Stagnation and the Growth of the Rajneesh Movement in Nepal: Culture and the New Paradigm in the Sociology of Religion

Chudamani Basnet
UGA , Department of Sociology
Email: cbasnet@uga.edu
(Draft, please do not cite)

The new paradigm in the sociology of religion is usually said to be uniquely suited to the socio-historical conditions of the United States. In this study, I show the usefulness of the paradigm in a non-Western and non-Christian context. However, I depart considerably from the mainstream of the new paradigm in that I envision a central role of culture in the movement dynamic. Drawing on advances made in the sociology of culture, I show that culture not only shapes the overall movement direction, but also offers crucial resources for the growth of religious movements. In explaining the two-decade long stagnation and the eventual rapid growth of the Rajneesh movement in Nepal, thus, I demonstrate the usefulness of the paradigm and offer a critique at the same time.

Introduction

Debate persists in the sociology of religion over the emergence, growth and decline of "new religious movements (NRMs)" The claim made by the secularization theory that religion would lose to the advancement of science and modernity could not stand the test of time as a host of religious movements in the United States and globally showed up with vengeance after the second half of the twentieth century. Beginning from the late 1970s, a number of sociologists have come up with an alternative explanation, now widely known as the "new paradigm," in the sociology of religion (Warner 1993, 1997; Sherkat and Wilson 1999). As we will see, the new paradigm is better suited to explain the emergence and growth of new religions. Drawing largely on the premises of the paradigm, this study explains

why the Rajneesh movement in Nepal stagnated for about two decades and why it has been growing rapidly over the past few years.

Led almost single handedly by Rodney Stark and his collaborators, the new paradigm, variously knows as "rational choice theories," the "religious economy" model or the "supply side" model, consists of loose ideas developed at the various levels of society over the past several decades (Warner 1993, 1997; Sherkat and Wilson 1999)[1]. A market analogy is the hallmark of the new paradigm. In sharp contrast to the "old paradigm" premised on the secularization model, the new paradigm argues that the "religious demand" has been a "constant" feature of human society. It holds that the "supply" side which includes religious "producers" and their "marketing" strategies is the key to specific religious developments (Warner 1993, 1997; Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Finke and Stark 1992; Stark and Bainbridge 1985). In this view, government regulations profoundly affect the behavior of the religious market (Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Melton 1993).

The new paradigm argues that religion is grounded in the exchange relationship between humans and the supernatural. Like business firms, religious organizations sell "otherworldly rewards" to religious consumers. The paradigm holds that religious entrepreneurs play key roles in that they manufacture and market novel "otherworldly rewards." Further, religious entrepreneurs play important roles in the process of the emergence of a new religion. Successful religious entrepreneurs need managerial skills to run their religious firms; hence they are usually first involved in one or more successful new religions before they establish their own (Stark and Bainbridge 1987). Thus, in the religious economy model, entrepreneurial

[1] In this paper, I use different names interchangeably, and focus on the "supply side" rather than the "demand side" within the paradigm. Critics often held that the demand side is particularly problematic (Sherkat 1997; Sherkat and William 1995; Sharot 2002).

logics play a pivotal role in the birth and growth of new religions.

As far as the "success" of new religions is concerned, the manifesto of the new paradigm perhaps is Stark's (1987) "theory of success" for new religious movements. In this theory as well as in his numerous publications over the past several decades, Stark has theorized that eight factors are crucial for the success or failure of a new religion: 1.) cultural continuity, 2.) medium tension, 3) effective mobilization, 4) A normal age and sex structure, 5) A favorable ecology, 6) network ties, 7) secularization, and 8.) adequate socialization. He restated these factors into ten formal propositions later in 1996. It should be noted that Stark, in lieu of the new paradigm, greatly privileges the supply side; nevertheless his ideas are not entirely antithetical to the traditional "demand" side. I draw considerably on Stark's theory of success.

It has been often argued that rational the new paradigm is suitable only to the United States, where religious pluralism and competition are said to be well institutionalized over the past several centuries (Warner 1993, 1997; Sharot 2002). Indeed, rational choice theorists heavily draw upon the past two hundreds or so of the U.S. history. Sharot (2002), in his critique of the new paradigm, suspects the usefulness of the model outside the Judeo-Christian traditions. He holds that the model should limit its explanation to American "congregational" religions, and that "conceptual and theoretical problems arise when the perspective is applied to non-western religion" (2002:427). Even sympathetic reviewers of the paradigm have questioned the individualist approach of the model, and sought cultural and social dimensions to the model (Sherkat 1997; Sherkat and William 1995).

Nepal's Rajneesh movement[2] offers a unique opportunity to examine the

---

[2] It is interesting to note that the followers of Rajneesh in Nepal deny that they are a "cult" or "sect" or religion. I assume that they are well-versed in anti-cult rhetoric in the West. In their official publications (as well in my personal conversation), these people characterize themselves as a

new paradigm in a non-Christian and non-Western context. The movement began in the early 1970s, but it stagnated for almost two decades. Beginning from the early 1990s, it started growing rapidly. Curiously, the movement achieved this growth despite a number of "crises" in the movement. First, the Rajneesh commune in the United States was disbanded in 1985 amidst controversies. Second, the founder charismatic leader Rajneesh died in 1990. Third, Nepal's Rajneesh's followers defected from the international movement "headquarters" in India. Surprisingly, in the face of all the odds, the movement started growing rapidly beginning from the early 1990s. In explaining this long stagnation and the eventual rapid growth of this movement, I will show that new paradigm can be extended to explain the emergence and the growth of new religions in non-Western contexts.

Second, I build on the critics who have sought an inclusion of cultural and social embeddedness into the paradigm, but I go beyond them arguing that culture is central to religious entrepreneurship. I argue that culture is more than merely one of the factors or vaguely and narrowly defined "cultural continuity" or "religious human capital" (Stark 1987, 1996; Iannaccone 1997). Third, I draw attention to additional factors that seem to be playing crucial roles in Nepal's non-Christian and "new democracy" context. In addition to the important role of "networks of faiths" in the people's "conversion career," I discus how religious entrepreneurs understand the role of the mass media, and how the media might generate interest in new religion among potential members. The second factor I draw attention to is the role of the central religious authority in a Hindu/Buddhist context. I argue that far from being an "inefficient" organization, the Guru system is well grounded into the local context, and functions as efficiently as formal religious organizations in the West. Finally, I discus a number of implications of this study for the current debates in

---

"movement." Following Stark and Bainbridge (1985), the group shows the characteristic of an innovative "cult movement." I term the group a "movement" in this paper.

new religious movement studies.

Data and Method

The bulk of the data employed in this study comes from my four month long ethnographic study among the followers, popularly know as sannyasins or neo-sannyasins, of Rajneesh in Kathmandu, Nepal. I carried out my research at the close of 1998 and the early 1999. I interviewed forty sannyasins including movement leaders. I re-interviewed sannyasins, particularly the movement leaders, in 2005, primarily for the purpose of an update. During the course of my ethnographic study, I participated in dozens of "celebrations" and took part in a three day meditation camp as a "seeker." Second, I also use a number of official Rajneesh publications and media reports as my source of data. Finally, I have benefited from my numerous discussions with movement sympathizers, popularly known as "Osho lovers," in Nepal.

The Rajneesh movement began in Nepal in the early 1970s, and now has spread all over the country. But my data come from Kathmandu followers. At the time of my research at the close of 1998, there were four Rajneesh centers in Kathmandu. The Osho Tapoban established in 1990 was the largest in Nepal; and it was also, in principle, modeled after Rajneesh's idea of a "commune." The Tapoban was led by Swami Ananda Arun. Swami Arun, the first official follower of Rajneesh in Nepal, was one of the oldest and closest disciples of the controversial Guru. Swami Arun and the Tapoban have been the focal points of the Rajneesh movement in Nepal for more than a decade now. Thus, I carried out a number of intensive interviews with Swami Arun. About one third of the forty sannyasins interviewed for the purpose of this study were not "affiliated" to the Tapoban directly at the time of my research; they were, nevertheless, involved in the Tapoban until very

recently[3]. Hence, this study, primarily, revolves around the Tapoban and the Tapoban-affiliated sannyasins.

I met my respondents primarily through accidental encounters at meditation centers, and the rest through a snowball sampling. To avoid a "network bias," I made conscious efforts *not* to interview more than one sannyasin from a single household. Half of my respondents were those who took sannyas when Rajneesh was still alive and the rest after the death of the Guru. Thus, my respondents had been in sannyas life ranging from a few months to more than two decades. Although I interviewed a few "silent" sannyasins, I could not locate a single "ex-sannyasin" during my study period. I interviewed my respondents in meditation centers, in their homes and restaurants. Interviews lasted up to eight hours in a few cases. I repeatedly interviewed a few of them, who wholeheartedly cooperated with me.

The Arrival and Growth of the Rajneesh Movement in Nepal

The India born-Guru, Rajneesh, began his movement in the 1960s in India. Studies show that by the end of the 1970s, while the movement was still based in India, Western followers tended to outnumber local ones (Mann 1993; Sharma 1985:117). Surrounded by his financially lucrative Western disciples, Rajneesh came to the United States in 1981, and soon settled in a 64000 acre commune in Oregon (Carter 1987; Urban 1986, 2000). At its height in the mid-1980s, it was estimated that nearly 30,000 sannyasins lived in various communes around the world, mostly in North America and Europe, and that Rajneesh's followers reached more than one hundred thousands (Urban 1986). Following a number of "crises" including the fall of the movement's Oregon commune, *Rajneeshpuram*, in 1985,

---

[3] Due to an internal power struggle, a small number of sannyasins dissociated themselves with the Tapoban. This power struggle coincided with my research period. Interestingly, the power struggle both facilitated and hindered my research.

and the death of Rajneesh in 1990, the movement in North America and Europe, currently, is said to be reeling under a "stagnation" phase (Goldman 2005).

Studies consistently describe the Rajneesh movement as fleeting, "post-Fordist," "inconsistent" and "hard to capture" (Goldman, 2005, Palmer and Sharma 1993, Carter 1987; Urban 1986, 2000, Palmer 1988). Rajneesh, occasionally, told his followers that he deliberately taught them "contradictory" lessons so as to assist them find their own individuality. However, it is not difficult to locate some of the "key" controversies in the Rajneesh movement. Commenting on the Oregon commune, Palmer and Sharma (1993:161), perceptively, state that "for historians in the future, *Rajneeshpuram* perhaps will be remembered as the only utopian commune which practiced "free love" and yet was ruled by women." Indeed, the commune, "free sex" and the idea of radical gender roles have often been projected as controversies as well as attractions of the movement. The Guru did not offer a well-developed theology, but he drew on all major world religions, and espoused the Hindu conception of "enlightenment" as the ultimate goal for his followers (Sharma 1993). A cursory look on numerous publications authored by Rajneesh points out that meditation was his equally consistent and central message to his followers.

In the wake of the Oregon crisis in 1985, Rajneesh relieved his follower from wearing orange robes and his locket, which had been the public symbols of the movement since the early 1970s when he began his "neo-sannyas" movement. The Guru spoke against the institution of marriage and the production of children in the already "over burdened" earth. The Guru asked his followers to leave behind old religious rituals and beliefs, and declared that mediation alone was a sure path to enlightenment. One of the rituals developed by Rajneesh which has drawn considerable attention was the "death celebration" in which the funeral of a dead sannyasin is held in a festive celebration. The Guru strongly advocated

vegetarianism; his ideas on drugs and alcohol often were ambivalent. Critiques point out that this was one of the major attractions of Rajneesh among the "counter-culture generation" in the West (Mann 1993).

Rajneesh started internationalizing his movement in the early 1970s. According to Swami Ananda Arun, Rajneesh himself named his first center in Nepal "Asheesh Rajneesh Meditation Centre," which was established in 1974 in Kathmandu. The early 1986 is important in the history of the movement. This year Rajneesh came to Nepal and stayed for about one and half month in Kathmandu following his "expulsion" from the United States. Although Nepal had only a nominal independent media in the 1980s and despite the fact that the newspapers were preoccupied with the upcoming elections, I found that the media gave a prominent place to Rajneesh's arrival. Not surprisingly, the newspapers greatly highlighted Rajneesh's wealth and his ideas on sex and gender roles. A couple of them also mentioned that Rajneesh was an "anti-Hindu" Guru.

Newspaper reports stated that ministers, industrialists, high level bureaucrats, doctors and engineers were among the most enthusiastic visitors to the Guru. One newspaper reported that the then Prime Minister of Nepal, Lokendra Bahadur Chand,[4] and one of his senior-most ministers showed keen interest in meeting the Guru. The core followers and the Osho lovers in Nepal until now have been the same well-integrated and highly-regarded people. In my interviews, an overwhelming majority of my respondents identified themselves with the "middle" and "upper-middle" class backgrounds.

When the international Rajneesh movement was growing rapidly in the 1970s through the mid-1985, Nepal's movement made little headway. One old sannyasin, for example, estimated the number of sannyasins at about 25 when he

[4] Former PM Chand, along with another former PM K. P. Bhattarai, is now an active "Osho lover," who routinely visits Rajneesh centers in Kathmandu.

took sannyas from Rajneesh in 1977[5]. After more than a decade since the first meditation center was established in Nepal, only two more Rajneesh centers were added by the end of the 1980s; thus, there were only 3 meditation centers in Nepal in 1990. Based on my interviews, I estimated that the number of Rajneesh followers in 1990 was less than fifteen hundred.

Beginning from the early 1990, Nepal's Rajneesh movement started growing rapidly. The number of meditation centers, for example, reached 29 in 1998 (Adhikary 1998). Singh (2000:21) estimated the total number of sannyasins at eight thousands in 2000. There were 54 meditation centers[6] in Nepal in 2005; and Nepali sannyasins claimed that more than one thousand people were joining the movement each year. Rajneesh centers have started penetrating areas far off the traditional hub of Kathmandu. Nepal's one of the most well known leftist leaders, Mohan Bikram Singh (2000), termed the Rajneesh movement as the "fastest growing religious groups" in Nepal. Currently, I estimate that the number of Rajneesh followers well over 20,000, and the number of movement sympathizers could be far more than this[7].

One noteworthy development in Nepal's Rajneesh movement has been the on-going deification of Rajneesh. During my visits to their homes and work-places, I observed that sannyasins worshipped the images of Rajneesh along with the sea of traditional religious gods and goddesses. This, indeed, is not new among traditional Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal. The sannyasins had pasted images of Rajneesh in

---

[5] Independent and systematic data were hard to obtain. Although I cross-checked these figures, and believe that they are reasonably closer to the "reality," these figures should be taken as the best guess or estimate.

6 Swami Arun claims that barring 3 or 4 centers, all meditation centers are "affiliated" to the Osho Tapoban. Obviously, these meditation centers do not have a hierarchical structure and a paid clergy although they seem to be coordinating activities in an *ad hoc* basis.

[7] In December 2005, a Nepali language newspaper quoted Swami Arun as saying that there were more than 20,000 "mad" people in Nepal. He was responding to those [occasional media reports, moral guardians of the society and a few radical left groups] who often characterize Rajneesh followers as "mad."

numerous places in their homes. The signs of fresh worships were visible around the images of Rajneesh. I saw a similar juxtaposition of the images of Rajneesh in sannyasins' workplaces. Interestingly, a number of Rajneesh meditation centers are called "*Mandir*" (a popular Nepali word for Hindu temples). In many ways, Rajneesh centers function like traditional Hindu/Buddhist holy places where devotees go for worship, meditation and recreational purposes, and where the sacred/profane boundary is maintained jealously.

Secularization and Socio-cultural Environment

Stark (1987, 1996) in his success model argues that a "favorable ecology" as reflected in an "unregulated religious economy," secularization trends and disruptive social conditions are favorable to the growth of new religious movements. This, indeed, is where Stark gives room for the traditional "culturalist" argument. The new paradigm posits that religious pluralism leads to a higher level of religious participation as "competition" among firms leads to the condition of market saturation. On the other hand, a monopoly religious monopoly could leave behind an "unchurched" population as a single religion may not satisfy the religious need of a diverse population. The religious economy model paradigm does not deny that "secularization," indeed, has been taking place; but, it differs from the old paradigm significantly in that the new paradigm takes secularization as a "self-limiting" process (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). As established religions become worldly and fail to fulfill the people's demand for "otherworldly rewards," they inadvertently make room for new religions. But as we will see, a more complex picture emerges than this simple characterization.

In the absence of the relevant data like large scale surveys in Nepal, it is hard to gauge whether the people's participation in religious affairs and their religious

commitment has increased or decreased. But the peculiarity of Hinduism in Nepal should be noted (see also Sharot 2002). Nepal's Hinduism does not have a separate and central organizational authority which legitimately can lay down theological or institutional guidelines to the people. People are born in Hinduism without ever becoming a member of any formal religious organization. Hindu priests, popularly known as the *Bahuns* in Nepal, exert their influence upon their clientele in local settings; and religious rituals are largely held at the family or kinship level. The state has remained the *de facto* guardian of Hinduism. Hindu organizations that emerged in recent decades, largely under the influence of Hindu fundamentalist politics in India, were religio-political organizations. They have actively aligned themselves with the Hindu forces within the Nepali state represented primarily by the high caste aristocrat and the palace.

Historically, this has led to two contradictory developments. On the one hand, because of the localness in their religious practices, the Hindus in Nepal seem to be "open" to new religious ideas, and often deft at synchronizing alien traditions (Bista 1990). On the other hand, many "inhuman" traditions like the caste system and "senseless" rituals and food taboos went on unhindered often with the complicity of the state. This condition was not to last long, however. The growth of secular education and Westernization beginning from the 1950s often contradicted people's deeply held traditional beliefs and practices (Bista 1990; Whelpton 2005). Traditional Hinduism had weakened to a great extent by the end of the 1980s, and a number of practices including food taboos were seriously challenged (Bista 1990; Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton 1997; Whelpton 2005). Significantly, the percentage of the people identifying themselves with Hinduism decreased from 89.5 percent in 1981 to 86.5 percent in the 1991 census and further 80.6 percent in 2001

(Nepal Census Report 2003)[8].

The Rajneesh movement in Nepal grew in this broad socio-cultural environment from the early 1970s to 1990. While faultlessly conforming to the general "folk" belief that their past lives explained their present search for "enlightenment," my respondents repeatedly showed their displeasure on traditional "conservative" beliefs and food taboos. Here is one typical sannyasin on food taboos:

> "Before I became a sannyasin [when I was not a vegetarian], I always wondered why my parents allowed me to eat mutton, but not pork or chicken. How is it possible that those who eat mutton go to heaven and those who eat chicken and pork to hell? I sensed that there was something wrong in our religion. I now practice vegetarianism strictly. I now believe that vegetarianism helps spiritual growth, but for different reasons than what my parents taught me."

Interestingly, many Rajneesh followers in Nepal put forth Western rationality in attacking the traditional religions. This, indeed, complicates the secularization model espoused by the new paradigm. One might be tempted to interpret that the people's demand for other worldly rewards "increased" due to monopoly of Hinduism as expressed by my respondents in their apathy towards the traditional religion. But, it was not the case that the traditional religions were lacking in "otherworldly rewards;" the "secularization" process was mediated by Western rationality, a prediction compatible with the old paradigm. The attraction toward Rajneesh, was not so much a story about a "strict church" (Iannacone 1994) as was the search for a "scientific" explanation for the traditional religion.

---

[8] I believe that this decrease has to do with ethnic movements in the post-democracy Nepal. The ethnic leaders asked people not to identify with Hinduism. A strong aversion to Hindu caste system was evident in the movement as leaders frequently mentioned how Hinduism relegated Nepal's ethnic people into lower caste groups (Gellner et. al. 1997).

In the wake of democracy in 1990, Nepal witnessed widespread ethnic, linguistic and regional movements, and the latter half of the 1990s saw unprecedented political violence. Nepal's socio-political conditions in many ways in the second-half of the 1990s were comparable to America's "turbulent" 1960s. The rise of the educated middle class, urbanization and Nepali state's inability to deliver goods rendered every thing, from the state to the tradition, suspect. My responded in their biographical portrayals depicted their moral, ethical and existential dilemmas[9] they faced in the years before they became sannyasins. These included general displeasure towards religious rituals and beliefs including the caste system, conflict with parents, and a general disbelief towards the political authority. It appears as if the movement showed up in a "right place at the right time" (Stark 1987:19).

One of the typical moments I observed was the reaction of sannyasins toward Rajneesh's videotaped "discourses." One of the rituals Nepal's Rajneesh followers have practiced for long is "*Satsang*" in which sannyasins gather in a large number to watch and listen to Rajneesh's (audio or video-taped) lectures. Saturday is especially notable. Every Saturday – indeed this is not restricted to Saturdays - Rajneesh followers and sympathizers gather in the Osho Tapoban or other meditation centers in a large number. The sannyasins sit in large halls to watch and listen to Rajneesh's recorded lectures. As the tape unrolls, a pin-drop silence follows; they watch the video in a rapt silence. When Rajneesh castigates - he faultlessly does in one or the other pretext - traditional priests and politicians, sannyasins burst into laughter and joy exuding Durkheimian "collective effervescence."

State Regulations and Nepal's "Religious Market"

[9] Although movement leaders often claimed the efficacy of their practices in solving personal problems like drugs, alcohol, and emotional traumas, consistent with their class backgrounds, my responded often downplayed a correspondence between their personal problems and new practice.

The new paradigm postulates that pluralism is the "natural state" of the religious economy. The liberalization of the "religious economy" is thought to impact the prospect for a NRM positively. Stark (1987: 19) notes that "when a single religious organization has been granted monopoly rights in a religious economy, backed by the coercive power of the state, it will be more difficult for new faiths to flourish." State regulations, thus, put strong constrains on religious movements.

When the Rajneesh movement began in Nepal in the early 1970s, Nepal had an autocratic political system. The Nepali state was constitutionally termed a Hindu state, and activities of non-Hindu religions, with a possible exception of Buddhism, were guarded jealously. Religious proselytization was defined as a crime against the state. Hence, in Nepal's religious economy, only those which identified themselves with traditional Hinduism or Buddhism could do their business without risking the wrath of the authorities. Not surprisingly, a number of traditional Hinduism-affirming new movements like the one led by the Sai Baba and various India-based conservative Hindu denominations like *Vaishnava* flourished greatly with an active support of the state. Even a "world-affirming" religion like the Transcendental Meditation was taken as a suspect, and its efforts to set up its base in Nepal was thwarted by the government in the early 1980s.

Nepal's Rajneesh followers before democracy, despite quite a few sympathizers and followers in the ruling establishment, received threats from the state authorities, and their efforts to register a formal organization were denied by the government. At times, Rajneesh followers practicing street solicitations were detained and harassed by the authorities. The authorities were particularly concerned with the potential political fall outs of religious movements. Any organization not aligned to the state, political or otherwise, was deemed politically subversive. The movement leaders told me that "the authorities were often alarmed by words like

revolution in the titles of a few publications authored by Rajneesh." Hence, a "black market" was the only option for the movement leaders under the monopoly religious economy (Stark and Bainbridge 1985).

A popular movement put an end to the autocratic regime in 1990, which greatly transformed Nepal's religious landscape. Although Nepal's "democratic" constitution promulgated in 1990 retained the official "Hindu" label, the religious economy, at least, for "Hindu looking" religions was liberalized to a great extent. During the 1990s, strident voices were heard in Kathmandu streets for a "secular" constitution. This was something people could hardly imagine during the autocratic regime. While in the absence of a systematic study, it can not be said conclusively about the people's participation and religious commitment, it is obvious that religious "firms" increased greatly after the political change in 1990. Nepal's one of the widely circulated weekly magazines in one of its issues last year cited at least a dozen "new religions" in Kathmandu, many of which were established after democracy (Wagle and Adhikari 2005). Among those listed in the magazine were Maharshi Yogi's Transcendental Meditation and little known "laptop Gurus."

With democracy came the people's rights to form an organization of their own choice. Hence, the relationship between the state and the organizational development of the Rajneesh movement is direct and obvious. It was due to the political change in 1990 that the Rajneesh movement leaders became able to register their organization and set up the Osho Tapoban. The importance of organizations and "resources" is well documented in the social movement literature. The Tapoban ultimately proved to be an important base from where the movement was launched in a full scale. Sannyasins leaders openly appreciated to me the role of the political change in 1990. They told me that their movement could not have reached the present phase without the political change and the subsequent "liberalization" of the

religious economy. Democracy not only offered the room for the organizational development and prevented the movement followers from the state harassment, it also brought with it modern and "free" media, which ultimately proved to be valuable resources for the movement (discussed later).

Defection and the Rise of the Local Authority

The fact that defection often gives rise to new religious entrepreneurs in not new in the new paradigm, but important qualifications must be added when the model is applied to the cases of "Asian" religions. Bromley (2004) notes that the practice of sending individuals on prolonged missions often disrupts the "internal solidarity" of the movement which may eventually lead to "disaffiliation." Stark and Bainbridge (1985) predict that schism in religious organizations usually occurs on the basis of "pre-existing" networks. This was the situation in Nepal.

Swami Arun was asked to stay and initiate local followers in Nepal since 1974. He, thus, remained cut-off from the core group around Rajneesh, and the Western disciples rose to the prominence as the movement progressed. By the time Rajneesh died in 1990, Swami Arun, however, had already created a sizable number of Rajneesh followers in Nepal. Ultimately, this paved the way for Swami Arun's defection from the international movement core. Following the death of Rajneesh in 1990, an intense power struggle ensued between the Rajneesh "headquarters" in India and his Nepali followers. Swami Arun, the undisputed leader of the local sannyasins, rejected Poona's "control efforts" arguing that Rajneesh never had wanted to create yet "another Vatican." Ultimately, the Inner Circle, the spiritual body formed by Rajneesh to look after his legacy days before his death, in Poona, India, "expelled" Swami Arun in 1996.

Swami Arun showed keen religious entrepreneurship as the conflict between

him and the headquarters intensified in the early 1990s. Local cultural resources came in handy to rescue him. He countered Poona's "control efforts" by proclaiming his own spiritual charisma. He claimed that he had gained special spiritual powers through meditation. He, frequently, mentioned that he talked to Rajneesh in dreams or meditative states[10]. He also claimed that he had the knowledge of his past lives, and that he visited his one of his homes in far western Nepal, where he was born and raised in his previous life; he further told his followers and the media that he was a "liberated" soul requiring no further birth in flesh and blood (Singh 2000).

The claim of Swami Arun made an immense sense in the local context as charismatic qualities based on spiritual practices are widely believed in Nepal. Similarly, the idea of reincarnation and past *karma* are part of every day vocabulary in "folk" Hindu-Buddhist tradition. The rise of Swami Arun at the center of the local movement had important consequences on organizational development and mobilization. Shinn in his analysis of the Guru tradition in the Hare Krishna movement observes that:

> "unlike the "horizontal communitas" of most religious communities that build commitment through peer support and social networks structures, the [Hindu] guru/disciple bonding reflects a "vertical communitas" which links the devotee to a transcendent divinity through an ascending succession of saints of whom his Guru is the most immediate" (1985:106 *parenthesis added*).

Although the sannyasins continued to suppose Rajneesh as their "ultimate" Guru, Swami Arun as the "most immediate" Guru easily won loyalties of Rajneesh's Nepali followers. Nepali sannyasins believed that Swami Arun was an "enlightened" master. Often, sannyasins told me that he was a *Sad Guru* (a true guru), a popular

[10] The claim of a contact with a dead Guru is not new in Hindu Guru tradition. Shinn (1985:111) reports a similar observation among the Hare Krishna movement followers.

term often used by his followers to revere Rajneesh. This Guru-disciple relationship was often consciously reinforced in every day practice. In the main meditation Hall of the Tapoban, a big portrait of Swami Arun has been juxtaposed along with Rajneesh and other "enlightened" masters. I observed that many sannyasins first put their heads to the feet of Swami Arun before they did to Rajneesh. He, frequently, writes about the "importance" of a living Guru in the spiritual growth of the disciples. A sannyasin expressed his views about Swami Arun's organizational and spiritual role in this way:

> "Everybody here including me accepts that Swami Arun has achieved spiritual powers through meditation. He is an enlightened Guru. Sometimes I burst into tears by his mere touch [because of the "energy" passed on to me by Swami Arun]. He is the center of the commune. You might have seen a pole even in a pond. Nothing is possible without a center."

The role of the central authority is imperfectly realized in the new paradigm model possibly because of its excessive reliance in the American setting. Stark (1987), based on one of the studies among the Hare Krishna followers (Shinn 1987), labels the Hindu Guru system as an example of an "inefficient" organization. My observation in Nepal shows that the problem in the Hare Krishna movement was not the problem of the Guru authority system as such; rather it was the problem of too many Gurus in an alien environment. The Guru system is perfectly compatible with the Hindu and Buddhist tradition in Nepal. Rochford (1989), in sharp contrast to Stark (1987), points out to the lack of the central authority as one of the factors for the "failure" of a splintered group in the Hare Krishna movement in Los Angles.

The rise of Swami Arun to the leadership contributed greatly to local mobilization efforts. My respondents explicitly expressed satisfaction over the fact that they had severed their relationship with the Rajneesh headquarters in India.

They often claimed that the lack and difficulty of communication was "hindering" their work in the pre-defection phase. One sannyasin, referring to the twenty-one member Inner Circle in Poona told me: "there are two dozen self-declared Oshos; whom do you deal with?" Indeed, one of the reasons of the conflict between the India headquarters and the Osho Tapoban was the headquarters' restriction on numbers and length of meditation sessions Swami Arun could conduct in Nepal; the Poona headquarters also wanted to restrict the number of sannyasins Swami Arun could initiate in Nepal (Adhikari 1998). One can assume that these restrictions might have put limitations on the growth of the movement. Although the claims of sannyasins should be taken cautiously, physical proximity of a widely accepted central authority seems to be an important factor in the current growth of the movement. This movement is largely an example of a Guru entrepreneurship.

A civil engineer by training, Swami Arun owned and managed one of Nepal's must successful engineering consultancy firms. His experience in a successful secular business firm came in handy to manage organizational activities in the Tapoban. Inadvertently, he could show to the people – and respond to the critiques - how "religion" was not antithetical to science and secular world. This, indeed, fitted perfectly with Rajneesh's characterization of his followers as "Zorba the Buddha" (Jina 1993). His "intellectual" background, further, helped him befriend liberal politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, academicians and businesspersons. My discussion with Rajneesh sympathizers also ["Osho lovers"] confirmed that the soft-spoken Swami was the key attraction among them. Freed from restrictions and "guidelines" from the India headquarters beginning from the early 1990s, he organized dozens of meditation sessions throughout the country, and confronted his critiques publicly.

Entrepreneurship and Cultural Work

Stark (1987, 1996) recognizes the role of "cultural continuity" and "familiar cultural material" in his model. Iannaccone's (1997) "religious human capital" theory, indeed, takes cultural factors into account. Despite this emphasis on the role of culture, the new paradigm theorists often put culture at the periphery or the importance of culture is imperfectly or inadequately realized (Sherkat 1997; Sherkat and William 1995). On the other hand, social movement and the sociology of culture theorists have made important advancements in understanding culture and its role in social life (Snow et al 1986; Swidler 1995, 1986; Sewell 1997). These advances show how entrepreneurial and cultural logics are deeply interrelated, and how entrepreneurship is constricted or facilitated by contextual forces. In my study, for example, only after did Nepal's Rajneesh movement leaders defect from the movement core that certain frames became possible. Second, change in socio-cultural and political environment made different frames possible. Finally, the meaning of the frame often changes over time as the context changes; often these frames carry with them multiple meanings. Again, entrepreneurship and cultural innovations are quite central. Here, I explain religious entrepreneurship in terms of movement frames.

a.) The Suitable-to-Soil Frame

The new paradigm postulates that pluralism is the "natural state" of the religious economy; and religious monopoly might lead to a "black market" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985). But how a religious black market functions is little understood. During state repression and monopoly phases, the followers just do not sit ideally waiting for a suitable time to come. Also, note that it is not necessary for a "religious group" to formulate "strict rules" to fight the problem of "free riding"

(Iannacone 1994) in the black market phase since threats from state repression is likely to keep the less committed at bay. I argue that a great deal of cultural innovation takes place during this phase.

During the black market phase, survival rather than aggressive growth strategies are likely to be followed by movement leaders. Cultural innovations are likely to be important strategies of survival in this phase. One of the most widely used cultural innovations by the movement leaders during the pre-democracy period was the "suitable-to-soil" frame. Put simply, this frame says that Rajneesh's teaching should be used cautiously according to the local condition. During the repressive regime, this frame was used to shield the movement from the authorities and moral guardians of the larger society. For example, due to state regulations, movement leaders were constrained to formulate the movement ideology in terms of Nepali state's official Hindu ideology. They told me that when the authorities questioned them, they often used this frame. They showed the authorities Rajneesh's commentaries on Hinduism and Buddhism, and "proved" to the satisfaction of authorities how Rajneesh was not an "anti-Hindu."

Second, the same frame was widely used and repeatedly highlighted at the time of the power struggle between Nepal's Rajneesh followers and the movement headquarters in India in the early 1990s. Swami Arun's response to one of my questions summarized nicely the theme and the function of this frame:

> "Some people have misunderstood freedom as '*Uchhringkhalata'* [Nepali word for thoughtless and shameless acts] but I have not allowed it in Nepal…Freedom doesn't mean to break the established norms of the society. This type of freedom can sometimes prove to be fatal. We have freedom here but it's not like the freedom in Poona [among Westerners]. I am against them. We don't allow that kind of freedom. We are more disciplined."

First, this cultural work was explicitly directed towards gaining a distinct identity vis-à-vis the international Rajneesh movement. Hence, the Rajneesh headquarters was cast as "reckless," and Nepal's movement as "thoughtful and disciplined."

Second, this frame was directed toward potential recruits from more tradition-oriented strata of the society. Associated with this frame were a number of efforts to bring down Rajneesh's radical ideas to the local moral and cultural standard. As noted earlier, sex or "free love" was one of the major controversies and attractions in the international Rajneesh movement. Sex, particularly female sexuality, is jealously guarded in Nepali society. Thus, the local leaders interpreted Rajneesh's ideas on sex as his way of teaching "Westerners" spiritual lessons. Hence, the ideas were not suitable to – and meant for - the Nepali society. One sannyasin leader clamed that the idea of "free sex" was just a "trick" played by Rajneesh to teach and test the people:

> "Rajneesh called his female sannyasins *Ma* (the mother). This was his strategy to prevent sexual relations among his disciples. But many male sannyasins maintain sexual relations with female sannyasins while addressing them as the mother. This is a great misunderstanding of Guru's teachings on the part of male sannyasins…it is a pathetic practice…in the name of meditation" (cited in Adhikary 1998:31).

In line with the suitable-to-soil frame, efforts were made to identify and associate Rajneesh with traditional Hindu Gods and saints. Indeed, evidence points out that the movement succeeded to lower the tension with self-declared moral guardians of the society. For example, in 1986, when Rajneesh came to Nepal, a number of newspapers raised the issue of Rajneesh's "anti-Hindu" instances as well as his sex and wealth scandals, by the end of the 1990s, a number of "Hindu" leaders

were seen hobnobbing with the Rajneesh followers. In newspapers articles and interviews, movement leaders frequently contrasted Rajneesh with Buddha, popular Hindu Gods and locally well-known saints. Also, as shown by the recruitment of aging parents of a number of sannyasins as well as dramatic surge of woman members in the second half of the 1990s, I believe that this frame paid off well. Movement leaders as well as female sannyasins told me that due to the cultural work, their "image" had improved over the years, and particularly, the tendency to look down upon woman followers as "shameless" and "immoral" had decreased markedly.

Finally, this frame resonated well with the broader political discourses. Nepal's ruling elites long, particularly during the pre-1990 dictatorial period, have projected India, Nepal's southern neighbor, as a political threat and the West a cultural one (Bista 1990). The thirty year long dictatorial regime (1960-1990) in Nepal was justified as a "suitable-to-soil" political system. The "West" is as much admired for its material prosperity as is castigated for its "cultural poverty." Bashing Western cultural "debasement" long has been the favorite past time particularly among the moral guardians of the society. Hence, the dilution of Rajneesh's radical ideas on sex, gender roles and commune in their public discourse proved to be an attractive option for the movement leaders. Instead of "Western" and alien ideas, a suitable-to-soil version of Rajneesh was offered as the "best" option to the Nepali people.

b.) The Intellectual Frame

The second most widely used frame was the intellectual frame. This frame depicted the movement as something endorsed by the educated and "intellectuals." In contrast to the first frame, this frame was likely to have a universal appeal in the

Nepali society. The presence of highly educated movement sympathizers has given movement leaders new vocabularies in their recruitment efforts and to face public criticism. The "Osho lovers," as they are often called in Nepal, include high level bureaucrats, politicians[11], professors, doctors, engineers, journalists and creative artists. Movement leaders frequently showcase their highly "intellectual" sympathizers to the larger society. My respondents frequently asked me to mull over the question of "why only the educated followed Rajneesh." The emphasis here is also to differentiate their movement from other competing groups, which presumably recruit the less educated.

In 1990, Nepal's literacy rate was only 40%. Doctors and engineers are the most prestigious professions in Nepal. And they are often presented as role models. The government invests substantially in science and technology education. Engineers, doctors and those in science and technology professions are considered natural "intellectuals" in society. In everyday political and economic discourse, education is presented as the sole reason of Nepal's "backwardness." Hence, the claim of the "religion of intellectuals" make an immense sense in Nepal as Wilson (1987) argues, the constituency is vigilant about the "what sort of people" are there in the movement.

It should be noted that the use of this frame increased dramatically after the explosion of the print and electronic media in Nepal in the post-democracy period. In his writings and speeches, Swami Arun and other leaders frequently compare Rajneesh with Marx, Fraud and Einstein (Singh 2000). Discourses of science and technology, caste and gender equality, population explosion, environment and the importance of meritocracy are all couched in the intellectual frame. Swami Arun's

---

11 It is rather puzzling that a large number of politicians are among the followers or Osho lovers in Nepal. Rajneesh spent his life poking fun at politicians, communists or capitalists. Osho lovers include three former prime ministers in Nepal.

articles frequently claim that Rajneesh explained traditional religions in "scientific" terms. Rajneesh is said to be misunderstood worldwide because only "intellectuals" could grasp him; thus those who don't subscribe to Rajneesh's ideas are relegated to a lesser intellectual category.

Nepal has a very strong left movement. Often Rajneesh is presented as a "true" communist. It is interesting that Swami Arun in a seminar argued that the failure of *Rajneeshpuram* in the United States was due to the conspiracies of "imperialist" America because Rajneesh created a commune in the U.S. "in a model envisioned by Marx" (Singh 2000). Swami Arun in his writings almost instinctually reminds his readers how Socrates (and even Einstein and Galileo) was "misunderstood" during his life time. Hence, the controversy around Rajneesh is presented as yet another example of cruelty of the humanity against a would-be-great-person. This means that only the future humanity would recognize the importance of great persons like Rajneesh. But the message is also the other way round: a few "intellectuals" still can understand Rajneesh right now. This realization was important both in the black market and the overt operation phases. This, on the one hand, was helpful to keep high the moral of the core members during the black market phase; and on the other hand, the message goes out to the potential members as "invitation" to join the circle of the chosen intellectuals who can realize the importance of a great man well ahead of time and the existing "crowd."

The Mass Media: Entrepreneurship and Controversy

The new paradigm continues to rely on the old "networks of faiths" approach when it comes to explaining the people's "conversion career" (Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Iannacone 1997). While the efficacy of networks in conversion is well established in the literature, it is rather surprising that despite an overt use of market

imageries and the central role of religious entrepreneurship and firms, the role of the "advertising agencies" is effectively missing in the mainstream new paradigm. Perhaps, drawing largely on the U.S. experience, it is taken for granted that today's all powerful media are "inimical" to new religious movements (Jenkins 2000). Here, I show how religious entrepreneur consciously use the media, and how movement entrepreneurs view controversies as resources.

Before the advent of democracy, Nepal had a nominal independent media, both print and electronics. During the black market phase, sannyasins were engaged in open street solicitation, characteristic of the Hare Krishna movement and the Unification Church in the 1970s, to a limited extent (Bromley and Haden 1984). Social networks often played the key role in this phase. Swami Ananda Arun told me that in the beginning, he even offered lunch to his office co-workers for reading Rajneesh's works. Perhaps the network continues to play an important role, but at the end of the 1990s, movement leaders told me that they did not go out to "recruit" anybody; they often repeated that the "thirsty comes to the sea" rather than the other way round. This points out to the phenomenal growth of the mass media in Nepal after the advent of democracy in 1990.

The relationship between the media and religious movements are often complex. Wilson (1987) notes that "modern" charismatic leaders are particularly vulnerable to the media. Indeed, "destructive" cult has been the persistent theme in the media in the United States from the nineteenth century (Jenkins 2000; Beckford 2003). This comes in sharp contrast to Nepal's experience. Perhaps, the historical absence of the cult-society conflict in Nepal was crucial to the positive response of the Nepali media. Second, there is a near absence of the psychiatry profession in Nepal, which played an important role in propounding the "brainwashing" thesis in the United States (Robbins 1982, 1988). Surprisingly, Nepali society is rich in

cultural references to *Sammohan* (hypnotism). But this too was rarely deployed to castigate Rajneesh followers. Possibly, due to the largely educated, powerful and professionally successful followers, and the dominance of the intellectual frame, the "destructive cult" and the "brainwashing thesis" never entered the mainstream media discourse in the 1990s. Finally, it could be the case that the media simply behaves differently in new democracies since the journalists often jostle with academicians and political leaders in showing a "liberal" and "tolerant" face to the public.

At the time of Rajneesh's arrival in 1986, Nepal's media was largely critical about Rajneesh and his teachings. By the end of the 1990s, there was little reference to Rajneesh's wealth and sex scandals in the popular media. Singh (2000) lamented that the mainstream media did not take the "cult menace" seriously. In the beginning, the movement took advantage of the new media development in the form of advertisement. Rajneesh followers, periodically, advertised their meditation sessions in the local newspapers. Later, a number of sannyasins and movement sympathizers started writing articles and regular columns. Swami Ananda features in the print and electronics media prominently. Currently, three TV stations broadcast Swami Arun's spiritual speeches once a week. Four FM radio stations have already broadcast his weekly "lectures." Currently, he writes a weekly column on "spirituality" in a popular Nepali language *Samaya* weekly magazine. Similarly, a number of Nepali language newspapers have published Rajneesh's teachings as serial columns. Readers, viewers and listeners' responses often have been positive. One reader, in 2004, for example, urged the editor of the country's largest circulating English daily newspaper to print more "optimistic" news items and articles. The reader cited Rajneesh as one of the persons in his mind.

Second, the Osho Tapoban has, in recent years, increased its activities in secular affairs. Nepal's example shows, further, that movement entrepreneurs quite

consciously employ the media. For example, it has started hosting creative writer and artists' exhibitions and workshops. It hosts an annual prize and honor for the "best" cartoonist affiliated with the local newspapers. The 2005 best cartoonist award went to a cartoonist of Nepal's mass circulating *Kantipur* daily newspaper. The daily newspaper, in return, gave the space to the news prominently. The Tapoban frequently invites journalists to its programs. In return, journalists not only describe the "peaceful' and "pollution free" Tapoban, but also make references to "energies" felt in the "Buddhafield." The serenity of the Osho Tapoban is usually contrasted with the crowded and polluted Kathmandu.

Third, efforts to cultivate positive relations to the media on the part of a "firm" is not new, but what surprised me the most was that the movement leaders were using "controversies" as resources consciously. At the time of my research one popular family digest published a detail and investigative report on factionalism, "corruption" and "sex scandals" among Rajneesh followers. To my much surprise, sannyasins were least perturbed, and I saw them quite enjoying the controversy. Also, they looked quite happy that the media were reporting the internal power struggle within the Tapoban. My inquiry revealed that sannyasins were deeply convinced that "people one day would know the truth," and newspaper reports would help the movement in the long run.

Possibly, we should abandon the idea that "cult controversy" harms religious movements. Depending upon the context, movements may try to cultivate controversies purposefully and strategically. In July 2005, for example, the Tapoban leaders submitted a video tape of a death funeral ceremony to Nepal's one of the private TV stations[12]. They had wanted to broadcast the death funeral of one of the dead sannyasins. The video tape, which I became able to obtain through a journalist,

[12] The TV station, for unknown reasons, did not broadcast the video.

juxtaposed a sannyasin's "death celebration" with the traditional death morning ritual. The death celebration depicts sannyasins dancing and yelling around the burning funeral pyre. I believe that the broadcast of the tape could have created a huge controversy among the people. This in turn could have generated interest in Rajneesh.

Undeniably, Rajneesh reached the thousands of Nepali households through the media in the 1990s. It is worth noting that I observed a marked difference in the process of seeking among the pre-and post-1990 followers. While the pre-1990 seekers tended to describe themselves as "in-born" seekers, the younger followers, who were initiated in the post-1990 period, were less likely to describe themselves in this term[13]. The younger sannyasins do not readily attribute their journey to sannyashood to "self-seeking;" rather they have vague notions of their attraction to the Guru. The Tapoban is located along a highway which Kathmandu residents often use on their weekend excursions. Apart from the usual "Buddhafield," the Tapoban, indeed, advertises itself as a serene tourist destination. The Osho Tapoban, in recent years, has become an important recreation center for sannyasins and the general public alike. It generates a significant amount of revenue by selling visitor tickets to the general public.

I suspect that the media's repeated description of the Tapoban as a "pollution free" and beautiful environment might have fuelled people's interest in the movement. A few young sannyasins and most notably many "Osho lovers" told me that they first visited the Tapoban for recreational or causal visit purposes. One young female sannyasin told me that she had gone to the place for a causal visit purpose on one of her weekend excursions where she found a "laughing and dancing religion." After a couple of meditation sessions, she became a sannyasin. Although

[13] It should be noted, however, that every one faultlessly thinks that their present sannyas life is the continuum of the spiritual journey which they started in their previous lives.

the effect of the media is hard to state conclusively, the growth of the mass media in the post-1990 period seems to be one of the crucial factors contributing to people's interest in the movement in the 1990s. The Rajneesh movement, undoubtedly, is the only innovative new religious movement to reach the Nepali households through the media in this scale.

Conclusion and Discussion

First, I applied theories developed in Western contexts to account for the rapid growth of a long stagnated religious movement in a developing society. The aim was to show, through the case study, that the new paradigm, indeed, adds to our understanding of the phenomenon of new religions in non-Western and non-Christian contexts. I, chiefly, showed that the issue of state regulation, organizational dynamics and religious entrepreneurship are quite central to the growth of new religions whether in the West or the East. Second, I showed that culture actively shapes and reshapes the trajectory of the religious movement. It is not that "profit" seeking entrepreneurs work in vacuum offering "otherworldly rewards" to ever demanding "religious consumers." In this sense, I showed that culture is at the center of the process. Linking structural forces and individual entrepreneurship, I showed an active interplay among structure, culture and agency (Sewell 1992). Obviously, the role of culture in religious movements is more than the narrowly defined "cultural continuity" or "human religious capital." Finally, I showed how the media is intricately related to religious entrepreneurship.

This study has a number of implications on contemporary issues in NRM studies. In sharp contrast to many religious movements in developing societies, this movement does not hint any trace of overt political insinuations or "resistance," to use the over-used used term in the sociology of culture. Its focus on individual

transformation might end up reproducing the existing "social structure" rather than transforming it in any meaningful way. Curiously, the movement, compared to its experience in the West, took an almost opposite growth trajectory in Nepal – when the movement was growing rapidly in the West, Nepal witnessed a stagnation phase; and when the movement in the West stagnated, the movement grew rapidly in Nepal. Thus, I suspect that many of the "demand" factors that "contributed" to the growth of NRMs in the West in the 1960s and 1970s were largely present in Nepal in the 1990s. While Stark (1987) notes that crisis periods are fertile for new movements, this might also mean that culturally grounded arguments as expressed in "cultural or moral confusion" or "civil religion" crisis are equally plausible reasons to account for the growth of the movement. Strangely, Nepal's Rajneesh followers employ modernity as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they use it as a weapon against the tradition; one the other hand, they show signs of rebellion against it.

My study also suggests that we have to rethink about impacts of defection on the fate of new religious movements. Bromley (2004) argues that defection by "high ranking members" is different than the usually reported low profile "exiting." (also Stark and Bainbridge 1985:122-124). Swami Ananda Arun was highly esteemed by Rajneesh, and he was one of the oldest and closest disciples of Rajneesh. His defection and subsequent entrepreneurship took the movement in Nepal to an entirely new direction. Second, defection necessarily may not mean "failure" as is usually assumed in the NRM literature (Rochford 1989). Viewed from above, one might conclude that this defection harmed the movement, but viewed locally, the defection seems to be important factor in the growth of the movement in Nepal. The creative adaptation and local frames in Nepal became possible partly because of its organizational decoupling from the movement headquarters, which could have

resisted ideological and cultural innovations. Second, my study underscores the fact that the physical proximity of a widely accepted central authority is crucial to the growth of religious movements. This is what Swami Arun offered in Nepal. This finding supports the recent reemphasize on the role of the leadership in the development of social movements (Morris 2000).

One interesting question will be whether the movement will peter out as has been the norm throughout the world or sustain the growth in the long run leading to "success." As Stark (1987) puts it in his theory, I found that many children of sannyasins have followed their parents' paths. Any causal visit to the Osho Tapoban and meditation sessions confirm that the number of young members and particularly young women (the movement until the early 1990s was exclusively male dominated) have increased dramatically beginning from the mid-1990s. By localizing Rajneesh's teachings and abandoning or postponing radical ideas about sex and commune, the movement leaders have succeeded in reducing the gap between them and the larger society.

The leadership is facing problem about the images of Rajneesh: How to offer Rajneesh to the people, his "radical" image or his localized and diluted versions? In other words, the question is: how will the movement meet a fine balance of "medium tension" (Stark 1996 1987) or "optimum strictness" Iannacone (1994 1997)? This is a difficult choice, which boils down to the question of how to balance cultural continuity and innovation. If the leadership chooses localized or diluted versions, it is possible that the movement as a whole might succumb to the strong pull of the traditional religions. The signs were already there. Many sannyasins, especially the older generations, told me that they considered Rajneesh as a worldly avatar of the popular Hindu trinity – *Brhama*, *Bishnu* and *Mahesh*.

I do not mean that this will necessarily cause a loss of the movement identity

altogether, however. But, it could alienate much younger urban followers, who seem to favor “radical elements” in Rajneesh’s teachings. Or as the new paradigm predicts it, this could lead to schism within the Tapoban with the more radical members distancing themselves from the movement core. Should this occur, it must be noted that this would be far cry from the “strict church” thesis, however (Iannacone 1994 1997). If the leadership adhere to more radical issues, it is likely to draw flakes from more puritan elements including Nepal’s powerful left groups. However, I believe that the movement is likely to draw attention of the people as the wind of change blows briskly in Nepal’s cultural landscape, and new religious entrepreneurs and firms continue to show up with even more attractive products.

One note of caution should be mentioned in the end. It should not be interpreted that the Rajneesh followers wholly subscribe to the movement leaders or entrepreneurs. It will be better to view the followers as falling on a continuum; some accept the leaders’ positions, while others are suspicious. Fluidity and multiplicity best describes the actual reception of the movement in Nepal. Indeed, the leaders and followers are quite aware of this as one leader conceded to me: although the quantity of the followers increased dramatically, the “quality” did not do proportionately. Perhaps, this is the price every movement has to pay as the movements try to maintain the fine balance between “quality” and quantity.

References

Adhikari, 1998. “Rajneesh: Sex and Conspiracy From Poona to Tapoban.” Kathmandu: *Sadhana Family Digest* (59): 6-39 [Text in Nepali].

Bainbridge, William Sims and Rodney Stark. 1979. “Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models.” *Sociological Analysis*. Vol. (40): 283-95.

Barker, E. 1986. “Religious Movements: Cult and Anticult Since Jonstown.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 12 (1986): 329-346.

Beckford, James A. 2003. “The Continuum Between ‘Cults’ and ‘Normal’ Religion.” Pp.26-32. in Lorne L. Dawson. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Bharti, Swami Atmateerth, Swami Satish Satyarthi and Swami Govinda Narayan Bharti (eds), 1985. *Asheesh*. Kathmandu: Asheesh Rajneesh Meditation Center.

Bimarsh, Saptahik. 1986. Volume (16): Nos. 1, 4, 5 and 6. [Weekly newspaper published from Kathmandu in Nepali].

Bista, Dor Bahadur. 1990. *Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization.* Calcutta: Orient Longman Ltd.

Bromley, David G. 1998. “Sociological Perspectives on Apostasy: An Overview.” In David G. Bromley, ed. 1998. *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Bromley, David G. 2004. “Leaving the Fold: Disaffiliation from New Religious Movements. In James R. Lewis. 2004. *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Carter, Lewis F. 1987. “The “New Renunciates” of the Bhagwan Shree Ranjneesh: Observation of Problems of Interpreting New Religious Movements” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Vol. 26 (2): 148-172.

Finke, Roger. 1997. “The Consequences of Religious Competition: Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change” Pp. 45-64. In Lawrence A. Young (ed.). *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment*. New York: Routledge.

Finke, Roger and Laurence R. Iannccone. 1993. “Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*. Vol. 527: 27-39.

Goldman, Marion S. and Lynne Isaacson. 1999. “Enduring Affiliation and Gender Doctrine for Shiloh Sisters and Rajneesh Sannyasins” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Vol. 26 (2): 411-422.

Goldman, Marion S. 2005. “When Leaders Dissolve: Considering Controversy and

Stagnation in the Osho Rajneesh Movement" PP. 119-138. In James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen. 2005. *Controversial New Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gellner, David N., Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton (eds). 1997. *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom*: *The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Gordon, James S. 1993. "A Letter from Poona, November, 1989." In Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (eds). *The Rajneesh Papers*. New Delhi: Motilal Banaraidas Publishers.

Iannacone, Laurence R. 1994. "Why strict churches are strong." *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. (99):1180-1211.

Jenkins, Philip. 2000. "False Prophets and Deluded Subjects: The Nineteenth Century." Pp. 25-45. In *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jina, Swami Ananda. 1993. "The Work of Osho Rajneesh: A Thematic Overview." In Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (eds). *The Rajneesh Papers*. New Delhi: Motilal Banaraidas Publishers.

Latkin, Carl A. et al. 1994. "Feelings After the Fall: Former Rajneeshpuram Commune Members' Perceptions of and Affiliation With the Rajneeshee Movement" *Sociology of Religion,* Vol. 55(1): 65-73.

Mann, Ted. 1993. "The Crazies-Who Follows Rajneesh and Why." In Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (eds). *The Rajneesh Papers*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers.

McCarthy, John and Mayer Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." *American Journal of Sociology.* Vol. (82): 1212-41.

Melton, J. Gordon. 1993. "Another Look at New Religion." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*. Vol. 527 (May 1993): 97-112

Nepal Census Report. 2003. Kathmandu: His Majesty's Government of Nepal. Accessed on July 2 2005: (http://www.mope.gov.np/population/chapter5.php).

Palmer, Susan J. 1993. "Rajneesh Women: Lovers and Leaders in a Utopian Commune." In Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (eds). *The Rajneesh Papers*. New Delhi: Motilal Banaraidas Publishers.

Palmer, Susan J. 1988. "Charisma and Abdication: A Study of the Leadership of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh." *Sociological Analysis*. Vol. 49 (2): 119-135.

Robbins, Thomas. 1988. *Cults, Converts, and Charisma: the Sociology of New Religious Movements*. London; Newbury Park [Calif.]: Sage Publications

Robbins, Thomas and Dick Anthony. 1982. "Deprogramming, Brainwashing and the Medacalization of Deviant Religious Groups" *Social Problems,* Vol. 29 (Feb, 1982):

282-297.

Rochford, E. Burke, Jr. 1989. “Factionalism, Group Defection and Schism in the Hare Krishna Movement.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 28(2) (Jun 1989): 162-179.

Rochford, E. Burke, Jr. 1985. *Hare Krishna in America.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Rochford, E. Burke, Jr. 1982. “Recruitment Strategies, Ideology and Organization in the Hare Krishna Movement.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 29(4) (Apr. 1982): 399-410.

Sewell, William H. Jr. 1992. “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation.” *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. (98):1-29.

Sharma, Arvind. 1993. “Rajneesh and the Guru Tradition in India.” In Susan J. Palmer and Arvind Sharma (eds). *The Rajneesh Papers*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers.

Sharma, Arvind. 1985. “The Rajneesh Movement.” Pp. 115-128. In Rodney Stark (ed.). *Religious Movements: Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers*. New York: Paragon House Publishers.

Sharot, S. 2002. “Beyond Christianity: A critique of rational choice theory of religion from a Weberian and comparative religions perspective.” *Sociology of Religion*. Vol. (63): 427–54.

Sherkat, Darren E. and Christophor G. Ellison. 1999. “Recent Development and Current Controversies in the Sociology of Religion” Annual Review of Sociology, Vol. 25 (1999): 363-394.

Sherkat, Darren. 1997. “Embedding Religious Choices: Integrating Preferences and Social Constraints into Rational Choice Theories of Religious Behavior.” Pp. 65-86. In Lawrence Young (ed.). *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment*. New York: Routledge.

Sherkat, Darren E. and John Wilson. 1995. “Preferences, Constrains, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy” *Social Forces,* Vol. 73: 993-1026.

Shinn, Larry. 1987. “The Future of an Old Man’s Vision: ISKCON in the Twenty-First Century.” Pp. 123-140. In David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond, eds. 1987. *The Future of New Religious Movements*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Shinn, Larry. 1985. “Conflicting Networks: Guru and Friend in ISKCON.” Pp. 95-114. In Rodney Stark, ed. 1985. *Religious Movements: Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers.* New York: Paragon House Publishers

Singh, Mohan Bikram (ed.). 2000. “Osho Religious Group And Its Impact on *Society.” Butwal: Bishwo Nepali Prakashan [Text in Nepali]*

Snow, David., Burke Rochford., Steven K. Worden, Robert Benford. 1986. Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review*. Vol. (51):456-81.

Stark, Rodney. 1997. "Bringing Theory Back In" Pp. 3-24. In Lawrence A. Young (ed.). *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment.* New York: Routledge.

Stark, Rodney. 1996a. "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model." *Journal of Contemporary Religion.* Vol. (11), 1996: 133-146

Stark, Rodney. 1987. "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model." Pp. 11-29. In David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond (eds.). *The Future of New Religious Movements*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Stark, Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge. 1985. "The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation." Berkely: University of California Press.

Swidler, Ann. 1995. "Cultural power and Social Movements." In Hank Johnston and Bert Klendermans (eds). *Social movements and Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." American Sociological Review. Vol. (51):273-86.

Urban, Huge B. 2000. "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism" *History of Religions,* Vol. 39(3): 268-304

Urban, Huge B. 1986. "Zorba The Buddha: Capitalism, Charisma and the Cult of Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh." *Religion* (1996): 161-182

Wagle, Dinesh and Deepak Adhikari. 2004. "Let's Surrender to the Feet of the Guru." *Nepal Weekly Magazine*. Issue 99. July 2004. [Text in Nepali].

Wallis, Roy and Steve Bruce. 1986. "Religion as Fun? The Rajneesh Movement." Pp. 191-224. In *Sociological Theory, Religion and Collective Action.* London: Rountledge and Kegan Paul.

Warner, Stephen R. 1997. "Convergence Rational Choice: Framework for the Scientific Study of Religion." Pp. 25-45. In Lawrence A. Young (ed.). *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment*. New York: Routledge.

Warner, Stephen R. 1993. "Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 98(5): 1044-93.

Whelpton, John. 2005. *A History of Nepal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, Bryan R. 1987. "Factors in the Failure of the New Religious Movements." Pp. 30-45. In David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond, eds. 1987. *The Future of*

New Religious Movements. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1998. "The New Spiritual Freedom." Pp. 52-84. In Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.