STRUCTURAL ADAPTATION AND "SUCCESS" IN THE TRANSPLANTATION OF AN ASIAN NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: THE BRAHMA KUMARIS IN THE WESTERN WORLD, PART I

Julia Day Howell and Peter L. Nelson

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines processes of organization-environment interaction in a New Religious Movement (NRM), the Brahma Kumaris, which in the last three decades has spread from its home in India to the West and other parts of the world. Emerging on the Western scene first in England and substantially shaped by the early

Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion,
Volume 8, pages 1-33.
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ISBN: 0-7623-0216-X

involvement of expatriate Indians and Australians, the movement has avoided the American-style commercialization that has detracted from the appeal in Europe of other Asian-derived NRMs. Using Stark's (1987) model of factors that facilitate the "success" of NRMs, this chapter shows that processes of organization-environment interaction have differed substantially in the Indian and the Western contexts. Adaptation to the Western environment, examined through case materials on the Australian branches of the Brahma Kumaris, has required changes to organization structures that permit a higher proportion of the membership in Western countries to participate in "household-collective" (Lofland and Richardson 1984) type institutions. Risks of movement decline through the consequent loss of contact with potential new members are shown to be lessened by the greater participation of Western "household-collective" members in the work force.

INTRODUCTION

In their study of New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Europe, Beckford and Levasseur (1986, p. 36) observed that the post-World War II movements, including Hindu and Buddhist ones ultimately of Asian origin, had been introduced to Europe from North America. This American "hot housing" of new religions bred into them a style of commercialization and public relations that actually detracted from their appeal to Europeans (Beckford and Levasseur 1986, p. 37; Hummel and Hardin 1983, p. 23). While noting one exception (the Rajneesh Foundation drew substantial numbers of Europeans to its Indian ashrams before its relocation to the United States and subsequent world-wide spread), Beckford and Levasseur missed the already vigorous and publicly visible Brahma Kumaris (BK) organization, which, while Indian in origin and even today overwhelmingly Indian in membership, nonetheless had been successfully launched into the Western world in 1971 from a stage in England.

The Brahma Kumaris also stand as an exception to one other of Beckford's and Levasseur's observations, namely that "to the best of [their] knowledge, no significant relations exist between any NRM [in the West] and ethnic or national minorities. This is to say, no movement has managed to recruit disproportionately from such a source" (1986, p. 41). Actually, the BKs' first "overseas" outpost was

among Indian expatriates in London, and these migrants have remained a substantial majority of the London branch, even though it early on opened itself to Western seekers. This association with the Indian ethnic community may well have helped the BKS overcome the conditions which Beckford and Levasseur (1986, p. 38) suggest inhibited the birth (or rebirth, in the case of Asians traditions) of other religious movements on European soil: the lack of financial means, if not lack of potential interest among the public.

Another important factor in the successful launch of BK world operations from England was the prominence in the early London branch of Australians, who, together with Europeans converted through the London center, went on to set up some of the first predominantly Western branches in Australia. The Brahma Kumaris' prohibition on soliciting funds from outsiders and its reliance on voluntary contributions from members sat well with Australians, who like Europeans, often express suspicion of commercialized spiritual "products." The BKS' strong growth in Australia then provided a high proportion of the pioneers who went on to establish outposts in other Western countries (including several on the European continent) and elsewhere in the world. The Australian movement thus has had an important role in carrying the Brahma Kumaris' message not only beyond India, but beyond overseas Indian enclaves.

The survival and present success of the movement in Australia, however, necessitated certain changes to the structure of the organization. This paper examines the evolution of the BK organization on Australian soil with the aim of shedding light on the organizational dynamics that have enabled the movement both to survive in that country and to spread elsewhere in the West, where similar adaptations have been instituted. It is argued that these dynamics are responses to processes of organization-environment interaction that differ significantly in the Western and the Indian contexts.

To facilitate generalization from the BK case to those of other religious movements and to frame the comparison, this paper uses Stark's (1987) model of circumstances facilitating or impeding movement "success." In this model the chances of a movement's "success" (defined as "a continuous variable based on the degree to which a religious movement is able to dominate one or more societies" [1987, p. 12]) are greatest where its belief system has substantial continuity with pre-existing faiths, where there is medium tension

with the wider society, where leadership succession problems are resolved, where dense internal networks have been formed without preventing contact with potential recruits, where the "ecology" is favorable, and where the movement's practices facilitate recruitment through reproduction (1987, pp. 13-23).

In the BK case, the Indian and Western branches have had different relationships with their environments. Whereas in India BK beliefs have substantial continuity with pre-existing faiths, in the Western environment there is little continuity. In both India and the West, BK practices at first generated a high degree of tension with the social life of the wider society, which moderated later on. What differed were the particular practices that caused the most acute tensions in the two social environments. In the Indian context the more readily distinguishable and less intensely involved lay membership have counter-balanced the tendencies of the monastic core membership to isolate the organization. In contrast, in Western branches, where a laity is not readily distinguishable and where internal networks are dense, the organization has had to innovate other compensatory mechanisms for reaching out to potential new members. In other respects the Indian and Western branches have similar advantages and liabilities as regards maintaining and expanding membership in the future: an early, but possibly temporary, resolution of leadership succession problems that might threaten mobilization; a moderately favorable "ecology;" and practices which limit recruitment through reproduction.

It is argued that the success of the BKS in the West is in part attributable to modifications of the Indian BK organizational pattern that have helped lessen problems encountered in the Western environment. These include modifications to the original Indian structure of movement organization (in Lofland and Richardson's [1984] terminology, a hybrid of "household-collective" and "congregational" type structures) that permit a higher proportion of the Australian membership to participate in the "household-collective" type institutions. There members both receive greater social support from colleagues and are more protected from interaction with unsympathetic views, thereby forestalling to a degree membership erosion such as experienced by elements of other NRMs exposed to high levels of "outsider" contact (Wright 1988, p. 155; Barker 1988, pp. 178-179). This adaptation, which is compatible with the "world rejecting" stance (Wallis 1979, 1984) of the movement and

so is important in a culturally alien environment, nonetheless has come at a cost: it diminishes BK access to potential new recruits, a problem experienced by other NRMs with sharp boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Stark 1987, p. 23).

The centripetal force embodied in the "household-collective" institutions has been partially counterbalanced, however, by other, centrifugal forces. One of these was generated by the greater participation in the public work force of members in "household-collective"-type institutions from the earliest days of the Western branches. It is argued that this was an adjustment to the differing mix of funding opportunities and constraints that BKs faced in the Western environment. This analysis thus demonstrates the proposition that NRMs, like social movements in general, must operate through organizations which are inevitably "subject to internal and external pressures that effect their stability and longevity" (Wright 1988, p. 156, following Zald and Ash 1966).

The analysis is preceded by an account of data sources and methodology. A brief summary of the historical background and core beliefs of the Brahma Kumaris is also provided as context for the subsequent discussion of organizational dynamics.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The Western case materials utilized in this analysis derive from a study conducted by the authors on the Brahma Kumaris between 1991-1995. The study was centered in Australia, where we concentrated most of our participant observation and in-depth interviewing, but we also visited BK centers and personnel in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States as well as in New Delhi and Mt Abu, the spiritual center of the organization in India. Unless otherwise indicated, the sources of information on the organization's history, structure and beliefs are our observations and interviews. In addition, in 1992 the Australian organization graciously helped us administer a questionnaire to its membership on their social backgrounds, the types and frequency of their involvement with the organization and their attitudes to spiritual and social issues. It was distributed at all of the Australian BK centers to people considered by their administrative officers to be following all the rules and practices incumbent upon the fully committed.

Questionnaires were received from 194 of the estimated 250 full members. BK officials in the United States and the United Kingdom did not wish to have the questionnaire distributed there. The Australian survey is thus the sole source of the statistical material presented here, other than that referenced to the BK leadership (reporting from their own records) or to secondary sources.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND BELIEFS

Origins in India

The Brahma Kumaris (or colloquially, "Raja Yoga") organization was founded in 1937 as "The Prajapita Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University" by the charismatic Sindhi diamond merchant and spiritual teacher Dada Lekhraj. Lekhraj (or "Brahma Baba" as he is affectionately known) was moved to create the organization as a result of a series of life-transforming visions. In those visions he saw the four-armed form of Vishnu, Shiva and the coming cataclysmic destruction of the world. Thereafter the Lord Shiva began speaking through him daily, dictating messages that became the basis for the Brahma Kumaris' teachings.

Arising from the Hindu tradition (which was the heritage of Lekhraj's family), the BK teachings are nonetheless markedly distinct in several respects. They retain from that tradition beliefs in karma, rebirth and the eternal recurrence of four ages of time. However, the BKs teach that the cycles are far shorter than other Hindus believe them to be—a mere 5000 years—and that rebirth in the Golden Age at the beginning of the cycles, not enlightenment, is the ultimate goal of spiritual life. Further, unlike most variants of the Hindu tradition (but not uniquely so [see Fuchs 1965]), the BK teachings are millenarian. They draw urgent attention to humanity's present place in the latest cycle: we are at its very end, the point of greatest decline and disarray, at the very brink of the cataclysm after which the Golden Age will be restored. This calls for drastic measures; those who would be reborn in that Golden Age must purify themselves. Purification is to be accomplished not only by abstaining from sex, alcohol, meat and other spiritually dulling foods such as onions, but also by refusing any food not cooked by those observing the BK purity rules. The observance of these rules,

combined with the practice of meditation, accomplishes the spiritual refinement which enables the soul to know its divine nature. Full realization of divinity is then enjoyed in the Golden Age when those who have followed the BK teachings will be reborn as actual deities, living in happy congress with their founder-become-Lord of that blessed time, Narayan. Others will have to wait for rebirth in a time suitable to their lesser spiritual natures, whether it be the Silver, Bronze or, worst, Iron Age. Those less fortunate ones, however, may be helped through the trauma of the fast approaching last days by learning to calm their minds and understand the deeper meaning of the world's travails.

While awaiting the cataclysm, those prepared to purify themselves and thereby become "brahmins" (or more casually "BKs"), use their meditations to commune with "The Supreme Soul," Shiva. They may also meet Brahma Baba, who not only was Shiva's medium while "in the body" (when he wrote down messages from Shiva), but who remains a means of special contact with the divine in his spiritual form. Brahmins, knowing their own divine nature, do not worship other deities and they rue the ignorance of Hindus who practice what they call "bhakti" or "deity worship." Like other Hindus, BKs celebrate the major Hindu holidays but they give them their own interpretations.

When Dada Lekhraj had his first visions, he had been conducting "satsangs" (informal devotional meetings) in his home around readings from the Bhagavadgita, a Hindu scripture. Those who attended were mostly his well-to-do business colleagues' wives and children who found in the Gita readings a socially respectable break from the confines of their homes. This folksy scene was electrified with new potentials, however, when Lekhraj began to have a his extraordinary experiences. Suddenly intimate with divinity, those gathered for the *satsangs* started being transfixed in their teacher's presence, spontaneously experiencing visions of Krishna of the sort that prove elusive to dedicated *bhaktas* (devotees of Hindu deities) and *sannyasins* (renunciants committed to spiritual learning, austerities and yoga). News of the remarkable happenings attracted others who, together with participants from the original *satsang* group, became the core of the newly formed Brahma Kumaris.

As it happened, the members were mostly female. As the teachings on purity took form, Lekhraj made it clear that women were not to be prevented from following the rules, despite the fact that in the

mainline Hindu tradition spiritual purification through celibacy had been the nearly exclusive preserve of males. Lekhraj actually went so far as to invert the traditional Hindu view that women are inferior spiritual vessels, only able to seek salvation through devotion to their husbands, and extolled what he saw as the often superior virtues of women. Further, through the establishment of an all-female board for the Brahma Kumaris he attempted to compensate women for their unjust suffering.

Lekhraj's precocious appreciation of women's spiritual virtues incurred the cost of intense persecution, first in the BKs' original home in present-day Pakistan, and even later, although less severely, in Rajastan, India, where they relocated in 1950 after Partition. There the organization also suffered great financial hardships which were only gradually overcome as new sources of support were found. In spite of these difficulties, by the time of the founder's death in 1969 the Brahma Kumaris had not only established themselves firmly in Mt Abu, their Rajastani home, but also in cities and towns throughout India. The next great trial for the organization, Lekhraj's passing, was quickly surmounted and today in India the BKs are a notable if not especially numerous movement. Thus by the time Babb studied the group in the 1980s the Indian movement was, in his view, "a well-established and conspicuous feature of the religious landscape in urban India" (Babb 1986, p. 95).

The Move to the West

Although insiders recall that Dada Lekhraj anticipated the spread of his movement outside of India, at the time of his death in 1969 no one guessed that this would actually happen. According to his official biography, Lekhraj believed that everyone in the world should have the chance to hear about the "Godly Knowledge" that streamed through him (Chandler 1983, p. 156). Accordingly, after relocating to Mt Abu in 1950 he began writing to notables in India (Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Chakravarty Raj Gopalacharya and British government representatives) and overseas (including no lesser personages than Elizabeth, wife of King George of England, and President Truman), enclosing brochures about his teachings along with personal letters (Chandler 1983, pp. 203-208). He also sent a small delegation of sisters to Japan for a conference as early as 1954, and they visited Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya enroute.

However they did not establish residence in any of these places. Indeed Lekhraj's companions expected before his death that "giving the world a chance to hear his message" meant leaving their doors open to all visitors but did not imply moving overseas.

In the 1960s a few Westerner visitors did come to Mt Abu to meet Dada Lekhraj, but none accepted his teachings during his lifetime. It was not until 1974 that a German visitor to Mt Abu became the first Westerner to "take the Knowledge" and adopt the full BK regime. In 1975 this convert returned to Germany to establish a BK branch in his home country, but his was not to be the first branch to be planted on foreign soil.

That had already been accomplished by Indian sisters and not by plan to, as it were, move into the Western "market." Rather it was in response to calls from Indian expatriates in England. Soon after Dada Lekhraj's passing, Indian families in London who had been associated with the movement in India expressed a need to have a representative of the organization sent to them for their spiritual guidance. They were sent a series of senior sisters experienced in the foundation and guidance of centers in India but with no experience overseas. The first of these was a qualified medical doctor, Dr. Nirmala, followed by Dadi Ratan Mohini and then in 1974 by Dadi Jenki, who has remained the principal figure in London. From there she oversees the BK's Western-world operations. Initially concerned with the spiritual needs of only a handful of Indian families overseas, she now ministers to an international, multi-ethnic community spanning 61 countries. Thus, although (according to the London office) two-thirds of the fully-committed United Kingdom membership are of Indian descent and the New York branch is heavily Indian, elsewhere only a small minority of the branch memberships are drawn from Indian ethnic enclaves. In Australia, for example, the authors found that only 8.3 percent of committed members, or brahmins, are of Indian parentage.

Westerners first started to become involved with the BKs in London only after Dadi Jenki's arrival, that is, in 1975. The organization came to their attention through public notices of activities intended for Indian expatriates, but not pointedly meant to exclude others. The Westerners found a very spartan environment which nonetheless replicated the essentials of an Indian center: a place for "yoga" (that is, meditation), some teaching materials and a spiritual teacher. At first no concessions were made to Western

cultural expectations, except for the availability of helpers who could assist with English communication.

By 1976 only about a dozen Westerners had made it through this cultural barrier. Some of them were drawn across that barrier by dramatic spiritual experiences that formed the basis of immediate and intense bonds with the teacher. But all had something in common sociologically: they were relatively well educated, creative and adventurous. A few of these Westerners, though by no means all, were what might loosely be described as "hippies": young people, among them travellers from Europe and Australia, looking to experience life and little concerned with moral and social conventions. The rest could be characterized as entertaining interests in "alternative" ideas and life styles. Social flexibility, combined with a capacity for discipline, enabled them to accept both the demanding regime of BKs (including the dietary and sexual abstinence, radically different hours of sleep, and regular meditation practice) and its embeddedness in a foreign culture.

Two of this early cohort were in their forties and the rest were under thirty; the majority were male. Their social profile (including their educational and attitudinal characteristics) thus contrasted with that of the Indian BKs in London, many of whom participated as families and who were struggling to establish themselves in the ethnically mixed and predominantly lower-middle class sections of north-west London.

From late 1975 Australian travellers returning home after having become associated with the London BKs, together with some British visitors, began founding places of co-residence and community out-reach in Australia. The Indian sister who had pioneered the London center, Dr. Nirmala, was then sent to support the new outposts. A small but vigorous community grew up which produced many members, including both Australians and temporary residents of European descent. Among them were those who subsequently carried the BK teachings to other countries, not only in the Western world, including Europe, but in the Near East (Israel) and Asia (Japan, Hong Kong and Indonesia). Meanwhile, British converts sent out directly from the United Kingdom became the other major contributors to the world-wide expansion of the Brahma Kumari movement.

The founding of BK centers in North America, under the initial guidance of sisters from the United Kingdom and India, proceeded

with more difficulty, with the first U.S. center being founded in Texas in 1978. Soon thereafter, in the same year, centers were established in New York and San Francisco (Streitfeld 1982, p. 8 in Babb 1986, p. 105). Ironically the United States, renowned for the intensity and catholicity of its religious interests, has proven less fertile ground for BK work than Great Britain and Australia. It may be that the low monetary costs of joining, that helped establish the BKs' bona fides in Europe and Australia, create a different impression in North America, the breeding ground of so many of the more highly commercialized NRMs. If so, Stark's surmise that "people place little value on religion that is cheap and prefer religions that are relatively costly" (1987, p. 25) would apply to North Americans but not to Europeans and Australians (so long as the cost is measured in money rather than in lifestyle changes). Whether for the same or other reasons, Japan has actually proven to be the "driest ground" for the BKs according to a senior London administrator. Visited already in 1954 and then sent a resident brother as early as 1971, Japan has yielded few converts.

Still, the overseas movement overall is vigorous, as is that in India. Thus London BK officials put the number of fully committed overseas members in June 1995 at 7,000, up from the 5715 figure quoted to Whaling (1995, p. 12) in May 1992. The numbers of fully committed members worldwide, in India and overseas, in the early 1980s was given by Chander (1983, p. 69) as "over 80,000." By June 1995 the numbers of fully committed members in all branches had grown to 300,000, according to the London office. The present world membership is spread across more than 1,800 branches.

As the BK movement has grown and spread overseas, the delegation of committed and capable members to new centers away from their home countries, as well as geographical mobility for personal professional reasons, have greatly internationalized the middle-level leadership of the organization outside India. Thus, for example, Australian BKs reside, pursue their professions and serve the organization in established centers in Great Britain, Brazil, Greece, Germany and the United States, as well as in the newer non-Western centers they helped to found. The major regions or "zones" of operation are still overseen by Indian sisters associated with the organization since the time of Dada Lekhraj, but Westerners and other non-Indians now staff many of the national-level coordination posts as well as local centers.

MOVEMENT ORGANIZATION AND ENVIRONMENT: CONTRASTING PATTERNS

Evolution of the BK Movement Organization in India

The BK centers formed in Western countries partially replicated a pattern of movement organization that had evolved in India as the founder's initial conception of his mission clarified and the organization matured in a difficult social environment. The culmination of this development is a structure which consists in India of a network of residential centers housing the core membership, some of whom engage in outside work, with non-resident participants visiting centers for study, meditation and service activities.

Although it has not been uniformly observed, the present common practice in Indian "centers" is for resident "sisters" to take charge of the primary teaching and spiritual functions (including cooking, which is understood to have high spiritual significance), while resident "brothers" earn money in outside jobs to contribute to the support of centers and assist sisters with center activities. The few exceptions include both sisters who have earned an outside income and brothers who have not. Thus in one case reported to the authors Brahma Baba himself insisted that a sister work for a living for a time, although, perhaps significantly, she was not one of the girls raised in the community. The Mt Abu headquarters is also somewhat exceptional: there a few very senior brothers, mostly those who have been brahmins long enough to have known and assisted Brahma Baba personally, receive full support in order to be free to give full time service to the organization. They are mostly in jobs that require technical or higher education, such as few of the senior women of the first generation had, or are of pensioner age.

The brahmins resident in Indian centers are known as "surrendered" sisters and brothers, indicating a willingness to accept what can be provided out of their joint efforts and the good will of the wider, non-resident brahmin community. (Non-residents also contribute financially to the centers on a voluntary basis, but Lekhraj forbade the sisters and brothers to accept money from non-brahmins [Chander 1983, p. 216].) The seriousness of the commitment made by the center-resident brahmins in India is further indicated by the imposition of a trial period of six months upon new residents. This trial period, combined with the very special privilege and obligation

of a surrendered sister to live from the support of the community, suggests that in India the move into a center is regarded as a choice for life. This is further suggested by the practice of families giving dowries for their daughters to the organization. It may also be that Indian recruits to the status of surrendered sister are able to make a more deliberate lifetime commitment than Westerners generally make upon adopting the purity rules and moving to a center since the typical Indian surrendered sister, according to Babb (1986, p. 131), has been familiar with the Brahma Kumaris since childhood.

What Babb (1986, p. 131ff) called the BK "lay members," that is, those who live and work outside the centers, join the surrendered sisters and brothers at the centers for meditation and spiritual study. They also provide assistance maintaining the buildings and putting on special programs. The markedly different commitments of the laity and the surrendered sisters and brothers in India are visually marked by the fact that only the surrendered sisters and brothers wear all-white clothing. This difference in organizational role and dress, however, does not betoken a lesser spiritual status for the laity, as all those who observe the purity rules taught by Dada Lekhraj are considered full brahmins capable of spiritual perfection. There is even a particular respect and concern accorded the "mothers," that is, women who before becoming brahmins have married and born children. A kind of heroism is seen in the "mothers'" acceptance of the brahmin path, including chastity, while continuing to care for children and often husbands as well.

These arrangements closely approximate Lofland and Richardson's "household collective" type of religious movement organization (RMO) hybridized with their "congregation" type (Lofland and Richardson 1984; Richardson 1988, pp. 9-12). Thus like the model "household collective" type of RMO, the Indian centers furnish core members residence, food and an explicit substitute for worldly family life, but they differ from the model in not leaving all ordinary work roles intact. Also, like the "congregation" type, in which people come to a central place for religious activities but provide for their other needs at separate places of work and residence, the BK centers minister to non-resident members intermittently.

This pattern of residential centers serving as places of congregational activity for core and non-residential members alike has enabled the mature Indian organization to minister to a now geographically dispersed clientele. At the same time, this pattern preserves some of

the intimacy of an earlier pattern of movement life that grew out of Lekhraj's original *satsang* group after his first visions became known: Followers electrified by reports of the visions sought more intense involvement with Lekhraj in religious pursuits. He met this need by instituting communal living and forming a school for the followers' children. Thus emerged the initial institutional pattern of the Brahma Kumaris as a distinct organization. These first BKs (primarily, but not exclusively female) were gathered in a small, intensely inward-looking group that enabled them to be intimately connected with their teacher through yoga, study, and communal living.

The inward focus of the group intensified after the move from Pakistan to the remote hill station of Mt Abu, India, in 1950. Like Lofland and Richardson's "colony" type of religious movement organization, which undertakes an "ideal revision of the total round of human life" for the participants (Lofland and Richardson 1984, p. 38; Richardson 1988, pp. 9-12), the "brahmin family" then lived together in one residence, focused almost entirely on their own spiritual practice and supported by their own remaining savings.

The evolution of Brahma Kumaris from a "colony" type of organization towards the more open "household collective"/ "congregation" type came in response to life cycle changes in the organization. By the 1950s many of the little girls, carefully nurtured and schooled by Brahma Baba and the brahmin family, had grown up. Occasional visitors to the mountain home of the community called attention to the spiritual needs of others, and so Baba sent his "daughters," the Daughters of Brahma (which is the meaning of Brahma Kumaris) to cities elsewhere in India to establish residences (or "centers") as homes for people who wished to take up the life and as places of yoga and teaching for the public.

Organizational Adjustments to the Western Context

The Brahma Kumaris are now a formally constituted international organization with individual centers (mostly in cities) overseen by country and regional (or zone) heads. These in turn take direction from the central administration in Mt Abu. The basic organizational structure is thus uniform from country to country, and even before faxes and E-mail began to displace the postal service, activities from the daily lesson to international public service projects were coordinated directly from Mt Abu for all centers. Since the hybrid

"household collective"/"congregation" form of movement organization had evolved by the time centers were established outside India, this became the model for all local units of the international organization. However significant adaptations have had to be made to this model to meet the needs of non-Indian members. We shall use the case of the Australian Brahma Kumaris to provide a detailed portrayal of these adaptations and to examine their significance for the movement's vitality in a Western context. Australia is a suitable example not only because it is one of the earliest and most active sites of the BK movement outside India and a source of teachers for pioneering new centers in other countries, but because its organizational adaptations are representative of those in other Western countries.

Distinctive adjustments to the Indian template were made early on in the Australian organization and have persisted up to the present day. One of these was the introduction of a requirement for all Australian BKs (other than the Indian sister provided to oversee the new branch) to earn an income through outside jobs. Center-resident sisters were thus not to be relieved of the necessity to support themselves. Clearly, in the earliest days when numbers interested in the BK teachings were extremely small, this was a sheer financial necessity in most cases. However, the requirement is still in place, not only in Australia but in other Western countries, for all but the most senior administrators at the national level. The one exception is one of the first English sisters of European descent. After "receiving the Knowledge" she spent a long period of residence in India and then took the teachings to North America. There she lived for several years with another sister of Indian descent on donations, mostly from a few Indian families. However, she too now has part-time employment outside the organization.

Significantly even for the few brahmins supported by their fellows in Western centers the term "surrendered sister" (or "surrendered brother") is not commonly used, as if to discourage the idea that full-time service is a superior status to which all might aspire. The practice of requiring all brahmins to support themselves may relate to the greater acceptability for Western women of employment outside the home, however it is usually explained by senior Indian BKs in terms of the lesser maturity of Westerners.

Another adjustment to the Indian organizational arrangements introduced early on in Australia was to draw a substantial proportion

of the Australian BK family into communal living outside centers, in "bhavans." A *bhavan* is a place of BK co-residence other than a center. (In India the Hindi term simply means "building," but in Australia the term differentiates one type of residential arrangement for BKs from another.) Although only 34 percent of Australian BKs surveyed in 1992 had ever lived in a center, 54.6 percent had lived in a *bhavan*. Perhaps in part because many more Australians than Indian young people live away from home and because there were no Australian families with BK affiliations when the organization was first established there, those wanting to practice the BKs' yoga (meditation) and prepared to adopt the purity rules readily sought to live with like-minded others. Living in a center, however, is highly demanding, since it is the place at which the administration, teaching and meditation functions for a whole area are carried out. The organization must see to it that its standards are met by having suitably capable people living in the centers; and individuals living in centers must be prepared to meet the constant demands on their time that are a part of the semi-public life of such places.

In Australia, further, there is no trial period for center-dwellers (or "center-*basi*," as they are known). It may well be that residence in a *bhavan* (which normally precedes center residence) substitutes for such a trial period, insofar as it gives more senior brahmins an opportunity to closely observe and counsel those with potential to benefit the organization by moving into a more demanding role in a center. In any case, center residence does not entail financial support from the organization. Nor is it expected in Australia that the sister or brother entering a center will necessarily spend the rest of their lives in one or another such center. Certainly the assumption is that one who becomes a brahmin, like a *sannyasin* in the mainstream Indian tradition, has permanently renounced worldly weaknesses and therefore will remain a brahmin for life; however Australian center-*basi* do often move into centers and out again to the more relaxed *bhavans*, according to their needs and those of the organization.

Because a high proportion of Australian brahmins have lived in BK residences, even if not in actual centers where congregational activities take place, and because nearly all brahmins, regardless of place of residence, provide for themselves financially and attempt to obey the same rules of conduct, the contrast between core members (center-dwellers) and others is not so great in Australia as in India. The term "laity" is thus actually inappropriate for brahmins living

outside centers in the Australian context. This blurring of membership statuses finds symbolic expression in the wearing of white by everyone who comes to a center, except for those who have not finished the classes through which newcomers are introduced to BK teachings and except for those who wish to signal that they have not fully accepted the BK way of life. It finds practical expression in the participation of non-center dwellers and even non-*bhavan* dwellers in important administrative and teaching tasks of the centers and in their leading of the meditations.

In sum, adjustments made in Australia and other Western countries to the Indian form of movement organization made for a closer approximation to the "household collective" form of movement organization, its expansion to include more junior members and a strengthening of congregational activities for non-resident members.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS: CONTRASTING PATTERNS

Cultural Continuity with Conventional Faiths

Evolved out of a Hindu tradition in India, the Brahma Kumaris' success in Western countries has been jeopardized by its foreignness. In this regard it is like many other NRMs which, as Stark points out, "suffer from asking converts to reject their whole religious heritage and thus risk being defined as too deviant" (1987, p. 15). In contrast, the chances of success of a new movement, he argues, are good where there is substantial continuity with pre-existing faiths (Stark 1987, pp. 13-15). On the credit side, the Brahma Kumaris' success in transplantation to a culturally alien environment has been facilitated first by initial support from Indian expatriate communities resident in Western countries and second by a preparedness to modify non-essential features for Western consumption. These modifications have been both organizational and aesthetic.

As for the organizational adaptations, alterations to the social structure of the Brahma Kumaris described above not only helped address practical problems faced by the new organization in the early phase of Western recruitment, but helped ease the transition of new members from a predominantly Judeo-Christian culture into a

spiritual environment constructed largely out of Hindu elements. In Australia, for example, most single brahmins move into *bhavans* soon after they have committed themselves to the meditation practice and purity rules. In the company of fellow seekers they more readily become at ease with new concepts and have support for following culturally alien practices. Living with other brahmins also makes it easier to adjust one's daily schedule to wake at 4 a.m. for private meditation and attend the day's lesson, or "murli" reading at the local center at 5:30 a.m. before going off to work.

There is no doubt, however, that adopting the purity rules involves more strain for Westerners than for BKs in India where each of these rules has wide currency and, where appropriately adopted, prestige value. All the purity rules were strange to mainstream Australia in the 1970s when BKs first began teaching there. Thus in India vegetarianism and avoidance of alcohol are practiced by higher castes and were advocated for all by the nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi; chastity is seen as part of the ideal Hindu lifestyle for older people who have finished child bearing and for male renunciants of all ages. In contrast, in the antipodean land of sheep and cattle stations, vegetarianism has become fashionable only recently and then only moderately so. Similarly, in the 1970s chastity was understood as appropriate only for Catholic priests and religious (already unpopular career choices) and unmarried women. Since then vocations to the celibate priesthood and holy orders have continued to decline, as has the popularity of chastity generally. As for alcohol, its consumption was and remains central to Australian male social behavior, whether in working-class rituals of "mateship" carried out in pubs or in up-market business lunches; youth and female drunkenness, never negligible, are actually on the increase.

Similarly, both the iconography and theological substance of BK teachings is more alien to Westerners than to Indians. Thus the divine appears with unfamiliar names (Shiva, Krishna, Brahma, etc.) and the workings of the universe (the law of karma, cycles of time, etc.) challenge those who have absorbed Judeo-Christian notions of sin and divine punishment or reward after a single chance at earthly life. The discontinuity is dampened, however, by the BKs' theological "pre-adaptation" (to borrow a term from archeology) of Hindu material to the Judeo-Christian environment. Thus, perhaps influenced by Christianity in the latter days of British imperial

domination, Lekhraj taught a strict monotheism, not polytheism or kathenotheism. Shiva is not for Lekhraj simply an *ishtadeva* (a personal favorite among a host of gods, one deity chosen to represent the Ultimate), but the One God. Chander makes this clear in his official biography of Lekhraj when he writes: "[Shiva] is the Supreme Soul, the one and only God. No one had ever said that before. Even the gurus who claimed to be God were careful to qualify it by saying that God was in everyone" (1983, p. 249).

Westerners' difficulties in accepting the BKs' Hindu-derived teachings have also been lessened by the extensive modifications in household decoration, pictorial representations and musical styles wrought by Western converts with their Indian seniors' approval. Thus Australian centers present visually and auditorially very little that is reminiscent of Hinduism or India. New pupils arriving to take the introductory course use sitting rooms decorated much like ordinary Australian homes. The art work on BK themes is done by Western artists. Newcomers do not see large pictures of Brahma Baba until they finish an intermediate course and join lessons (*murli*) and meditation sessions ("yoga") in a room dedicated to this purpose. Even in the meditation room cultural foreignness is minimized. One sees meditators, sometimes in saris and kurta pyjamas and sitting cross-legged on the floor, facing another meditator on a low platform (the *gatti*) underneath a large picture of Brahma Baba. Above his image is typically a red ovoid fixture radiating a pinpoint of white light (the symbol of Shiva). Music is generally Western meditation music, interspersed occasionally with Indian devotional songs. Although the Indian leadership finds the meditation music soporific, the Westerners quietly resist raising the percentage of Indian music (which most Westerners find too peppy or jarringly romantic). This presentation contrasts dramatically with that of Indian centers, where the walls are covered with paintings illustrating the whole cycle of time and featuring much Hindu iconography in an ebullient Indian popular religious art style. In that context, rather than creating confusion and cultural distance, the images rather link the BKs' novel revelations to a common cultural heritage.

The importance to Westerners of the aesthetic adaptations they have been allowed to make lends support to Stark's suggestion that "imported faiths appear to do best if and when they are taken over by locals and modified to include familiar cultural elements" (1987, p. 15). Nonetheless it is well to note that the crucial changes to

organizational structure came at the insistence of the Indian sisters responsible for overseas branches.

It should also be noted that practices and images unpleasantly foreign to the average Australian in the 1970s were not necessarily off-putting to the first cohort of Australian brahmins, who were, after all, mostly distanced from the Australian mainstream. This echoes Wallis's observation that "world-rejecting" movements in North America in the 1960s "possessed clear cultural continuities with the counterculture" (1987, p. 85). Further, that counterculture in Australia has been to a significant degree absorbed into mainstream culture. This dilution of Anglo-Celtic culture in Australia can be traced to the revocation in 1973 of the White Australia Policy, the acceptance from that time of unprecedented numbers of Asian migrants and the coming of age of the children of an earlier, post-World War II wave of Mediterranean migrants. Anglo-Celtic Australians now consume foreign ideas as readily as they consume foreign foods. Indeed Australians are as eager as other Westerners to buy "Egyptian" meditation balms or American Indian shaman calendars for friends for Christmas from New Age book shops.

Tension with the Wider Society

Even though Indian BKs share in a general way the Hindu culture of the surrounding community, the organization in its early years in India existed in a state of high tension with society. This tension has eased but did not disappear, a condition Stark (1987, pp. 15-16) actually considers favorable to movement success. Thus he argues that movements in very high tension with their environment find few people willing to bear the costs of involvement; on the other hand if tension is very low, it is likely that there is insufficient difference between the organization and other institutions to attract members (Stark 1987, pp. 15-16). In Australia the organization has never been under acute threat, but in its early years it did encourage a style of self-presentation to the public that made for more tensions than exist today. The BKs in both India and Australia, then, can be said to have experienced very high to high tension with their social environments that subsequently diminished to what can be called "medium" tension in recent years. As could be expected, however, the sources of tension differ in the differing cultural contexts.

In Australia the whole list of purity rules found little or no sanction in mainstream culture and had the combined effect of drawing brahmins out of relationships with old friends as well as family. Rules pertaining to food and drink are most powerful in discouraging *laukik* ("outsider" or "worldly") connections. Entertaining becomes difficult because a brahmin cannot offer the range of food non-vegetarians are used to (although non-brahmins who are prepared to make modest adjustments to their expectations may actually experience some culinary enticements). Yet more challenging are the difficulties brahmins face in accepting the hospitality of *laukik* friends and relatives, since they should refuse food cooked by non-brahmins. Beyond this, the demanding regime of early rising for meditation at home, attending the pre-breakfast lesson and meditation at a center, working a full day to earn an income or run a household and then perhaps attending other devotions or service activities at a center in the evening leaves little time or energy for outside social life. To compensate for this, centers sometimes organize recreational activities just for the brahmin family.

The Australian organization has exercised great care in counselling members who find their new commitments are making difficulties with their *laukik* families and urges open discussion with all parties. It also helps to cultivate links with parents through activities such as Mothers' Day teas. However, painful rifts between BKs and their families are not uncommon, and no encouragement is offered for maintaining outside friendships.

It is in the area of work place interactions that Australian BKs have experienced a diminution of tensions. Although the BKs have always promoted values useful in the work place (such as disciplined effort, respect for others and self-reflection), in the early days of the movement in Australia it encouraged brahmins to wear their distinctive all-white, and preferably Indian-style clothes to work. This enabled them to visibly carry their spiritual identity into the company of those who did not share their commitments, both reminding themselves of their higher calling and quietly testifying to others. Such public display, however, is now seen as inappropriate as it tends to set BKs apart from others. White is worn in public (that is, outside a BK residence or retreat) by people other than senior Indian sisters only when brahmins invite the public to a community service program. Even in such cases the norm is changing to ordinary neat

and modest dress except for a few brothers and sisters who will exemplify the spiritual ideal by wearing white clothes.

In India (in contrast to the Australian situation) the purity rules were not of themselves problematic; rather it was encouragement offered to women to strive for spiritual perfection through early chastity in marriage and through celibacy that most inflamed conventional Hindus. Lekhraj's women followers were seen as rejecting the authority of males over the disposal of their wives' and daughters' reproductive powers.

This radically unconventional approach to women's spirituality provoked a vehement response. In the early days of the organization many women were locked in their homes and viscously beaten to prevent them from participating; the communal residences were repeatedly attacked, law suits were filed and an assassin was even sent to murder Lekhraj. Opposition was organized through a group called the "Anti-Om Mandali Committee" ("Om Mandali" being a name by which the Lekhraj's group was known at the time). The "Anti Party" drew to itself support from high-ranking political figures and the press (Chander 1983, p. 97ff). Although these threats receded after the expulsion of Hindus from Pakistan and the later move of Lekhraj's group to India, there is still a belief among BKs in an on-going secret counter-movement.

The diminution of tension caused by offering women such extraordinary opportunities can be related to the organization's recruitment history. In the very beginning, women came from families with wholly conventional expectations to a new, aberrant group; then there was the move from their initial home and isolation in a distant place; that was followed by the gradual establishment of links with new places through individuals attracted to the movement; and eventually there emerged BK families who saw the decision of a child to be a surrendered sister or brother as a positive life choice.

To some extent, also, changing attitudes in the wider society towards women's roles has played a part in the lessening of tensions. What was once a cause of vilification of the movement is now a valuable mark of progressivism in cosmopolitan Indian eyes. The importance of the progressivist view has been reinforced since the 1980s by the BK leadership's cultivation of ties with senior Indian government officials and with international bodies such as the UN. Such ties confer legitimacy upon the organization, which in turn helps

to diminish tensions with the wider society (cf. Khalsa 1988, p. 131; Bromley and Shupe 1980, p. 33).

While it has become somewhat more acceptable for women to pursue an independent spiritual life, this is far from widely accepted in India and the notion that women are actually the pre-eminent vessels of salvation is still far out of line with prevailing values. There are also other ways in which tensions are created with the wider society. Thus although BK teachings draw heavily on the Hindu tradition and the organization celebrates the major Hindu holidays, BK reinterpretations of Hindu festivals promoting their own teachings are seen as confrontational (Babb 1986, p. 135).

Density of Internal Networks and Isolation

The purity rules, which qualify brahmins for the roles they will assume in the imminent Golden Age, tend to create tensions in relationships with non-brahmins that are often resolved by letting those relationships wither. The compensations are the opportunity to develop their spiritual practice with minimal discouragement from outside critics and the opportunity for regular, close involvement with their new "brahmin family." Indeed the term "brahmin family" accurately conveys the importance which BKs place on their relationships with each other and is used frequently to validate solidarity amongst members. In referring to themselves as a "family" and actually meeting members' needs for a "surrogate extended family" in the absence of lost ties to friends and natural families, the Brahma Kumaris follow a pattern recognized by Robbins and Anthony (1979, pp. 88-89) as common to many NRMs. However, Stark (1987, p. 23) warns that such intense bonds within an organization jeopardize its long term survival if contacts with the public, from whom new members must be recruited, become too attenuated as a result. In the case of the BKs, the Indian and Australian branches differ in their exposure to this risk. More specifically, they differ in the extent to which different membership statuses offer opportunities for regular involvement in the organization and, correspondingly, in the extent to which BKs experience isolation from the wider society.

Center-dwellers in both India and Australia bear the brunt of responsibility for organizing devotional and service activities, offering spiritual guidance and attending to the physical maintenance

of the center. Thus of necessity they constantly interact with other brahmins, except when out earning an income. They are also more likely than others to be tapped for projects run by the national and international BK organization and, given their high level of commitment, they try to travel at least yearly to Mt Abu on retreat. Further, they put themselves at the disposal of seniors to move to other centers or open new ones unless unusual professional commitments tie them to a particular location. When traveling, they, like other brahmins, tend to stay at centers or private BK residences, since eating and domestic arrangements are easier to manage that way. They thus form, in Stark's (1987, p. 23) terminology, "dense network ties" within the centers as well as nationally and internationally within the BK organization.

The extent to which these "dense network ties" of center-dwellers isolate them from non-brahmins differs by country, since Indian surrendered sisters, unlike sisters running centers overseas, devote their full energies to the organization. This cuts them off from contacts in the work force. Of course, absence of work force ties does not necessarily mean that the surrendered sisters lack opportunities to meet the public. Teaching and service activities indeed necessitate this and are key elements in the organization's strategy for contacting potential new members. However, contacts with the public in situations where the organization is hosting and structuring the activity do not offer the same opportunities for engaging others on their own terms as work place interactions do.

Patterns of non-center-dweller interaction in India and Australia offer even stronger contrasts than patterns of center-dweller interaction. This can be seen first in brahmin relationships with their *laukik* families. All of the first cohort of Australian BKs were single. In the 1990s most BKs still are. Few Australian brahmins have children or spouses living with them. Of those surveyed only 19 percent had dependent children living with them and only 24 percent were living with an adult partner. 60 percent of the total were neither living with a partner nor caring for dependents. Consequently the majority live with other brahmins. In contrast, in India married lay brahmins with children seem to be common. Although there is no survey data available on the BK laity in India, families figure prominently in accounts of the life of the organization, particularly after its "colony" phase. Thus, in the early days of movement expansion in India Lekhraj directed his

young pupils to spread their "Godly Knowledge" to their families first. The families that responded positively became important nodes in recruitment networks. Further, families that have been associated with the organization since Lekhraj's time have been a significant source of vocations in India, supplying most of the surrendered sisters and brothers.

Looking at the laity as a whole in India, Babb (1986, p. 132) has found that they are not uniformly well integrated into the organization. He goes so far as to diagnose the Indian BK laity as "anomic." He also suspects that many new members do not fully understand the nature or weight of the commitments they are expected to take on, as he found a sharply bimodal distribution in the length of time people were associated with the BKs there: quite new members and people long "in the Knowledge" predominated, with few people in the middle range (1986, p. 131). Apparently many Indian new members do not survive the realization of the costs of their new way of life.

In Australia such a bimodal distribution in length of association with the organization is not evident. The proportion of people who have been BKs for over one half to one year (4.7%) is only slightly less than that of people who have been BKs for a half a year or less (5.2%), and the percentage of those who have been BKs for between one to two years (9.4%) is about twice that in the half year or less category. Apparently sufficient support is available to new BKs to carry them past their period of early enthusiasm into long term participation and commitment.

The better integration of non-center-dwellers into the life of the Australian BK organization is also suggested by rates of participation. In Australia these are exceptionally high for the family as a whole, with only minor variations from city to city relating to size of city and consequent ease or difficulty of transport access to the centers. Participation rates are high not only in the main weekend services but also in weekday activities. When interviewed 88 percent of respondents (N = 194) stated that they had attended Sunday morning *murli* session in the last week. 80 percent claimed that they had attended weekday morning meditation at least once in the past week, with 53 percent affirming that they had attended six times or more during this period (median attendance rate = 6).

The high levels of participation of all Australian brahmins are associated with a relatively good performance in member retention

and are indicative of high levels of integration of members in the organization. There is, however, a cost associated with these high levels of integration of non-center-dwellers in the Australian organization: the diminished linkages of a much larger proportion of the brahmin population to the wider society from which new members might be drawn.

Mobilization

In discussing mobilization strategies that make for success in New Religious Movements, Stark (1987, p. 16) reiterates Shinn's (1985) view that groups focused on gurus have the advantage of being able to inspire high levels of commitment, but carry the notorious disability of being prone to disintegration upon the death of the leader. The Brahma Kumaris honor Dada Lekhraj as the bringer of a new and salvific spiritual understanding to humanity in its darkest hour. Source of revelations, gentle and loving founder of the spiritual family, and eventually linked with both Brahma and Shiva, "The Supreme Soul," he is the emotional and spiritual center of BK life. In many respects, then, the BKs appear to be a "guru movement." Yet there are paradoxes here: the BK movement is alive and growing more than 25 years after the founder's passing. How is this to be explained?

As a preface to explanation, the BK "emic" view (Harris 1979, pp. 32-34) must be aired: brahmins reject the notion that Dada Lekhraj is their "guru." Distaste for this term is rooted in their theology, which contrasts the BK use of meditation and purity rules to achieve salvation with what they understand to be the wider Hindu community's "mere worship" of deities, what they call "bhakti." "Gurus" are seen to be objects of worship or slavish devotion and hence are implicated in the "bhakti" complex. There is no doubt, however, that Lekhraj was a "charismatic leader" in the Weberian (1968a, 1968b) sense, and Weber (1968b) himself called attention to problems of succession faced by charismatic leaders of all sorts.

There is also another sense in which the Brahma Kumaris might wish to be exempted from the category of a "guru movement" and from the implications that succession problems were inevitable for them. At the very outset of the life of the organization (in 1937) Lekhraj devolved both his authority and personal fortune upon a formal body: the Managing Committee. Thus more than thirty years

before his passing, Lekhraj took action that could minimize the organization's vulnerability to disruption in the wake of that inevitable event.

In Weberian terms, it could be said that Lekhraj attempted an early institutionalization of his own charisma. But Weber again sounded a caution relevant to this point: "The administrative staff of a charismatic leader," he asserted, "does not consist of 'officials'" (1968b, p. 51). The staff of a charismatic leader, he observed, are chosen for their own charismatic qualities rather than for their technical competence; and they are appraised, promoted or dismissed according to their personal standing with the leader rather than on the grounds of objective performance criteria. Our ability to objectively assess the inner workings of the Brahma Kumaris Managing Committee in the years before Lekhraj's death is limited, but from reports of early participants it appears that Weber's caution is both appropriate and overstated. The Committee did relieve Lekhraj of administrative duties under formally delegated authority. On the other hand, it is clear that he continued to set the direction for the organization and his pronouncements had overwhelming significance for everyone in the organization. Further, the members of the Managing Committee did indeed have their own charisma derived from their early association with Lekhraj, from their own reported experiences of the divine and from their very selection by the founder for the positions on the Committee. These very senior women who were companions of Brahma Baba are known as "the dadis." "Dadi" simply means "elder sister," but its usage by the BKs signifies only those very senior women who were Lekhraj's companions.

Most remarkable of these early officers was Om Radhe, the head of the Committee from its formation until her death in the 1950s. To the post she brought not only a college education and personal qualities appropriate to an administrator (Chander 1983, pp. 58, 76) but also a spiritual character that earned her the name Jagadamba Saraswati, "World Mother Goddess of Knowledge" (Chander 1983, p. 58, 76). To the others she became "Mama," alongside Lekhraj who was "Baba" (father).

Om Radhe and the other sisters installed on the Managing Committee could be said to have exercised both formal authority deriving from their offices and personal charisma in their own right. Both helped ease the trauma of Lekhraj's passing in 1969 and the organization's loss of its incomparable head. However, administra-

tive continuity and a body of loved and highly esteemed associates of the founder were not the only keys to a successful succession. Through Lekhraj's death they had lost the medium who enabled God to speak directly to them, guiding the life of the brahmin family. Recovery from this loss was dramatically facilitated just a few days after the death, when the dadis were still in deep mourning: One of the senior sisters, in the midst of her meditation, began speaking in the voices of Brahma Baba and Shiva, with whom Brahma Baba had become linked.

This sister, Dadi Gulzar, has been able to continue this service to the present day, enabling the senior management to avail themselves of the continuing guidance of the founder. She has also made herself available as a medium at scheduled times during the winter at Mt Abu. Until recently this has made it possible for all brahmins visiting at the appropriate times to have personal meetings with their Baba. Now, however, the numbers of visiting brahmins are so great that Dadi Gulzar brings the voice of Brahma Baba to most brahmins only in country groups.

Given the importance of the personal authority of the dadis and the founder's continued channeled appearances, one has to regard the accomplishment of a "rational-legal" authority structure as partial. Further, insofar as the charisma of the dadis (and of Baba through one of them) now supplements the legal underpinnings of the organization, that organization has to be seen to be vulnerable to a future crisis. The dadis are now in their later years and yet work to demanding schedules, several of them with ill health. Indeed BKs themselves are deeply concerned about this, although in their minds is also the possibility that the millennium will resolve the issue of leadership transition before they have to deal with it.

Favorable Ecology

Both India and Australia are relatively unregulated "religious economies" (in Stark's terminology), although levels of inter-religious tension contrast sharply: in India they are acute; in Australia today they are minimal. In any case, the Brahma Kumaris do not become embroiled in the problems of the religious arena in either country. Both in India and Western countries they present themselves as a "spiritual university" rather than as a "religion." Whatever the practical benefits of this designation, it expresses a notion that might

not be so cheerfully accepted if it were appreciated by the wider society: namely that "the Knowledge" embodies truths deeper than those of "the religions" (Chander 1983, p. 223) and also superior to those of science.

Beyond the issue of legal standing there is the issue of how the organization presents itself to the public in its recruitment and public service activities. In Australia the BKs strongly emphasize the difference between themselves as a "spiritual" organization and religions. In India this contrast is not so strongly drawn for the public. Thus, in Australia the idea that the BK teachings are "not a religion" is important to many members who have been alienated from the conventional religions or never felt attracted to them. This relates to the fact that the conventional faith, Christianity, in its mainstream forms is weak in Australia. Many BKs come to the organization through public activities that do not suggest "religion." At BK public talks and stalls there are no images of God or gods that Australians would recognize. The orange ovoid shape representing Shiva appears as an insignia on brochures that are handed out to the public, but the symbolism is not understandable to outsiders. The texts of the introductory brochures describe the work of the organization in teaching meditation and promoting social causes like world peace. Center signs prominently feature the organization's popular name, "Raja Yoga," which readily connects to the understanding of yoga as some kind of self-improvement technique. "Meditation," which BKs offer to teach at free lessons, also has acquired connotations more medical (as a stress reduction technique) or recreational than religious. Of course, when people actually take the meditation lessons they are taught that meditation is meant to connect a person to God and the more advanced lessons elaborate the BK understanding of God and the human drama.

In India, in contrast, the organization has promoted itself to the public primarily through visual displays of the story of world history as BKs understand it. These picture galleries line the walls of the larger centers (that are called "Spiritual Museums" as well as "Raja Yoga Centers") and mobile picture galleries are also taken into public places at festival times. Although the pictures tell the BK's particular "spiritual" message, the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are immediately recognizable in them. The public is most likely to visit the picture gallery first, and then if they are intrigued by the story they represent, they will attend a meditation class and do the

introductory course. In other words, in India the first contact with the BKs is likely to be in a context that would be understood as "religious" by most people, since the gods of Hindu pantheon play major roles in the displays. Only after this do people generally move to involvement with the meditation, and even then, meditation cannot easily be disassociated from religion by people from a Hindu background. This stronger linkage to the familiar contexts of religion in India may be understood in view of the fact that conventional religion remains vigorous there, although rather anarchic.

Recruitment: Reproduction vs Outside Recruitment

The requirement that brahmins be chaste, and if not yet married, celibate, severely restricts the organization's ability to grow through internal reproduction. However, in India where chastity in marriage is a familiar concept (if not usually considered desirable for younger people), marrieds are more likely than Western couples to be receptive to a call to chastity. Perhaps as a result, the Brahma Kumaris in India have more members with families and the organization has more capacity for recruitment through children of members than in the West. The significance of the limited ability of the organization to grow in the West through giving birth to and socializing its own children is amplified by high levels of integration of the majority of Western BKs into brahmin family life and their consequent loss of ties to the wider society where future new adult members must mostly be found.

CONCLUSION

Despite their manifest lack of concern to build an organization capable of expanding indefinitely in numbers and time, the Brahma Kumaris can nonetheless be seen to have achieved substantial success. They have survived the death of their founder and spread throughout India and overseas. The numbers of members in each country are not large, but those who count as full members, the brahmins, are both highly active and often effective in forging links with governments, the business and professional communities and the arts. This paper has demonstrated the utility of Stark's (1987) model in accounting for the BKs' success, but has shown that the assets and

liabilities of the Western and Indian branches have not been the same in all respects. As a consequence, the Western branches have evolved somewhat differently from their Indian counterparts in order to survive and grow.

Chief amongst the differences in assets is the continuity BK beliefs have with conventional religious culture in India and their near, but not complete, lack of continuity with Western culture. That this has not been an insurmountable obstacle may well be in part attributable to the fact that the BKs had already survived the first major crisis of leadership succession and acceptance of their radical views in their home country (cf. Stark 1987, p. 15). In any case, we have shown here that the success of the organization in the Western environment was substantially facilitated by both cultural and social structural innovations in that new setting. Not only did the Indian leadership permit Western members to "include familiar cultural elements" (Stark 1987, p. 15) in the outfitting of their centers, but they incorporated members into the organization in somewhat different ways. Thus in the West a higher proportion of the membership has been drawn into "household collective"-type institutions (Lofland and Richardson 1984) through "bhavans." These places of co-residence for members other than leaders extend the organization's capability for supporting its distinctive lifestyle and protect members from high levels of "outsider" contact (cf. Wright 1988, p. 155; Barker 1988, pp. 178-179). At the same time, the requirement in Western countries (unlike India) for all but the most senior BKs to be self-supporting helps to counterbalance a tendency toward isolation of the organization from prospective recruits that high levels of member co-residence would otherwise affect.

Related to the issue of cultural continuity is that of tension with the surrounding environment. In both India and in the Western countries the organization has a history of overcoming initially high levels of tension with its environment, after which it stabilized in a condition of medium tension (a condition Stark [1987, pp. 15-16] considers favorable to movement success). However, because the particular practices that have generated tensions in the Indian and Western contexts differ, the structural innovations in the Western branches have been important in managing tensions in the new context.

In other respects the Indian and Western branches share a common set of assets and liabilities. On the "plus" side is a moderately favorably "ecology" in both settings. On the liability side

is the limited capacity to recruit through reproduction as a result of a common commitment throughout the organization to celibacy for unmarrieds and chastity for married members. On the liability side should also be listed the possibility that the leadership succession problem has not been definitively solved, even though the organization was able to survive the death of its charismatic founder. Thus while Lekhraj did establish a rational-legal basis for leadership early in the life of the organization in the form of the Managing Committee, and the Committee did indeed carry on the administration after his death, the senior "managers" on that committee inspire strong commitment to themselves personally as companions of the founder and spiritual leaders in their own right. They are, in other words, a second generation of charismatic leaders. Whether or not the bureaucratic structure of the organization will "hold" in their absence is an open question.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research reported herein was supported by grants from the Australian Research Council and Griffith University. The authors gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments of anonymous reviewers.

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