

prem-rawat-maharaji.info

Research Perspective

Although primarily constructed with concern for the needs of journalists and media researchers, this web site contains much that will be of use to academic and social researchers. The aim has been to provide a detailed account of the life of Prem Pal Singh Rawat and the movement that has supported him over four decades. For those needing a simple précis of the Rawat phenomenon a summary of the site is provided below.



The main body of the site is divided into six sections dealing with the person of Prem Rawat, the History of his movement, the Organizations that support Prem Rawat, the meditation, called Knowledge, the issue of whether Prem Rawat leads a Cult and lastly a section which deals with the many interesting Contradictions of Prem Rawat's life and the beliefs of his followers.

Academic interest in Prem Rawat has come primarily from those investigating New Religious Movements from a Social Sciences perspective, and from those researching cult movements from Social Sciences and Psychology perspectives

There is little published analysis focussing on the Prem Rawat movement, the work of Ron Geaves is the only recent English language publication of note, while Dutch academic Dr. Jan van der Lans published work in 1981. Geaves was one of Prem Rawat's first western disciples and has been criticised for publishing work on Rawat without making a clear declaration of his perspective.

For some researchers, this website itself may be considered unreliable because of the 'apostate test' and any student using this site as a reference should first consider issues raised by A Shupe & DG Bromley

While this website has been created with the purpose of promoting critical assessment of Prem Rawat and the movement that has grown up to support him, it is not a statement of apostasy. This site provides material of value for both researchers and students whose interests cover broad Sociological and Psychological issues as well as those concerned with the specific study of New Religious Movements.

R.Geaves - From Divine Light Mission to Elan Vital and Beyond: An Exploration of Change and Adaptation -
caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/nr.2004.7.3.45

Dr. Jan van der Lans - Followers of the guru: contemporary religious movements in the Netherlands" ISBN 90-263-0521-4, 1981
www.ksgv.nl/2-18.html

A. Shupe and D. G. Bromley (eds.), Anti-Cult Movements in Cross Cultural Perspective (New York: Garland,1994)

David G. Bromley (eds), The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements Praeger Publishers, 1998, ISBN: 0275955087nt

A fuller list of references is located in the Cult Question Section:
<http://www.prem-rawat-maharaji.info/index.php?id=42>

Summary

This web site has been developed by ex followers of Prem Pal Singh Rawat, otherwise known as Maharaji or Guru Maharaj Ji. While other sources of information about Prem Rawat exist their content is often not easily accessible to outsiders of the Prem Rawat movement, the purpose of this website is to provide an information source for the media and those interested in the character and history of Prem Rawat and the organizations that support and promote him.

WORSHIP OF A DIVINE CHILD

The 1960s and early 1970s saw numbers of Indian 'gurus' extend their following to Europe, the Americas and Australasia, Prem Rawat was one of those 'gurus'. What sets Prem Rawat apart from the likes of Maharishi Yogi, Sai Baba and Shri Rajneesh is that his mission commenced when he was just a child and that he inherited a ready made religious vehicle



for his activities - the Divine Light Mission. And unlike most other Indian 'teachers' Prem Rawat has subsequently sought to energetically recast his mission in a western style.

BELIEF SYSTEM

It has been a consistent contention of Prem Rawat and his followers that what Rawat teaches has nothing to do with 'belief' but is wholly 'experiential'. Prior to initiation an individual lacks the 'empirical' understanding claimed to be gifted by Prem Rawat, and therefore must adopt many beliefs about Prem Rawat in order to negotiate the 'aspirant' process. A very comprehensive belief system does exist within the Prem Rawat movement, although it has no supporting liturgy, prescribed text or publicly acknowledged historical reference.

ASSETS

The acquisition of wealth, particularly items of demonstrable value is important to Prem Rawat. In the early days Rawat's followers justified this acquisitive behaviour in two ways - firstly as a 'realised soul' Prem Rawat was above attachment to the 'baubles' of materialism, secondly that as the Lord of the Universe it was only right that Prem Rawat should have the best of everything. The question of Prem Rawat's personal wealth is currently addressed in terms that Prem Rawat is a 'successful private investor'. The actual sources of Prem Rawat's wealth are threefold:

Personal donations from a broad follower base in the years 1971-76

Personal gifts from wealthy followers, including transfers of substantial business interests.

A consistent flow of maintenance support provided via the DLM/Elan Vital in respect of Prem Rawat's promotional activities.

LIFESTYLE

Prem Rawat lives a life that is at complete variance to the renunciate style that he once recommended for his followers. It is tempting to compare the way that Prem Rawat conducts his life with that of a wealthy and reclusive celebrity, however Rawat's own self image suggests something closer to a 'Captain of Industry' - someone for whom the rewards of decision making brings an entitlement to Rolls Royces, an executive jet, an ocean going 'mega yacht', a personal chef, a branded watch collection and a mansion on every continent.

REVELATIONS

Prem Rawat has been able to ride out media criticism of his lifestyle because the vast majority of his followers have simply not acknowledged it. Over time however



a canon of more serious allegations has served to raise doubts, not only about Prem Rawat personally but also about the veracity of his teaching and the validity of the organizations that support him. The most consistent and seemingly unshakeable allegation is that Prem Rawat is a charismatic leader of a harmful cult.

ASCENDENCY

Although Prem Rawat and his supporting organizations now deny the religious content of Rawat's earliest teaching, there has been no attempt by Rawat to forsake the process of religious ascendancy that saw him titled 'guru'. Indeed without his religious Ascendancy it seems unlikely that Prem Rawat would have had success as a secular 'inspirational speaker'. The Ascendancy issue does provide more than just a presentational problem for Prem Rawat because even within Hinduism there is a very real question about the religious authority claimed by Prem Rawat's father.

THE HISTORY OF PREM RAWAT AND HIS MISSION

A TRADITION PASSED ON

Prem Rawat is a child of post Imperial rule India, he was born in 1957, just ten years after Independence from Britain. His schooling was in the English style and while his father pursued the very Indian career of 'religious teacher' the aspirations of the Rawat family seem to have been strongly informed by middle class Anglo/Indian attitudes. Prem was not only his father's favourite son, he was also a favourite of his father's followers and crucially of certain senior Mahatmas. The conferring of his father's 'guru' mantle onto the eight year old Prem in 1966 was as much a political decision within the Divine Light Mission as it was a religious consequence.

THE YOUNG GURU GOES WEST

In 1971, some six months before his fourteenth birthday Prem Rawat travelled to England in the company of Mahatma Gurucharnand, ostensibly to follow up on Gurucharnand's earlier evangelism amongst

Hindus in London. Supported by a few young British followers Rawat gained celebrity style exposure within the New Age movement and buoyed by this success and, inexplicably, in the light of his mother's objections, Rawat was granted a visa to visit the USA. Within months further young 'new agers' had been recruited and a Divine Light Mission organisation able to widely promote Rawat was in existence. What followed was five years of considerable expansion of the promotion of Prem Rawat and his western Divine Light Mission.

THE IMAGE MAKEOVER

The many contradictions of the western Divine Light Mission inevitably led to conflict not only for the organization, but for its adolescent 'leader'. As Rawat grew to adulthood he looked to fashion an image for himself and the Mission that was more to his liking. The religious aspects of the early days became an encumbrance for Rawat and he sought the creation of an organization that could deliver him as the 'branded' product. Spiritual teacher Guru Maharaj Ji became Maharaji 'humanitarian giver of a practical way to peace', this image served Rawat from the late 1970s through to the early 1990s when the 'inspirational speaker' label was subtly introduced.

MIDDLE AGE REVIVAL

From 1976 onwards Prem Rawat was able to rest on the 'success' of his first five years in the west. The number of early recruits provided a resource large enough to keep the Mission operating and a few wealthy contributors kept Rawat in a style to which he was by then accustomed. The DECA project had provided an effective fund raising base and Rawat's promotional activities increased during the 1980s in proportion to the growth of fund raising income. It was not however until the early 1990s that any significant reinvigoration of the 'mission' was attempted, when Rawat sought several costly transport

and property acquisitions. The buying of planes and land was predicated on a re commitment to an energetic propagation of the 'Knowledge' and the promise of a 'great leaps forward' in the promotion of Rawat's message.

IMAGES UNDER SCRUTINY

Prem Rawat's success has been founded on his ability to distance himself from any criticism; in his 'child god' incarnation this was easily achieved but has been far more problematic for him in adulthood. The contradictions in his transformation from 'guru' to 'inspirational speaker' are obvious to impartial observers, yet many premises seem oblivious to the inconsistencies of Rawat's message. The response of Rawat to what is in effect a replay of the conflicts that plagued him and his mission in the 1970s, has been to pursue elaborate revisionism and to avoid even the most benign public interrogation.



EX FOLLOWERS SPEAK OUT

Prem Rawat's autocratic leadership has impeded any expression of dissent within the Prem Rawat movement. Even as a mere 'inspirational speaker' he is presented as being beyond challenge by those who promote him. Although Prem Rawat frequently side steps religious matters, in the face of criticism, his organizations have adopted defensive responses pioneered by openly religious organizations such as Scientology and The Family.

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS THE KNOWLEDGE ?

Knowledge, The Knowledge and Self Knowledge are interchangeable terms in the language of Prem Rawat and his followers.

Understanding what is meant by these terms is unfortunately not a simple matter of definition, rather Knowledge, (or The Knowledge or Self Knowledge) has a spectrum of meaning which provides a level of ambiguity that is actively resistant to definition. In the most reductive sense 'Knowledge' refers to the meditation that Prem Rawat prescribes.

THE FOUR TECHNIQUES OF MEDITATION

At the heart of what Prem Rawat presents as his 'message' lays the concept of 'an achievement through meditation', the meditation is a gateway to an experience, and Prem Rawat is presented as a uniquely able gatekeeper. Prem Rawat prescribes four techniques of meditation, these are unexceptional and part of the wider canon of yoga; although the processes of preparation and teaching the techniques are elaborate they are taught without cultural reference.

PREPARATION FOR KNOWLEDGE

The term 'preparation' when used in relation to Prem Rawat's 'Knowledge' defines an active process by which the 'aspirant' is made 'receptive'. In the regime dictated by Shri Hans Ji, and which was followed in the early part of Prem Rawat's western mission - preparation was achieved by listening to satsang - sermons and speeches given by Mahatmas and sometimes by the Guru himself. Today, preparation is achieved by watching a succession of DVD

recordings of Prem Rawat speaking ; while the role of social contact with Rawat's followers and attendance of Events is not specified it nevertheless appears to have some contribution to the preparation process.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF MEDITATION AND ADHERENCE TO PREM RAWAT

Current followers of Prem Rawat attest to the benefits they have received as a result of their practice of the four techniques of meditation which Rawat refers to as 'Knowledge'. Many say that 'Knowledge' and the continued guidance of Prem Rawat has created a profound transformation in their lives for which they are eternally grateful.

MEDITATION: HARMFUL EFFECTS

No human activity is completely without risk of harmful outcome, nor is there any human activity that is wholly beneficial to every individual in every circumstance. Meditation is not an exception and suspending normal judgement about the effects of any meditational practice is not warranted, no matter how strongly the claimed benefits are promoted. Prem Rawat does not offer any caution about the meditation that he prescribes.

THE ORGANIZATIONS

THE MECHANICS OF PROMOTION

The religious origin of Prem Rawat's western Mission has served to obscure what has been a consistent and energetic impetus to promote Prem Rawat, firstly in his role as Guru and subsequently as

an Inspirational Speaker. Setting aside questions of the validity of Rawat's Mission, his career has been founded upon a single strategy - he is the Brand and effective promotion of the Brand, especially promotion designed to maintain Brand loyalty, is the source of his success.

PROMOTION OF PREM RAWAT IN INDIA

The Divine Light Mission created by Shri Hans Ji was Prem Rawat's first promotional base; DLM India provided the infrastructure for the events at which Rawat spoke in the years following his father's death, prior to Rawat's move westward. Subsequently the Divine United Organisation, recently renamed Raj Vidya Kender, became Rawat's Indian base. While RVK continues to promote Prem Rawat in India, it is notable that the funding of charitable activities held in concert with Events attended by Rawat in India, is claimed by the US based The Prem Rawat Foundation, and that TPRF also controls Public Relations relating to Rawat's Indian Events.

PROMOTION OF PREM RAWAT IN THE UNITED STATES

The founding of the US Divine Light Mission Incorporated provided the material base upon which all of Prem Rawat's subsequent success was built. The combination of a large cash rich group of followers and the felicitous legal arrangements for US charitable religious organizations made the US DLM Inc. the ideal vehicle for the rapid development of a programme of promotion suited to the authoritarian but still adolescent Prem Rawat. Re named Elan Vital Incorporated, the organization has served Prem Rawat's purposes for over 33 years.

PROMOTION OF PREM RAWAT IN EUROPE

In terms of income generation Europe has been second only to the US for those organizations which promote Prem Rawat, more pertinently Europe has proved a net generator of funds which have been channelled for use to the US, Australia and other non European countries. The primary channel for International funding of Prem Rawat's promotional activities is the Swiss based Elan Vital Foundation.

PROMOTION OF PREM RAWAT IN AUSTRALIA

Australia's significance to the promotion of Prem Rawat dates from the early 1990s when the 'Amaroo' development was begun. The huge commitment of funds and human resources involved has seen Amaroo become the greatest controversy for Prem Rawat since the exploitative DECA project, and it is certainly the longest running and most damaging controversy that Rawat has ever had to face. The Australian Elan Vital Incorporated and its commercial subsidiary Ivory's Rock Conference Centre Pty Ltd have become notable as an aggressive agency of 'defensive promotion' of Prem Rawat in the face of sustained criticism.

FINANCING THE PROMOTION OF PREM RAWAT

In stark contrast to their history of disastrous resource management, the western Divine Light Missions rapidly developed an effective capacity to garner funds. The willingness of Prem Rawat's followers to part with cash, personal property and even inheritances has been of remarkable proportions and 'giving' remains the basis of funding Rawat's promotion.

THE CULT QUESTION

A RECURRENT ANXIETY

The 'cult' accusation, with all its profoundly negative connotations, has been levelled against Prem Rawat and his supporting organizations ever since Divine Light Mission was set up outside of India. An accusation of course does not constitute a fact and it is important to understand why such accusations have been made, what have been their sources, what have been the motivations behind them and what is the evidence upon which they are based.

DEFINING A CULT

The word cult is in itself quite neutral, it does not signify something that is bad or dangerous, however when applied to organizations of very particular religious or political belief, 'cult' is now widely understood to indicate something potentially harmful. Rather like the term 'terrorist' acceptance of the label frequently depends upon whether one is on the 'inside' or the 'outside'. Indeed, the very existence of an 'inside' and an 'outside' is the point at which the 'cult question' must be addressed.

IS PREM RAWAT THE HEAD OF A CULT ?

It is perhaps only fair to first ask: Why should the 'cult question' be put in relation to Prem Rawat ? In the early days of the western Divine Light Mission the cult label was largely a response by a skeptical media and distressed family members toward an individual and organization that were quite literally, foreign to them. Thirty years on Prem Rawat and the organizations that support him, have

three decades of activity on which to be judged and which provides a 'case to answer'.

APOLOGISM AND PREM RAWAT

Apologism, also known as Apologetics, is historically specific to Christianity, it should not be confused with any expression of regret - Apologism is about justification. Apologism has become important to the presentation of Prem Rawat, it is inextricably linked to the recasting of Rawat as an 'inspirational speaker' and underlies what Rawat's critics claim is a process of blatant and dishonest revisionism.

CONTRADICTIONS

PREM RAWAT'S SELF IMAGE

It is not surprising that someone such as Prem Rawat who was treated as 'divine' in his formative years, would develop inconsistencies of character that cause contradictions in both public and private life. The difficulty for Prem Rawat and his followers is that Rawat is so closely identified with his mission and message, that his personal contradictions seem to colour the whole of his public presentation. The question that arises is: If the teaching is unique to the teacher, and the teacher is terribly flawed, then how sound is the teaching ?

MIND, INNER DECAY AND ILLUSION

Prem Rawat's 'message' as 'an 'inspirational speaker' seems intractably linked to his earlier 'message' as 'spiritual teacher'. The problem arises because while Rawat has comfortably made a presentational transition, he has been unable to find a linguistic

alternative with which to deliver the new 'inspirational' message. Although subject to a degree of revisionism Rawat's core references are still to the 'falsity of the human mind, to a fear of 'inner decay' and to the inadequacy of the physical world and human relationships.

THE QUESTION OF RELIGION

In addition to the very public fact that Elan Vital (previously Divine Light Mission) has, for the last 33 years been registered under US Government IRS Codes as, operating for Religious Purpose, there remain many aspects of Prem Rawat's presentation that appear religious. Prem Rawat frequently makes reference to religious texts and iconography, he talks about an inner self or 'heart' in a way that suggests a non material reality - something comparable to 'soul', and Rawat himself seeks and receives a degree of adulation that is common only to those holding elevated religious positions.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

It has always been Prem Rawat's strategy to withdraw from the challenge of facing incisive questioning, this strategy is followed by Elan Vital and the other organizations that promote Prem Rawat. Subjects that appear to cause Prem Rawat particular discomfort include the issue of his supposed divinity, his uniqueness as a 'master', his necessity to the experience of 'Knowledge' and the sources of misapprehension and misunderstanding about Prem Rawat.

For further information please contact info@prem-rawat-maharaji.info

end