

The land-use case also had a political dimension, though it had been brought before the Antelope battle and was in its essence a straightforward question of legal interpretation. Since the adoption of the Oregon land laws, in 1973, no county had ever incorporated a city on agricultural land. Could a county do this, as Wasco County had, without submitting the incorporation to state

land-use goals? The wording of the law was somewhat vague at this point, since the framers had been principally concerned with the encroachment of existing cities onto agricultural land, but 1000 Friends maintained that a proper reading of the law would show that the land-use goals applied to new cities as well. By the spring of 1983, the case had made its way through several courts and was proceeding more or less as 1000 Friends had hoped. At this point, K.D. and Ma Prem Isabel, the head of the Twinkies (the Rajneeshee public-relations spokeswomen), went to the state legislature to propose a deal: the Rajneeshee would get out of Antelope if the legislature would pass a bill legalizing the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram. The reaction was negative. Legislators who were in no way "bigots" told me that they hadn't felt like doing the Rajneeshee any favors after what the Rajneeshee did to Antelope.

In July, the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission adopted a set of temporary rules clarifying the land-use laws to read that a county had to come to it before incorporating a city. That the commission made these rules retroactive to August of 1981 suggested that the commissioners wished not merely to close the loophole but to stop Rajneeshpuram as well. In September, 1000 Friends' suit, having made its way through another court, arrived at the state Land Use Board of Appeals. This administrative appeals court, in its turn, ordered the Wasco County commission to hold new hearings and justify the incorporation by making a compelling case that a city was needed on the Rajneeshee ranch. The likelihood that the three Wasco County commissioners would make such a case had by then, however, radically diminished.

Central Oregonians generally disliked the land-use laws, since the laws treated the wide open spaces of the rangeland much as they treated the remaining green fields and the delicate ecological system of the Willamette Valley. The ranchers usually complained that they couldn't build a lean-to without permission from the bureaucrats in Salem, the state capital. That was not quite the case, but in their view it was near enough. Now, because of Antelope, many people in Central Oregon began to think that their county commissioners, by finding for the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram, in November of 1981, had not represented their interests. At the Land Use Board of Appeals hearings, the lawyers for 1000 Friends charged that one of the commissioners, Richard C. Cantrell, had sold the Rajneeshee seventeen thousand five hundred and forty dollars' worth of cattle at the time of the vote, and had not disclosed the sale or excused him-self from the decision. A subsequent investigation by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission showed not only that the charge was accurate but also that Cantrell had been under some pressure to pay off a bank note just at that time. Still, the Ethics Commission decided that conflict of interest would be too difficult to prove under Oregon law. The citizens of Wasco County thereupon took matters into their own hands. Cantrell was, as it happened, a Mormon, and not Jong after the commission announced its findings Mormon Church officials in Salt Lake City gave notice that Cantrell was wanted immediately in their

mission in Nigeria. Cantrell, then aged sixty-one, had planned to serve out his term on the county commission before doing his missionary service, and his wife had a good job at a bank. But the church gave him little alternative, so the couple quit their jobs and left for a place that many Central Oregonians would have conceived of as Hell. At around the same time, the second commissioner who had voted for the incorporation changed his mind about the virtues of supporting the Rajneeshee. This was no coincidence: the same group of Wasco County citizens who got in touch with the Mormon Church had put some forceful, and finally persuasive, arguments to him.

In the wake of the Antelope school takeover, a number of new legal problems cropped up for the Rajneeshee. In October, the state attorney general, David Frohnmayer, issued an opinion that the municipal status of Rajneeshpuram violated the religious-establishment clause in both the state and Federal Constitutions. In Frohnmayer's view, the issue was not that religious people ran the city government but that the city was actually owned and controlled by a church; that is, by the commune and the Rajneesh Foundation International. The church could decide who might visit the ranch and who might visit its private property, yet it collected state funds and exercised police and other government powers. The Rajneeshee had anticipated such a ruling months before it came down, and had already prepared much of their defense. What surprised them was two new rulings by the Wasco County Circuit Court judge: the first held up thirty thousand dollars that the state and county education authorities had approved for the Rajneeshee school; the second enjoined any further construction at Rajneeshpuram until the settlement of the incorporation case. The second ruling was a serious blow to the Rajneeshee. Until then, they had been able to continue building their city—and digging themselves into the Oregon landscape—while they batted lawsuits around from court to court. But now they were effectively stalled, able to complete only the work they had already started.

Wadud, for one, understood perfectly well the kind of opposition the Rajneeshee faced in Wasco County. At the same time that he was forcing the school issue, he told me that the Rajneeshee lawyers were building a case against the county, and, in particular, against the Circuit Court judge, for bigotry. "We used to try to accommodate," he said, "but, more and more, it's just war." Now, instead, they would go to Jefferson County—where part of the ranch lay—and ask for the incorporation of a new city. True, Jefferson County had turned them down before, but that was "just politics." They would go ahead anyway. "People here said, 'Screw it, well incorporate another city,' "

Wadud told me. "Well just push them a little bit, and if it can be shown that the decisions are obviously prejudiced sue for our rights. Eventually, well get a city in Jefferson County, because that's what's right." Remembering a Jefferson County judge who had walked away with only minor injuries when a propane tank exploded next to him, I felt that Wadud had become quite seriously detached from reality.

In fact, from the very beginning the Rajneeshee had often seemed to act against their own interests. Not long after their arrival in Oregon, they had hired Robert Davis, a former aide to Governor McCall and the most respected and influential lobbyist in the state, to act as their political consultant. Davis had advised them to conciliate their neighbors, but instead of taking his advice they had used him—and his considerable reputation—to make promises about getting out of Antelope that they would never keep. Davis had finally quit, leaving them without a Champion in Salem. This kind of behavior was puzzling, because in many ways the Rajneeshee managers promoted the interests of their organization extremely well. Isabel and her colleagues put a great deal of effort into charming visitors and cultivating journalists. Always reasonable and diplomatic, they were patient with people they felt were hostile, warm and jokey with everyone else. As a result, the Rajneeshee enjoyed generally good relations with the Oregon press. The major newspaper in the state, the Oregonian, championed their rights in editorials and ran friendly feature pieces about them. (In mid-1984, it undertook an investigative series on them, but the series did not run until June and July of 1985.) For every attack on them in the Central Oregon press, there was a favorable story about them elsewhere. Swami Prem Niren, the Rajneeshee legal counsel, for his part did an excellent, professional job of representing Rajneeshee interests, and Wadud and Neehar, the farm coordinator, often impressed the professionals in their fields. Sheela gave cocktail parties for "friends and associates" in Portland, and radiated charm. The Rajneeshee sometimes said they were "integrating themselves into society," and sometimes this seemed to be true.

But now a more consistent pattern of behavior seemed to be emerging. While Isabel remained as diplomatic as ever, all the other Rajneeshee spokesmen seemed to be going out of their way to alienate everyone in the state whose support might be helpful to them. They called Senator Hatfield a bigot, and they spoke insultingly of the governor, the secretary of state, the attorney general, and the local representatives to the state legislature. When the religious-establishment opinion against them came down, Sheela and K.D., acting as spokesmen for the commune, behaved as if they had never heard of the issue before. "I'm outraged beyond words," Sheela said in a prepared statement. "The attorney general's statement is in the long tradition of bigotry and intolerance which this state has exhibited since its birth." She added that Frohnmayer needed psychiatric help and should report to a Rajneeshee clinic.

Such remarks directed at Oregon state officials seemed merely childish—a reflection of the boarding-school atmosphere of the commune coordinators' meetings. (The coordinators met with Sheela once a week to make decisions for the commune.) But the Rajneeshee attacked their neighbors, and others they had some power over, in much the same way, and if this was childish it was something else as well. In particular, one incident that had occurred during the summer cast a very different light on their motivations. In June, Paul Gerhardt, Jr., a land-use planner, and Mark J.

Greenfield, the main attorney for 1000 Friends in the Rajneeshpuram case, visited the ranch to inspect the building and land-use permits issued by the city. According to Gerhardt's memo of the event, the two went to the city offices and while they were sitting with Wadud looking over the permits three Rajneeshee came over and began asking them hostile questions. When Wadud did nothing to stop them, the three came closer and fired questions in such a way that Gerhardt and Greenfield could not do their work. One of them—he had a German accent—made a series of anti-Semitic remarks, including a remark about "Jews in toasters." At twelve-fifteen, Wadud told them that the building was closed until two-thirty and they would have to leave. Gerhardt and Greenfield drove out along the county road and were followed by a parade of Rajneeshee cars (one with Sheela and her husband, Jayananda, in it); when they got out to take a photograph of a construction site, they were harassed by people and photographed by a video team. Returning to the city offices, they were greeted by a crowd of Rajneeshee chanting Slogans and yelling, "Get the hell out of here, we don't like you" They resumed their work, but the demonstrators closed in on them, shouting so loudly that they could not continue. Wadud and a Rajneeshpuram attorney, Sangeet, who was working with him, just laughed. Gerhardt and Greenfield drove away quite shaken by the experience.

When I asked Wadud about the incident, he denied that there had been any "negative harassment"—and that any anti-Semitic remarks had been made. "There was just singing and joking," he said. "To us, such things aren't serious—it's all play. Greenfield's asleep—he's off on his own ego trip. People were just letting him know what they thought of him. Whoever comes into contact with us has to wake up a bit. It's like an encounter group." Both Gerhardt and Greenfield, however, had heard the anti-Semitic remarks, and Gerhardt had written his memo about the incident the day after it occurred.

Wadud's explanation was nonetheless interesting, for he had made a clear connection between what the Rajneeshee thought they were doing inside the community and their hostile behavior toward outsiders. Later, in talking with other sannyasins—disciples of the guru—I found that there was a well-developed rationale for this kind of hostility. Subhuti, for example, put it this way: "Being here, you see the phyness of all politics. Everyone, consciously or unconsciously, is trying to manipulate everyone else and necessarily so, as everyone is imprisoned in his own ego. Only, we are not into that. So it's better to offend people to the point where they say what they mean. I feel more comfortable when people don't like us, because when they're for us they're for us for all the wrong reasons." Subhuti was a gentle person who would not offend anyone if he thought it would hurt. Much the same was true of Swami Anand Videh, the coordinator of the commune's water systems, but, speaking of his experience of state water boards and commissions, Videh said, "No one really wants to change things. Agencies would rather regulate than solve problems. Citizens blame each other for problems, so there are lots of intellectual discussions and lots of emotions, but

no one jumps out of his own focus long enough to get it. Then we do something really outrageous—which comes right from our guts—and it gets people into a different level of functioning." When I asked if politics in general were hopeless, Videh said, "This country is a kind of anarchy. It tries to deal with ongoing problems and pretends to be a democracy, but nothing works. I realize this is a delicate conversation, as what I said might be used to justify fascism. But I'm not talking about democracy as an ideal—I'm talking about what's going on now here and in most countries." What were the Rajneeshee doing about this? "Well," Videh answered, "we're playing this game on a pretty large scale, and we've had a good deal of impact on the state—forcing the hands of government agencies that should know better. But our focus is really on our own transformation. We're trying to free ourselves up from social patterns and social conditioning. And we can free ourselves more easily when people aren't telling us all the time that we're good guys "

On page 56 of a booklet called "Rajneeshism," which was published by the commune, there was a quotation, attributed to the guru, that began, "Man is now living in his most critical moment and it is a crisis of immense dimensions. Either he will die or a new man will be born. Rajneeshism accepts this challenge and is making the only worldwide effort to transform human consciousness so that man can die and a superman can be born out of his ashes." The quotation went on to predict floods, volcanic eruptions, and nuclear war in the next decade. When I asked Ma Mary Catherine, a former political scientist from Oregon, about this passage, she more or less dismissed it as hyperbole: Rajneesh said all kinds of things he did not mean to be taken literally. But clearly the Rajneeshee did believe in the New Man. What was more, they believed that no one but themselves had a legitimate point of view. Provocation, they believed, was the only way to deal with outsiders, and if they made themselves disliked, even detested, that would only help their development.

This doctrine was, of course, chilling. It was all the more so in relation to another theme the Rajneeshee were now playing heavily upon. The theme had first been sounded by Sheela in April. In a letter to the Rajneesh Times she wrote:

*A relatively small number of people who are themselves no better than thugs have been trying to scare us out of the state by threatening the lives of Rajneeshees, or those of our friends, or trying to destroy our property....*

*We are tired of this uncivilized, barbaric, unsophisticated and violent way of trying to intimidate a religious minority. Once and for all, we wish to make it clear that we are here in Oregon to stay at whatever the cost.*

*If that means that some of our blood is spilled, or some of our property vandalized, then that is the price we are prepared to pay.*

At the time, this sounded like pure melodrama—the very diction of the letter asked that it not be taken seriously. But since then the Rajneeshee had reiterated this theme of violence many

times. Wadud had mentioned it to me in connection with Gerhardt and Greenfield. "1000 Friends gives people hope that they can get rid of us legally, but once people find that we're here to stay the other shoe will drop and there will be violence," he said. "We've got a lot of threats already, as people get tired of waiting for the law to act for them." Subhuti told me that he had butterflies in his stomach every time he went to Antelope. And many sannyasins talked about bullet holes in road signs and the shot that wounded a horse belonging to Harry Hawkins, a local deputy sheriff, who trained the Rajneeshee Peace Force, as the commune's police force was known. On ABC's "Nightline," in July, Sheela accused the Antelope old-timers of "persecuting" the Rajneeshee. Don Smith had threatened to run them out of the country, she said, and there had been anonymous threats to burn Rajneeshpuram down.

In fact, the Rajneeshee had received some threats in the previous months. According to a Journalist hostile to the Rajneeshee, a local man had approached K.D. and said, "You're a psychologist. Just how much more of this crap do you think I can take before I crack and start pulling the trigger?" But whether any of these threats deserved to be treated as anything more serious than bar talk was questionable. Don Smith, who was on the same "Nightline" program as Sheela, said he believed that the guru was in the country illegally—and that's what he had said. To anyone watching the program the idea that this man in his seventies could have threatened the Rajneeshee, whatever he had said, must have seemed patently absurd. Theo, too, there had been no violence in Antelope or Rajneeshpuram. (True, a hotel the Rajneeshee owned in Portland had been bombed in July of 1983, but that was the work of a California man, possibly a deranged person, who had his own fantasies about the Rajneeshee.) True, the commune was the object of widespread hostility in the two counties of which it was a part. But if the Rajneeshee were really worried about violence they might have taken some steps to allay it—as they had when earlier demonstrations in Madras turned ugly. As it was, they continued to provoke hostility, and often in a very deliberate manner.

A few non-Rajneeshee still attended the meetings of the Antelope City council, and a few of the ranchers' wives still went to the school-board meetings, though these were now held in Rajneeshpuram. The Rajneeshee often used these meetings for theatre. In one city-council meeting, for example, Ma Prem Karuna, the mayor of Antelope, announced that she had been thinking long and hard about creating a park for nudists there. There were costs, she said: the park would offend those people who did not live in the twentieth century, and building it would be an expense to all taxpayers. But the benefits of having a place where people could feel at one with nature finally outweighed these costs, so she was now proposing an ordinance for it. The ordinance was passed, but the park was never built, perhaps because the Rajneeshee had then decided to create such a park in Rajneeshpuram. A few months later, the city council changed the names of all the streets in Antelope; Main Street became Mevlana Bhagwan Street, College Street became Mansoor, and so on.



In reporting on this, one Oregon journalist recalled the colonization of American Indian country by white settlers.

*Sometimes the provocations*

were initiated by K.D., Karuna, or Wadud, but most often it was Sheela who took the offensive. At a school-board meeting in front of television cameras from a Portland Station, Sheela declared that the children of the ranchers looked retarded, and that Margaret Hill, the retired schoolteacher, looked retarded, too. Staring straight at a young woman whose husband had just been killed in a hunting accident, Sheela said that the state of affairs in Antelope was such that a man had just committed suicide because his wife was "screwing around" with another man. The young woman left in helpless tears. On "Nightline," Sheela told Margaret Hill to "shut up for a while," and in response to Don Smith's charge that the guru was here illegally she screeched "Bullshit!" and then "Bullshit!" again. (A local court finally awarded libel damages to Rosemary McGreer, whom the Rajneeshee were suing for defamation, because Sheela had called her a "racist" and a "bigot," among other things.)

Wondering if this might be simply Sheela's way, I went one day to ask her why she so often made such a spectacle of herself. Sheela was receiving in bed that day (she suffered occasionally from phlebitis), and a number of her women coordinators were sitting on the floor around her bed. K.D. hovered in the doorway. In answer to my question, she said in a loud voice, "I'm here to say the words of the Master. He calls a spade a spade, and I can't do anything else. Truth can be harsh and sharp. That's the nature of the truth."

"It wakes people up," K.D. interjected. "If a person's not intelligent, he or she can't understand it any other way."

Sheela went on to say that the reactions she had got to her performance on "Nightline" had been entirely favorable, and, besides, because she acted as she did, Ted Koppel had decided to put Niren on the show the next night to debate the I.N.S. case. "All publicity is good publicity, and I can get it for free," she said. "Not even the governor can do that!" She paused, and then added in a harsh tone, "Donkeys can only understand a kick. The Antelopians are your average day-today bigots. Their brains are in the fifteenth century."

The insults were not, then, spontaneous or authentic expressions of Sheela's personality. They were calculated. But what was the calculation? To know Sheela at all was to know that she could not be operating out of some fuzzy Western-style philosophy about the death of politics and the birth of the New Man. (This was K.D.'s Maslovian province.) Sheela said she wanted to attract publicity, and, clearly, she succeeded a good bit of the time, for better or worse. But the harassment of Gerhardt and Greenfield was no publicity stunt, and many of Sheela's outbursts were heard only in Wasco and Jefferson Counties. The explanation now current among county officials and ranchers was that the Rajneeshee were quite deliberately making enemies for the sake of their own internal

cohesion.

The explanation was a plausible one. There were antagonisms within the commune, and by stifling dissent the Rajneeshee leaders were causing them to build up in silence. They needed an enemy. The neighboring ranchers and the people of Antelope could not do serious physical damage to the commune even if they wanted to, yet sannyasins, isolated as they -were, could easily be persuaded to believe they lived in the midst of a wilderness populated only by rednecks with guns. (Some sannyasins told me this; others said they felt like blacks in the South—apparently meaning it.) Possibly the New Man notions they had developed were merely rationalizations for this requirement. Still, the whole world of illusion that the leaders lived in seemed more complicated than that.

Sheela had told me that her outrageousness made for good publicity. She had also told me that she was doing the bidding of Rajneesh himself. And there was some evidence that this was so. Circulating among the opposition in Oregon at the time were two documents purporting to be the minutes of two coordinators' meetings, one dated November of 1982 and one January of 1983. The documents sounded authentic, and were later authenticated by two sannyasins who had been present at the meetings. One of them ended with the directive "Please shred these notes immediately after use," and both contained reports of discussions a good deal more sensitive than the one I had listened to, and apparently among a far smaller group of people. Both indicated that there was dissension within the commune, and both reported the gist of conversations that Sheela and others had had with the guru. One entry in the November minutes, for example, read:

*Bhagwan said not to worry about why people left, focus attention on work here. He doesn't want to speak again but if money becomes too difficult, He would do. He wants to attract people who can sit silently and also enjoy the work.*

An entry in the January minutes read:

*Sheela was on CBS Eye Witness News —Bhagwan was very pleased because she was so feisty. "It was all bullshit."*

The guru had apparently liked that word.

Then, also in the second set of minutes, there was a report of the commune's dealings with the lobbyist Bob Davis. In a meeting with Sheela, Isabel, K.D., and Niren, Davis had complained that the Rajneeshee were not taking his advice—that the guru's teachings always took precedence over political or legal counsel. Niren had taken Davis's side, Isabel had remained silent, and K.D. had supported Sheela against Davis. Later, Davis had told Jayananda that he would like to meet with him privately but that he would not deal with Sheela or K.D. The meeting apparently did not take place. According to the minutes, "Sheela and Bhagwan explained the trap involved...Bhagwan called Jay and Isabel to tell them that we have to be a hundred per cent supportive and because we are a minority we have to be very assertive and very together to survive." The guru, in other words, had been

responsible for undercutting Davis's excellent political advice, against the better judgment of Jayananda and Niren.

That the guru himself was directly responsible for the policy of provocation made a great deal of sense. Rajneesh, after all, had made a career of outrageousness. As an assistant Professor at an obscure university from 1960 to 1966, he had drawn crowds in cities across India by attacking Gandhi, socialism, and orthodox Hinduism —just to provoke. Later, he had become the outrageous guru who attacked Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, and Morarji Desai. It had been a great success. Westerners had poured in and laughed at his anti-Catholic jokes, his anti-Semitic jokes, his anti-Hindu jokes, and his dirty jokes. He made his listeners feel that they belonged to an elite of true freethinkers, who saw beyond the superstitions and pathetic social props of everyone else's existence. Instinctively, perhaps, Rajneesh understood the sociology of in-groups and out-groups: he had talked about the provocation that people wearing red clothes and malas were to everyone else. At the same time, there seemed to be another purpose to his provocations.

In the set of minutes wherein it was reported that the guru congratulated Sheela for her feistiness, there was an entry a little farther down that read:

*He said we are not politicians, so we don't need to please people for their votes. If we are silent, e.g. on TV when negative people are speaking against us it gives false impression, we should show them where they are coming from but not to be angry, only assertive. He spoke about Pontius Pilate's wife persuading Pontius to listen to Jesus and he tried to advise Jesus how to be tactful, but Jesus would not compromise. We should not compromise but remain authentic to ourselves. We have nothing to lose, we have lost it anyway. "Life is such a little thing, so short anyway ..."*

The story was hardly reassuring, considering what happened to Jesus when he refused to compromise. But it was vintage Rajneesh. At his ashram in Poona, Rajneesh had lectured on many occasions on the martyrdom of Jesus and Socrates, and had added more than once that his disciples would surely serve him better than Jesus' disciples had served their master. Martyrdom and persecution were constant themes with him. When he settled in Bombay, in 1970, and revealed that he had been enlightened twenty years before, he told a disciple that the reason he had not revealed this until then was that in all his years of travelling he could very easily have been killed by "the stupid mob." At the same time, he revealed that his last incarnation had been as a great sage seven hundred years ago, and that the reason he had not at that time escaped the great chain of being into Buddhahood was that he had allowed a disciple to kill him three days before his appointed death, so he would be able to return in the twentieth century. In Poona, just before leaving for the United States, Rajneesh told an audience that he would take the risk of exposing orthodox Hinduism (hardly an original risk with him), because "the most they can do is kill me." The year before, a Hindu had made a run at him with a knife in the middle of a lecture. The ashram press release on the incident

read, in part:

*Today, in Buddha Hall, the history of assassination, abuse and hostility which has been India's reaction to all its great mystics and seers repeated itself. These are the people who stoned Buddha, tortured Mahavir and who now wish to silence Bhagwan.*

This reading of Indian history, a history in which thousands of great mystics, including the Buddha, had died quite peacefully of old age, recalled Sheela's reading of Oregon history.

In the last few weeks before Rajneesh left Poona for the United States, there was, according to his biographer, an alarming increase in the number of threatening letters and phone calls to the ashram. (Most of the threats were apparently anonymous, but, according to an ashram press release, one was signed "Roman Catholics of Bombay and Poona.") Four days before Sheela put the guru on the plane, a fire broke out in a castle that Ma Yoga Laxmi, the secretary to the guru at that time, had leased for a "new commune" outside the town. The next day, arson destroyed a Rajneeshee book warehouse, and at the same time an explosive device was detonated at the ashram's medical center. No one was hurt in these incidents. The Indian police never discovered who or what caused the fires. The company that insured the warehouse contested the Rajneeshee's claim and, in the end, paid out only a minimal sum.

The guru had predicted acts of violence against him and his disciples. This took no great prescience, since he himself had done his best to provoke such acts. To be noted, however, was the fact that the acts of violence (including the ineffectual assassination attempt) did little damage to the ashram or its inhabitants. In any event, what caused far more trouble than any violence was the alienation of the Poona citizenry and the Indian government—resulting, as it did, in a denial of tax-exempt status for the ashram and the government's refusal to give the necessary permissions for the building of the new commune. In the fall of 1983, this pattern seemed to be repeating itself in Oregon. Sheela, K.D., and others were doing what they could to provoke violence from their neighbors, and it was not altogether out of the question that some hothead would start a fire on Rajneeshee property or take a potshot at someone. But the real damage that the provocation was doing was political. The constant prodding and poking of the Antelope people had created ripples of hostility across the state; it had turned the politicians and bureaucrats against the Rajneeshee and was slowly strangling the commune in litigation. With all the great ambitions the Rajneeshee had for their commune, they seemed quite unconscious of this banal form of danger; what they saw was merely the mythic drama that the guru had created around them.

***By the winter of 1983-84,***

many Rajneeshee-watchers in Oregon believed that some form of dénouement was inevitable. The Rajneeshee lawyers were still holding back all the legal challenges to the commune's existence, but there were a great many forces arrayed against them, and the Rajneeshee leaders seemed bent on a

course of conflict. Considering the guru's interest in martyrdom, a number of Rajneeshee-watchers, including some Madras residents and former sannyasins, now feared the worst that when the Rajneeshee leaders found themselves wholly frustrated they would create a violent confrontation and ask their disciples to give up their lives for the commune. To other people, including me, a Jonestown-style dénouement seemed quite unlikely. It would, I thought, be out of character for the Rajneeshee. In the first place, the guru was a survivor—that was his life story, his drama—and while he continued to flirt rhetorically with martyrdom he also continued to accumulate Rolls-Royces (there were now sixty or so in the garages around his house), diamond watches, and other consolation prizes for remaining on earth. Sheela, for her part, spent a great deal of time raising money for these and other extravagances; no one knew where the money went, or even how much of it there was, but Sheela, like Mme. Nhu and the other great iron butterflies of Asia, seemed to me a practical person when it came to money and personal survival. Also, she had a non-Rajneeshee brother in the United States—a financier of some undefined sort, whose very existence she kept a secret. Finally, the Rajneeshee sannyasins as a group did not seem to me the most likely candidates for self-immolation. They did not, after all, suffer from guilt or from lack of a sense of self-worth; their affliction was, rather, a sense of superiority, and certainly they overestimated their importance to the world. (Even those who disliked Sheela imagined that her television performances left a vivid impression on the whole American public.) If a crisis came, some might be capable of conceiving that they had to fight for the commune, but others, I felt quite strongly, would see a dear alternative in the hot tubs of Mill Valley. On the whole, it seemed to me more likely that the dénouement would come via the slow, mundane processes of politics and the law.

Eight months later, however, I could no longer be confident of this, for the Rajneeshee had made all the preparations for war. Beginning in the spring of 1984, disciples using their sannyasin names or their given names had gone to arms dealers in cities across the country; by the fall, they had amassed an arsenal that included a number of semi-automatic weapons—Uzi carbines and Galil assault rifles—and many rifles and handguns. They had tried to buy automatic weapons on a number of occasions, but the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms had prevented the sales from going through—at least, when they tried to buy them legally. Sannyasins had also bought hundreds of human silhouette targets for weapons training, and had spent twenty-five thousand dollars for ammunition (or more than half what the City of Portland spent for ammunition in that year). In addition to the Peace Force, there were now a hundred and fifty sannyasin security guards patrolling the ranch, and two helicopter-reconnaissance teams.

There were other ominous signals from the commune. In March of 1984, the guru had announced, through Sheela, that acquired-immune-deficiency syndrome, or AIDS, was the scourge predicted by Nostradamus: the disease would cover the earth, and billions of people would die from

it in the next ten years. Only the Rajneeshee commune would be safe from it, the guru said, for protective measures would be adopted: sannyasins should stop sex altogether, or stay with one partner, or take extreme precautions. (The following day, the commune bought all the prophylactics and rubber gloves immediately available from suppliers in the state of Oregon.) The guru's message was shocking—particularly since it was only the third public statement he had made in the three years since he had come to the United States. The first was his prediction of nuclear war, and the second was his earthquake alert, which, among other things, brought a number of gay sannyasins from San Francisco to the commune. Rajneeshee spokesmen denied having anyone with AIDS in the commune, but, given the fact that the Rajneeshee never admitted to having any serious diseases, this seer-Led improbable. And some months later they built a rather elaborate gas-fired crematorium.

At about this time, extraordinary stories began to travel around the network of ex-sannyasins in the country. One story was that the Rajneeshee, believing in an imminent holocaust, were stocking caves in the mountains with all the necessities for survival, including microchips or computer tapes containing the information required to begin civilization all over again. A woman who described herself as a former aide to Sheela told me with some certainty that the commune was involved in a triangle trade of gold, drugs, and arms across the world: the guns and the drugs were hidden in caves, and the whole operation was (she suspected) run from a giant computer installed in Rajneesh's house. Another ex-sannyasin told me (though not for attribution) that the Rajneeshee had infiltrated the highest levels of the state government, and had blackmailed Oregon politicians with photographs of themselves in compromising positions with Rajneeshee women. Still another ex-sannyasin—now one of the group's most outspoken opponents—told me there might be an esoteric death cult in the commune: a sannyasin who had just left the ranch had told him there were rumors of an inner sanctum where the goddess Kali was worshipped and there had been a human sacrifice. There was, of course, no evidence for any of this, but, with the AIDS alarm, the weapons purchases, and the building of the crematorium, it was not impossible to dismiss any mythopoetic scenario out of hand.

In June, the word went out informally along sannyasin networks that the guru might "drop his body"—that is, die—during the Master's Day Festival, in July. Many outsiders, however, suspected that there was a banal reason for this, and, a year later, when the Oregonian published its investigative series, they found their suspicions confirmed. According to Oregonian reporters, the European movement had flourished in the first two years after the exodus from Poona. Sannyasins had opened dozens of new centers and started small businesses—restaurants, bookstores, meditation classes, and so on. But beginning in 1982 Sheela and her minions—Arup, the coordinator of the Rajneeshee therapy and meditation centers; Sushila, the main fund-raiser; and others—made

a concerted effort to rationalize these centers and bring them under the control of the ranch. They ordered the small centers closed, and insisted that all sannyasins live together in large communes in the major cities. They then required these large communes to start ambitious new businesses with their own capital—the Rajneeshee financial organizations accepting their profits but not their losses or debts. While denying that the ranch had any control over the other communes, Sheela's group insisted on standardization of logos, restaurant food, therapies, and so on. "All the communes are patterned exactly alike...exactly patterned like the commune here," Rajneesh said at one point. Finally, of course, the European communes were required to contribute heavily to the ranch in Oregon. These measures, combined with the highhanded manner of "the duchesses" (as Sheela and her principal assistants were now called), did not sit well with the sannyasins in Europe. A number of the therapists there had become quite successful in their own right, and they assumed that they had a direct, personal relationship with the guru. Most ordinary sannyasins could not or would not move to the large communes. And a good deal of the business advice turned out to be bad. The result was turmoil in the movement. Some of the therapists refused to close their centers and were "excommunicated" by Sheela; others obeyed orders but then lost their followings. A number of the large communes had business failures. Indeed, in February of 1984, the very month that *Der Spiegel* did a story on the Rajneeshee, some Rajneeshee discos in West Germany failed; as for a "chain of hotels" mentioned in the story, it never materialized. Then, with the small centers closed, the Rajneeshee had lost their most effective recruitment centers, and the numbers of new people dropped off. The leaders had, in other words, managed, in an excess of tidiness, to cut off the roots and branches of the movement.

Rajneeshee financial statements for 1981 through 1983 showed a total of twenty million dollars in gifts to the Rajneesh Foundation International and the commune, but in sharply decreasing amounts over that time. The foundation, for example, received five million one hundred thousand dollars in 1981 and only one million three hundred thousand in 1983. (What these sums represented in terms of the total of Rajneeshee funds was not at all clear, but the relative decline was nonetheless significant.) The decrease in contributions would not have mattered, of course, if the ranch businesses had grown increasingly successful, but this had not happened. In the spring of 1984, the leaders must have anticipated that the Master's Day Festival would bring fewer people than it had the year before, and it was for this reason that the word went out that the guru might "drop his body." But in the event the guru made no move to shed his mortal coil, and the festival went off without incident—except that Sheela, packing a Smith & Wesson revolver, managed to terrify a number of reporters. Then, too, in spite of the fact that no good sannyasin would have wished to miss the guru's moment of passage, there were noticeably fewer people at the festival than there had been the year before. In the weeks following, ranch personnel wrote or telephoned

every American sannyasin and every American who had ever stayed at the ranch to offer a six weeks' to three months' stay in Rajneeshpuram at reduced rates—indeed, virtually free of charge. But very few people accepted. "We opened up the ranch to all in the United States, and nobody came," Ma Satya Bharti, a long-term sannyasin, told me later. "Bhagwan does not seem to attract so many Americans these days." At the time, however, the very small number of American arrivals must have surprised the ranch leaders, for, as it turned out, they had big plans.

At the end of August, the Rajneeshee announced that they were collecting homeless people from big cities across the United States—New York, Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, Chicago—and housing them to the ranch to live there. In this "Share-A-Home" program, the homeless would be given room and board; they would be free to work on the commune if they wanted to and free to leave when they liked; if they left, they would be given bus tickets to the city of their choice. It was, the Rajneeshee said, an experiment in communal living: "We have such abundance here we want to share it." When journalists remarked that altruism ran counter to the usual philosophy of the commune, Isabel said, "We don't have at all the traditional approach to charity. We are sharing something we have—a beautiful lifestyle, a beautiful environment." By September 6th, there were, according to the Rajneeshee, six hundred homeless people on the ranch; by October 1st, there were by their count two thousand. And by this time many Oregonians were quite beside themselves.

According to reporters—now flocking to the ranch from all over the country—the "homeless" included derelicts, people down on their luck, curiosity seekers, hitchhikers who had run out of money, drunks, petty criminals (or former petty criminals), and street hustlers. Many of them were black, and all of them were over eighteen. (Rajneeshee charity apparently did not extend to homeless families.) Out-of-state reporters could not help seeing some comedy in the spectacle of hundreds of street people suddenly delivered into cowboy country to join a lot of human-potential-movement therapists and an Indian guru with sixty-odd Rolls-Royces. Central Oregonians, however, were not amused. They were not, to begin with, keen on having new neighbors of this sort, and after that came the question of what the Rajneeshee intended to do with these people. The commune had an arsenal, and many of the "homeless" were tough-looking young men. Would they be given terrorist training? Drugged into zombies? Or simply let loose on the streets of Madras and The Dalles with knives? The darkest suspicions abounded. On September 26th, the state attorney general's office called a meeting of some forty top ranking police, military, and civilian officials in the state. All concerned refused to say even what agencies were represented at the meeting—much less what was discussed. They did, however, set up an information hot line for rumor control.

### *The dominant view*

in Oregon was that the Rajneeshee were importing street people as voters and were planning to take over Wasco County in the November election. The theory was not farfetched, for two of the three



seats on the Wasco County commission would be on the ballot on November 6th, and the relationship between the Rajneeshee and Wasco County had become strained. In recent months, the commissioners had, among other things, voted to repeal Rajneeshpuram's comprehensive City plan, delayed the permit for the Master's Day Festival, and denied tax-exempt status to Rajneesh Mandir, the religious-meeting hall. The Rajneeshee, for their part, had changed the name of their second city from Antelope to Rajneesh. The county planner, Dan Durow, had tried to visit Rajneeshpuram twice, but both times had found Rajneeshee vehicles blocking the roads. Then, on August 29th, three county commissioners had visited the ranch, and two of them had become ill. The chairman of the commission, Judge William Hulse, later testified that the three had toured the ranch in a Rajneeshee car and returned to the visitors' center to find his car with a flat tire. During a long wait while the tire was changed, Sheela had offered the three men glasses of water; the glasses had been brought out by a woman from the Rajneeshee medical services. They had drunk the water, and later Hulse (who had taken the strongest line against the Rajneeshee) became very sick and went to the hospital, and nearly died; the second commissioner was slightly ill, and the third unaffected. Two weeks later, there was a large and mysterious out-break of salmonella poisoning in The Dalles. The infection, it was discovered, came from the salad bars of eight separate restaurants, but it could not, as is normal in such cases, be traced to a single food source or a single group of food handlers. About seven hundred and fifty people were taken ill, and, because of Hulse's experience, many people believed that the Rajneeshee had poisoned them.

The Rajneeshee indignantly denied that they had imported the street people for the election (and, of course, denied the suggestion about the poisoning); their only desire, they said, was to share their wealth and "inspire a life of dignity with love and respect." They added, however, that the people in their Share-A-Home program might vote in the election, as was their constitutional right. The announcement had a marvelous effect on citizenship in Wasco County: it inspired two thousand non-Rajneeshee to get out and register, bringing the voting rolls from twelve thousand to fourteen thousand. (About eight hundred and fifty were previously registered Rajneeshee.) It also inspired a fundamentalist group based in Albany, Oregon, to threaten to bring thousands of people from around the state to vote in the Wasco County election. On October 5th, Sheela announced that the Rajneeshee were putting up two write-in candidates for the Wasco County commission; two days later, a ranch spokesman said that there were now seven thousand people in Rajneeshpuram—fifteen hundred residents, fifteen hundred paying guests, and four thousand in the Share-A-Home program. Apparently, it was Antelope all over again, but on a much larger scale. This time, however, Norma Paulus, the Oregon secretary of state, was prepared. On October 10th, she brought voter registration in Wasco County to a halt and afterward set up a special hearing process for all prospective voters: at mass hearings in The Dalles on November 1st and 2nd, a few days before the

election, fifty lawyers would interview all those wishing to register and would make their own subjective judgment about each applicant's intent to reside in Wasco County. The Rajneeshee protested the order and took it to court, but in court the order was upheld.

On October 17th, the last day new-comers to the county could sign up to vote in the county election, the Rajneeshee were dispatching aircraft —three DC-3s and two Convairs—around the neighboring states to bring in sannyasins. The next day, Isabel announced that the Share-A-Home program had reached capacity and the recruitment of street people had stopped. By October 21st, Sue Proffitt, the Wasco County clerk, had received three thousand voter-registration cards from Rajneeshpuram—all of them since October 10th—and more were coming in daily. She was also, she said, receiving fraudulent voting cards in the names of non-Rajneeshee citizens. She said she knew they were fraudulent because she knew some of the names and they belonged to people who had already registered with different addresses, or they belonged to people who had died. Around the same time, Wayne Fawbush, the county representative to the state legislature, up for reelection, and another Rajneeshee opponent discovered that fraudulent letters were going out over their signatures.

Then, on October 26th, a Rajneeshee city official announced that she was going to urge all Rajneeshee to boycott the county election. Ever since the Paulus order came down, Rajneeshee spokesmen had been complaining that it was unjust for their prospective voters to have to go to The Dalles, a hundred miles away; now Krishna Deva said that Rajneeshpuram lacked the transport to take all the Rajneeshee people to the hearings. On November 1st and 2nd, the dates of the scheduled hearings, fifty volunteer lawyers sat idle in The Dalles armory: the street people never showed up. The Rajneeshee entered pollbook challenges against the two thousand-odd Wasco County voters, and warned that a contested election might result. Later, however, they called off the challenges, and on November 6th most of their registered voters voted only for their own municipal offices. Ten days later, a spokesman said that about half the street people had left Rajneeshpuram, and only two thousand remained.

The Rajneeshee, it appeared, had made a stunning series of miscalculations. In the first place, they never came close to having enough voters to win. Even if the non-Rajneeshee had split their votes evenly between the two non-Rajneeshee candidates for each job (an extremely unlikely event if a Rajneeshee was in the race), the Rajneeshee candidates would have had to have over seven thousand votes each in order to win. On October 10th, the Rajneeshee claimed to have seven thousand people on the ranch, but, according to observers, they had nowhere near that many. They had, after all, very few paying guests, and though they bused a total of forty-two hundred street people to the ranch, some of the homeless left just a week after the first bus pulled in, and after that there was a steady exodus. Only three thousand people ever signed voting cards, and some of them

had left by the end of October. In fact, the Rajneeshee could have hoped to win only by fraud—for example, by overwhelming the Wasco County system with a mass of new registrations just before the election, by casting votes in the names of street people who had already left (or who did not exist), and by putting enough fraudulent voter cards into the system to contest all the new Wasco County voters successfully. Norma Paulus had most efficiently prevented any of this from happening. But if she had not taken action Wasco County officials surely would have. That the Rajneeshee leaders had somehow imagined that the county and the state would let them get away with rigging an election showed just how far they had retreated into their world of illusion.

What happened to all the street people no outsider knew precisely. Some of those who talked to reporters said they had had a good time in Rajneeshpuram: they had had free room and board, people were nice, it was a change of scene. Others clearly couldn't stand the wide-open spaces. Still others objected to the regimentation: they had been searched and given medical tests, and there were guards everywhere with guns. Some thought that they had landed in some kind of Jonestown and that the Rajneeshee were putting drugs in their food. The last, I thought at the dose, was quite probably true. In the first place, the Rajneeshee had in their charge a number of alcoholics and others who might well become violent. In the second place, the Oregon Board of Medical Examiners discovered that the Rajneeshee had bought large quantities of Haldol, a colorless, odorless, and tasteless tranquilizer. In the third place, there was one known casualty of the experience: a man found dead of hypothermia behind a tavern in a Central Oregon town; in his blood was an antidepressant, which the Rajneeshee admitted he had received in Rajneeshpuram. In the beginning, the Rajneeshee had offered roundtrip tickets to the ranch, but so many people left after a week or so that from September 23rd on they offered only a one-way ticket. When the newer recruits insisted on leaving, the Rajneeshee simply bused them off the ranch and dumped them in some Oregon town. Oregonians protested mightily, and Curtis Sliwa, the founder of the Guardian Angels, came all the way from New York to demonstrate against the Rajneeshee, but to no avail. Street people kept turning up in Madras, Portland, and The Dalles, often without money or winter clothes. Churches helped them, and the Salvation Army spent a hundred thousand dollars to feed them and provide them with bus tickets back home. In February, a Rajneeshee spokesman, the therapist Swami Prem Siddha, said that from eight to nine hundred remained on the ranch, but outsiders estimated that there were two hundred or fewer.

For the Rajneeshee, this whole enterprise was very expensive. According to their spokesmen, it cost a million dollars. Whether the figure was accurate or not, it cost a great deal of money they could ill afford to lose just then, and it spurred a great many people into action against them. The two major cases against them—the land-use case and the church-state case— were still in litigation; the I.N.S. ruling was still pending; and a number of old grievance cases were still in the works. But

now a number of new suits were filed. Margaret Hill, her son, and the woman whose husband had died in a hunting accident brought suit against Sheela for her behavior in the school-board meeting. A lawyer representing seven street people sued the Rajneeshee, claiming fraud, coercion, physical abuse, and theft. A former Rajneeshee, Helen C. Byron, brought suit claiming that she was deceived into giving the group three hundred and ten thousand dollars in Poona, and a local judge awarded her one million seven hundred thousand dollars in damages. The list went on. And the legal problems for the Rajneeshee were now compounded by the fact that it was hard to find, anywhere in the state, twelve jurors unbiased against them. A study that their legal services had commissioned from a Portland re-eparch group showed that over two-thirds of the people in four counties believed that the Rajneeshee were using the legal system unfairly and would lie to further their own interests; only thirty per cent of those surveyed believed that the Rajneeshee "were not hurting anyone and should be left alone."

Oregon politicians and officials were now under heavy pressure to do something about the Rajneeshee, and the politicians who represented Central Oregon had strong feelings of their own. In November of 1984, United States Representative James Weaver and two of his colleagues held hearings on the Rajneeshee's use of federal land in and around the ranch, and made as much trouble as they could on this score. In the next six months, Wayne Fawbush and Billy Bellamy, the local representatives to the state legislature, introduced three separate bills aimed at the Rajneeshee, and Fawbush started a petition drive to put a measure on the ballot that would repeal the charter of Rajneesh City, on the ground that it violated the separation of church and state. In March of 1985, the state superintendent of schools, Verne Duncan, noted (for the first time) that the work-study program in the Rajneeshee school put public-school children to work in religious organizations, and he threatened to cut off state aid to the school. The Rajneeshee protested but finally dismantled the program. In late November of 1984, the county planner, Dan Durow, finally gaining access to Rajneeshpuram, took a look at six hundred and forty structures that the Rajneeshee called "winterized tents," and decided they were permanent structures built without permits. The state then issued fines totalling one million four hundred thousand dollars for violations of the electrical code, and though the fines were eventually reduced in court, the Rajneeshee did have to dismantle the structures. A week later, a fire broke out in the offices of the Wasco County Planning Department, destroying a third to a half of the county records; police in The Dalles believed that it was arson, because file drawers were open and records had been vandalized before the fire broke out.

On June 21, 1985, the Rajneeshee filed a suit alleging that state and county officials had conspired in an attempt to drive them out of Oregon; they named the governor, the attorney general, a number of Wasco County officials, and Henry R. Richmond, the head of 1000 Friends, as

defendants. This suit, however, was eclipsed by one that they had brought against Attorney General Edwin Meese; Secretary of State George Shultz and the State Department; and the commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Alan C. Nelson, and eight other I.N.S. officials, accusing them of engaging in "a religious-based discriminatory program of unlawful and intrusive monitoring, surveillance and purported 'investigation'" that violated their constitutional rights. The suit—the Rajneeshee nicknamed it *God v. the Universe*—was clearly a preemptive strike at the I.N.S. proceedings against them. Sheela claimed to have information that a federal grand-jury indictment was pending, and that she and the guru would be arrested. But no indictment occurred and no arrests were made.

"God" was by this time speaking in public again—just as he had promised he would "if money becomes too difficult." He had begun giving lectures to small groups of sannyasins the previous fall. (The lectures were videotaped and shown to the ranch population the day after.) His first lecture was on October 30th—a week and a half after the Rajneeshee decided to boycott the election and give up on the Share-A-Home program. The guru lectured to small groups for the next eight months. On June 30th, just before the 1985 Master's Day Festival, he began giving public lectures, mornings, in the meeting hall. Asked why he had resumed lecturing, he said that he had stopped in order to create a hiatus in his own work and to get rid of a lot of people who had been hanging around him just for his words. But if that had been his purpose he had apparently succeeded all too well, for the festival that year drew far fewer people than had come the year before. By all accounts, the European movement was now in disastrous decline: two large communes in England had closed, and so had centers in France, Italy, and Scandinavia; now there were only nine communes left—one in Amsterdam, one in Zurich, and the rest in West Germany. When the festival was over, Rajneesh held a press conference—the first he had given in the United States —and thereafter granted interviews to virtually any journalist who put in a request.

### *At the end of August,*

when I visited the ranch once again, Rajneeshpuram looked empty and motionless by comparison with the way it had been in 1983. There were a few more buildings than there had been two years before—a hotel, a new visitors' center, and a two-story mall—but most of these had been under construction or in the advanced planning stage then. The building moratorium was still in effect, but that was not the reason for the change, because the Rajneeshee had not used all the permits they had. A huge prefab-housing complex they had bought from a defunct mine and stuck up in Antelope remained unfinished, and a row of bulldozers lay idle in front of it. On the ranch, the creeks were flowing and the farmland looked lush and green, but there was very little new acreage under cultivation, the landscaping was minimal (rows of trees had been planted just in time for the summer festival and, predictably, had died of the heat), and the horses kept for pleasure riding had gone.

Most striking, however, was the quietness of the place. The hotel was almost empty, the lake was deserted, and the visitors' center had few visitors: a few family members, and a few journalists who had come to interview the guru. For most of the day, the town was as quiet as any other small Oregon town. Isabel told me that there were forty-five hundred people on the ranch, but this simply could not have been true. Counting heads in the cafeteria and at the guru's daily lectures (which most people on the ranch attended every other day), I estimated that the population could not be over two thousand.

The atmosphere in this half ghost town was decidedly spooky. For one thing, there were security guards all over the ranch, and the restrictions on visitors were like those of a federal prison. From the entrance of the ranch to the visitors' center, there were five guard posts, each staffed by two Rajneeshee in pink uniforms. At the visitors' center, there were more uniformed guards, with guard dogs, and all comers were searched. Visitors were now asked to sign three separate regulation forms before being given an identification bracelet that allowed them into the commune. Visitors, I discovered, could drive on the county roads, go to their lodgings, and walk around the mall in the center of town unaccompanied, but virtually everything else on the ranch was off limits to them. Security guards posted beside the roads and in front of buildings would stop you if you went off course. The only hiking trail open was a short one that led around the lake and past the crematorium; visitors had to check in at the visitors' center before and after taking this walk. Then, too, there seemed to be places where even resident sannyasins were forbidden to go. Beyond the farm—which I visited with Isabel—there was a "NO HIKING" sign on the path where I had once walked along the John Day River. All this created a sense of constriction and threat—a feeling strengthened by the fact that the guards and the ranch managers could not, or would not, explain the reasons for the particular barriers and roadblocks. Taking a stroll one evening, I was stopped a few hundred yards from the hotel by a guard who told me I could not go into an area where sannyasins were planting shrubs, since that was a "worship site;" she said she really didn't know the reason for the regulation, but perhaps it was to prevent visitors from disturbing sannyasins. Isabel pleaded ignorance about the "NO HIKING" sign, and Wadud told me he had no idea of the reasons for specific regulations. He did say, however, that security at the ranch was very important—far more important than the convenience of visitors. He said that his life had been threatened in The Dalles, and that the security measures were alone responsible for the fact that Bhagwan was still alive today and the commune was intact. The paranoia in the air persuaded me not to say very much over the telephone, and to interview lower-level sannyasins only outside the hotel. What I could not decide was whether the Rajneeshee leaders had something to hide or had created this atmosphere for mythopoetic purposes alone.

Along with the security restrictions, a miasma of secrecy and prevarication had risen up

through the commune. Ranch managers would tell me that their production had doubled in two years, and then give me the same figures they had given me two years before. Their estimates of net worth in Oregon had always been inflated, but now they were four times the figures that had appeared on their last financial statement to the Internal Revenue Service. One of the Twinkies told me that more than four hundred street people remained on the ranch; two ordinary sannyasins told me that there might be a hundred; I saw only a handful I could recognize as such. (On the farm, Neehar pointed out three young black men working on the farm machinery, apparently with enthusiasm.) So it went with most matters of fact. In some cases, I got three or four different answers to a question, and in some cases none. Wadud lied to me about a matter of public record—a lawsuit he was being deposed for—when he thought I knew nothing about the issue. The Twinkies would evade factual questions or contradict the evidence before one's eyes. This was disconcerting, particularly since in many cases it was difficult to figure out why they went to the trouble. Ordinary sannyasins sometimes gave me more plausible answers to questions of fact than the Twinkies or the ranch managers did. But often they would plead ignorant or recite, with great earnestness and every appearance of sincerity, the line the Twinkies had given me. About half the people I had seen before, including Siddha and another therapist, had left the commune.

Another strange thing about the commune was the series of measures it had adopted to prevent the spread of AIDS. Since the guru's announcement about it the year before, the commune had been supplying condoms and rubber gloves along with the toothpaste. More recently, however, Ma Anand Puja, who had been the medical coordinator and was now the secretary-treasurer of the Rajneesh Medical Corporation, had drawn up a long list of rules for AIDS prevention, covering not just sex but eating, drinking, swimming, and other activities. All sannyasins, for example, now had to wash their hands with alcohol before going into the food line; they were not to share food, drink, or cigarettes, and if they were sharing a candy bar they had to break it with the wrapper on. If they used a public restroom, they were to bring a small bottle of alcohol and wash the toilet seat, the faucets, and the doorknobs. They were to clean telephone mouthpieces with alcohol and to wash before swimming in the lake. They were not to lick envelopes, lick their fingers to turn the pages of books or newspapers, or lick thread when threading a needle. Dentists on the ranch had to wear gowns, masks, gloves, and "protective eyewear," and large electric bug killers had been put outside the residential buildings and kitchens, in case mosquitoes could transmit the AIDS virus. Now each bathroom had a regular wastebasket and a plastic-lined basket marked "CONTAMINATED WASTES," in which residents were to put everything touched by their bodily fluids, including cigarettes and gum.

The Rajneeshee were, of course, right to take precautions against AIDS. In a small, sexually active community such as theirs, the disease, once introduced, could actually wipe out the

population. They would have been right to follow the recommendations of AIDS experts, and then take some further precautions for good measure, since there were still a few medical uncertainties about the transmission of the disease. But the regulations that Puja had drawn up and they were now observing were obviously excessive. Not only did these regulations go far beyond anything recommended by public-health authorities but some of them, such as the injunction not to lick thread, had nothing to do with the exchange of bodily fluids. All this was not for lack of expertise or information. The Rajneeshee doctors had clearly read all the AIDS literature available, for they published the most current information week by week in the Rajneesh Times.

Wondering about the reasons for these measures, I remembered that the commune had always been fairly compulsive about cleanliness—or, anyway, about the disposal of its wastes. From the beginning, it had sorted its garbage into five categories—compost, recyclable paper, recyclable cans, glass, and trash. That had seemed sound environmentalism, and it still did. But now there were new measures. Videh, who had been worrying about the pollutant effect of detergents when I was last there, was now worrying about the small amounts of chemical wastes (Clorox, photographers' developing solution, and so on) that the commune had accumulated. Neehar, taking me on a tour of his impeccably clean farm buildings, told me that sannyasins now cleaned up the manure in the cow barns every few hours. Neither Videh's concerns nor Neehar's measures seemed wholly irrational in themselves, but when they were seen in the light of the AIDS-prevention measures they suggested that the commune had become obsessed by pollution—obsessed by what happened to its bodily fluids and wastes. Then, too, the concern about pollution had an analogy in the clearly excessive security measures and restrictions, and in the attempt by Sheela and the others to control and regulate the European communes. The impulse in each case was to control, and the concern in each case was for purity. What seemed most extraordinary about all this was that in Poona the commune had been just the opposite. There the Rajneeshee had celebrated spontaneity, sexual abandon, "openness," nakedness, chaos, and a "dissolving," or "melting," of the individual into the group. In Oregon, the commune had clenched up like a muscle to become rigid, controlling, compulsive. Possibly, I thought, its concern for purity was a reaction against the disorder and impurity of its past in India. But possibly it was a clenching up in fear of losing its own membership, its own substance.

Then, too, another tendency in the commune had developed in two years: in ceremony, costume, and hierarchy, the religious organization had become elaborate, even baroque. The degrees and titles awarded to the leaders had, for example, increased four times over. Sheela was now formally known as Bodhisattva Ma Anand Sheela, M.M., D.Phil.M., D.Litt.M.(RIMU), Acharya. One of the editors of the guru's lectures was called Sambodhi Ma Prem Maneesha, S.R.N., S.R.M., R.M.N., M.M., D.Phil.M.(RIMU), Acharya. Just as before, the therapist Rajen told me that the titles and the degrees, which were from Rajneesh International Meditation University, meant nothing to



him—they were for newcomers. But now there were no newcomers; the university and the meditation and therapy center were almost empty the day I went to see him. As before, Rajen could not, or would not, tell me who had invented all these titles. But Sheela seemed to me a likely candidate. For a year or so now, Sheela had been dressing for special occasions—such as press conferences—in long red robes with the Rajneeshee symbol embroidered on the front, a mala with pearl or diamond beads, and, on her head, an embroidered scarf. It was papal raiment. But then for a year or more the guru him-self had been dressed up like a Christmas tree in glittering robes and diamond watches. In Poona, he had worn plain white. He had always liked a little theatre, but now he went in for pageantry. When he drove the few hundred yards from his house to the lecture hall, or the half mile to Sheela's compound for a press inter-view, his Roils-Royce (now a stretch limousine, chauffeur-driven) would be accompanied not only by guard cars but also by two helicopters, their racket enormous in the narrow canyons of the ranch. In the lecture hall, he was flanked by four guards, two of them with Uzis at the ready, and four more guards on a catwalk overhead raked the audience with their binoculars. When he went to a press interview, a small crowd of sannyasins would be standing in front of Sheela's compound clapping, singing, and waiting to throw rose petals in his path. Two and a half hours later, the crowd would still be there, to applaud the conclusion of the interview and to throw more rose petals. The performance was a cross between Oscar night and a Latin-American dictator's evening out.

To listen to Rajneesh lecture, how-ever, was to understand some of his attraction for his disciples. He was—in a way that could not be appreciated on videotape—a brilliant lecturer. He spoke slowly—the right pace for a large lecture hall. Every sentence was well formed, and his timing was perfect. The gist of his Lectures was familiar to me from his books, but what had not gathered from reading the lectures was his talent as a comedian. The jokes sounded better than they read, but far better were the comic riffs he would go off into once or twice in a lecture—little experiments in language and the play of associations. Also, Rajneesh was a world-class hypnotist. One of his lectures ended with a description of a dewdrop sliding off a lotus leaf and being carried down a stream to the ocean. It put virtually everyone in his audience into an alphawave state at ten in the morning. But Rajneesh's talents as a speaker did not come across in his television interviews. The interview was not his forte—he needed the long form to draw the audience into his world—and television was too close and intimate a medium for a stage performer. What was more, he seemed to be trying too hard in the interviews. He would speak ill of Jesus, talk about his own past sex life, make funny faces—anything to entertain or to shock. It was, in fact, buffoonery, and it made some reporters feel that they were being used. Isabel, of course, thought that the interview went wonderful; she thought that Rajneesh was attracting favorable attention, which, in turn, would attract people to the ranch. But if this was the purpose of his giving interviews, the results were not appreciable two months after he

had begun.

Possibly, the day for gurus—or gurus of this sort—had passed. Wadud said as much. He said that people were not now drawn to the Buddhafield for spiritual reasons, because they did not understand the master-disciple relationship. His plan, therefore, was to create programs for alcoholics, drug abusers, and others in need of healing to attract people to the religion. This seemed to me some-thing of a last resort. A survey done by four psychology professors from the University of Oregon in 1983 found that the average age of sannyasins was thirty-four; and a survey done this year showed it to be thirty-seven. The Rajneeshee had thus simply grown older; and they had lost a good many of their number.

In two years, the commune leaders had done a lot of things that ordinary sannyasins might have construed as contradictory, stupid, vicious or nuts. Those who left had doubtless construed them as such. But those who remained denied the existence of what could be denied—the attempt to rig the Wasco County election, for example—and for the rest they used the magic formula the guru had given them: the formula that would turn wrong into right and evil into good. In the past, I had suspected that this formula was simply a trick, which would not work when it was put to any real test. But now it was clear that for a fair number it had worked. On the subject of the security measures, for example, the ordinary sannyasins I spoke with told me that they actually liked having the guards around, because the guards helped them come to terms with their own true feelings about policemen, guns, and violence.

Sannyasins used a similar variety of reasoning to explain the virtues of the Share-A-Home program. A former Marxist historian from New York whom I had met on my first trip said, "At first, I didn't know what the idea was. The mall at the center of town looked like Forty-Second Street—everyone hanging about with ghetto blasters. But then I thought it was really beautiful: it was pushing a lot of buttons, shaking us up. A lot of liberal shit came out—you know, people thinking that because someone was black he or she could do no wrong. It was a wonderful way for us to look at ourselves." As a postscript, the former Marxist added that some of the Share-A-Home people had stayed on (though he didn't know how many), and that they were beautiful people.

Rajen had a slightly different version of the same event. He told me that he and a number of the other therapists had led dance and rap groups for some of the street people in the meditation half. "We tried to help them express themselves," he said. "The idea was for them to say what they wanted to and get rid of their defenses and the rest of the garbage they had brought with them."

Garbage! The word leaped out at me, I had forgotten that "getting rid of garbage," or "shit," as the historian had put it, was a central concept in the human-potential movement. Now everything had been transmuted into it, including the most useful kind of suspicion.

"It was wonderful for me," Rajen went on. "It changed my work—it fine-tuned it. These

people were so defensive they would react to the slightest hint of tension in your voice and interpret the slightest flippancy as a put-down. So I had to let go of something in myself. I had to become more loving. The media focused entirely on what happened to them. But we focused on what happened to wand., of course, on those who stayed. The whole experience left us more relaxed, more able to be happy and in love."

Not one sannyasin I spoke with expressed concern for the street people who had left or who had been ejected by the commune. A number of people, however, told me how much more relaxed and happy and in love they now were. Niren told me this when I met him for dinner in the commune's restaurant. He had been talking with Krishna Deva in the bar, and he seemed very tense; he snapped at me and did not relax until Isabel came and sat down.

During my visit, Puja put out a press release saying that the Rajneeshee medical service was in the process of giving the AIDS test to everyone in the commune, and that so far two people had tested positive for the AIDS virus; the two people, the release said, had been given separate living quarters on the ranch. This sounded odd to me. I had assumed that if any AIDS victims had been found on the ranch, or any carriers of HTLV-III, the AIDS virus, they would have been sent away; the Rajneeshee, after all, never admitted the existence of any serious illness on the ranch—they sent the very sick to hospitals elsewhere.. Why were they now advertising the AIDS virus? The rumor going around was that the commune would soon announce that it was creating an AIDS care facility for the general public. I asked to see Puja, and she appeared at the hotel wearing a sequined cocktail dress in the middle of the afternoon. She was a Filipino by birth, and she had, she told me, a nursing degree. She said that the commune had never had an AIDS case, but that two people, a man and a woman, had tested positive for the virus. She said that the two were now totally isolated, visited only by doctors and nurses, and that every-thing they touched was sterilized, I asked why people who had simply tested positive and might never get the disease would put up with total Isolation. She said that the two people were grateful to be taken care of by the commune. When I asked about the rumored announcement, she told me that there would be an announcement having something to do with AIDS on September 15th, and that it would be an important one.

### *On Monday, September 16th,*

Rajneesh called a press conference to make an announcement rather different from the one anticipated. He said that Sheela and a dozen other commune leaders, including Puja, had left the commune over the weekend and gone to Europe. Calling them a "gang of fascists," he charged them with attempting to poison his doctor, his dentist, and his female companion, a young Englishwoman who went by the name Ma Yoga Vivek, and also the Jefferson County district attorney and the water system in The Dalles. He also said that Sheela had mismanaged the commune finances, had stolen money, and had left the commune fifty-five million dollars in debt. Later on in the week, he added a

number of charges to the list: Sheela and her gang had robbed and set fire to the Wasco County planning office, and had planned to crash an explosives-laden plane into The Dalles courthouse; they had engineered the bombing of the hotel in Portland; they had poisoned Judge Hulse, the county commissioner; and quite possibly they had been responsible for the salmonella outbreak in The Dalles. They had harassed the people of Antelope and created a Stalinist regime on the ranch, bugging rooms and telephones, and communicating with one another in secret codes. Finally, and most treacherously, they had bugged his bedroom and had tried to incapacitate or kill him by poisoning him with substances they prepared in a secret tunnel behind Sheela's house.

At his press conferences, Rajneesh said that he had known nothing about any of these crimes until Sheela and her gang left and other sannyasins came and informed him. He also insisted that things would be different on the ranch now that the fascists were gone, and their crimes had been exposed. Sannyasins would dance and sing; they would talk to their families and outside friends again; they would make peace with their neighbors and give Antelope back to its rightful owners. He added that Sheela had wanted to put an AIDS treatment center in Antelope but that he had thought it unsafe and had put a stop to the plan.

The guru's revelations, as might be expected, had an electric effect on Oregon. Journalists poured into the ranch, closely followed by people from six law-enforcement agencies. Representative Weaver said that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had promised an inquiry, adding that for a year law-enforcement officials had been looking for "a stool pigeon." Now, he went on, "we got the biggest one of all. The Bhagwan himself. That's going to break it." County, state, and federal officers set up an interagency task force on the ranch and gave press briefings twice a day. During the crucial first week, however, they turned up very little in the way of tangible evidence to support the guru's most serious charges. The Rajneeshee showed them an enormous number of sophisticated wiretapping devices installed in the phone system, in the hotel rooms, and in other places around the ranch, and also showed them a secret tunnel that could be entered through a closet in Sheela's house and ran underground, coming out in an irrigation ditch some distance away. But the only thing in the tunnel was a large lavender hot tub.

According to the Twinkies, sannyasins greeted the revelations with a mixture of horror and relief—horror at the heinous crimes committed by Sheela and her henchmen, relief that the reign of terror was over now and the commune could become the beautiful place it always should have been. The Twinkies' account was difficult to believe, of course, but one worried mother of a sannyasin called her daughter and found that it was essentially correct. Her daughter, who had stoutly defended Sheela at her most obnoxious, confessed that she had never liked the woman at all, and had defended her merely because she thought Sheela was Bhagwan's choice for the commune. Now all would be well. After Bhagwan told them they should not be so isolated, she had gone to Madras

for the first time in a year and a half and had wandered around the streets feeling full of love for everyone.

Asked why Sheela had left and how the guru had come to know what he disclosed to the press, the Twinkies told this story: In the last year, Sheela had been spending a great deal of time in Europe and Australia. On September 13th, a Friday, Bhagwan had received a letter from her saying that she felt "more excitement" in Europe than in Rajneeshpuram. He said at his evening darshan that this was only natural—that she had been the supreme power and the center of attention in the commune when he was silent, and she preferred it that way, because she was on a power trip. Sheela had been upset by this rebuke, and on Saturday she had left by plane with Ma Yoga Vidya, the president of the commune; with Puja; and with her own personal assistant and hairdresser. Thirty or forty sannyasins gathered to say goodbye to her at the airport, little knowing what she had done. The next day, a dozen other sannyasins had left, including Ma Prem Savita, the chief accountant; Ma Anand Su, the president of the Rajneesh Investment Corporation; Shanti Bhadra, the treasurer of the Rajneesh Foundation International; K.D.; and two municipal officers, one of whom was K.D.'s girlfriend, Sagun. Only after they had left did sannyasins dare to go to Bhagwan and tell him about the crimes these people had committed. He had not known anything about them before; Sheela had deliberately kept him uninformed.

The story was, of course, not remotely plausible. To believe it, you would have to believe that the entire top echelon of the organization had carried out a coup against itself and then driven itself into exile for no reason, and then that the guru and all his sannyasins had not noticed that all the leaders, including all the chief finance officers, had gone. The story became even less plausible as time went on. Within a week, it came out that Rajneesh had replaced all the departing officers even before their departure, and had installed at the center of power a group of wealthy American sannyasins that Sheela had called "the Hollywood gang." The new secretary to the guru and president of the Rajneesh Foundation International was Ma Prem Hasya, formerly Françoise Ruddy and a Hollywood movie producer (she and her former husband, Albert S. Ruddy, produced "The Godfather"). She had come to the ranch for the first time in 1982, with three friends, also from "the Coast." The four had bought a few of the guru's Rolls-Royces, and, having contributed a good deal of money, had lived a privileged existence on the ranch in private accommodations, apart from the commune. In March of 1984, Hasya had married the guru's personal physician, Deveraj; and a member of her group, Dhyana John, had been made head of the organization that owned the guru's Rolls-Royces. The group thus had direct access to the guru, and though Hasya was not known to be ambitious Sheela had for some time quite naturally regarded her as a rival. Dhyana John was now the president of the Rajneesh Investment Corporation, and a third member of the group, Swami David, was later made the vice-president of the commune. The new leaders quickly reassured commune

members that in spite of what the guru had said (Bhagwan often used figures loosely) Sheela had not taken money from the ranch accounts, and that the Rajneeshee organizations were in good financial shape. In other words, Sheela, Savita, and the others had not taken with them all the keys to the safe.

The Rajneeshee police chief, Deva Barkha, had promised that the Rajneeshee would cooperate with the law-enforcement agencies in investigating the alleged crimes. But while many ordinary sannyasins gave testimony to the police, the cooperation of Rajneeshee officials and lawyers was rather limited. They allowed police divers to make a completely fruitless search of the bottoms of two lakes, but they refused to let any of the various agencies examine their files or search all their buildings. Every time an investigator found something he thought might be a piece of evidence, the Twinkies would arrive with dozens of TV camera crews trailing behind them. As for the guru, he would speak to law officers only in front of television cameras (the F.B.I. men were asked to remove their shoes), and, while he described in detail Sheela's vile plots against him and his physician, he remained quite vague about the other charges he had made. After a time, he began to complain that instead of arresting Sheela and others the investigators were trying to find evidence to destroy his commune.

Toward the end of September, Rajneesh announced that "Rajneeshism" had been entirely Sheela's invention: he himself had never claimed to be a religious leader—indeed, he had never been anything more than a friend to his sannyasins. He urged the commune members to destroy all traces of the religion and said there was no necessity for them to wear malas and sunset-colored clothes. Obliging, his disciples made a bonfire of Sheela's red robes and all available copies of the booklet "Rajneeshism," and sang and danced around the flames. The guru expressed pleasure at this: what had burned, he said, was poor Frohnmayer—the Oregon attorney general—for since there was no religion there could be no church-state suit. But when sannyasins appeared without their malas and in green or blue he chided them for so easily giving up the symbols of their attachment to him. The malas and the red clothes went back on. At around the same time, he announced that the commune lawyers would drop their suit against state and county officials and change the name of the city of Rajneesh back to Antelope. Oregonians, he suggested, might now want to drop some of their lawsuits against the commune.

The guru's strategy seemed to be quite clear. He and the other commune leaders apparently believed they could limit the investigation as they wished, pin the blame for everything on Sheela and the others who had fled, extricate themselves from a number of expensive lawsuits, mend their political fences, and get a great deal of free airtime to boot. Sheela, for her part, seemed no less sanguine. Now ensconced with her "duchesses" in a resort near the Black Forest, she was selling Interviews to the German press in which she blamed Rajneesh for ruining the commune with bis

incessant demands for more diamond watches and more Rolls-Royces, and his absurd idea that it should build an AIDS treatment center in Antelope.

In reality, the investigators were not quite as helpless as the guru and Sheela seemed to suppose. For two weeks, they had proceeded with great caution, because they feared that the heavily armed Rajneeshee guards might start shooting and precipitate a violent confrontation, if not a Jonestown-style denouement. Finally, on October 2nd, they issued search warrants for the commune buildings and began serving subpoenas on a hundred sannyasins. Three National Guard helicopters were standing at the ready in case the officers serving the warrants needed help, but these proved unnecessary. The Rajneeshee allowed the search to go ahead. According to Oregonian reporters, the investigators did not find very much in the way of documentary evidence, and they supposed that Sheela and her successors had destroyed a good many files. Still, they were accumulating evidence, since many ordinary sannyasins told the investigators what they knew, and then three of the people who had left the ranch with Sheela came back and turned state's evidence. By mid-October, the commune leaders had put the Portland hotel and three airplanes up for sale and were trying to buy a jet. The guru had conceivably begun to feel threatened.

Then, on October 23rd, a federal grand jury convened by the local United States Attorney, Charles H. Turner, on behalf of the I.N.S. issued a thirty-five-count indictment charging the guru, Sheela, and six other disciples with a conspiracy to evade the immigration laws. This was the indictment that the Portland office of the I.N.S. had been working on since 1982; it charged that the guru had lied on his visa application, and that he and the others had arranged sham marriages so that foreign disciples could remain in the United States. The indictment was returned in camera, but word of it was leaked, through a media source, to Isabel and Niren on October 24th. The following day, a Friday, a lawyer for the Rajneeshee went to Turner to ask that the guru be allowed to surrender in Portland when the indictment was officially announced; he called Turner again on Sunday afternoon, but no deal was struck. On Sunday night, two chartered Lear jets left the ranch after filing flight plans for Salt Lake City, Pueblo, Colorado, and Charlotte, North Carolina. Two sannyasins were at the Charlotte airport when the planes arrived, having made arrangements for another chartered jet to fly to Bermuda with eight people and their luggage. But federal customs agents were there also, and upon ordering the passengers out of the Lear jets they found the guru with six of his disciples, and also a gun, fifty-eight thousand dollars in cash, and a box containing thirty-five jewel-encrusted watches and bracelets.

There followed an extraordinary sequence of events, much of it recorded on national television. The guru went to jail; he was stripped of his robes and woolen hat, issued green prison pajamas, and put in chains for court appearances. The Rajneeshee lawyers desperately tried to get him out on bail, citing his delicate health ("It's almost a bubble-boy situation," Niren said), but the

local judge refused to release him, on the ground that he had been fleeing arrest and might leave the country. Hasya and others protested, in vain, that he had just been going on a vacation. The guru spent a week in a medical cell of the Mecklenburg County Jail. At first, he seemed quite happy with the situation; he smiled his foxy smile a lot and said outrageous things to the press. He seemed less pleased as the days went by, but he never complained to the prison nurses looking after him; he ate the prison food (all but the hominy grits), and did what they told him to do, and apparently suffered no ill effects. On November 4th, a United States marshal's plane took him to a federal prison in El Reno, Oklahoma, and three days later another plane took him back to Portland.

On arrival, he pleaded not guilty to all charges and was released on five hundred thousand dollars' cash bail to go back to the ranch. His lawyers, however, were already cutting a deal with the United States Attorney's Office, and on November 14th he returned to Portland and pleaded guilty to two felonies: making false statements to the immigration authorities in 1981, and concealing his intent to reside in the United States. He received a ten-year suspended prison sentence, and agreed to pay four hundred thousand dollars in fines and prosecution costs, to leave the country within five days, and not to come back for at least five years without the explicit permission of the United States Attorney General. A year or two before, the Rajneeshee lawyers would no doubt have succeeded in dragging the case out for months or years, if not actually winning it in the end, but now the commune was in disarray, and the guru was ready to leave. The same day, he boarded a plane for New Delhi with Vivek, Deveraj, and his seventy-two-year-old mother, who had come to Oregon, and declared that he never wanted to see the United States again.

On October 28th, the day the guru was arrested in North Carolina, the West German police had arrested Sheela, Puja, and Shanti Bhadra in their Black Forest resort hotel. The United States Attorney in Portland, Charles Turner, and the state attorney general, David Frohnmayer, had wanted to have the German police pick up Sheela on the immigration charges before federal officials arrested the guru on the ranch, but they had discovered that the extradition treaty between the United States and West Germany did not cover immigration fraud, and might not be enough to keep her in prison in Germany. Thus, on October 25th, lawyers from Frohnmayer's office convened the Wasco County grand jury that had been hearing testimony from the Rajneeshee, and that afternoon the three women were indicted for attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and first-degree assault on Deveraj. Officials then took these charges to the German police and, shortly after the arrests were made, began extradition proceedings. In November, before the women were returned to the United States, the same grand jury indicted Sheela and Puja for the poisoning of the two county commissioners and for the burglary and arson at the Wasco County Planning Department. In December, federal authorities indicted Sheela and twenty other sannyasins, including Puja, on wiretapping charges.



After the guru's final departure from the ranch, Dhyana John assured the remaining sannyasins that the commune would continue to exist, and spoke of various ways in which the ranch might be made profitable. But a week later Niren announced that the commune was closing down and the sannyasins should make arrangements to leave. He made the announcement just hours after K.D., who had returned to the ranch early in October and then disappeared from sight, turned up at the Wasco County Courthouse in the company of officials. K.D. had gone to the authorities and agreed to plead guilty to charges of racketeering and immigration fraud and to tell prosecutors everything he knew in return for immunity from further prosecution. Shortly after K.D. made his plea, Frohnmayer went to the federal district court with an affidavit from him supporting the state's contention that the incorporation of Rajneeshpuram violated the religious-establishment clause. According to K.D.'s testimony, the religious entities on the ranch had directly controlled the city government; among other things, the guru himself had chosen the city officials and selected the design for the city's stationery. Two and a half weeks later, the district-court judge ruled Rajneeshpuram unconstitutional by summary judgment. The Rajneeshes appealed the ruling, though by that point the judgment was more or less moot, since the commune was closing down.

By now, a great number of sannyasins had talked to investigators and grand juries. A dozen of them had pleaded guilty to charges of arranging fraudulent marriages or to being implicated in the electronic-eavesdropping scheme, and had been let off with light sentences (five years' probation, in most cases). Then, too, a few key figures—including K.D.; his girlfriend, Sagun; and Ava, a young woman from Sheela's inner circle had turned state's evidence. The investigators thus had a great deal of information about what had happened in the commune. While some of it remained confidential, some of it had come out in court affidavits, and a good deal more had been leaked to the press (notably during the time the authorities held the guru in jail). Oregonian reporters had collected all this information and done some further investigative work on their own. According to their published stories, most of the guru's charges had a solid basis in fact, and not only that but Sheela and her minions had committed a number of crimes that the guru had not mentioned, and they had planned crimes that surpassed the imagination of even the most fervid opponents of the commune. The sannyasins I later spoke with confirmed all these stories and added a few of their own; from what they said, it was possible to sketch a picture of what had happened in Sheela's inner circle, at the center of the commune.

When Sheela took over as the guru's secretary, in 1981, she seemed —initially, at least— more open and available than Laxmi, her predecessor in Poona. Laxmi had given orders; Sheela laughed and joked with ordinary sannyasins. But this collegiality was largely a facade. Sheela had had to scheme in order to get her position, and she felt that she had to scheme in order to keep it. She was jealous of long-term disciples who had personal relationships with the guru. She sent some of

them away (including the guru's former bodyguard); she coopted a few of them; and she blacklisted the rest, giving them only menial jobs, restricting their access to the outside world, and setting other sannyasins to spy on them for "negativity." At the same time, she created a coterie of sannyasins loyal to her. The membership of this coterie changed over the years; Sushila, for example, was in it until 1984, when Sheela read her out of the movement. Also, it had various circles within it: Isabel, for example, remained in an outer circle, while in the inmost circle were people like Savita, who knew everything about the movement's finances, and people like Su and Shanti Bhadra, who worked closely with Sheela. Puja was perhaps the nearest to the center, for Puja supplied Sheela with Percodan, Valium, and Demerol, the drugs she increasingly needed to keep going; also, Puja, who ran the medical clinic dictatorially, had ways of dealing with Sheela's enemies.

Unlike Laxmi, Sheela—and the commune she created—always had something to hide from the authorities. In the beginning, there were always more people on the ranch than the land-use laws allowed, and there were foreigners on the ranch without visas; later, of course, there were foreigners who had married Americans to get around the immigration laws. Sheela told sannyasins to be very careful about what they said in their telephone conversations, because the federal authorities were very probably bugging the ranch. Perhaps she believed they were. In any case, she worried a good deal about information leaks. In November of 1983, a few months after she set up the first security system, of guards and guard dogs at the entrance to the ranch, she ordered a series of bugging devices installed in the Alan Watts cabins, where journalists and other visitors stayed at the time. A few months later, the eavesdropping system was expanded to cover four rooms in the newly built Hotel Rajneesh, where Laxmi lived when she returned to the ranch in 1985, and the entire ranch telephone system, including the six public pay phones. An English electronics expert, Swami Anand Julian, set up the system, and sannyasins—a good number of them—took turns monitoring the calls at a listening post in the administration building. Now the ranch had something else to hide.

Most sannyasins who knew about the wiretapping justified it to themselves on the ground that it was necessary for the protection of the guru and his commune. Sheela, however, had other purposes in mind for it. In the first place, she was more vulnerable than the guru to charges of immigration fraud; indeed, since they had come to the ranch, Rajneesh had been quite effectively insulated from all legal proceedings. In the second place, she worried a good deal about dissidence within the commune. There was, of course, no open dissent, and as a result she had to worry increasingly about secret dissenters. She was concerned not about ordinary sannyasins but about the people who knew in detail about the illegalities. The ordinary sannyasins could leave or stay as they wished, but those who knew things or were in positions of power and objected to her management could not be allowed to pass their "negativity" on to others. Puja, however, had a solution to this

problem.

How long Puja had been using drugs and other poisons on recalcitrant sannyasins it was by now impossible to determine. Satya Bharti later told me that—with hindsight—she believed it had been going on since Poona days. In Poona, a medical administrator had persuaded her to go to the ashram clinic to get a slight neck ailment treated. Satya had thought treatment unnecessary, but she had gone to the clinic and had been given a series of powerful drugs—Quaaludes, among others. She had become drug-dependent, and her weight had gone down dangerously. When she questioned her treatment, Sheela and Puja had told the doctors that she was just crazy. Finally, when her weight went down to seventy-nine pounds, Sheela had told her she should go home to America, but without seeing the guru. Satya had left, certain that she was going home to die, but once she was home her father, a doctor, had told her that there was not much medically wrong with her except her drug addiction, and asked her who at the ashram had wanted to get rid of her. Satya could not, of course, believe that anyone had, but when she went to the Oregon commune she was blacklisted. Then, too, she had noticed that when people who had been working at the medical and financial centers wanted to leave, they left secretly, in the middle of the night. But still she had drawn no conclusions.

After Sheela left, it became public knowledge for the first time that a number of sannyasins had been drugged, poisoned, or otherwise medically ill-treated on the ranch. According to Oregonian reporters, Devaprem, the chief of construction on the ranch, was drugged after he told Sheela that he wanted to leave. Puja gave him a tranquillizer, telling him that what he needed was rest, and then put him under heavy sedation in Sheela's house. When Arup asked about him, she was told that he was overworked and over-wrought—that if he were in his right mind he would not want to leave. After three days of this "rest cure," Devaprem said he had changed his mind about leaving, and struggled back to work. Two weeks later, he left the ranch in secret and went to live incognito in another state.

At least three other sannyasins were given this kind of rest cure, and one of them, Hasya, was isolated at the medical clinic for thirteen days. Others had worse things done to them. One woman developed a serious neurological condition while she was working in the legal department; the ranch managers then began to suspect her of "negativity" and would not allow her out to go to a specialist, so her condition remained dangerously untreated for a year and a half. Another woman—Samya, the publisher of the Rajneesh Times—fell ill after Sheela intercepted a letter she had sent the guru warning him about Sheela's group. A hysterectomy was performed on her, and afterward Puja gave her medicine that, Samya said, made her emotionally unstable for a very long time. Worst of all in some ways was what happened to Ma Anand Zeno, the former art director of Ramparts, whom I had met in 1983. Zeno worked for Julian in the audiovisual department. She suspected that he had set up wiretaps, and she did not like that; also, she associated with a few of the blacklisted people on the

ranch. In December of 1984, Puja gave the AIDS test to a number of sannyasins, and subsequently told eleven people that they had tested positive for the HTLV-III antibody. One of them was Zeno. Puja asked the eleven people whether they would prefer to leave or to stay, and all said they wanted to stay, even though the following July, Puja moved them to an "AIDS village," a nest of trailers in a remote area of the ranch. Over the summer, Zeno developed headaches and cramps, and thought she must be coming down with AIDS. But the symptoms disappeared after Puja left, in September. Later, Hasya had all eleven people retested, and two of them tested negative—Zeno and a man who was suspected of having supplied Puja with drugs from Europe. (Thus, when Puja told me in August that a man and a woman had tested positive she was apparently referring to the two who had not, since all the rest were men. She had denied that there were any AIDS victims on the ranch, but in late September one sannyasin, a gay man, died of AIDS. He was apparently the only person on the ranch who had the disease.)

Whenever it was that Sheela and Puja began to use medical terrorism on their fellow-sannyasins, there was clearly a progression to their activities—a progression that followed their spiral into desperation and craziness. Ava, Sheela's twenty-five-year-old aide, told me that the spiral began in the spring of 1984. By then, the movement was quite obviously faring badly under Sheela's management: the European communes were in Chaos, the flow of money to the ranch was dwindling, and the moratorium on building had left the commune with nowhere to go. When Deveraj, whom Sheela hated, married the golden girl of the Hollywood group—the only group to bring a new infusion of money into the ranch—Sheela began to worry seriously about maintaining her own position. Shortly before the summer festival that year, Deveraj came down with extremely bad diarrhea, which made him stagger about as if he were drunk. He went to the clinic, and Shunyo, one of the commune doctors, was there when Puja, very much against his wishes, gave him an I.V. Within twenty-four hours, he was in septic shock with an extremely high fever and falling blood pressure; Shunyo resuscitated him, and later found an un-usual sort of bacteria in his blood culture. Around the same time—or so the sequence of events was later reconstructed—Puja began asking the pharmacists and herbalists on the ranch if there was a way to poison people without actually killing them. It was thought that she was worried about outsiders trying to poison sannyasins, but it turned out that she had set up a secret laboratory on the ranch and was experimenting with poisons on mice. Apparently, she found what she wanted, for in September William Hulse and his colleague were poisoned after drinking glasses of water she gave them.

Sometime during the summer, Sheela decided that the only way out of the political impasse in Oregon was to try to take over Wasco County in the election. An American sannyasin suggested importing homeless people. It was a crazy idea. Among other things, the Rajneeshee would have had to collect and house two or three times their own number to win the election, or even to rig it

plausibly. At the time the outbreak of salmonella poisoning occurred, even those people who suspected the Rajneeshee of poisoning the salad bars could not imagine what their motive might be, apart from sheer malice. But, according to informants, the poisoning was merely a test run for Election Day, when Sheela's minions were to poison the entire water system in The Dalles. In January of 1985, according to witnesses, members of Sheela's inner circle vandalized and set fire to the Wasco County Planning Department office.

As Wadud once said, the commune leaders had long seen themselves as engaged in "a war" with Oregon politicians and administrators. But after the failure of the election attempt, they began to see themselves as engaged in a war they might lose. The Share-A-Home program was extremely costly: It consumed well over a million dollars (the medical bills were huge); it turned most of Oregon against them; and it raised doubts in the minds of a number of resident sannyasins. Sheela, increasingly desperate, took a series of trips abroad to try to raise money and to try to find a place where the guru might take refuge if that became necessary. Laxmi was also dispatched to try to find a place for him. Sheela, on her trip to Australia, virtually destroyed the Australian movement by behaving in exactly the same way she behaved in Oregon. Her long absences and her lack of success made her feel all the more vulnerable. On one trip, she married Dhyana Dipo, a Swiss sannyasin, who ran Rajneesh Services International, presumably doing so as an insurance policy for herself. She neglected to get a divorce from Jayananda until after she was married, however, and months later Jayananda, investigating, found an illegal, backdated divorce in Nepal. When she returned to the ranch, she had bugging devices installed in twenty-four rooms of the hotel, in the Hollywood people's quarters and the table they used at the restaurant, and in the bedroom of everyone who might betray her, including Shunyo, Isabel, Niren, and the guru himself. It was around this time that she sent Hasya to the clinic for a "rest cure."

Two weeks before the 1985 summer festival, Deveraj fell ill with the same mysterious form of diarrhea he had had the year before. He told Shunyo that he had fallen ill just after having tea with Sheela, and that he suspected her of poisoning him. Shunyo ran a toxic screen on him that would pick up traces of ordinary drugs and poisons, but the screen showed nothing. Since Shunyo knew of the hostility that existed between Deveraj and Sheela, he put Deveraj's suspicions down to paranoia, and his condition down to stress before the Festival. On Master's Day, however, Deveraj fell deathly ill in the crowded assembly hall. When Shunyo arrived, Deveraj, thinking he was dying, told his colleague that Shanti Bhadra had come up behind him and stuck him with a needle and within minutes he had felt woozy. He wanted to show Shunyo the mark of the needle, but he went into shock and couldn't breathe. Shunyo performed a major resuscitation and flew him to an intensive-care unit at the principal hospital of the region, in Bend, Oregon. Deveraj revived, but only because of these measures. He had a puncture in one of his buttocks, and clearly the shock was non-cardiac: it

came from a capillary leak.

When the crisis was over, Shunyo called Vivek and told her Deveraj's suspicions, adding that he himself found it impossible to believe that Shanti Bhadra had poisoned his colleague. A few minutes later, Sheela called him to say that there were stories about people being poisoned, that she was horrified, that she would mount an investigation, and how could he, Shunyo, suspect Shanti Bhadra? Shortly after that, Durga, one of Puja's nurses at the clinic, showed Shunyo an open safety pin she said she had found in Deveraj's trousers, thus accounting for the puncture Shunyo had found. It was only after Sheela had left and Rajneesh had made his accusations that Shunyo could bring himself to believe that Deveraj had been poisoned. At that point, he remembered that Michael Sullivan, the Jefferson County district attorney, had gone into the same kind of severe capillary-leak shock—for which there had been no apparent cause—in February of 1983, when he entered the Madras hospital in a state of collapse. It was a freak condition, which a doctor would generally see no more than once in a lifetime. Shunyo, who was working at the Madras hospital at the time, had been called into the emergency room by Sullivan's doctors to help out. Leer, Sheela had telephoned him to suggest that Sullivan might have been poisoned. Shunyo had not thought of this as a possibility, but he had then brought it up to the state medical examiner. The medical examiner had told him that very little was known about poisons, for there were, after all, very few cases of deliberate poisoning. Sullivan's doctors, for their part, conjectured that the shock might have been brought on by a trace of pneumonia—a trace so small that the bacteria did not show up in his blood culture. After leaving the ranch, Shunyo asked a number of specialists what kind of poison might have created such a condition—but thus far he had no answer. Also, in the case of Sullivan there was no obvious answer to the question of motive; possibly, Sheela at a certain point in her negotiations with Sullivan over the demonstrations in Madras thought that the District Attorney had gone over to the other side.

By June of 1985, Sheela had come to believe that the authorities would soon be coming to arrest her and Rajneesh. She said this when she launched the God v. the Universe suit. She had other worries as well. The Internal Revenue Service had given her notice that its criminal division was investigating her personal income taxes, and she knew that the Oregonian was about to publish its long investigative series on the Rajneeshee. Helen C. Byron, the former sannyasin, had just won a huge judgment against her, and the commune was very short of funds. The previous year, Sheela had created a "dirty tricks" unit to carry out her attacks on The Dalles. Now she and her group planned to sabotage the microcomputer system used by the Oregonian reporters. K.D. was dispatched to reconnoitre the building, and so were two Rajneeshee women posing as employees of a maintenance company. The women were discovered and ejected from the building, however, and the plan broke down. The unit also drew up a "hit list" of Rajneeshee enemies—a list that included Charles Turner; David Frohnmayer; Dan Durow; Leslie Zaitz, the chief Oregonian investigative

reporter; Helen Byron and her daughter; Laxmi; and Vivek. Sheela and three others obtained false identification papers and bought handguns in Texas; a team of Rajneeshee women then staked out Turner's house in a Portland suburb and made an elaborate plan to ambush his car and shoot him. The plan, however, came to naught.

When Sheela and fifteen other sannyasins left the ranch in mid-September, their main motive, according to the testimony of sannyasins, was to escape indictment for immigration fraud by a federal grand jury—an indictment they supposed would be announced by October 3rd. (They had the date wrong; the announcement was planned to come down by November 1st.) On the face of it, their fear of the immigration charges seemed unjustified: the Rajneeshee lawyers had fought the I.N.S. off since 1982 and were confident that they could continue to fight the charges. (Alan Nelson, the commissioner of the I.N.S., later suggested that the Rajneeshee suit filed in June might have delayed the indictment, and acknowledged that Sheela's departure and all that followed from it "enhanced the final resolution of the matter.") But Sheela and her intimates were not up to a battle in court. According to Ava, they had long since passed the point of rationality. They were exhausted, crazy with tension, and in a state of acute paranoia; Vidya had fallen ill under the pressure, and all the drugs that Sheela was taking did not help her sanity. Sheela trusted no one outside her inner circle, and she could expect only the worst if Vivek or Deveraj or any of her other victims were to take the witness stand. She did not trust the guru himself; she had been bugging his bedroom for several months, and he had clearly run out of patience with her. He meant, it was rumored, to displace her and make Hasya his new secretary. Quite conceivably, Sheela and her companions suspected that when the indictment was announced Rajneesh would make them face the I.N.S. charges by themselves. On departing, Vidya was heard to say, "I don't trust Bhagwan enough to go to jail." Still, according to all sources, Sheela and her companions never suspected that the guru would come out and charge them with crimes that the authorities did not know about or had no evidence of. Why would he do such a thing? It would mean a police investigation, and, besides, Sheela could give all kinds of testimony about her past conversations with him. Perhaps they thought he had some affection for them, or some gratitude for their long and faithful service. In any case, they seriously underestimated him. Rajneesh loved public drama, and he loved taking dangerous risks: he had always survived them, after all.

The following summer, Sheela, Puja, and Shanti Bhadra pleaded guilty to having attempted to murder Deveraj with an injection of adrenalin; Sheela and Puja pleaded guilty to wiretapping charges, the poisoning of William Hulse and his colleague, and causing the outbreak of salmonella poisoning in The Dalles; Sheela, in addition, pleaded guilty to Immigration fraud and to setting fire to the Wasco County planning office. Sheela and Puja were given maximum twenty-year sentences in the poisoning cases, and Sheela was fined nearly half a million dollars; officials estimated that the

two women would spend three and a half years more in jail.

*By the end of December,*

most of the sannyasins had departed the ranch, leaving behind them only a caretaking crew and a legal and administrative staff. Eighty-five of the Rolls-Royces were sold (there were ninety-three of them by now), and the ranch itself was put up for sale to pay off the Rajneeshee debts. The ranch equipment was sold separately, and in December an Oregonian reporter found that among other things up for immediate sale were a flight simulator, a fifteen-thousand-dollar cello, two baby-grand pianos, two samadhi, or relaxation, tanks, and twenty-one Israeli-made Galil assault rifles.

Interestingly, the ranch accounts appeared to be in fairly good order. If Sheela and her circle had stolen money (and they appeared not to lack for it), they must have skimmed it off the donations before these went into the organizational accounts. The ranch had paid its bills, and its sole large outstanding debt—estimated at thirty-five million dollars—was to sannyasins who had made loans to the foundation or to other entities. Only one creditor complained of irregularities: a German woman claimed that Rajneesh Services International had moved eight hundred thousand dollars from her bank in Switzerland to the commune account without her permission. The woman, it appeared, had given Dhyan Dipo, Sheela's putative husband, her power of attorney but not the power to transfer money without her permission. She sued, and won a huge settlement.

The new administrators clearly hoped to pay back the loans from sannyasins, but whether they would succeed was now uncertain, for a good many Oregonians had gone into competition for what was left of Rajneeshpuram. In December, the State of Oregon filed a civil racketeering suit against twenty-six Rajneeshee organizations, seeking six and a half million dollars in costs and penalties, the state also asked more than a hundred thousand dollars in civil penalties for violation of the electrical-safety laws. (This was the old case of the "winterized tents.") Four restaurants in The Dalles filed multimillion-dollar damage claims against several Rajneeshee corporations for the outbreak of salmonella poisoning. Around the same time, two of the older civil suits came up for settlement, and juries awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages to the plaintiffs. The judgment in one of these cases suggested that future juries might well consider the Rajneeshee corporations liable for what Sheela and her friends had done. Then, too, what claims the Rajneeshee could pay depended on the outcome of the land-use case, which was still going through the courts. If 1000 Friends won, then the ranch would be worth little more than what Sheela had paid for it, because the buildings would have to be torn down.

By February of 1986, only a hundred people remained on the ranch; the rest were taking up their lives in "the world" again, and just a few—a very few—were holding themselves in readiness to go to the guru if he called them. (Since his departure, Rajneesh had moved from India to Nepal and then to Crete, where, in February, he was staying with a Greek producer of X-rated films. According



to the sannyasins, he had proved physically quite tough; indeed, on his first stop, when he found that Laxmi had rented, not bought, the Himalayan hotel where he was staying, and had obtained only three-week visas for his non-Indian sannyasins, he took a bus to New Delhi and left Laxmi with the hotel bills.) Most of his sannyasins, or former sannyasins, were now busy with the practical problems of finding jobs, getting credit, finding places to live. Some of them, such as Videh, were doing these things for the first time; others were doing them for the first time in eight or ten years. They were like Rip Van Winkles come down from the mountains—the more so because they could not tell prospective employers, credit managers, and so on, where they had been. Of course, a number of them had resources, and some of these, like Isabel and Niren, simply sailed off to Europe or South America for vacations. Others, however, were working just as hard as they had on the ranch — working as waitresses or housecleaners and going to school at night—for they were facing the fact that, at the age of thirty-five or forty, they had to start over again from scratch. Yet with one or two exceptions those I talked to were not angry, bitter, or depressed about what had happened. On the contrary, they seemed just as cheerful and energetic as before. Over lunch in San Diego, Videh, who was looking for a job as a salesman, said, "I can't seem to make my parents understand that I was fine when I was on the ranch and I'm fine here, too." Most of them, including Videh, told me how grateful they were for having had such an experience.

In the past, I had always wondered how much ordinary sannyasins believed of what they told me and how much they said because they felt they had to. Now most of those people I had met before told me that they had had—but had concealed—many objections to the way the commune was run. "I hated this us-them syndrome that Sheela created," one ex-Twinkie said. "I never felt that all outsiders were hostile, and I felt that we were just driving people away." Two of the other ex-Twinkies I met said the same thing, and all of them said they had not liked having to lie to journalists; two of them had resigned their press jobs to avoid doing so. Most of the people I talked to had seen the power struggles going on around Sheela and had noticed the way they turned those involved into petty tyrants. Most, too, had noticed the growing paranoia on the ranch, and had thought the guards and the guns unnecessary—absurd, perhaps even dangerous. A few had left the ranch because of these things, and a great many—indeed, most of the people I talked to outside the leadership circles—had made a kind of internal emigration. "My friends and I just gave up on trying to make the commune the way we wanted it," Subhuti said. "We went low-profile and had a good time. If we had known people were being poisoned ..." Videh told me he had made an effort to stay out of policymaking circles as he watched people within them doing and saying things that in some part of their being they had to feel were wrong. He had decided just to do his job as well as he could.

None of the ordinary sannyasins, of course, had known that Sheela was drugging and poisoning people, and not very many had known about the wiretapping. The astonishing thing was

that, given the great variety of clues that lay around, most did not even suspect that something terrible was happening. But most did not. Like Shunyo, they couldn't believe it—and some of them, like Zeno, who had her suspicions, had suffered mentally or physically because they could not. Sampatti, a former Twinkie who had left the ranch the previous spring because she had doubts, explained it this way: "When you're around a master, you have to trust. You have to suspend judgment in order to open yourself up to new experiences. You have to see how things feel before making judgments. Otherwise, how can you get out of your old patterns, your social conditioning? There was an innocence about sannyasins."

The new vice-president of the commune, a bearded long-term sannyasin called C.C., went into more detail on this point. "Sannyasins have an inclination to surrender," he said in February of 1986. "That's the Eastern quality of our work. Each one of us mirrors what is going on inside everyone else. That's the basis of living in the Buddhafield. I never cared for the us-them dichotomy, and the commune wasn't the way I would have wanted it. But we trusted him, or her, or whoever it was. There are many levels around Bhagwan's work—those you can see and those you can't."

The guru had often told his disciples they were asleep, and that was certainly the way it looked now. They had all gone along and done their jobs and not asked questions. Now, looking at this experience in retrospect, Sampatti, C.C., and all the other sannyasins I talked to said that they had been wrong to trust in this way, and that they bore some responsibility for what had occurred. But then they said something else. "When Bhagwan started speaking again, he talked about the importance of having doubts, trusting our own Feelings, and taking responsibility for ourselves," Sampatti said. "That's what I heard, anyway, and that's why I left. I could not say yes enthusiastically enough. But not everyone seemed to hear this." C.C., who had stayed at the ranch, and who still wore red clothes and a mala, surprisingly seemed to agree. "In Poona, Bhagwan emphasized surrender," he said. "But here, where we had to build a large organization, that kind of trust was not appropriate. He said as much, but most of us did not listen."

Not everyone I spoke with seemed to think that the only error lay in not listening to the guru closely enough. Some acknowledged that Rajneesh often said contradictory things. But all said that they had learned a lesson. Subhuti, who was struggling with the facts of the matter in order to write a book, said, in answer to a question, "Yes, I suspected that Hulse's illness and the fire in the planning office were caused by us. But it wasn't a big thing for me. I went unconscious on it. It's all in Bhagwan's hands,' I said to myself. That was the reasoning. We saw Bhagwan as this Big Daddy who could take care of everything. But we've learned that you can't avoid taking responsibility for yourself."

The lesson did not seem to be a very remarkable one. Many sannyasins had doubtless learned it before they joined Rajneesh. But Subhuti, Videh, Sampatti, and others told me over and

over how grateful they were to Bhagwan for it and how good they felt about it. But they went on to suggest that they had not learned it at all. "Every phase of Bhagwan's work is different," C.C. said. "Here it was an experiment in the collective unconscious. Bhagwan made us look at our will to power and that of people on the outside. You see, outsiders came into his Buddha-field, too, and all of us had to struggle with the same fears and insecurities."

Videh, for his part, said, "I wouldn't have missed the experience for anything. Bhagwan showed us at firsthand how power corrupts. He showed us how fascism comes into being. Where else could you learn something like that?"

Even Ava, who had been a member of Sheela's "dirty tricks" squad, was grateful for this lesson. "Bhagwan's outrageous," she said when I first talked to her. "There's no one like him. If I put up with horror to be near him, it was all worth it. I got to see the horrible, sinister side of myself and to accept it. I don't have any regrets."

This, then, was the reason for the extraordinary cheerfulness of most sannyasins, and even most former sannyasins. They had "taken responsibility," as the therapists said, without taking any responsibility at all. They had nothing on their consciences, for the guru "on some level," as they kept saying, was responsible for everything that had occurred. Almost all of them believed that Sheela had been in practice responsible for the criminality, and that the guru had known nothing about it—bat that did not change their view. They also believed that they themselves would never have done violence to anyone on Sheela's orders. The open question was how many of them would have committed crimes if they thought the guru wanted them to. For most of them, this was a nonquestion, since they believed Rajneesh incapable of doing, or willing, violence against another person. For one woman, however, it was not. "Masters throw you into the moment," she said. "They create crises and make you live on the edge. They create the fever-pitched moment in order to throw you back into yourself. Bhagwan was doing that for us. If humanity would be saved in this way, well, it might be at the expense of other people, and criminal acts could be justified." What this woman (she was one who had physically suffered on the ranch) was saying was that a master-disciple relationship of this imperial, world-conquering sort might well lead to criminality. That was the logic of it, and in practice that was where it had led. Yet this woman did not blame herself for having accepted the logic. "I have no respect for Bhagwan anymore," she continued. "He's an intelligent man, and he influenced everything we did. I think he told Sheela to do a lot of the things she did—like the burning of Durow's Office and the salmonella poisonings in The Dalles. I can't prove it, but at a meeting I went to after the Share-A-Home program he said that he told Sheela exactly what to say. So in the end, when he blamed Sheela for everything, there were a lot of people who knew this was not true. By the end, the ranch was set up so that no one trusted himself. I can't trash the whole experience. I had so many friends there I really liked a lot. It was just the people who were running

the place."

A number of sannyasins and former sannyasins used the word "innocence" about themselves. But they were not really innocent, for many had doubts and reservations, and many, like Subhuti, had suspicions. They merely acted as if they had none, concealing their suspicions not just from outsiders but from themselves and from one another—the very people they claimed to "mirror" and trust. In fact, the ranch was something like a hall of mirrors without windows. The outside world did not exist.

While I was talking at length with Subhuti (who was still living at the ranch), I, and then he, realized that he had forgotten certain things. He had forgotten, for example, what he had said to me six months before about the New Man taking shape in the commune; in fact, he could no longer remember that he had said anything like that. He asked me to tell him exactly what he had said, so that he could use it in his book. Then, later, when he was talking about the way the sannyasins had seen how power corrupts, he said how amazing it was to watch Oregon politicians ganging up against the commune, passing laws against it any way they could. When I reminded him that this had happened after Antelope, after the commune's attempt to rig the Wasco County election, after the salmonella outbreak, and so on, he laughed in surprise. "I guess they had some reason to think we were dangerous," he said. "And you're right, the means they used were perfectly legal unlike ours."

Videh, I discovered, had forgotten things, too. He no longer remembered making a theoretical justification for the hostile, provocative behavior of the group. And he could not remember having ever made a provocative gesture himself—though he had told me about one six months before. "I never liked the us-them thing," he said now, "and I always did my best to keep friendly relations with those people I worked with on the inside." Looking at Videh, I knew he believed what he was now saying just as sincerely as he had believed what he said six months earlier. I had never thought Subhuti or Videh capable of hurting anyone, and the record showed that they had not. But there were people in the commune who had.

"Sheela flipped out—she went crazy" was the verdict of most sannyasins and former sannyasins these days. Two people who had gone to see her in a Portland jail after her extradition reported that she had promised she would always be the "ma" to her sannyasins. "She's really crazy," people said who heard that. People thought Vidya was crazy, too, for Vidya was not hiding out in Europe; she was calling a number of sannyasins, saying where she was and offering to produce character witnesses for Sheela. Ava thought that both of them had gone around the bend. She could not imagine what had come over them. But then, without realizing it, she provided an explanation. "You know, it's curious," she said the second time I spoke with her. "After I spent two weeks being debriefed by the F.B.I. and everyone else, I went back to the ranch, and everyone was talking about how wonderful things would be now that Sheela was gone—how they were going to make a new

start, and so on. I thought everyone was nuts, knew this couldn't be. But then—this is strange—I started forgetting things. I conveniently forgot things, because they seemed impossible to remember. I forgot—well, I forgot the tape Sheela had of a conversation with Bhagwan which showed that he was involved in things he said he wasn't. Things like that. I stuffed these things away, and I remembered them just a few days ago. I remembered them because I went to Portland to testify again, and I talked with K.D. and Sagun for the first time since we left the ranch, and they reminded me. For three days, I was just so angry at Bhagwan. But I'm over that now."

Ava called in a third time to say that she hoped she had not sounded too negative before. She had been in a bad space but now she had accepted everything and Bhagwan was still her Master.