

Rajneesh artifacts and ephemera collection, 1981-2004

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Rajneesh artifacts and ephemera collection, 1981-2004

Overview of the Collection

Title

Rajneesh artifacts and ephemera collection

Dates

1981-2004 (inclusive)

Quantity

7.5 linear feet, (25 containers)

Collection Number

Coll 275

Summary

The Rajneesh Artifacts and Ephemera Collection focuses primarily on artifacts and documents from Rajneeshpuram and the City of Rajneesh in the state of Oregon through the 1980s. It secondarily focuses on the Rajneeshes after they left Oregon. These items refer to "Osho," as his devotees later called Rajneesh.

Repository

[University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.](#)

UO Libraries--SPC, 1299

University of Oregon

Eugene OR

97403-1299

Telephone: 541-346-3068

Fax: 541-346-3485

spcarref@uoregon.edu

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to the public.

Collection must be used in Special Collections & University Archives Reading Room.

Languages

English

Sponsor

Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Historical Note [Return to Top](#)

The man who took the title Bhagwan was born Mohan Chandra Rajneesh in 1931, in the small rural Central Indian village of Kutchwada. His childhood was rebellious; he organized gangs that terrorized local villagers and led “experiments” encouraging others to take near-fatal risks so he could observe their reactions under stress. When he was 16 his girlfriend died and he sank into depression. He briefly attended classes at Hitkarini College, but was asked to leave after conflicts with an instructor in Philosophy and Logic. He transferred to D.N. Jain College in Jabalpur, where on March 21, 1953 he experienced his “enlightenment.” He received a B.A. in 1955 and an M.A. in Philosophy in 1957, both from the University of Saugar. In 1958 he lectured in Philosophy at the University of Jabalpur, and in 1960 was promoted to professor.

He traveled throughout India giving lectures criticizing socialism and Gandhi, and in 1964 he established his first meditation camp. A woman named Ma Yoga Laxmi, politically connected to India’s National Congress Party, became his first disciple and the manager of his affairs. In 1966 the University asked him to resign. He began using the title “Acharya,” or “Spiritual Teacher.”

In 1968 Rajneesh offended Hindu leaders by calling for freer acceptance of sex. At the Second World Hindu Conference in 1969 he enraged Hindu leaders by criticizing all organized religions and their priests. Settling in Bombay with a small group of disciples, he formed an official organization. He developed the concept of the neo-sannyasin, dressing them in the saffron robes worn by ascetic Hindu holy men, but Rajneesh’s neo-sannyasins embraced fleshly pleasures. He initiated his first six disciples and founded the Neo-Sannyas International Movement.

In 1971 Rajneesh assumed the title “Bhagwan,” or “the Enlightened One.” That year his first English-language book was published, *The Gateless Gate*. Recruitment expanded greatly. Rajneesh instructed followers to establish meditation centers in their home countries, and his camps attracted a following among dissatisfied wealthy Americans and Europeans, including therapists, alternative health professionals and people involved in the Human Potential movement.

By 1973 an extensive organization had developed, including two centers in England and one in the US. By the following year, centers existed in fifteen countries.

In 1974 the movement became internationally visible. Rajneesh added “Shree,” meaning “Sir,” to his name, and he established the Shree Rajneesh Ashram in Poona. It included a publishing

business, the Rajneesh International Meditation University, and educational and meditation programs. The Rajneesh Foundation was established to underwrite the activities. The Book of Secrets II offered a list of Rajneesh centers outside India, and demonstrations by Hindu traditionalists, outraged by the holy robes on Bhagwan's uninhibited followers, attracted journalistic attention.

In 1975 Rajneesh added Western therapies to Eastern mysticism. Violence and openly sexual explorations damaged their reputation in India and later in Oregon. Rajneesh's discourses now consisted mostly of racial and obscene jokes. In June 1980 Rajneesh began his period of "silence." Police investigations, violent incidents, and lawsuits from neighbors abounded; the government denied visas to Ashram visitors.

In 1981, Sheela Silverman, the effective business manager of the movement, bought a mansion in Montclair, New Jersey for a meditation center. Rajneesh came to the US and they bought a ranch and land in Central Oregon near Antelope, where they relocated.

In June 1981 the infrastructure for a large commune was underway on the ranch, but publicly they denied building a major spiritual center. By September local residents tried to block development by organizing and lobbying. The group "1000 Friends of Oregon" filed motions. Rajneesh's lawyers initially won by claiming discrimination, but county commissioners and land-use boards were reluctant to issue further permits.

The US Immigration and Naturalization Service noticed high numbers of residents with temporary visas, and questioned Rajneesh's intention to permanently reside in the US. In October the Portland INS office investigated possible immigration fraud. Rajneesh requested permanent residence status as a "refugee religious leader," securing a temporary visa extension, but investigations continued.

By November growth on the ranch had been blocked. Rajneesh's leaders asserted dominance in Antelope with its already existing Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB), and moved towards incorporating a new city (Rajneeshpuram) which would form a growth boundary of its own. Opposition among locals increased.

By 1982 the Oregon commune could sustain 2,000 residents and as many as 5,000 visitors. Their commercial enterprises spread into Antelope. Residents responded with rigid code enforcement, a moratorium on permits, and an attempt to "disincorporate" the town itself, which was defeated in a bitter election covered by the national media. The Rajneeshes succeeded due to their then-larger numbers. The incorporation of Rajneeshpuram and the political coup in Antelope allowed them freer land-use, but made local criticisms more credible. Dissent appeared in the ranks, and several core members were expelled as Sheela assumed almost total control.

Locals tried to halt the movement's continuing expansion. In August the new Rajneeshpuram city council was elected, and by September they adopted a Comprehensive Plan and Development Code. The incorporation and the development plan were challenged, but the community kept building as more followers arrived. By November the Rajneeshes controlled

Antelope, with local elections formalizing their authority. The town was renamed “City of Rajneesh” to distinguish it from the nearby ranch, which was called “Rajneeshpuram.”

On December 23, Rajneesh’s requests for visa reclassification and permanent resident status were denied. Rajneeshee attorneys appealed and the decision was later rescinded.

In early 1983 the community’s institutional autonomy grew. The commune completed the Meditation University, hotel, cabins and cottages, townhouses, and other facilities to accommodate its projected 1995 population. Followers demonstrated and wrote letters about Rajneesh’s deportation. Leaders criticized state and federal officials. Portland INS ordered Rajneesh to leave the country by mid-February. The order was withdrawn in mid-January, but Rajneesh’s status remained undetermined. Commune members became increasingly abusive of local residents, all but 13 of whom had moved out of the area.

In March and April of 1983, the Oregon Court of Appeals rejected Rajneeshee assertions that the Land Use Board of Appeals had no jurisdiction over incorporation of new cities, and the Rajneeshees appealed to the Supreme Court.

Two disastrous management decisions doomed the movement. First, they used Antelope as a “hostage” town to stop challenges against incorporating Rajneeshpuram. The City of Rajneesh (formerly Antelope) council raised taxes and fees for services, harassed the remaining local residents, restricted entry to public offices and took over the Antelope school. Finally, they offered to “trade” Antelope for recognition of Rajneeshpuram’s legal status. This drew many neutrals to the side of the townspeople; opponents questioned the allocation of public funds to an almost completely privately owned city.

The second issue was the control the “church” exerted in protecting Rajneeshpuram from outside interference. The links between the church, the commune, and the city formed the basis for a suit on first amendment grounds by then-Oregon Attorney General Dave Frohnmayer.

In June state officials investigated church-state conflicts. Ma Prem Sangeet, the City Attorney, claimed the city was independent of its sole landowner, as well as the movement that was its entire reason for being. The Attorney General was unconvinced and investigated relationships among Rajneeshee legal entities.

In September an organization of “Concerned Oregonians” began actively observing the Antelope school. They called for investigations and lobbied for the termination of state funding. Frohnmayer released an opinion that sparked a lawsuit challenging incorporation on the basis of church and state separation issues. Sannyasins responded by engaging in paramilitary training, wiretapping, and mass poisonings, undermining their already diminishing credibility.

In autumn 1984 Rajneeshees tried to take control of Wasco County using lenient Oregon voter registration laws to pad elections. They bused in thousands of homeless to swell the population enough to ensure victory at the polls. Oregon passed “emergency procedures” requiring interviews of new voters gauging their residency intentions; many were denied registration. On November 16 two uncontested candidates for Wasco County Commissioner were elected; a

record 92% of county residents voted. Afterwards the commune dumped the homeless folks into surrounding areas.

In September, at Sheela's request, they placed salmonella on food in eight salad bars in The Dalles area. 750 people fell ill in two outbreaks of poisoning; 45% required hospitalization. This was a "test" to determine if enough voters could be disabled in case of a close race. Some sannyasins left, disillusioned by the homeless experiment and the poisonings. Community income decreased and more foreign centers failed.

On September 13, 1985 Sheela told a few leaders that the commune was collapsing and she was leaving. Fearful of arrest, she left for Europe the next day with Ma Anand Puja, medical corporation director and accomplice in the salmonella incident. Two staff members accompanied the women. On September 15, ten more leaders fled.

On September 16 Rajneesh called a press conference announcing plans for a management change and restructuring. He denounced those who left and claimed ignorance of the community's actions. He told the sannyasins to sell the Antelope properties to former residents, restore the town's name, and begin giving up control. He declared dress codes and sannyasins' names optional, and selected new leaders from among his wealthier American disciples. A joint federal and state investigative task force moved to Rajneeshpuram. Investigators confirmed evidence regarding wiretapping, salmonella cultures, and sham marriages, among other crimes.

By September 23 there was enough to indict Rajneesh and seven others on several conspiracy and perjury charges. A Federal Grand Jury indicted Sheela, Puja, and Bhadra.

On October 27, 1985 Rajneesh boarded a Lear jet with a physician, his housekeeper, his cook, and other sannyasins. They headed to Bermuda with a .38 revolver, Teflon coated ammunition, \$58,522 in currency, and \$1 million in jewelry. From North Carolina, around midnight, Ma Vedanta Hamya and Swami Prem Prasad tried to rent two jets to follow Rajneesh, but the pair was detained. When the jets from Oregon arrived, the travelers were arrested.

German federal police accompanied by FBI agents arrested Sheela, Puja, and Bhadra on October 28, 1985 at Haesern in West Germany. Federal and state charges of attempted murder and other crimes were brought against them, and they were extradited to Portland on February 6, 1986. Sheela was denied bail. A complex plea-bargaining arrangement was worked out in which Rajneesh left the country and Sheela, Puja and Bhadra received prison sentences. They pleaded guilty to some charges, innocent to others. Rajneesh was fined \$400,000, given ten years suspended, five on probation, and was "allowed" to leave the US. Sheela was fined and sentenced to 64 years served concurrently with a highest single term of 20 years. She served two and a half years in a federal medium security prison in Pleasanton, California and was released early for good behavior.

After Rajneesh's departure, the commune's bank accounts were frozen and most residents departed. The ranch was sold at auction; the community assets liquidated. After returning to India, Rajneesh embarked on a "world tour," but many countries either forcibly ejected him or only allowed his plane to land long enough to refuel. He died in India in 1990.

Content Description[Return to Top](#)

The Rajneesh Artifacts and Ephemera Collection focuses primarily on artifacts and documents from Rajneeshpuram and the City of Rajneesh in the state of Oregon through the 1980s. It secondarily focuses on the Rajneeshes after they left Oregon. These items refer to “Osho” as Rajneesh was later called by the sannyasins. The collection is arranged in two series, “Artifacts” and “Ephemera.” Where possible, the items reflecting the Rajneeshes in Oregon are arranged first, with artifacts and ephemera representing “Osho” coming later.

The collection was amassed through individual gifts and from other manuscript collections in Special Collections and University Archives containing artifacts or ephemera.

Use of the Collection[Return to Top](#)

Restrictions on Use

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Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to identifiable living individuals represented in this collection without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications (e.g. a cause of action for invasion of privacy may arise if facts concerning an individual's private life are published that would be deemed highly offensive to a reasonable person) for which the University of Oregon assumes no responsibility.

If a researcher finds sensitive personal information in a collection, please bring it to the attention of the reading room staff.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Rajneesh Artifacts and Ephemera Collection, Coll 275, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Or.

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Series I: Artifacts[Return to Top](#)

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box		
1	Light pink T-shirt: "The City of Rajneeshpuram"	
1	Deep pink T-shirt: "Rajneesh, The Newspaper"	
1	Maroon shirt (long sleeve): "The Rajneesh Times"	
2	Red long sleeve sweatshirt: "Rajneeshpuram"	
3	Mauve Totes nylon raincoat for sale at the Rajneeshpuram Devarteerth Shopping Mall	
4	Gray T-shirt "Nuke the Guru" (4 shirts)	
5	White T-shirt "Bhagwan Busters"	
6	Meditation pillow, pink	
7	Meditation pillow, faded pink	
8	"Bullet necklace" made up of bullets, beads, and a button that says "Descendant, Oregon Pioneers, Bosswhan" and a photograph of an unidentified pioneer. This "necklace" was made to mock the mala necklace worn by the sannyasins	
9	Buttons: "Descendant Oregon Pioneers (3); "I'm Voting Nov 6th Rajneeshpuram Precinct 19" (1)	
10	Framed note (4 3/4" x 6 1/2") written on the back of a Rajneesh Times scrap of paper: "Beloveds, At daytime the windows and curtains should be closed. So the air conditioning system doesn't brake [sic] down. It's nice and cool when you are coming home. Love Cleaner" Hearts and clover drawn in top right corner.	
11	Box of three condoms, packets of lubricating jelly, packet of latex gloves, and brochure, "AIDS will kill two thirds of the world's population" printed by the Rajneesh Medical Corporation, P.O. Box 8 Rajneeshpuram, Or 97741.	
11a	Box of three condoms, packets of lubricating jelly, 4 packets of latex gloves, and brochure, "AIDS will kill two thirds of the world's population" printed by the Rajneesh Medical Corporation, P.O. Box 8 Rajneeshpuram, Or 97741.	
12	Packet of Rajneesh Neo-Tarot cards (2 decks) published by the Rajneesh Foundation International, 1983.	1983
13	Silver coins (2). On obverse of each: Silver Trade Unit, One Troy Ounce, .999 Fine Silver. On face: 1) "Bye Bye Bhagwan," October 28, 1985. Picture of earth, with outline of Oregon, moon and stars in background. Bhagwan on flying carpet, waving good- bye to Oregon. 2) "Antelope Bagged the Bhagwan," October 1985. Shining sun in the background, Bhagwan bending over and an antelope poking him in the rear-end.	1985
14	Gray hand towel embroidered with "Osho" in Sanskrit.	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
15	Small plastic container of eye shadow with the word "Rajneesh" and the Rajneesh logo of two doves on lid. Purchased by the donor at a boutique at the Devateerth Mall at Rajneeshpuram.	
16	Mala with wood beads and medallion with photograph of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's face	
17	Watch called "The Lady Osho," commercially available (wrist watch is heavily jeweled with rhinestones, modeled after the elaborate watches worn by Bhagwan)	2002
	Folder	
18	1 Decoupaged black and white photograph of Bhagwan sipping a cup of tea	
18	2 Women's restroom sign	
19	Anti-Rajneesh political button "Save Antelope" (P.O. Box 66, Antelope, OR 97001) worn by Bill Bowerman	July 1985
19	"I am NOT a Rajneesh" button	
19	"I am NOT an Oregon pig" button	

Series II: Ephemera [Return to Top](#)

Container(s)	Description	Dates
Box	Folder	
1	1 Postcards of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh	
1	2 Pictures of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh	
1	3 Postcards of Rajneeshpuram	
1	4 Postcards of Rajneeshpuram	
1	5 Postcards of Rajneeshpuram	
1	6 Photograph on card, "View from sitting room to garden door of Bhagwan's trailer at Rajneeshpuram"	
1	7 Photograph on card, "View of Bhagwan's bathroom—Rajneeshpuram"	
1	8 Photograph on card, "View of top of crematorium at Rajneeshpuram"	
1	9 Invitation to celebrate Rajneeshpuram's second anniversary	May 18, 1984- May 19, 1984
1	10 Invitation to celebrate Rajneeshpuram's third anniversary	May 25, 1985- May 26, 1985
1	11 Rajneeshpuram and Vicinity Telephone Directory	1985
1	12 Booklet: Rajneeshpuram, An Oasis (Rajneeshpuram, Oregon: Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, Rajneeshpuram)	1982

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1	13 Booklet: Rajneeshpuram, An Oasis (Rajneeshpuram, Oregon: Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, Rajneeshpuram)	1982
1	14 Booklet: Rajneeshpuram: The First Annual World Celebration (Rajneeshpuram, Oregon: Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, Rajneeshpuram)	1982
1	15 Booklet: Rajneeshpuram: The First Annual World Celebration (Rajneeshpuram, Oregon: Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, Rajneeshpuram)	1982
1	16 Booklet: Rajneeshpuram: The First Annual World Celebration (Rajneeshpuram, Oregon: Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune, Rajneeshpuram)	1982
1	17 Visitor's map, Rajneeshpuram Chamber of Commerce	
1	18 Rajneesh Foundation International Catalog of books, audio and videotapes	
1	19 Meditation booklet for Chidvilas Rajneesh Meditation Center	
1	20 Decal "I've Been to The City of Rajneeshpuram" (2 copies)	
1	21 Plastic slide holder "Slides of the City of Rajneeshpuram and Rancho Rajneesh, \$10.00	1984
1	22 <i>Bhagwan</i> (Number 6)	1984
1	23 Visitor's Day Pass to Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune	
1	24 "Please do not disturb" sign used at the Hotel Rajneesh	
1	25 Bookmark, "Black is needed as much as white in fact, without black, white will lose all meaning"	
1	26 Order form for book, audio, and video of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh	
1	27 Note cards with quotes of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh	
1	28 Sign, "Be Aware No Smoking" with double dove symbol	
1	29 Sign, "Save Water Please do not flush after peeing"	
1	30 Bumper sticker, "Hallelujah! Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh"	
1	31 Color copies of two Rajneesh bumper stickers: "The Goose is Out" and "Only One Sky"	
1	32 Map, anti-Rajneesh spoof, "State of Rajneesh" ("The Original Plans of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh")	
1	33 Hunting Season notices, anti-Rajneesh spoof	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
1	34 Fundraising flyer from the 1000 Friends of Oregon, with an envelope with the words "Rajneeshpuram Alert!" on the front	
1	35 Booklet: Shay, T.L. <i>Rajneeshpuram and the Abuse of Power</i> . West Linn, Oregon: Scout Creek Press	1985
1	36 Christie's auction catalog offering some of Bhagwan's jeweled watches	September 17, 1987
2	1 Invitation to a reading by Professor Marion Goldman at Knight Library, University of Oregon	February 3, 2000
2	2 Post card of "Sisters" Osho Sannyasins' restaurant at Pike Place Market, Seattle	1998
2	3 Osho International Foundation publications—postcards	
2	4 Osho International Foundation publications—brochures	
2	5 Osho International Foundation publications—booklets on meditation	
2	6 Osho International Foundation publications—Osho Multiversity publications	
2	7 Osho International Center for Consciousness in Organizations—brochure	
2	8 Osho International Foundation publications—Osho meditation booklet	
2	9 <i>Osho Times</i>	Fall 1999
2	10 <i>Osho Times</i>	April 2004
2	11 New England Institute for Transforming Consciousness—brochure	
2	12 Business card of Karuna Kress, director of the Osho Center for Consciousness in Organizations	
2	13 Business card of Sheela Birnstiel (formerly known as "Ma Anand Sheela"), director of "Matrusaden" and "Bapusaden" nursing homes in Switzerland	2004
2	14 Membership card for the Shree Rajneesh Ashram in Poona	February 1978
2	15 Letterhead, envelopes, currency card	
3	Scrapbook about Bhagwan Rajneesh	
	Folder	
3	1 Bumper sticker—"Antelope... Better Dead Than Red" (oversize)	
3	2 Publicity packet regarding Bhagwan's arrest, "Bhagwan: Twelve Days That Shook the World" (oversize)	
3	3 Osho Commune International brochure (oversize)	

Container(s)	Description	Dates
3	4 Osho International Foundation—Poster, “Osho Tribute 2000”	2000
4	1 Quote by Bhagwan about Pythagoras (calligraphic design)	September 1982
4	2 Poster—“The Goose is Out” – photograph of Bhagwan walking away from a Learjet	
4	3 Poster—Sannyasins lined up outside awaiting the arrival of Bhagwan in a Rolls Royce	
	Rajneesh Newsclippings Scrapbook	1981-1985
Box		
5	Map: Muddy Ranch, Oregon topographical map	1987
5	Map: Rajneeshpuram and vicinity	1983
5	Map: City of Antelope, Oregon	1991

Names and Subjects [Return to Top](#)

- Subject Terms :
- Anti-cult movements--Oregon--Antelope
- City Planning
- Oregon
- Rajneeshees--Oregon--Rajneeshpuram
- Religion
- Religion and state--Oregon--Rajneeshpuram
- Religious communities--Oregon--Rajneeshpuram

- Personal Names :
- Osho, 1931-1990
- Rajneesh, Bhagwan Shree, 1931-

- Corporate Names :
- Osho International Foundation
- Rajneesh Neo-Sannyas International Commune

- Geographical Names :
- Antelope (Or.)--Religion
- Rajneeshpuram (Or.)
- Wasco County (Or.)--Politics and government--20th century

- Form or Genre Terms :
- Artifacts
- Coins
- Ephemera
- Printed ephemera

- T-shirts

**Finding aid prepared by Finding aid prepared by Christa Orth, Avi Neuman, and Rose Smith
2004**

