

POSSESSING KNOWLEDGE:
ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES AMONG THE BRAHMA KUMARIS

Richard Musselwhite

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Religious Studies.

Chapel Hill
2009

Approved by:

Carl Ernst

Joanne Punzo Waghorne

Randall Styers

Katherine Ewing

Lauren Leve

©2009
Richard Musselwhite
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

RICHARD MUSSELWHITE: Possessing Knowledge: Organizational Boundaries among the
Brahma Kumaris

(Under the direction of Carl Ernst, Joanne Punzo Waghorne, Randall Steyers, Katherine
Ewing, and Lauren Leve)

This dissertation presents an ethnographically-informed portrait of the organizational boundaries that give the Brahma Kumaris their institutional structure and managerial culture. The Brahma Kumaris are a Hindu new religious movement from India that began in 1936 and now claims more than half a million members worldwide. The fieldwork informing this dissertation took place between July 1999 and December 2003 at two primary sites, including a Brahma Kumaris center in a major metropolitan center in the Southern United States and the Brahma Kumaris' world headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India. The Brahma Kumaris aspire to serve the world as a model of good management and effective leadership, and to this end, they have constructed organizational boundaries, status hierarchies, and managerial practices that support their esoteric, service-oriented religion by emphasizing the importance of well-managed personal relationships within and beyond their institution's boundaries.

To my friends and family.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee: At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are Professors Carl Ernst, Randall Styers and Lauren Leve. At Syracuse University is Professor Joanne Punzo Waghorne. At Duke University is Professor Katherine Ewing. I would also like to thank the following grant agencies for making this dissertation possible: The Fulbright Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program and the American Institute of Indian Studies. I presented a paper based on my early fieldwork at The North Carolina Religious Studies Association in 2000. My sponsoring university in India was Mohanlal Sukhadia University in Udaipur, Rajasthan, India. Several members of the Brahma Kumaris were especially helpful during my research. You know who you are, and I will never forget you.

Table of Contents

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION	1
The Brahma Kumaris	1
Knowledge	3
Organization.....	10
History.....	26
About this Dissertation	34
Fieldwork	35
Anonymity	37
Literature Review.....	40
Objective.....	48
Arguments.....	50
Significance.....	51
Chapter Overview	51
Terminology.....	52
II. OUTERMOST BOUNDARIES.....	57
Adaptable Self-Presentations	57
Spiritual Museums	61
Local Disapproval.....	64

Mrs. Patel	66
Mr. Sharma	70
A Brahma Kumaris Response.....	74
III. OUTREACH IN SOUTHERN TOWN	76
The Centers	78
Outreach Programs.....	87
International Non-governmental Conferences on World Peace, Sponsored by the Brahma Kumaris	88
Inter-religious Events, Attended by the Brahma Kumaris.....	91
IV. MEMBERSHIP	99
Seven Days Course	100
Three Basic Member Types	104
Discourses and Daily Routines	108
Discourses at Southern Town	114
Hindi Discourses	118
Discourses at Southern Town, Continued.....	120
Discourse Discussions	123
Boundaries at Southern Town.....	131
V. CORE MANAGEMENT	133
VI. CONCLUSION.....	164
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	170

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Brahma Kumaris

The Brahma Kumaris may be little known to academic scholarship,¹ but our lack of attention does not seem to have slowed them down any. The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is a new religious movement that originated in 1936 in the Sindh region of South Asia, in present-day Pakistan. In 1952, the movement relocated its headquarters to Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India, and it now claims to administer 4,522 centers² in over sixty³

¹Some scholars have published on the Brahma Kumaris, including Lawrence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), Lawrence A. Babb, “Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (1981): 387–401, Lawrence A. Babb, “Amnesia and Remembrance in a Hindu Theory of History,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 41, no. 1 (1982): 49–66, Lawrence A. Babb, “The Physiology of Redemption,” *History of Religions* 22, no. 4 (1983): 298–312, Lawrence A. Babb, “Indigenous Feminism in a Modern Hindu Sect,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9, no. 3 (1984): 399–416, Lawrence A. Babb, “Part Two: Amnesia and Remembrance among the Brahma Kumaris,” in *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 93–155, Kim Knott, “Raja Yoga; and the Teaching and Practice of Meditation in Raja Yoga,” in *Hinduism in Leeds: A Study of Religious Practice in the Indian Hindu Community and in Hindu-Related Groups* (Leeds, UK: University of Leeds, 1986), 193–95, Frank Whaling, “The Brahma Kumaris,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10, no. 1 (1995): 3–28, Peggy Morgan, “The Authority of Believers in the Study of Religions,” *Diskus* 4, no. 1 (1996): 1–10, Julia Day Howell and Peter L. Nelson, “Structural Adaptation and ‘Success’ in the Transplantation of an Asian Religious Movement: The Brahma Kumaris in the Western World, Part 1,” *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 8 (1997): 1–33, Carguilo, Kristen. “Gateway to Paradise: The Brahma Kumaris Movement.” Master's thesis, Hampshire College, 1999, and John Wallis, “From World Rejection to Ambivalence: The Development of Millenarianism in the Brahma Kumaris,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14, no. 3 (1999): 375–85, but this body of literature is disproportionately small relative to the movement’s global significance. I discuss some reasons why the Brahma Kumaris may have been overlooked by most academic scholars in my literature review, below.

countries with 407,285 members,⁴ 168,810 of whom⁵ are “surrendered”⁶ resident members of Brahma Kumaris facilities. Their numbers may not be great, but they have earned substantial international recognition for their service activities, including receipt of several awards⁷ and formal affiliations with several United Nations departments.⁸

The purpose of this dissertation is to help document contemporary Brahma Kumaris activities through an ethnographic analysis based on the author’s three years of sustained participant observations. The focus of the portrait presented here is organizational: I propose to sketch the institutional structure of their movement by forwarding a series of observations and interviews that illustrate how the Brahma Kumaris maintain boundaries between members, non-members, and between different types of members, and how the organization’s management balances their personal spiritual growth with their authority as institutional leaders. I aim to present ethnographic vignettes rich enough to provide useful

²Figure cited from Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Introduction and Addresses of Some of the Centres in India and Overseas* (Mount Abu, India: Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1996), inside back cover.

³Ibid., 1.

⁴Ibid., inside back cover.

⁵Ibid.

⁶I discuss the distinctions between “surrendered” and other types of members in Chapter Four.

⁷The Brahma Kumaris have received two United Nations Peace Medal awards, in 1981 and 1986, and an International Peace Messenger Award, in 1987; Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Introduction and Addresses*, 1.

⁸The Brahma Kumaris are formally affiliated with several United Nations departments, including the Department of Public Information (DPI), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The Brahma Kumaris also maintain an office in the United Nations Plaza, Room 4054; *ibid.*

insights into the organization as a whole, but I also emphasize that the organization's managerial methods illustrate how secular and sacred modes of authority and power overlap in unexpected ways.

Knowledge

For readers who are unfamiliar with the Brahma Kumaris, it may help to begin this dissertation with a summary of their theology; or as they say, their knowledge. While it sometimes happens that someone may begin to learn what the Brahma Kumaris teach from a friend, family member, publication, or television broadcast,⁹ the only approved way to begin to learn Brahma Kumaris knowledge is by taking what they call the Seven Day Course. The Seven Day Course is only taught at a Brahma Kumaris center by an instructor who has been properly authorized to teach it. Authorized teachers are usually coordinators of a Brahma Kumaris center or one of her¹⁰ trusted assistants.

The Brahma Kumaris do not publish the course for public consumption. It is not available outside of developing a personal relationship with a Brahma Kumaris instructor. One of my consultants, Sister Charlotte, who served the organization as a center coordinator, explained to me that even if someone obtained a copy of the lessons and studied them, the student would not be able to understand them properly; even students who study the Course under a Brahma Kumaris teacher cannot understand them fully because they are intended merely as a brief introduction to Brahma Kumaris knowledge.¹¹ They are for rank beginners

⁹The Brahma Kumaris occasionally broadcast programs on Samachar, India's dedicated religious television channel.

¹⁰Almost all Brahma Kumaris leaders are women. I discuss the nearly all-female leadership of the Brahma Kumaris throughout this dissertation.

¹¹Personal communication, October 8, 2000.

only, and they introduce only a few basic ideas, about which a student and teacher are expected to talk. In practice, the Course is a cipher developing a personal relationship between Brahma Kumaris teacher and student. Still, readers of this dissertation may benefit from learning a few of the most basic points of Brahma Kumaris knowledge. The following summary is my own synthesis of Brahma Kumaris knowledge, based on four years of experience with the organization and course publications such as the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa-Vidyalaya's *One Week Course: For Attainment of Complete Purity, Peace, and Prosperity*.¹²

Brahma Kumaris knowledge begins with God, who is said never to have become entangled with the world. Thus, God is not responsible for the world. God has never been embodied. God is the only soul whom the world has never tainted. Human souls take bodies and through their sensory experience, the world enters into them and become a part of who they are. Human souls have a dual nature: Partly divine, partly worldly. Only God remains unstained by the world. Only God is wholly pure, wholly clean, and wholly divine.

Brahma Kumaris knowledge teaches that God did not create the world. The world exists in itself as independent from God. God is not bound up in the world and God does not affect anything that happens in the world. The world is completely independent from God.

The world creates itself anew approximately every 5,000 years after having deconstructed the previous world cycle. Each new world cycle of 5,000 years repeats itself identically to every other world cycle. Every world cycle of 5,000 years is predestined to recur precisely as every other world cycle occurs.

¹²Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *One Week Course: For Attainment of Complete Purity, Peace, and Prosperity* (Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India: Pandav Bhawan, 1996).

At the beginning of each world cycle, the moral and material conditions of life are ideal. Life on earth is peaceful, prosperous, and pure. This is a Golden Age for humanity. But gradually, the world declines. It moves through four stages of approximately 1250 years each, beginning with the Golden Age and proceeding through the Silver Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. There is also a fifth age. Between the end of the Iron Age and the start of a new Golden Age is a special transitional time called the Diamond Age. The Diamond Age is the time when God speaks and tells the children the truth about who God is, who they are as souls, and how the world works. During the Diamond Age, souls make efforts to purify themselves and earn their places in the Golden Age of the next world order. The beginning of the Golden Age was in 1936, when Dada Lekhraj first began to receive God's revelation. God's teachings regarding the end of the Diamond Age have not been entirely consistent. The most senior member I heard speak on the subject suggested that the Diamond Age will last either 100 or 250 years.¹³ When the Diamond Age ends, the cataclysmic world transformation will begin.

The Brahma Kumaris believe in reincarnation and their doctrine consistently follows their teachings about God, souls, and the world: God never interacts with the world. World cycles are entirely predestined and repeat identically approximately every 5,000 years. Human beings are the only earthly creatures with souls. Unlike God, human souls have a dual nature. They are partly divine and partly worldly. It follows, then, that the lives of souls are also predestined every world cycle. Souls are tied to the history of the world.

The Brahma Kumaris also believe that there must always be one soul for every human being alive at any given time. Because souls reincarnate, there won't be many more

¹³Anonymous, personal communication, March 3, 2003.

souls in existence than the maximum number of human beings who will be living at the height of Earth's population, prior to the end of the Diamond Age.

Earth's population today is much higher than it has been in the past. According to the Brahma Kumaris, when our current world cycle created itself approximately 5,000 years ago, the population of Earth stood at 900,000 human beings. These persons did not evolve over billions of years from more primitive life forms. At the beginning of each Golden Age, they descend from the spiritual world and are incarnated on the Earth as its inhabitants. At that time, there were still approximately 5 billion souls in existence, but only 900,000 of them are incarnated as humans. The others remain immaterialized in their soul world, which is entirely separated from the material universe. As the world cycle advances and the human population grew, an increasing number of souls descend from the soul world to inhabit the increasing number of human bodies.

Souls reincarnate into new human bodies continuously from the time of their first birth onward. Thus, the original 900,000 souls are the only souls who reincarnate throughout the entire 5,000 years of each complete world cycle. These 900,000 souls are said to be especially blessed because only they enjoy the delights of living in the naturally pure and morally righteous Golden Age.

Other souls are only as pure as the world conditions in which they first incarnate. Souls who take their first birth later in the Golden Age are still very pure but not quite as spotless as the original 900,000. At the other extreme are souls who take their first births during our current global conditions, wherein war, hunger, crime and worse atrocities are all too common. Those souls are generally as corrupt as the prevailing conditions of their life experiences. But even the purity of the original 900,000 souls degenerates progressively as

each world cycle advances until all of them have forgotten their true nature as souls and the purity of the Golden Age that they once inhabited. It is at that time in the world cycle that God first reveals himself to humanity and heralds the start of the diamond age, the only age in which souls may purify themselves and restore their original divinity.

It is a matter of choice to become a dedicated soul. Because of drama, there is nothing wrong with souls who never come to Baba. They are still souls. During the period of transformation, they dwell far from him. During life, they do not know him. Their existence is relatively without joy or happiness, but there is nothing “wrong” with that. Every cycle repeats identically, so billions of souls are fated for precisely that life. Thus, to be a Brahma Kumaris is to make the commitment that it is simply better to be closer to God, to be a member of his family. Nothing keeps them from leaving except their own conviction that they would rather be a Brahman than not.

God and souls are the only divine beings in existence. God never interacts with the world, whereas every other soul takes birth as a human being at the same point in each world cycle. Another way of making approximately the same point would be to say that God and human beings are the only spiritual beings that exist. Other than God and human souls, there are no other divine beings. There are no gods, no goddesses, no angels, no demons, no spirits, no ghosts, no supernatural beings of any kind whatsoever other than God and human souls. Except for God, human souls, and their soul world, everything else that exists is mundane. The universe does not conform to the views that the sciences have constructed of it – especially insofar as the age of Earth and the history of homo sapiens is concerned – but otherwise there is nothing supernatural about it.

The Brahma Kumaris do not aspire to be systematic theologians. They listen to God and do their best to implement God's directions in their lives and in the life of their organization. Moreover, God has not revealed his theology all at once. Rather, God has revealed Brahma Kumaris theology gradually and in response to his assessment of the Brahma Kumaris' needs and ability to understand. Their theology is not sealed and their canon is not closed. It grows continually as God explains and elaborates on it. Tomorrow, God may personally resolve any contradictions that appear today.

The religious core of Brahma Kumaris life is characterized by the practice of a style of spirit-possession that has always been more deeply indebted to practices among the royal elite for communing with sovereign temple deities in their territory than with the more spontaneous rural practices that give voice to the underclass or abject. Moreover, the Brahma Kumaris insist that the God whom they channel is the same God whom all other religions worship throughout the world. This kind of universalistic claim is not uncommon among Hindu sects, but the Brahma Kumaris are unusual insofar as they firmly reject polytheism, henotheism, pantheism, and all other understandings of God worldwide, insisting instead on a strong form of monotheism wherein only one God has ever existed. While other religions may have been inspired by partial awareness of God, it is only through the mouth of designated Brahma Kumaris mediums whom God possesses that God is revealed directly to human kind. Throughout the early decades of the movement, God possessed only Dada Lekhraj and spoke exclusively through his lips. Since Dada Lekhraj's death in 1969, a successor was chosen to serve as God's medium; however, no longer is God's medium looked upon as the leader of the Brahma Kumaris. Instead, she merely serves as a capable vehicle

through whom God speaks to the organization's administrators and the rest of the Brahma Kumaris family.

In addition to their teachings on God, the Brahma Kumaris teach an uncompromisingly strict form of predestination and millennialism. According to the Brahma Kumaris, the world repeats in absolutely identical cycles every five thousand years, and the current cycle is on the brink of ending. The end of the world cycle is characterized by floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, and nuclear war. These cataclysms serve as cleansing mechanisms by which the earth purifies itself, resulting in the restoration of perfect purity after only a few short decades. During the earth's transformation, all human beings are killed, their souls traveling to the spirit world where they remain until they reincarnate again at their predestined time in the new world cycle, which proceeds identically as the prior and future world cycles.

The Brahma Kumaris' teachings about the world cycle are important for understanding the organization's objectives. During the first quarter of each world cycle, only nine hundred thousand souls are incarnated on earth, including sixteen thousand who serve as leaders, and one hundred and eight who serve as royalty. These nine hundred thousand souls are the same souls who served in the same capacities during every previous world cycle, and who will serve in the same capacities during every future world cycle. These are the most royal, pure, and elite souls in existence. These nine hundred thousand souls are the only souls who reincarnate on earth throughout the cycle, and these are the only souls who—during these critical years just prior to the end of the world—are now remembering God, their true nature as deity souls, and the truth of the world cycle. The Brahma Kumaris are dedicated to identifying these original souls and helping them to remember their highest purpose in life,

which is to guide humanity through the coming transformation and to lead them virtuously in the Golden Age to come.

On account of their birthright as divine global governors of perfect peace, joy, and divine love, many of these souls currently hold positions of power and influence in their societies, wherever they may be located throughout the world. The Brahma Kumaris expect that they will meet many of these souls in the corridors of power that drive our current world system. They will likely be serving as government officials, business leaders, civic leaders, experts in every industry with advanced training in technology, culture, communication, agriculture, and all the arts. These souls will come from a cross-section of all the best that the world has to offer, because these souls will incarnate during the Golden Age after the world's apocalyptic transformation; these souls will make the Golden Age possible, ushering in twelve hundred and fifty years of perfect purity, plenty, and peace.

God has revealed these truths to the Brahma Kumaris, and the Brahma Kumaris seek to adhere to them through a combination of organizational savvy, spiritual acumen, and loving fellowship. Over the past seventy-three years, they have gained substantial experience at researching global trends, harnessing them for their own purposes, and networking worldwide in search of the purest and most capable of world leaders. They have built their organization to serve as a showcase of enlightened management, based solely on the spirit of volunteering, and protected by the scrupulous maintenance of social boundaries that filter out the undesirable and let pass only those with whom they wish to engage.

Organization

As much of this dissertation is dedicated to analyzing the institutional structure of the Brahma Kumaris organization by discussing a selection of ethnographic vignettes drawn

from my fieldwork, I offer here a summary overview of how the Brahma Kumaris were organized during the years of my fieldwork.

The Brahma Kumaris are registered with national governments and the global community of international non-governmental organizations as two separate corporate entities. One of these corporate entities is chartered as a religious organization, the other as an educational and cultural service organization. The religious organization is known as The World Preservation Trust, and their secular educational and service organization is known as The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (also known as The Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa-Vidyalyaya). The religious side is a “trust,” their secular side is a “spiritual university.” The connotations of these terms are partially inverted from their common applications, as “trusts” are often secular and “spiritual universities” are often religious. The partial inversion of these terms is the first indication that the Brahma Kumaris’ institution escapes easy categorization as either religious or secular. Moreover, the personnel of both institutions are nearly identical, and each chartered organization’s activities are inseparably integrated with the mission of the institution as a whole.

Within the organization, members pursue their spiritual growth and worldly service through three primary modes of activity. These three modes include the family, the administration, and the spiritual university. In this context (that of the internal constitution of the organization along the lines of familial, administrative, and spiritual modes of activity), the mode of Brahma Kumaris activity pertaining to the “spiritual university” involves studying the words of God, not to secular pursuits.

The familial mode of Brahma Kumaris activity operates on an ad-hoc, egalitarian, and consensus basis. The administrative mode, in contrast, is a hierarchical, command-

oriented power structure. The spiritual university is antinomian: Within the organization understood as an university, each Brahma Kumaris member pursues the purification of her (or his) soul through meditation, upstanding moral conduct, and service activities.

The administrative mode is the simplest to describe. The Brahma Kumaris call the head of their organization “Bap-Dada,” a term in the Hindi language that translates as “Father-Uncle” and which refers to God and Dada Lekhraj. According to Brahma Kumaris knowledge, God has never taken human form, and Dada Lekhraj, as a soul, departed to the soul world upon his death in 1969. Since then, God and Dada Lekhraj (in the form of an incorporeal soul) have been possessing pre-designated Brahma Kumaris hosts on a regular and frequent basis. Consequently, Bap-Dada (God and Dada Lekhraj) are frequently literally present among the Brahma Kumaris through spirit-possession, speaking with the Brahma Kumaris about their efforts as a family, an organization, and a university.

Everyone who comes into any significant contact with Brahma Kumaris knowledge learns almost immediately that the Brahma Kumaris do not believe in gurus and that there are no gurus among them. Everyone in their organization, regardless of how highly esteemed she or he may be, is nothing more than a human soul, and only God’s knowledge is complete. Moreover, because God and God’s ambassador to humanity, Dada Lekhraj, make themselves available to all Brahma Kumaris for conversation at least a dozen times per year (in decades past, God visited much more frequently), there is never any question among the Brahma Kumaris regarding what God teaches. God comes and tells everyone directly, through the lips of a pre-designated trance medium at times that are announced weeks in advance of God’s arrival. All Brahma Kumaris know that God and Dada Lekhraj (known together as Bap-Dada) head their organization.

The day-to-day administration of the Brahma Kumaris institution is headed up by two joint administrative chiefs. One of the two chiefs leads the organization in India, the other leads the organization's international operations. During my fieldwork,¹⁴ the joint administrative chief for India was Dadi¹⁵ Prakashmani, and the joint administrative chief for international operations was Dadi Jenki. However, Dadi Prakashmani died in 2006, and now Dadi Jenki leads the organization's Indian affairs and one of Dadi Jenki's former protégé's, Sister Jayanti, directs the organization's international operations.¹⁶

Both joint administrative chiefs are also members of the institution's board of directors. During my fieldwork, I did not confirm the precise number of board members or the precise charter that governs the board, and I never encountered that information in any of the hundreds of internal publications I surveyed, either; but every published account of Brahma Kumaris history (including academic publications and the movement's own literature) confirms that Dada Lekhraj chartered the board in 1937, almost immediately after he founded the organization, and right from the start, Lekhraj surrendered to it control over the institution's assets and legal authority. Moreover, it was a commonplace among all of the hundreds of Brahma Kumaris whom I met that most of the board members were the same Dadis whom Dada Lekhraj appointed to the board originally.¹⁷ In other words, the joint

¹⁴The period of my most intensive fieldwork spanned all of calendar years 2001–2003. I discuss my fieldwork as a research method later in this chapter.

¹⁵*Dadi* is a commonly used term of address in India. It means “aunt.”

¹⁶It is tempting to speculate that the dual-headed character of the Brahma Kumaris' top leadership mimics the dual nature of Bap-Dada as a two-soul leadership team, but I never heard any Brahma Kumaris member mention this similarity, and the movement's own published histories do not mention their organizational structure as having any more significance than mere administrative expediency.

administrative chiefs of the organization are the institution's chief executives, but they do not act alone. They remain in constant communication with each other, with their board, and with God (Bap-Dada).

Beneath each of the joint administrative chiefs, the Brahma Kumaris divide their respective regions into zones (for India) or regions (for the rest of the world), each of which is headed by its own director. On an as-needed basis, zones and regions may be sub-divided into smaller administrative units, each with their own directors, in order to meet the changing needs of any particular service area. regional, zonal, and other directors communicate frequently with each other, their superiors, and their subordinates.

At the grassroots level of the Brahma Kumaris administration are center coordinators. Every single Brahma Kumaris member is attached to the organization through their local center. In other words, there is no such thing as an "unaffiliated" Brahma Kumaris. To be a member of the organization demands, in part, membership in the community life of a specific center (of which the Brahma Kumaris reported 4,522 in 1996¹⁸). Each center is led by at least one center coordinator, although sometimes a center may have more than one Coordinator, as was the case in Southern Town, USA, where I completed two years of fieldwork (between January 2000 – November 2002). center coordinators are held personally accountable for all of their center's affairs, although regional, zonal, and other directors (such as national directors) do pitch in and help from time to time, whenever they can. Each of these Brahma Kumaris administrators is clearly positioned within a chain of command that flows from God

¹⁷All of the original board members are now quite advanced in years, as indicated by Dadi Prakashmani's recent death.

¹⁸Figure cited from Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Introduction and Addresses*, inside back cover.

(Bap-Dada), through the board of directors, the joint administrative chiefs, regional or zonal directors (within the Indian and international divisions of the organization, respectively), sub-directors (where relevant), and center coordinators.

As mentioned, all Brahma Kumaris members (including the administrators themselves) belong to specific local centers, and thus center coordinators serve as the organization's immediate managers in almost all cases.¹⁹ In other words, for the huge majority of members, center coordinators provide their most immediate and relevant experience of the administration.

Brahma Kumaris administration is, in part, hierarchical and command-oriented. The organization exists to implement God's teachings. Fortunately for the Brahma Kumaris, God is hardly a tyrant. I personally participated in six, in-person meetings with God during my fieldwork,²⁰ and I listened in on live audio feeds of two additional meetings.²¹ I also own a complete set of God's discourses published by the organization for internal use between the

¹⁹The major exception to the role of center coordinators as member managers pertains to the organization's world headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India, which houses a permanent staff of 500 surrendered members. There, the center coordinator is the joint administrative chief for India, and she is assisted by dozens of department directors, who manage their campus operations. During my fieldwork, I heard of a few other exceptionally large centers in which the local administration is similarly extended to manage its operations, such as the international coordinating office in London, England, their international retreat center in New Delhi, India, and a center in Mumbai, India, that also manages a major metropolitan hospital. During my fieldwork, I spent one week at the Brahma Kumaris' regional retreat center for the Americas, located in Haines Falls, New York, where the local administration is similarly extended.

²⁰These meetings occurred on January 18, February 13, February 28, March 17, October 17, and November 15, 2003.

²¹I listened to two meetings with God (Bap-Dada) from the center in Southern Town, USA. The Brahma Kumaris broadcast those two meetings to all Brahma Kumaris centers worldwide over secure Internet streams. I could not locate the field notes I took after the first meeting, but I did refer back to it in my field notes for the second meeting on February 3, 2002.

years 1969-2003 (the set contains approximately 10,000 pages of transcripts). It would be a breach of trust to reveal specific details of God's discourses, but I can say with complete confidence that when God speaks to the Brahma Kumaris, God does not presume blind obedience. God speaks in a variety of discursive modes, and the Brahma Kumaris do indeed embrace God's words as embodying the highest possible authority; but, as mentioned above in my discussion of Brahma Kumaris knowledge, God teaches that the only difference between God and human beings is that God has never taken human form. Human beings are just as divine as God himself. Moreover, it is only human beings who are capable of completing the worldly tasks that must occur in order for the organization's goals to be realized. Accordingly, God instructs and advises the Brahma Kumaris, but God rarely specifies how the Brahma Kumaris should best pursue their goals.

God's partnership with the Brahma Kumaris' senior leadership has important implications for their institution's corporate culture as a whole. God provides broad directives, but implementation is left to human hands. Among the Brahma Kumaris (as elsewhere in the private worlds of business and public worlds of civil governance), the best ideas and talent often emerge from the grass roots, not from the top of the administrative hierarchy. Consequently, the Brahma Kumaris strive to keep their administrative hierarchy as flat as possible. In almost all cases, each member of the organization is governed by only three tiers of human management (consisting of their center coordinator, regional or zonal director, and joint administrative chief). At major administrative nodes (such as at the world headquarters, the international coordinating office, and the regional and zonal headquarters), the hierarchy is flattened to only one or two administrative tiers.

Brahma Kumaris administration is hierarchical and command-oriented, but it is also extremely flexible, adaptable, and receptive to grass-roots input. Indeed, some of the most successful initiatives within the organization's history have surfaced as ideas at local centers.²² Center coordinators are expected to manage their centers in full and complete conformity with a clearly and tightly delineated set of standards, such that every member I met during my fieldwork all unanimously explained that wherever in the world they traveled, every Brahma Kumaris center they visited reminded them of their own home center in almost every immediately observable way in terms of its daily routine, teachings, and corporate culture.²³ However, center coordinators are still given a remarkable degree of autonomy to manage the details of their center's programs, outreach activities, and social events as they deem appropriate for their local operating environment. In other words, each center is encouraged to innovate within their common context of Brahma Kumaris teaching and practice, and center coordinators remain in close communication with their regional or zonal directors about the results their centers are producing. In this manner, good ideas at the grass-roots level can spread very quickly throughout the worldwide organization.

The great majority of Brahma Kumaris administrators throughout the organization are women. The Brahma Kumaris teach that patriarchy is one of the most obvious signs that our world has fallen from the purity of the Golden Age. They teach that souls have no gender, and thus all human beings are equally divine. Patriarchal customs pervert this truth by encouraging men to assume greater worth for themselves than women, and for women to assume themselves to be less capable than men. The Brahma Kumaris look forward to the

²²Examples include the Million Minutes of Peace Appeal and Global Cooperation for a Better World, discussed later in this chapter.

²³Anonymous, personal communication, February 13, 2000.

return of a rapidly approaching Golden Age wherein men and women are entirely equal. Meanwhile, in order to aid its members in their efforts to balance their souls and attain perfect purity before the coming world transformation, the organization elevates women to the highest offices so they may learn to exercise their leadership abilities and so men may learn humility.

The nearly all female character of Brahma Kumaris leadership often generates interest among non-members. During my fieldwork, a few of my interviewees discussed their experiences with Brahma Kumaris management, and they included some gendered observations in their remarks. For example, one center coordinator, Sister Charlotte,²⁴ who lived in a household with seven Brahma Kumaris Sisters for seven years before assuming the leadership of her center, described the experience of her training as follows:

I learned how to deal with different people. With seven Sisters living in one house, I learned how to deal with certain things – certain “sanskars,” or what we call personality traits – which might not always be the most comfortable. You put seven girls together and they get along, that's great; and I think it is amazing when you live together as seven women, yet you don't scratch each others' eyes out, but you understand that it is your own weakness that is rubbing off on another person.

I learned a lot how to develop relationships. Many times I would honestly say that I wasn't successful...I learned a lot. I learned a lot. And I

²⁴A pseudonym.

didn't know I was learning so much until I was transferred [and] all the stuff I went through was building my character and my growth and I didn't know it.²⁵

Sister Charlotte speaks here about the importance of relationships among Brahma Kumaris management, and she indicated that the lessons she learned about relationships from living with seven Sisters for seven years built her character and prepared her for her current role as a center coordinator. Moreover, because only one of the six women with whom she lived was herself a center coordinator—the rest were her organizational peers, the relationship style in which she was trained emphasized 'horizontal,' or 'sibling style' relationship skills.

Significantly, the word “Kumaris” in the organization’s name, “Brahma Kumaris,” means “Children” in Hindi, and the Brahma Kumaris understand themselves as children of God, making them all siblings to each other. One of the organization’s three primary modes of interaction is familial, and it is in precisely this sense of sisterhood (and brotherhood) that the Brahma Kumaris understand family, with God as the only true parent.

Another primary mode of organization among the Brahma Kumaris is the administrative. Brahma Kumaris are assigned to their posts partly because of their occupational skills, but their capacities for sibling-style familial relationship also plays a role, as does the purity of their spiritual accomplishments (which is the third major mode of attainment in the organization). For example, when I interviewed another center coordinator (Sister Lydia²⁶) about how administrative advancement works within the organization, she

²⁵Recorded interview, February 20, 2000.

²⁶A pseudonym.

replied, "skills always are there [as a consideration for assigning tasks]; but also, integrated very deeply, are the qualities [of a member]."²⁷

An assistant to yet another center coordinator, Sister Savannah,²⁸ contributed to this emerging picture of how Brahma Kumaris administration is bound up with sibling-style familial relationships and spirituality when she responded in an interview to one of my questions about how it is that Brahma Kumaris centers throughout the world are said to share a similar atmosphere and purpose:

The big, big, big thing is the Supreme Being.... Yes, we have directors, and there is sort of a level of respect for different positions, but everyone is a student. Everybody is learning, everybody is growing, and everybody is going at their different pace and allowing for that respect and that dignity to develop in each one as we are becoming this bigger and bigger family throughout the world. The big things or big events will always be given to one of the directors or coordinators of, like, the region, or whatever, and they will give their ideas, and it is presented that way. But it's not like the bigger the position the bigger the paycheck, because it is not in that way. You sort of earn your level.²⁹

Brahma Kumaris earn their level in the hierarchical administration by deepening the purity of their spiritual attainments, specifically the virtue of their moral conduct, their capacity for dignity and respect. These are seen as the manifest expression of the "the big, big, big thing,"

²⁷Recorded interview, April 1, 2000.

²⁸A pseudonym.

²⁹Recorded interview, February 28, 2000.

which is the quality of a Brahma Kumaris' personal relationship with a God. Occupational skills play a part in administrative advancement, but only instrumentally.

The Brahma Kumaris dedicated themselves and their organization to spiritual advancements, and thus the purity of each member's soul is an essential ingredient for determining the administrative potential of members. High spiritual attainment is not sufficient in itself to advance a member up through the organization's administrative hierarchy, as some members have more interest in service or meditation than management; but as Sister Lydia explained at some length later during the same interview quoted above, administrative status within the organization is tempered by family and spiritual endeavors. She said:

I think that if any difficulties come into the organization, they come because people sometimes think that they are better or worse than another based on the work they do within Brahma Kumaris organization. But family balances that, so that at the end of the day, any conflicts or tensions that may have arisen during the course of the day's organizational work can be let go of and everyone is just family.

In many organizations, status, money and fame flow from position in a corporation. Moreover, opportunities for development stop at a certain point because the seniors are holding the top positions and there is no room for people to move based on their growth. The Brahma Kumaris are not like that.

For us, all departments are equal. Transportation, publishing, administration, teaching, etcetera; all are equal because all are necessary. None could work without the others. If you think of it like a machine, there

may be some large parts, but without screws the whole thing would not hold together. So someone may feel like they are only a screw, but nonetheless they are essential to the organization. That is why everyone is given a vision of the whole.

In the family, everyone wants to belong. Sometimes, a person may feel like she doesn't belong because of their own personal issues. She does belong, but she doesn't feel like it because of past relationship problems.

When someone new comes to the Brahma Kumaris, of course everyone makes a special effort to make them feel welcome and part of the family. But after a while, once they meet everyone and become familiar with everything and get to know their way around, then people pull back a little bit. She just becomes part of the family, and she kind of finds her own way. It isn't right to keep giving her special treatment, because that is like an attached mother.

But sometimes a person might be spoiled. She was like that before she came. So when the Brahma Kumaris who greeted her begin to pull back a little bit, she feels like she isn't wanted.

On one level, we are all family. We are all God's children, and that makes us all part of the same value. So a big part of the Brahma Kumaris stems from family values. This is an unstructured, casual way of interacting with each other. But there is also the level of the university, or knowledge. At this level, we are all individuals. No one should ever feel like she is better than someone else because she is better in knowledge. All students are ranked,

and students have different capacities for taking knowledge. But Baba says over and over that you should not operate from the law. That can refine your spirituality, but it can make you rigid, stiff. At the level of the university, we are all equal because we are all students. Even Dada [Lekhraj] was a student. He was only receiving the knowledge. There were points in it that even he had to learn. So everyone is equal at the level of the university, because everyone is a student.

The students are ranked, but pride should not come from this. Students are different in their capacity, and everyone is doing their best. But in the family, relationship rules apply and there can be different relationships like any family. So there is difference there.

But then there is also the level of the organization, and the organization is what gives people direction. If there was only family, people wouldn't grow. They would just stay in the same place within the family. Most corporations are like that. People can't move. So, too, in a family. The elders in a family might think that they are on top. But the Brahma Kumaris organization prevents that, because everyone is always moving within it.

Also, there is no way to claim 'me' or 'mine' in the organization, because you never know if your assignment is going to change, or if you will move on to a new task. So the roles keep changing and that keeps a dynamism moving through the Brahma Kumaris. There is the family that provides emotional sustenance, the university that provides knowledge and encourages

individual effort and spiritual growth, and there is the organization that provides direction and new opportunities for cooperation.

In the outside world, people might think about the Brahma Kumaris organization and ask, what tasks are they doing, what is their work, what jobs do they have? But inside it is not like that. Inside, it is more like cooperation between members of a family. How can we use our unique talents, skills and specialties to cooperate? That is what the organization is like.

So family is togetherness with unique emotional relationships that fill emotional needs within the spiritual context of God's family, the university provides knowledge that Brahma Kumaris work on individually to advance their spiritual acumen, everyone is equal insofar as everyone is a student, and there are rankings within students just as there are rankings in students everywhere, but within the Brahma Kumaris this is not a criterion for status differences, and the organization provides direction for everyone, gives everyone the opportunity to use their skills, talents and specialties; but again here there is no claim to status.

No one gets a paycheck. Everyone is a volunteer. There are no discrepancies in pay for the service that anyone gives, because no one is paid. All departments are seen as equally important, because all are necessary. Brahma Kumaris grow into service roles that match their skills and specialties. All Brahma Kumaris are members of the same spiritual family, and all attend the same university.

Assignments can change at any time, so no one can develop a sense of 'me' or 'mine' related to the particular service they are doing for the organization. The organization is also not 'fixed.' Everyone is welcome to come in at any point, at any level of the organization and from any direction and learn as much as they want to. Since there is no indelible organization structure, anyone can come and take as much as they can and find a way to give back to the organization and the world in the way best suited to their skills. That's how it works. This is why everyone who comes is welcomed, regardless of their shortcomings or faults.

Everyone is invited into the family, and Brahma Kumaris make a special effort to greet everyone.... Once they get oriented and meet us, then we back away some and let them find their own place, determine their own work. There is so much flexibility in the organization so everyone can implement their talents in the best way. People come and learn, so of course they naturally want to give back to others what they have learned.³⁰

Advancement within the organization is familial, spiritual, and administrative. Each of these three modalities for the attainment of power work together to provide checks and balances against the others. As Sister Savannah said:

Some people have studied for many, many, many years, but they have held on to certain weaknesses or habits that go all the way up. One of our instruments will often give us the example that you can climb to the top of the ladder, but if you have carried this with you, you can't just drop it. You have to go all the

³⁰Recorded interview, April 1, 2000.

way back down to the bottom of the ladder and climb up the right ladder. You can have an image or appearance of being very, very good, but unless you have let go of weaknesses and behaviors that are not the highest ideal and the highest value, then that will catch up to you. It is very, very much about honesty and truthfulness....³¹

Keeping each other honest is one of the most important functions of family among the Brahma Kumaris, and this honesty quickens deeper spiritual attainments, which in turn facilitates enlightened management.

History

In addition to having a basic understanding of Brahma Kumaris knowledge and administration, readers may benefit from a brief overview of a few important historical events pertaining to the growth of their institution. As discussed below in the literature review section of this chapter, every single scholar who has published on the Brahma Kumaris dedicates approximately half of their publications to summarizing Brahma Kumaris history,³² so there is little need to rehearse that exercise here. Instead, I focus only briefly on major developments in the organization's history that anticipate my ethnographic analysis of their organizational boundaries.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is a new religious movement that began in 1936 in Hyderabad, Pakistan. It was founded by a retiring diamond merchant named

³¹Recorded interview, February 28, 2000.

³²See Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*; Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism"; Babb, "Amnesia and Remembrance"; Babb, "Physiology of Redemption"; Babb, "Indigenous Feminism"; Babb, "Part Two: Amnesia and Remembrance"; Knott, "Raja Yoga"; Whaling, "Brahma Kumaris"; Morgan, "Authority of Believers"; Howell and Nelson, "Structural Adaptation and 'Success' "; Carguilo, "Gateway to Paradise: The Brahma Kumaris Movement"; and Wallis, "From World Rejection to Ambivalence."

Dada Lekhraj who initiated it on the basis of revelations that he received during the preceding two years. Initially, the religion consisted of little more than a close-knit gathering of Lekhraj's closest family, friends, and business associates, although it quickly grew by attracting mostly young women as members.

The organization was vigorously persecuted during its first two decades on suspicion of taking advantage of the women in the movement and for disrupting families by encouraging their female members practice celibacy. In 1936, women's lives in South Asia were generally tightly controlled by fathers and husbands, particularly the lives of young women – by their fathers if as-yet unmarried, and by their husbands if wedded. The involvement of young women in the Brahma Kumaris movement was thus upsetting to the fathers or husbands because abstinence from sex, meat, liquor, tobacco, and other vices inspired young Brahma Kumaris women to refuse marriages that had been arranged for them, or to terminate conjugal relations with their husbands.

One response of the Brahma Kumaris to the resistances they faced on account of their pure lifestyles was to close ranks and avoid contact with their larger social environment. This created insular living conditions among the predominately female members of the Brahma Kumaris movement, and established a precedent for sorority living as a requisite part of Brahma Kumaris spiritual training that remains in practice to this day. Living in all-female households, in turn, compels Brahma Kumaris members to learn 'horizontal' or 'sibling style' relationship skills that play out as the familial mode of attainment within the institution, as discussed above.

The Brahma Kumaris did not open their organization to non-members until after 1951,³³ shortly after they relocated their headquarters from Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan, to its present locations in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India.³⁴ The first satellite center was established in Delhi in 1952, and by 1969, the Brahma Kumaris had opened around 400 centers throughout India.³⁵

Brahma Kumaris literature indicates that 1954 was the year in which the Brahma Kumaris' institutional constitution was finalized, their institution's flag was designed, and for the first time all Brahma Kumaris were expected to wear only white clothing. Also in 1954, the Brahma Kumaris implemented consistent policies for the management of all Brahma Kumaris centers and the Brahma Kumaris for the first time hosted their own inter-religious dialogues, conferences, and exhibitions in India.³⁶

The Brahma Kumaris began to expand their activities internationally in 1954 when senior Brahma Kumaris attended a World Religions Conference in Shimizu City, Japan,³⁷ and other Brahma Kumaris went to Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.³⁸ The Shimizu City World Religions Conference was an important event within the world of global civil society,

³³Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Landmarks in the History of Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya* (Mount Abu, India: Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1996), 1.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵Ramesh N. Shah, ed., *New Light for a Better World* (Mount Abu, India: Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1995), 34.

³⁶Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Landmarks*, 10–11.

³⁷Howell and Nelson, "Structural Adaptation and 'Success,'" 10.

³⁸Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Landmarks*, 10–11.

and the Brahma Kumaris' participation in the World Religions Conference marks the beginning of their participation in it.

In 1965, the Brahma Kumaris met H. E. Pope John Paul at the Vatican. Brahma Kumaris' histories indicate that by 1965, Brahma Kumaris' theology was fully formed, but the detailed explication of their theology had not yet been completed.³⁹

The Brahma Kumaris spent eighteen years gaining practical experience in the contexts of global and international civil societies before they established their first international centers in London and Hong Kong in 1971.⁴⁰ The London center in particular was established in response to calls from South Asians who had emigrated to London in sizeable enough numbers to request a center to support them.⁴¹

Howell and Nelson report that in addition to English Londoners who participated in Brahma Kumaris activities after Dadi Jenki's arrival in 1975, Australian nationals also participated in center activities. Shortly after becoming involved with the Brahma Kumaris in London, these Australians took their commitment to the Brahma Kumaris back with them to their homes in Australia and started Brahma Kumaris activities there. Sister Nirmala, the first Brahma Kumaris to represent the institution in London, was then sent to support Brahma Kumaris members in Australia. The Brahma Kumaris with Australian heritages then played a crucial role in expanding Brahma Kumaris activity into other European states and elsewhere including the Israel, Japan and Indonesia.⁴²

³⁹Ibid., 21–23.

⁴⁰Shah, *New Light*, 22.

⁴¹Howell and Nelson, "Structural Adaptation and 'Success,' " 10.

⁴²Ibid., 3–10.

Dadi Jenki was sent specifically to expand the membership of the Brahma Kumaris in London and abroad, Howell and Nelson report that Westerners started to become involved with the Brahma Kumaris center in London only after Dadi Jenki arrived in 1975.⁴³ Dadi Jenki was one of the original members of the steering committee of the board of directors appointed by Dada Lekhraj, and currently she is the administrative chief of the Brahma Kumaris in charge of India.

Even before the London center expanded its operations, in 1972 the Brahma Kumaris sent more of their members to the United States and Southeast Asia to continue preparations for international centers there, and in 1974 a German was the first person without a South Asian heritage to make a commitment to the Brahma Kumaris. In 1975, he established a Brahma Kumaris center in Germany.⁴⁴ A New York center was opened in 1975,⁴⁵ and subsequently the Brahma Kumaris opened centers in San Antonio, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tampa, Miami, Boston, Chicago, Toronto, Guyana and in some Caribbean states.⁴⁶ In 1977, Dadi Prakashmani, the then-administrative chief of the Brahma Kumaris in India, took a 2 month tour of Brahma Kumaris centers throughout the world,⁴⁷ and the Brahma Kumaris opened a new center in New Zealand in 1978.⁴⁸

⁴³Ibid., 9.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Shah, *New Light*, 32.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Landmarks*, 15.

⁴⁸Shah, *New Light*, 26.

These events were important because they suggest that the Brahma Kumaris made considerable efforts to become involved in global civic society and learn how best to grow their institution within global and international civil societies. But it wasn't until later that the Brahma Kumaris began to engage with the United Nations as a means for actively participating in the civil society of our global polity.

The Brahma Kumaris first became closely involved with the United Nations in 1977 when the Brahma Kumaris moved their African regional headquarters to Nairobi. The United Nations had their Environment Project (UNEP) headquartered in Nairobi, and the Brahma Kumaris took advantage of the two institutions' proximity in the same city to organize several programs with the United Nations Environmental Project.⁴⁹

In 1980, the Brahma Kumaris formally affiliated with the United Nations Department of Public Information as a non-governmental organization.⁵⁰ Also in 1980, according to Brahma Kumaris sources, there were "over 80,000" members worldwide.⁵¹ Members of the Brahma Kumaris demonstrated their aptitude for global organizing by holding an international conference on "human survival" with programs in Bangalore, Canada, Australia, Germany and the United States.⁵² The Brahma Kumaris further demonstrated their capacity for global coordination in the same year by involving all of their centers outside of

⁴⁹Ibid., 27–28.

⁵⁰Ibid., 10, 18.

⁵¹Howell and Nelson, "Structural Adaptation and 'Success,'" 10, citing Jagdish Chander Hassija, *Adi Dev: The First Man*, 2nd English ed. (Mount Abu: Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1983), 69.

⁵²Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Landmarks*, 15–16.

India in a 'world welfare festival' in which the Brahma Kumaris engaged in public service.⁵³ By the end of 1982, the Brahma Kumaris claimed 850 centers and sub-centers in 35 countries, 70 of which were outside India.⁵⁴

In 1981, the United Nations awarded a Peace Medal to the Brahma Kumaris.++ In 1983, the Brahma Kumaris adopted a 'Universal Peace Charter' and obtained consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).⁵⁵ Their induction ceremonies were attended by the Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and by the president of Peace University in Costa Rica, a university that is now an official United Nations institution.⁵⁶

Also in 1983, the Brahma Kumaris held their first Universal Peace Conference at their world headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India. 3,000 delegates from 38 countries attended the event, which had separate workshops for jurists, scientists, educationists, youth, women, doctors and other groups.⁵⁷ In 1984, the Brahma Kumaris held their Second Universal Peace Conference at their headquarters in Mount Abu. This time, the event was commenced by the President of India and attended by the Dalai Lama, Madam Anwar Sadat, and two Assistant Secretary Generals of the United Nations.⁵⁸

⁵³Ibid., 16.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., 17–19.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 18.

1984 was also the year when Perez de Cueller, Secretary General of the United Nations, awarded a United Nations Peace Medal at a conference of NGOs at the United Nations to Dadi Prakashmani, administrative chief of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.⁵⁹

In 1985 the Brahma Kumaris serve as one of the principal coordinators of the United Nations' Million Minutes of Peace Appeal that is launched in 88 countries. The Appeal collects donations of more than 1 billion minutes of positive thoughts, prayer or meditation from people all across the world. The Brahma Kumaris then present the final report of the Appeal to the Secretary General of the United Nations in New York on the occasion of the United Nations' fortieth anniversary celebrations.⁶⁰

In 1987, the Brahma Kumaris launch Global Cooperation for a Better World to continue the work of the Million Minutes of Peace Appeal. The project is the first Peace Messenger Initiative dedicated to the United Nations and lasts two years, reaching 122 countries. The United Nations Secretary General awards Kenya and the Brahma Kumaris a Peace Award for its participation in Global Cooperation for a Better World. Dadi Prakashmani was awarded the International Peace Messenger Award from the Secretary General of the United Nations.⁶¹

In 1992, the Brahma Kumaris participated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, Brazil. Brahma Kumaris participate in preparatory

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 21.

⁶¹Ibid.

meetings and serve on steering committees. Dadi Jenki, administrative chief of the Brahma Kumaris in charge of international activities, delivered an address to the conference.⁶²

In 1994, S.R. Insanally, President of the United Nations General Assembly, commenced the 50th anniversary of the United Nations by visiting the Brahma Kumaris headquarters in Mount Abu. The conference's theme was “We the People of the United Nations Unite for a Better World,” and Brahma Kumaris centers around the world dedicated the year to “Sharing Values for a Better World.”⁶³

In 1995, the Brahma Kumaris participated in the United Nations Conference on Women, in Beijing;⁶⁴ UNESCO's Restoration of Humanity conference in Seoul, South Korea;⁶⁵ and in the United Nations' 50th anniversary celebrations in New York.⁶⁶ In this year, the London Brahma Kumaris office put the number of fully committed overseas members at 7,000, with 300,000 fully committed members worldwide.⁶⁷ By the end of 1995, the United Nations had awarded the Brahma Kumaris one Peace Medal, one International Peace Messenger Award, and five National Peace Messenger awards.++

About This Dissertation

⁶²Shah, *New Light*, 32.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 19, 34.

⁶⁴Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Landmarks*, 23.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶Shah, *New Light*, 10.

⁶⁷Howell and Nelson, “Structural Adaptation and ‘Success,’ ” 10.

Fieldwork

I first encountered the Brahma Kumaris by accident in the town where their world headquarters is located, in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India. During the summer of 1999, I attended a Hindi language training program in Udaipur, Rajasthan, hosted by the American Institute of Indian Studies. During the hottest weeks of pre-monsoon summer, the program retreated from the desert valleys of Udaipur to the cool hill station of Mount Abu in the Aravali Mountains bordering Pakistan and the Indian state of Gujarat. As luck would have it, Mount Abu is also the world headquarters of the Brahma Kumaris, and their white-clad presence in the town was difficult to miss. I visited several of their facilities, including two “spiritual museums” and both of their main campuses in town. I spoke with several members of the religion and with a few non-Brahma Kumaris local residents.

When I returned to the United States, I contacted two Brahma Kumaris centers in my region and established a research relationship with one of them, in Southern Town,⁶⁸ where I pursued participant observations for three years, from December 1999 through December 2002. My research there included field trips to local events and a nine-day stay at one of their retreat facilities, in Northern Woods.⁶⁹

I returned to the organization's world headquarters in Mount Abu to complete my research in January 2003, where I remained for eleven months, through December 2003. It was during that final period of research in India that I learned the most about how the Brahma Kumaris operate.

⁶⁸A pseudonym.

⁶⁹A pseudonym.

My relationship with the Brahma Kumaris was governed as much by their preferences as mine: My Brahma Kumaris consultants generally preferred to interact with me as a student of their spiritual university, as a family member, or as a member of their administration, instead of as a researcher. I consistently reminded the Brahma Kumaris of my research agenda over the years, and together we negotiated a working relationship that was acceptable to the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; however, the Brahma Kumaris consistently sought to manage me and my research according to their own protocols.

I did make sincere efforts to serve the organization's interests and incorporate as many of their teachings into my life as I could, including adhering to their lifestyle norms pertaining to practices such as daily meditation using approved techniques, observing celibacy, and avoiding food that was not prepared by myself or a Brahma Kumaris member. I consider myself fortunate to have benefited from striving to exemplify the firm moral values that the organization upholds. As a researcher, I strove to be as considerate and unobtrusive in my participant observations as possible.

However, even though the Brahma Kumaris welcomed my participation in their organization and never objected to my research, they did not always expedite my efforts. To the degree that my research interests and their interest in me as a potential member of their organization coincided, I enjoyed every advantage they had to offer; but on several occasions my research interests and schedule did not conform to their wishes for me. On those occasions, Brahma Kumaris administrators did not voice any objections, withdraw their consent, or interfere with my research in any way; but they also did not issue the explicit directives throughout the administration that would have been needed for all of my research

plans to be implemented. Nonetheless, I am grateful to the Brahma Kumaris for their cooperation, especially from those members of the organization who welcomed me most whole-heartedly and without whose consultation this dissertation would not have been possible.

During my research, I attended, recorded, and analyzed 172 of their core ritual events. My records of those events included written field notes and audio dictation files. I also took photographs and recorded videos. I spoke and corresponded with dozens of Brahma Kumaris members and interviewed several senior leaders. I did my best to adhere to their lifestyle constraints, including daily meditations using approved techniques, the observance of celibacy, avoidance of hotels and non-Brahma Kumaris households, and avoidance of restaurants plus any other food that was not prepared by myself or a Brahma Kumaris member. I studied many of their internal publications housed in their two private libraries in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India (at the Madhuban and Gyan Sarovar campus libraries), and acquired a substantial personal library of Brahma Kumaris publications, including a wide variety of materials that I purchased from the Brahma Kumaris publications department, including printed documents, audio files, and video discs.

Anonymity

Even though I sought and received permissions from the Brahma Kumaris for my participation, observations, and interviews, I do not feel comfortable using the real names of my consultants or providing enough information about them such that they may be easily identified. Most of my consultants will recognize themselves in these pages, but I would prefer not to reveal enough information about them such that those who know them only by acquaintance or reputation can identify them easily. My concern is that if I were to name my

consultants, their status within the organization could be jeopardized. As a field worker with four years experience with the organization, I am well aware that this concern stems from administrative, spiritual, and familial reasons.

Administratively, the Brahma Kumaris are hierarchical. Subordinates are expected to be fully obedient and completely transparent to their superiors insofar as their intentions are concerned. The expectations that superiors have of their subordinates are not formally codified, and thus it is always possible to reinterpret whether subordinates are in proper compliance with directives. In my approved research protocols filed with the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Brahma Kumaris requested that senior administrators sign approvals for their jurisdiction as a whole instead of allowing individual Brahma Kumaris to sign their own permissions. This arrangement placed subordinates in the position of having to ensure that they were interacting with me in a manner that remained within the constraints of their superiors' expectations. As a researcher, I cannot in good faith expose my consultants to the risk that their superiors may deem at least some of the information they provided to me as improper, either at the time when they communicated the information to me, at such a time when they read this dissertation, or at some even later date.

The Brahma Kumaris do differentiate between what they call “churning” and what I call heresy. Among the Brahma Kumaris, there is nothing wrong with thinking about what God says and struggling to understand God's teachings. It is perfectly okay for Brahma Kumaris to discuss imperfections in their understanding, and to give voice to their reservations, questions, and conflicted feelings about God's teachings. This activity is called

“churning,” and the term refers to the churning action of a till or plow as it breaks up the soil to increase its value as fertile ground for the cultivation of productive crops.

In contrast to churning is what I refer to as heresy, which involves what the Brahma Kumaris view as a stubborn refusal to at least accept God's teachings as provisionally true—a provision that is kept in perpetual abeyance until it is embraced fully as unconditionally true. It is heretical, for example, to openly voice interpretations grounded in the critical stance of an outsider.

The boundary between churning and heresy is not always easy to determine. In my experience with the Brahma Kumaris, the line is drawn differently by different members of the organization, and even differently by the same members at different times. Because of this, it would be unconscionable for me to reveal the names of my consultants. If I were to do so, it is nearly certain that some Brahma Kumaris would consider their views as heretical rather than as churning, and my consultants would be placed at some considerable risk of invoking the disapproval of their superiors, peers, and subordinates.

In addition to placing my consultants at some administrative risk if I were to identify them, I would also risk betraying the trust that some of them placed in me as a social intimate. The Brahma Kumaris highly value the experience of familial intimacy among members within the constraints of celibacy, and many relationships are maintained on the basis of that trust, which by its nature is not public. Even though I consistently reminded my consultants that I was as much an observer as a participant in their organization and that I would be writing my doctoral dissertation on the basis of the field data I was collecting, it is too much to expect that my consultants always filtered the information they conveyed to me sufficiently to have rendered it safe for public consumption.

Literature Review

Most of this dissertation is based on the primary sources I gathered during my fieldwork, including my participant observations, field notes, photographs, videos, interviews with Brahma Kumaris members, and Brahma Kumaris publications in print and electronic formats. I drew on only a few secondary sources, as only a small handful of scholarly studies on the Brahma Kumaris have been published. The theory informing this dissertation came from four broad subject areas, including studies of religious and secular institutions, spirit-possession, the discursive construction of power, and the sociology of values as promulgated globally by international non-governmental organizations.

I discussed the fieldwork that produced my primary sources in the previous two sections of this chapter. I provide in-text citations and entries on my “Bibliography” pages for the primary source I draw on throughout the dissertation.

Only a few scholarly studies on the Brahma Kumaris have been published.⁷⁰ One theme that carries through almost all of them is a concern for summarizing the basics of Brahma Kumaris history and theology. This theme is appropriate for studies of a new religious movement whose activities are little-known to scholarship.

In 1997, Howell and Nelson suggested that the Brahma Kumaris have been studied only seldom because their growth strategy was unique among new religious movements with their origins in South Asia. Rather than traveling first to the United States and then expanding to other Western nations, the Brahma Kumaris traveled first to England, Germany,

⁷⁰Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*; Babb, “Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism”; Babb, “Amnesia and Remembrance”; Babb, “Physiology of Redemption”; Babb, “Indigenous Feminism”; Babb, “Part Two: Amnesia and Remembrance”; Knott, “Raja Yoga”; Whaling, “Brahma Kumaris”; Morgan, “Authority of Believers”; Howell and Nelson, “Structural Adaptation and ‘Success’ ”; Carguilo, “Gateway to Paradise: The Brahma Kumaris Movement”; and Wallis, “From World Rejection to Ambivalence.”

and Australia. Consequently, only a few scholars in the United States (where most of the world's religious studies researchers hold academic posts) noticed the Brahma Kumaris' significance. The shared concern of these publications with supplying a basic narrative of the Brahma Kumaris as a new religious movement means that much of the content of these published essays overlap, with a comparatively smaller amount of attention paid to interpreting or theorizing about the organization.

Four of the six scholars who published on the Brahma Kumaris applied a broadly sociological approach to their work and focused on how the organization adapted to life in the West, including London, England⁷¹; Edinburgh, England⁷²; England and Australia⁷³; and international outreach efforts coordinated with United Nations programs (Wallis 1999).⁷⁴ One scholar, Carguilo,⁷⁵ penned a master's thesis on the organization that summarized several of its most widely publications, and it serves as a helpful synopsis of several of the Brahma Kumaris' narratives about their history, theology, and senior leaders.

Only one scholar before me, Lawrence A. Babb, based his publications on a sustained period of ethnographic research on the organization in India. Babb spent one year researching the organization in India's capital city of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, in 1979. During his fieldwork, however, Babb split his research agenda between the Brahma Kumaris and two other Indian

⁷¹Knott, "Raja Yoga."

⁷²Whaling, "Brahma Kumaris."

⁷³Howell and Nelson, "Structural Adaptation and 'Success.' "

⁷⁴Wallis, "From World Rejection to Ambivalence."

⁷⁵ Carguilo, "Gateway to Paradise: The Brahma Kumaris Movement."

religious movements, the Radhasoamis and some urban devotees of Satya Sai Baba.⁷⁶ This dissertation is thus the first published effort to portray the Brahma Kumaris ethnographically through a method of sustained participant observation devoted exclusively to the movement.

My commitment to participant observation as a research method led me to focus on descriptions and arguments I could sustain on the basis of my fieldwork directly rather than on other published studies or detached theory. In my analyses, I have sought out consistent patterns in my field data and striven to describe the patterns I found. Still, my analyses here were influenced by a few other publications.

In the field of institutional analysis, I took inspiration primarily from several chapters contributed to *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*.⁷⁷ As the title suggests, the contributors to this volume were all interested in revealing how identical or similar principles animate both religious and private-sector organizations, regardless of their stated objectives. Religions may be studied as organizations, but studying them as organizations neither erases their distinctively religious dimensions nor distinguishes them clearly from secular organizations because secular organizations, too, display many of the same types of authority and strategies for legitimating their aims as religious organizations do. Similarly, my objective in this dissertation is to present an analysis of the Brahma Kumaris organization that does not depend on explicitly religious characteristics. Instead, I seek to describe the structure of their institution,

⁷⁶

⁷⁷N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, eds., *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

emphasize the boundaries that shape it, and explain how its leadership exercises their power within those boundaries.

Within *Sacred Companies*, Mark Chaves' chapter entitled, "Denominations as Dual Structures: An Organizational Analysis,"⁷⁸ provides a particularly useful analysis of how some Protestant denominations in the United States should not be analyzed as organizational wholes, but complexes of "religious authority structures" plus "agency structures." Each type of structure responds to different contextual pressures and pursues distinctive (but compatible) aims. Chaves does not claim that his analysis pertains to all denominations in the United States, much less all religions throughout the world. Indeed, Chaves explicitly acknowledges that some denominations, including groups that most sociologists would categorize as "cults," exhibit unitary authority structures where all agency and authority reside in a single charismatic leader or leadership body. Nonetheless, my field work with the Brahma Kumaris suggests that their organization exhibits characteristics similar to those identified by Chaves. Other scholars also have highlighted the isomorphism of secular and religious institutions.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Mark Chaves, "Denominations as Dual Structures: An Organizational Analysis," in *Sacred Companies*, 175–94.

⁷⁹Penny Edgell Becker, "Congregational Models and Conflict: A Study of How Institutions Shape Organizational Process," in *Sacred Companies*, 231-256; Chaves, "Denominations as Dual Structures"; D. Scott Cormode, "Does Institutional Isomorphism Imply Secularization? Churches and Secular Voluntary Associations in the Turn-of-the-century City," in *Sacred Companies*, 116-131; N. J. Demerath III and Terry Schmitt, "Transcending Sacred and Secular: Mutual Benefits in Analyzing Religious and Nonreligious Organizations," in *Sacred Companies*, 381-400; Margaret Harris, "Religious Congregations as Nonprofit Organizations: Four English Case Studies," in *Sacred Companies*, 307-320; David Swartz, "Secularization, Religion, and Isomorphism: A Study of Large Nonprofit Hospital Trustees," in *Sacred Companies*, 323-339.

The most recognizable religious feature of the Brahma Kumaris institution is spirit-possession. Ever since God possessed the body of Dada Lekhraj for the first time in 1935, God has continued to descend and possess the body of a Brahma Kumaris host in order to speak to them. Throughout Dada Lekhraj's lifetime, Lekhraj served as God's host. After his death, one senior sister by the name of Dadi Gulzar has served as God's primary host. Regardless of who has served as God's host, the Brahma Kumaris have always taken their spiritual direction directly from the lips of God, and God has spoken directly to them. During the first few decades of Brahma Kumaris history, God descended to speak with the Brahma Kumaris literally hundreds of times each year, and God would often remain to speak for many hours at a time. In recent decades, God has been coming to meet with general assemblies of Brahma Kumaris less frequently; during the year of my fieldwork at the world headquarters in Mount Abu, God came to speak to the full assembly of Brahma Kumaris only nine times. Regardless of frequency, however, spirit-possession remains the religious core of the Brahma Kumaris institution, and a few prior studies of spirit-possession have inspired my analyses in this dissertation.

As Frederick M. Smith and Shail Mayaram observe in their review essays,⁸⁰ traditions of spirit-possession in South Asia have sometimes worked to promote prevailing social norms rather than only giving voice to the disenfranchised or marginalized, and the Brahma Kumaris practice of spirit-possession is definitely of the more socially conservative type. The revelations God made through Dada Lekhraj from 1936 onward did establish a new religious movement whose theology and practice diverged from the mainstreams of their

⁸⁰Frederick M. Smith, "The Current State of Possession Studies as a Cross-Disciplinary Project," *Religious Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (2001): 203–12; Shail Mayaram, "Recent Anthropological Works on Spirit Possession," *Religious Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (2001): 213–22.

contemporary religious contexts, but the Brahma Kumaris performance of spirit-possession remains a remarkably ordered affair. Throughout the organization's history, God has almost always possessed only Dada Lekhraj or Dadi Gulzar, and the possessions almost always occur at times and locations announced well in advance (especially in recent decades).

God's teachings are directed toward encouraging members to improve the purity of their souls, which includes enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of their institution. God teaches that the Golden Age will come when all of the technologies needed to live in perfect harmony with earth have been perfected, and thus the Brahma Kumaris encourage all manner of technological, social, and cultural advancements that support peace and prosperity. Far from seeking to undermine or protest the world's hegemonic orders, the Brahma Kumaris practice of spirit-possession seeks to quicken it in preparation for the end of days. One could argue that the Brahma Kumaris' ultimate aims are subversive (because they anticipate the end of the world), but the Brahma Kumaris never seek to undermine global order.

Theology, ritual, and Brahma Kumaris institutional structures are intertwined. I refer to their mutual junctures as "discourses" (after Foucault's usage), signifying in this dissertation the juncture of spiritual power, knowledge, ritual actions, and the institutional dimensions of family, university, and administration.

The topic of religion and globalization has been widely discussed in recent years,⁸¹ and my dissertation research will draw on these discussions for support. But helpful as these

⁸¹Peter F. Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994); Peter B. Clarke, " 'Success' and 'Failure': Japanese New Religions Abroad," in *Some Remarks on the Church of World Messianity*, edited by Peter B. Clarke (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000), 272–311; John L. Esposito and Michael Watson, *Religion and Global Order* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); Roland Robertson and William R. Garrett, *Religion and Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1991); Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992); Roland Robertson and JoAnn

wide-ranging discussions are, their utility is also limited because they either tend to focus on one or another aspect of globalization as a total process of global integration (such as the economic, political, technological, or communicative), or they tend to focus on specific religious traditions within a delimited geographic area.

I can situate my study of the Brahma Kumaris relative to the moral values of global civil society because of Boli and Thomas'⁸² study of the institutional structure of the world polity's civil society, *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875*. Boli and Thomas "analyze international non-governmental organizations as the primary organizational field in which world culture takes structural form, showing how international non-governmental organizations help shape and define world culture as a distinct level of social reality."⁸³ Their longitudinal and statistical analysis of registered international non-governmental organizations around the world since 1875 seeks to demonstrate that not only has global society become a "single place" (following Robertson and Chirico's⁸⁴ use of the term in 1985), but also that international non-governmental organizations constitute the structural sinews of its civil society.

Chirico, "Humanity, Globalization, and Worldwide Religious Resurgence: A Theoretical Explanation," *Sociological Analysis* 46 (1985): 219–42; Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James P. Piscatori, *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); William H. Swatos Jr., "Losing Faith in the 'Religion' of Secularization: Worldwide Religious Resurgence and the Definition of Religion," in *Religious Politics in Global and Comparative Perspective*, edited by William H. Swatos (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 147–53; William H. Swatos, *Twentieth-century World Religious Movements in Neo-Weberian Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

⁸²John Boli and George M. Thomas, *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁸³*Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁴Robertson and Chirico, "Humanity, Globalization."

Even though the international non-governmental organizations that constitute the structure of the world polity's civil society diverge widely in their specific areas of interest and concern, nonetheless they all function according to a core set of five ethical values, including: universalism, individualism, rationally-derived authority based on voluntary participation, progress, and world citizenship. As a full-fledged international non-governmental organization holding five consultative status positions with the United Nations, the Brahma Kumaris have woven themselves integrally into the structure of global civil society in all five of those ways.

Moreover, transnational corporations and international governmental organizations "represent a general process of mutual legitimation."⁸⁵ International governmental organizations

gain legitimacy by incorporating international non-governmental organization knowledge and views in their reports and policy proposals, because international non-governmental organizations represent informed "world public opinion" and are buttressed by the ultimate sovereignty that inheres in their individual members as world citizens. International non-governmental organizations enhance their prestige by collaborating with the IGOs [international governmental organizations] that are formally responsible for the domains in question....⁸⁶

In other words, international non-governmental organizations serve as "priests" of the world polity insofar as they articulate the moral and ethical norms that should guide the various

⁸⁵Boli and Thomas, *Constructing World Culture*, 30.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 292.

activities of governments and multinational corporations within the global arena:

“International non-governmental organization members are, as it were, priests of the world polity....These clergies most often exercise institutionalized charisma, usually quite different from that of morally fervent visionaries.”⁸⁷ This is the route that the Brahma Kumaris have taken as they have grown and expanded internationally.

The Brahma Kumaris’ status as an international non-governmental, values-based “university” gives the Brahma Kumaris maximum advantage insofar as expanding across the world through the social channels afforded by global civil society is concerned. Moreover, the Brahma Kumaris specialize in a kind of education that is particularly well received within global civil society: “International non-governmental organizations that promot[e] world unity, peace, international or world law, environmentalism, and the like...are all especially universal, drawing members from the margins relatively frequently.”⁸⁸ The Brahma Kumaris may have entered the world stage from the margins, but they are hardly marginal in global significance.

Objective

The primary objective of this dissertation is to contribute to the existing body of scholarship on the Brahma Kumaris an ethnographic portrait of the institution based on three years of participant observations. This portrait focuses specifically on the boundaries that the organization maintains between members and non-members, and between different types of members. This focus surfaced from the texture of the fieldwork data I collected, and it speaks to broader questions about the relationship between religious and secular modes of boundary

⁸⁷Ibid., 284.

⁸⁸Ibid., 65.

maintenance among successfully institutionalized organizations. These issues are particularly interesting among the Brahma Kumaris because of their relationship to God as the leader of their movement, as known through spirit-possession performances.

The broadest context for my analysis is global, including the structural conditions within which operate national governments, international non-governmental organizations, and global economies. Within that framework, God expresses teachings to the Brahma Kumaris and provides direction for the organization. It is from God that the Brahma Kumaris take their inspiration, but it is to the beat of global civil society that they march.

However, every global context is localized in particular places, and thus this dissertation focuses on the two locales where I completed most of my fieldwork, including a branch center at Southern Town, USA, and the organization's world headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India. In addition to describing some of the differences that distinguish each of these sites from the other, I illustrate how consistently the Brahma Kumaris manage their affairs in both places. These consistencies speak to the strength of Brahma Kumaris managers and administrators.

Finally, this dissertation seeks to account for the potency of the organization. In other words, this dissertation seeks to answer the question of from where the institution draws the best practices for efficient management that it implements in order to be successful on a wide range of issues, including local issues that animate Center life in Southern Town and the world headquarters in Mount Abu, the global context of the world polity's civil society, and the personal issues of spiritual growth among its members, both as individuals and as a family of spiritual siblings.

My concern with organization is one way of explaining my interest in power. One view of organizations is that they are conduits for the power they wield. They distribute power internally among their constituent parts; they filter the external influences that press in upon them; and they shape the kind of power that they deliver outward into their wider worlds. Much of this dissertation is concerned with the internal and external boundaries that the Brahma Kumaris strive to maintain and the slippages of power that always accompany any organization's efforts to maintain their structural integrity as they steer their institution in desired directions.

Arguments

I am primarily concerned with boundaries in this dissertation. In seeking to account for the potency of the Brahma Kumaris institution and arguing that it is to be found in a specific brand of management philosophy pioneered by one of their members, it is not my contention that the Brahma Kumaris may be explained in secular terms. Practices of spirit-possession lie at the heart of the organization, and God serves as the only true authority among the Brahma Kumaris. However, God teaches that God has always been entirely separate from the world, God did not create the world, and that God does not cause the world transformation (because the world initiates its own transformation). God tells the Brahma Kumaris that the world is its own cause, and that it is predestined to repeat its history identically every 5,000 years. Thus, to seek an account of Brahma Kumaris potency from worldly sources is entirely consistent with Brahma Kumaris knowledge. There is no other source from which such power could come. No other source, that is, except for the power of each individual Brahma Kumaris' soul; and the Brahma Kumaris management practices I describe as central to their success is focused squarely on guiding its participant managers

toward the clarification of the unique talents and aims inherent in their souls as managers spiritual aspirants.

As I build my argument through ethnographic descriptions, I also emphasize the roles that boundaries play for the organization. I contend that these boundaries are an important component of Brahma Kumaris success because they give structure and definition to the organization, providing it with a social barrier that protects it from the vagaries of their local contexts and makes possible the status distinctions within the organization upon which its administration depends. I take seriously the Brahma Kumaris' declared mission to become, quite literally, queens and kings of earth, ruling over a paradise of perfect moral and natural purity. The Brahma Kumaris organization, then, provides its members with the training grounds they need in order to perfect their own spiritual purity and leadership skills until the coming immanent world transformation provides them with the actual leadership of the planet. I argue that Brahma Kumaris management is so effective at guiding the organization from global success to global success because the Brahma Kumaris aim at precisely that goal: Simply and straightforwardly, to rule the world.

Significance

As an ethnographic portrait of the Brahma Kumaris, the primary significance of this dissertation is the modest contribution it makes to existing scholarly literature about the organization. The dissertation also proposes a new line of interpretive analysis focusing on how the Brahma Kumaris organize themselves and exercise their institution's power, which also contributes a case study to our understanding of how contemporary global organizations may combine secular with religious modes of authority.

Chapter Overview

In this first chapter, my goal has been to introduce Brahma Kumaris knowledge, the basic contours of their organization, and a few of the movement's historic milestones while internationalizing their institution. I have also sought to describe the fieldwork I completed, my approach to protecting the anonymity of my consultants, the scholarly literature with which this dissertation engages, and its objectives, arguments, and significance. I close this chapter by describing the approach I took grammatically to integrating some of the Hindi-language vocabulary used by the movement into English.

Chapters 2 through 5 contain the heart of my ethnographic analyses, grounded in three years of participant observation. Together, my discussion in these chapters move generally from the peripheries of the organization as viewed from outsiders (chapter 2), to how those peripheral boundaries are maintained by members as a recruitment threshold and service field (chapter 3), to the boundaries that structure the experience of different types of Brahma Kumaris members (chapter 4), and finally to an account of the management philosophy guiding the administration as they maintain the integrity of their organization and lead it toward ever-greater integration with prevailing best practices among multinational corporations. Chapter 6 provides a summary overview of my ethnographic descriptions, research findings, and general conclusions.

Terminology

Even though Brahma Kumaris members spoke a variety of northern Indian languages during the earliest decades of the movement (including Hindi, Urdu, Sindhi, Gujarati, and Punjabi), Hindi has almost always been the organization's first language. Sanskrit was never used. Today, the organization strives to translate its publications into hundreds of languages

worldwide, and they routinely provide simultaneous translation services in dozens of languages during their programs for participants.

Whenever I inquired about whether anything about the Brahma Kumaris ever got lost in translation, my consultants consistently explained that God speaks plainly, and that even though a few terms or turns of phrase may not translate readily from Hindi to other languages, nothing very important was lost. My consultants were convinced that language is imbedded in culture, and thus translation was as much a cultural transliteration project as an issue of semantic translation. In other words, some cultures have particular ways of expressing their heritage; but the Brahma Kumaris believe that their teachings are universal and can be communicated intelligibly to anyone, regardless of which language they speak.

One immediate consequence of the Brahma Kumaris' position on the issue of language was that whenever anyone learned that English was my first language, they strongly preferred to communicate with me in English, even though I demonstrated significant fluency in Hindi. When I graduated from the American Institute of Indian Studies' Summer 2000 intensive Hindi language training program, my skill in conversational Hindi was evaluated as "intermediate-advanced," just one-third rank beneath the highest category, "high-advanced." After another twelve months of living in India conducting my fieldwork, my Hindi was even better during the time of my fieldwork with the Brahma Kumaris. Still, the Brahma Kumaris made every effort to always speak Hindi with me, insisting that it would be easier for me to understand God's message in my first language.

Another consequence of the Brahma Kumaris position on the issue of language is that most of the terms I use in this dissertation are in English. The Brahma Kumaris would prefer that I communicate to my readers in English, and English was the language they preferred to

use when they spoke with me. To the ear of scholars for whom comparative linguistics are a significant interest, this dissertation may appear disappointingly flat; however, out of the respect I have for the Brahma Kumaris, as well as on the basis of most the ethnographic data I collected, I have preferred to use the English forms of most of the specialized terms that the Brahma Kumaris employ.

However, the Brahma Kumaris do routinely leave some specialized terms untranslated, even when they are speaking to English-only audiences. Coming to terms with those few words is a routine part of any new members' orientation to the group. In the case of those terms, I follow the Brahma Kumaris custom and leave them untranslated as well, although I do provide a sufficient explanation of their meanings. On a few occasions, I also include data that have come to me through Hindi, either in print or the spoken word. In those cases, I have provided my own translations.

The term, “Brahma” in the name, “Brahma Kumaris,” refers primarily to the Hindu god Brahma, who is credited with the role of creating the world. Dada Lekhraj is also called “Brahma Baba” because he is seen as the catalyst for ushering in the world renewal of a new Golden Age. In Hinduism, “Brahma” also appears in the caste name, “brahman.” In mainstream Hinduism, this term refers to those who are the mouth of Brahma, when Brahma is the name given to Prajapati, or the creator of the world in the Vedic hymn. The caste of priests in Hinduism is called brahmins because they give voice to Brahma, or God. The Brahma Kumaris thus consider themselves all to be brahmins because they speak the truth of God just as God speaks it himself through the mouth of a trance medium.

Two additional points pertaining to terminology remain to be raised, both of them involving gender. Hindi is a gendered language, and thus some terms that the Brahma

Kumaris use in their English language publications and spoken communications display grammatical irregularities in English. Chief among these are “Brahma Kumaris,” “Brahma Kumar,” and “Brahma Kumari.” “Brahma Kumaris” is a proper noun conjugated in the singular. It is also a plural noun and an adjective. The following sentence is an example of its usage as a proper noun: “The Brahma Kumaris is a new religious movement.” As a plural noun, “Brahma Kumaris” might refer to a group of two or more members of the Brahma Kumaris. The following sentence is an example of its usage as a plural noun: “The Brahma Kumaris boarded the bus, which drove them up the mountain.” As an adjective, “Brahma Kumaris” modifies both singular and plural nouns. The following sentences are examples of its usage as an adjective: “Brahma Kumaris theology is dualistic.” Or: “Brahma Kumaris buildings are almost always painted in red and white.” “Brahma Kumar” is a singular masculine noun. Each individual male member of the Brahma Kumaris is a Brahma Kumar. “Brahma Kumari” is a singular feminine noun. Each individual female member of the Brahma Kumaris is a Brahma Kumari.

The second point pertaining to gendered language is that I do not refer to God or souls as “he,” “she,” or “it.” According to Brahma Kumaris theology, neither God nor souls have gender, so it would be inappropriate to refer to God or souls as “he” or “she.” It would also be inappropriate to refer to God or a soul as an “it” because they are the only spiritual beings in existence, and beings are not referred to as “it.”

None of this should suggest that gender plays no role in Brahma Kumaris theology or practice. The Brahma Kumaris encourage their members to nurture intimate relationships with God (and only God) that carry the emotional connotations that accompany perfectly pure and loving relationships with an earthly father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, or

any other safe and supportive human relationship. All of these human relationships are gendered, and the Brahma Kumaris understand that gendered nuances constitute a portion of most persons' understanding of God and their relationship with God. However, the perception of gender in these cases results merely from human projection based on analogies drawn from our embodied world and superimposed onto the divine realm, which transcends all materiality.

Chapter 2: Outermost Boundaries

One of this dissertation's main objectives is to analyze the boundaries that give shape to the Brahma Kumaris institution. One boundary that the Brahma Kumaris cultivate lies between their institution and the local populations in the midst of whom they situate their centers. I collected more information about this boundary as it is maintained in Mount Abu than in Southern Town or Northern Woods; but in all three cases, even though the Brahma Kumaris are exceptionally skilled at presenting agreeable public images of themselves, local residents view them with disaffection. These contrasting views of the organization—the first an insider view and the second an outsider view—together illustrate that the Brahma Kumaris choose to cultivate a boundary between themselves and their local neighbors that limits the likelihood that local residents will engage with them merely on the basis of proximate residence. The Brahma Kumaris are targeting different audiences, as revealed by the recommendations my consultants made for organizing this dissertation, the organization's skill at running their spiritual museums, and the nearly universal disapproval with which local Mount Abu residents speak of the religion. Undeterred, the Brahma Kumaris are committed to their aims and resist becoming embroiled in what they see as petty or ill-intentioned slurs.

Adaptable Self-Presentations

Adapting their self-presentation to suit their intended audiences comes easily to the Brahma Kumaris. They first developed this skill as a method for defending themselves

against vigorous attempts to persecute them during the first two decades of their organization's history,¹ but they have also learned how to use it to their positive advantage. During the course of my fieldwork, several consultants recommended strategies for organizing this dissertation most persuasively, and they pointed out how often the organization adapts its messages to appeal to whichever audience they may be trying to reach at any given time.

My consultants frequently encouraged me to write this dissertation in a way that would improve the impression that the Brahma Kumaris make on academic audiences. This encouragement was never expressed as an interest in co-authorship or even editorial oversight, but the frequency with which my consultants made suggestions about how to structure this document indicates that the impulse to adapt their self-presentation in order to favorably impress their intended audiences comes easily to them.

One of my consultants who expressed this interest most eloquently was a senior manager at the organization's world headquarters in Mount Abu. Shortly after being introduced to this manager by one of my other consultants, I was invited into the department office to chat.++ There the manager explained,

We present the organization in different ways to different people. Sometimes we present the Brahma Kumaris as a values-based organization providing an education in living values for creating a better world. For other people, we want to present that God is with us, that we have exclusive access to God. For still others, we try to present an image of their own religion to persuade them

¹See Chapter One.

that their religion is encouraging and inspiring them to live a lifestyle of real spirituality.

The first image the manager identified is the image they project to the international community through their participation in activities dedicated to the United Nations. The latter two images are displayed for spiritual seekers or adherents of other religious traditions.

The manager continued to explain how the organization pitches its teachings differently to meet the differing expectations of newcomers from Indian and non-Indian backgrounds. Of the two types, it is easier to give an "introduction" to the organization to non-Indian newcomers because they do not usually have any preconceived notions about mainstream Hinduism, relative to which the Brahma Kumaris are quite different:

Indian residents have already read the Hindu scriptures, and so when giving knowledge to those souls, a lot of effort needs to be paid to re-interpreting the scriptures and their stories, and to positioning knowledge next to mainstream Hinduism. But non-Indian newcomers haven't read the Indian scriptures, and so they just go directly into knowledge. Especially if they accept and easily understand the first two lessons about the self and God, then everything else comes very easily and is, in a sense, just more details and more elaboration. Non-Indian newcomers can reach that point very easily, and so the introduction [to Brahma Kumaris knowledge and ritual practice] can skip over or bypasses almost all of the Hindu scriptures. The non-Indian newcomers are able to grasp the essence of knowledge much more quickly than Indian residents who take longer to understand knowledge because each point needs to be explained and used to reinterpret the Hindu scriptures.

Many of my consultants echoed this manager's opinion that non-Indian residents find it easier to advance more quickly through the ranks of the organization than Indian residents, precisely because they have fewer "false" ideas about God to unlearn.

In addition to appealing to religiously minded newcomers, the Brahma Kumaris also find it sensible to adapt their teaches to suit the thinking styles of secularly minded newcomers as well. Indeed, according to this manager consultant, the Brahma Kumaris' ability to adapt themselves to meet the needs and "understandings" of their target audiences serves as one proof that they "truly are the Godly university for all the world":

For lawyers or advocates, we can give them knowledge in a way that emphasizes Baba's teachings that make sense to a lawyer. When you talk to a housewife, they will explain knowledge in their own way, and when you talk to doctors--even if that doctor might be a woman--she will explain knowledge and how Baba reached her in a different way. So the Brahma Kumaris always try to reach each group, each category or type of person in a way that will make the most sense to them. This is proof that the Brahma Kumaris organization is a Godly university, because God's introduction can be given to everyone according to their own needs and according to their own understandings. The Brahma Kumaris truly are the godly university for all the world because they are meeting everybody's needs of all types.

The manager concluded his explanation by recommending that I interview as many Brahma Kumaris from as widely divergent backgrounds as possible and demonstrate how the organization met the unique needs of each one. That, he said, would help intellectuals to understand that the Brahma Kumaris are for all types of people in the world.

Spiritual Museums

The Brahma Kumaris interest in projecting favorable impressions on their target audiences guides the operation of their spiritual museums. They operate two of them in Mount Abu, both of which cater to tourists rather than residents. The first museum is located just off the main road that leads through the heart of Mount Abu to Nakki Lake. The road narrows considerably about one kilometer before reaching the Lake, just at the edge of the oldest part of town. The tourist bus depot is located there, and on the western end of the depot, slightly elevated on a hillside, is one of the museums.

On the day that I arrived at the museum to observe it,² there were only three or four other visitors there. It must have been a slow day, because on previous occasions I had seen as many as one hundred visitors milling around the grounds, almost all of whom had arrived on tour buses.

While I was taking some pictures of the exterior, an elderly Brahma Kumar wearing all white clothing noticed me and invited me inside. When he caught my eye, he asked, "Yes? You want to see the laser light show?" I said that I would, so he led me inside the compound and up the exterior stairs to the second floor veranda. While we were walking, he said cheerfully, "you will certainly experience the meditation. It will come to you."

The man had been speaking to me in English and I had been replying in Hindi, so he asked me how well I knew both languages. When he learned that I was more fluent in English than Hindi, he said that he would show me the English version of the guided meditation.

²The date of my first visit was June 16, 1999. At that time, I was in Mount Abu studying Hindi with the American Institute of Indian Studies.

Beside a door on the second floor veranda was a sign instructing guests to remove their shoes. My guide also indicated that I should remove my shoes, which I did. He then led me through the door and into a small waiting room. From there, he led me through another door into a small auditorium with plastic chairs for about fifty persons.

The upper half of the auditorium's front wall was a large viewing screen. It was approximately twelve feet high, forty feet wide, and raised about four feet above the floor. The chairs were arranged in five rows with space for an aisle through the middle, along both sides, and in front of the screen. This was an arrangement that movie goers anywhere would recognize.

The man suggested that I sit in the middle of the back row. He said I would have the best view from there. Back at the doorway, he threw some switches on a panel to turn on an air conditioner and dim the lights. He then exited, and the show began.

The first half of the show, which lasted a total of approximately fifteen minutes, was a slide show accompanied by the recorded voice of a woman narrator. After instructing the audience to relax and make themselves comfortable, the screen displayed a set of six images on the left side of the screen. These six images included scenes of urban congestion, industrial pollution, war, and the faces of adults wearing worried expressions. These six images were then replaced by six more images, this time shown on the right half of the screen. Those images showed peaceful images such as a woman resting with a cup of tea, the Himalayas, sunsets on the beach, and the faces of smiling children. The alternating sets of images on the left and right were displayed far enough apart from each other that I had to turn my head from side to side to view them. As the images on the left were shown, the narrator spoke about personal, social, and environmental problems in the world. As the

images on the right were shown, the narrator spoke of the need to find solutions, of quests to find God, and the allure of a world filled with peace and serenity.

When the slide show was over, a Brahma Kumar dressed in all white entered the auditorium through a door opposite the one I had used to enter. He threw some switches on a panel beside that door, the lights turned on and then off, and the man sat down in chair nearby.

For the second half of the show, the room was completely dark. The recorded voice of the female narrator explained that she would lead the audience through a guided meditation. From behind the screen, a planetarium-style projector emitted laser beams, similar to the kind used in laser pointers, through the screen in rotating pattern that revolved around all three axes. At the same time, a dry ice machine blew mist into the room, rendering the full length of the beams visible as they moved. The narrator spoke of God and souls as points of light, and the peace that comes from recognizing that all souls and God are equally divine. She said anyone can recover this experience of serenity for themselves by remembering who they truly are.

After the guided meditation ended, the room lights came up and the screen went blank. The first Brahma Kumar who had led me up into the viewing room beckoned me to follow him out and back downstairs to the museum's courtyard, where he stood behind a table underneath a covered patio. Several Brahma Kumaris publications in about a dozen languages were displayed there. He asked me where I was from, and suggested that I look up a Brahma Kumaris center near my home town. He invited me to peruse the books and to choose whatever I liked. I chose six books and four pamphlets, for which he charged me the equivalent in rupees of approximately four U.S. dollars, a rate that was fully four-fifths

below what similar books would have cost in market bookstores. When I asked about taking meditation classes, he suggested that I walk across town to their main campus, called The Forest of Honey.

The Brahma Kumaris with whom I spoke with at the museum seemed skilled at putting visitors at ease. The museum was not busy during my visit, so the Brahma Kumaris staff was not pressed for time. Nonetheless, they seemed comfortable with foreigners, they demonstrated good listening skills, they were deliberate and concise with their speech, and they projected gentle, kind personalities.

Local Disapproval

Considering how willing Brahma Kumaris administrators were to adapt their self-presentation to meet the needs of diverse audiences, and how welcoming the Brahma Kumaris were to newcomers at their spiritual museums, it was somewhat surprising to learn that all the Mount Abu residents with whom I spoke were negatively impressed. When I pressed several of my Mount Abu resident consultant to think of something positive to say about the organization, some of them would concede that they keep their facilities and grounds very clean,³ that their members never become angry,⁴ and that the Global Hospital they run in town sometimes assists non-Brahma Kumaris residents in the region;⁵ however, these concessions were made grudgingly and without significantly altering their overall negative assessment. Except for one owner of an Internet shop who benefited enormously from the patronage of participants on Brahma Kumaris programs, I did not meet even one

³Personal communication, June 6, 1999.

⁴Personal communication, June 19, 1999.

⁵Personal communication, June 6, 1999.

non-Brahma Kumaris resident of Mount Abu who spoke favorably about the organization during the twelve months I lived in the town, including my first three-week stay in Mount Abu while on the summer Hindi training program.

My purpose in calling attention to the views of disapproving outsiders is not to criticize the organization through proxies. Any large organization that serves a wider clientele than their local host communities is almost certain to attract at least some criticism from local residents who feel the organization is not doing as much for them as they expect. The nearly universal disapproval of the Brahma Kumaris in Mount Abu, however, invites closer analysis because it helps to reveal the kinds of exterior institutional boundaries the Brahma Kumaris choose to maintain and the priorities motivating their choice.

Two of my non-Brahma Kumaris Mount Abu consultants, whom I will call Mrs. Patel and Mr. Sharma, were particularly forthcoming in their explanations of why they disapproved of the institution, but I frequently heard other townsfolk express similar sentiments. These consultants expressed disapproval of how little concern the Brahma Kumaris express in serving the local population, how widely their teachings differ from mainstream Hindu norms, how their fiscal strategies interfere with family inheritances, and how powerful the organization is on account of its international stature. Some of these criticisms are reminiscent of the persecutions the institution suffered during its early decades⁶; but these sightings of the Brahma Kumaris' outermost public boundaries also reveal an organization that chooses to filter out local constituencies in order to focus its attention almost exclusively on the more mobile and far-flung constituencies they prefer to serve.

⁶Discussed in Chapter Two.

Mrs. Patel

One of the local Mount Abu residents I came to know best was Mrs. Patel, who had lived in town for decades. I met her while she was serving as conversation instructor with the Hindi teaching staff in Mount Abu during the three weeks that it operated out of Mount Abu. In that capacity, I spoke with Mrs. Patel about the Brahma Kumaris twice during Hindi classes and once more during a school-organized field trip to her home. On all three occasions, we spoke under the general supervision of AIIS' senior teaching staff.⁷

Mrs. Patel was a mother of two grown children who had graduated college and moved on to professional careers in two of India's major metropolitan centers. She and her husband owned a middle-class home situated on several dozen, orchard-dotted rural acres just outside the city limits of Mount Abu. Like many middle-class Indians, she employed several servants who assisted her with the upkeep of her home, land, and orchards. Her husband traveled frequently for business and pilgrimage, and he was away while Mrs. Patel was serving on the AIIS staff. Mrs. Patel was also a disciple of a regionally renowned, itinerant holy man for whom she and her co-disciples maintained a very modest seasonal dwelling in the mountains nearby.

I doubt that Mrs. Patel ever would have spoken of the Brahma Kumaris if I had not raised the topic with her, but I quickly discovered that she had plenty to say about them, almost all of it negative. During our first conversation, she even tried to discouraging my interest in them by suggesting that Mount Abu's Catholic boarding schools, Lions Club, or Rotary Club would serve as better examples of local, international non-governmental organizations than the Brahma Kumaris; but at that point, a senior AIIS instructor interjected

⁷The dates of these conversations were June 16, 19, and 25, 1999.

that the Brahma Kumaris nonetheless remain a prominent example of that institutional type in Mount Abu, a point she conceded reluctantly by chuckling self-consciously. After this exchange, Mrs. Patel no longer seemed reluctant to speak about the Brahma Kumaris, because she criticized their theology, meditative technologies, recruitment strategies, financial practices, and what she called their “unnatural” practice of celibacy within marriage.

Mrs. Patel observed that only about five hundred Brahma Kumaris permanently reside in Mount Abu. The rest are guests who come and go either as temporary workers or participants in their various programs. She said that they keep themselves and their campuses very clean. She said they demonstrate remarkable discipline and self control: They will not become angry even when they are strongly or personally criticized. She conceded that the Brahma Kumaris run an efficient hospital, but she also claimed that no Mount Abu residents were Brahma Kumaris.

Mrs. Patel gave several theological reasons for why no Mount Abu residents were Brahma Kumaris. She said Mount Abu residents do not believe their God is the same God to whom the Brahma Kumaris are dedicated, and that their spiritual practices amounted to little more than "autosuggestion," which yielded “two second enlightenments” at best.

These criticisms reveal Mrs. Patel as a disciple of a mainstream Hindu renunciate guru. For Hindus such as her, it is nonsensical to speak of God as the Brahma Kumaris do, and it is spiritually ineffective to practice meditation as they do. In the mainstream Hindu imaginary, the god Shiv (whom the Brahma Kumaris claim is a distorted representation of the God who runs their organization) is one of the most august and powerful of deities, replete with fully developed mythologies and theologies that have persisted for millennia.

Similarly, legitimate meditative technologies are characterized by more than two thousands years of rigorous testing and refinement, all of which have been historically documented and safeguarded by religious specialists (such as Mrs. Patel's guru) who are the only authorities qualified to teach them.

In contrast, the Brahma Kumaris radically discount all of those views as mere superstitions. For the Brahma Kumaris, all religions - including all varieties of Hinduism - are fundamentally in error because they are built not on the firm foundations of direct revelation, but on the traditions of societies, which are driven by the hazy memories of souls who have almost entirely forgotten God and their own true natures. Mrs. Patel and similarly inclined, traditional Hindus like her do not find those arguments convincing.

In addition to rejecting Brahma Kumaris theology, Mrs. Patel also objected to their social and financial practices. She claimed they recruit new members by telling them that they are "one of ours," instead of empowering them to look within themselves and discover their own true selves. She said the Brahma Kumaris advise their members to abandon greed but then take their adherents' money for themselves. She said they relentlessly proselytize rich people and do not relent until they convert.

These views also mark Mrs. Patel as a Hindu who participates in a renunciate tradition. For Hindus of this type, money generally does more spiritual harm than good because it binds its possessor into worldly networks of greed. Under ideal conditions, all money and material possessions are to be abandoned in favor of living an ascetic spiritual life of utter poverty. As a wife, mother, and householder, Mrs. Patel does not count herself as an example of this spiritual ideal, but she expects her religious leaders to exemplify those ideals.

Mrs. Patel may disapprove of the Brahma Kumaris financial and social practices, but I will argue that the Brahma Kumaris are marching to the beat of a different drummer. The Brahma Kumaris have never claimed to adhere to other-worldly ascetic ideals. Instead, they combine a quintessentially modern, this-worldly asceticism with another of Hinduism's most powerful imaginaries, that of the temple and its divine court. Wealth and worldly power are hallmarks of both of those religious styles and would not likely draw the same kind of critical response that Mrs. Patel expressed about the Brahma Kumaris.

Mrs. Patel reserved her strongest criticism for the Brahma Kumaris' practice of celibacy within marriage, which she opposed on the basis of what she called "natural law." During my first personal tutorial with her she asked rhetorically, "What is human nature? Man and woman should live together as man and wife. This is our Hindu way. Otherwise, there are problems. The Brahma Kumaris say to think of each other as brother and sister. This isn't right." For Mrs. Patel, sex is a natural expression of the exogamous bond between husband and wife. To think of husband and wife as brother and sister is incestuous, and to think of marriage without sex is unnatural. For Mrs. Patel, only extraordinarily accomplished ascetic masters who practice celibacy in social isolation and under the supervisory constraints of initiatory monastic lineages such as those to which her guru belongs are potentially capable of successfully sublimating their sexual drives for spiritual purposes. Everyone else, especially married couples, would be better served by assessing their capacities for sexual restraint more realistically and striving to live responsibly within those constraints.

Mrs. Patel's views on this topic confirm her religious sensibilities in favor of Hindu renunciate traditions, but she is far from the first observer to question the legitimacy of the celibate norms that the Brahma Kumaris impose on their members. Calling attention to issues

of sexual propriety has been a favorite smear tactic of the Brahma Kumaris' detractors ever since the founding of the organization in 1936. However, I uncovered no evidence of sexual impropriety within the organization in my historical or field research. As far as I have been able to determine, the Brahma Kumaris do apply themselves earnestly to the practice of their celibate ideals.

Mr. Sharma

Another Mount Abu resident who explained his views on the Brahma Kumaris to me in considerable detail was Mr. Sharma. Mr. Sharma managed one of the hundreds of small shops that line the narrow streets of Mount Abu's oldest districts. I visited Mr. Sharma several times over a three-week period, during which time I kept him up to date on my impressions of the Brahma Kumaris and invited him to share his views of them with me. Mr. Sharma raised several of the same concerns that Mrs. Patel had, including the segregation of the organization from the local community, their fiscal strategies, and the unconventional character of their theology and religious practice.⁸

Mr. Sharma claimed that “no locals are Brahma Kumaris” and said that the Brahma Kumaris hospital in town “served mostly their own people,” bringing little benefit to the town. In addition to Mr. Sharma and Mrs. Patel, these sentiments were often expressed to me by other Mount Abu residents, even though they may not be literally true. Over the course of my fieldwork in Mount Abu, I attended six classes hosted by the Brahma Kumaris for the benefit of local residents; however, no more than eight residents showed up for the classes, and based on the questions they asked, none of them appeared ready to commit to the organization. The Global Hospital the Brahma Kumaris operate in Mount Abu is rated well

⁸I took detailed notes of my conversations with Mr. Sharma on June 16, 20, and 26, 1999.

as a health care provider by the State of Rajasthan, but by reason of standard medical confidentiality practices, information about patient demographics was not available to me.

Some of Mr. Sharma's other criticisms followed from his status in town. His shop is a family run affair, as are most Mount Abu businesses. It was founded by Mr. Sharma's father several decades ago after his father relocated his family and extended kin into town from an outlying village. As leaders of their caste group, the Sharmas exercise considerable social authority in town and likely feel a great deal of responsibility for their cohorts. By the time I met them, Mr. Sharma's father had mostly retired, leaving Mr. Sharma and his brother to mind the store. Mr. Sharma's brother supervised a few full-time employees to handle the labor associated with the business while Mr. Sharma looked after the customers.

Mr. Sharma mentioned disapprovingly that entire families sometimes join the Brahma Kumaris. He said, "at first everything seems alright because they do not ask for anything. But then when someone in the family dies, the deceased wills all their property, land, and money to them." Considering Mr. Sharma's family history and local influence, it seems likely that some of the families who traveled to Mount Abu and settled there with Mr. Sharma's father subsequently became members of the Brahma Kumaris. Conversions of this type would detract from the Sharma's social capital and material assets. It is standard practice among India's families and castes to maintain control over the wealth of their extended family or caste. For a family to will their assets to a recipient outside of the family and caste such as the Brahma Kumaris would likely be perceived as undermining family and caste loyalties.

Two other shopkeepers with stores nearby Mr. Sharma's independently expressed similar concerns about the organization's financial strategies. After observing that "not a single Mount Abu resident is a Brahma Kumaris," one of these shopkeepers added with

apparently heartfelt distress that they are doing absolutely nothing for the poor. He said, "they will not even allow a poor person to sit next to them." The other shopkeeper also said that "no Brahma Kumaris live in Mount Abu," and that "no local residents go there." He said that "only foreigners from India and abroad go there." He expressed his view that the Brahma Kumaris "are only about the money." During one of my first visits with Mr. Sharma, he even went so far with his criticisms as to say, "I hate them. They are politically very powerful. They are members of the United Nations. If we don't like something, there is nothing we can do."

Regardless of what may be causing Mount Abu residents to disapprove of how the organization operates the financial side of their operation and contributes to the local welfare, their grievances are remarkably consistent. Disapproval among local community members--anywhere in the world--for larger organizations--of any type--that they often host is common. Many large organizations with global operations appear to local residents as uncaring and driven by the motive to acquire a larger fortune than can be acquired from within the local micro economy. Still, there is no rule that global organizations must have cold relations with their host communities. In this case, part of the problem arises from the Brahma Kumaris' organizational objectives and methods. Their objective is to become rulers over a world kingdom of nine hundred thousand of the most elite souls; their methods involve inserting themselves at the highest levels of the world polity and economy global economy. Without a mandate to serve local constituencies for their own sakes, it is not surprising that the Brahma Kumaris aren't directing many of their charitable efforts toward local recipients. As one of my most productive Brahma Kumaris consultants once told me, "God said that when the end

comes, there will be only Brahma Kumaris living in Mount Abu." According to this consultant, Mount Abu residents won't be staying long, anyway.

In addition to discussing social and financial concerns, Mr. Sharma indicated his rejection of the organization on religious grounds, stemming from his deep involvement in local Hindu communities. On one occasion, he showed me the vestments that his shop was stitching for a local temple goddess to wear during her birthday celebrations. In traditional Hindu temple ritual culture, only a few blessed craftsmen are permitted to create items that will come into direct contact with a temple deity. It is not surprising then that Mr. Sharma would criticize Brahma Kumaris theology and religious practice; but the views he sanctioned merit attention because, like Mrs. Patel's, they were also voiced consistently by other local consultants.

During another visit with Mr. Sharma, the head instructor of a nearby Hindu religious school stopped by to chat with him. This teacher, whom I will call Mr. Deva, was a frequent customer of Mr. Sharma's shop because Mr. Sharma stitched all of the school's instructor's robes. The school was staffed by eight full-time teachers, all of whom were monks in a nationally recognized monastic order. Their curriculum included the most traditional of Hindu subjects, training their students in Hindu scripture, law, and ritual practices.

When Mr. Sharma introduced me to Mr. Deva, Mr. Sharma informed him of my interest in the Brahma Kumaris. Mr. Deva then turned to me and said that he and his monastic order had frequently invited the Brahma Kumaris to participate in public debates about any subject of the Brahma Kumaris' choosing, but that the Brahma Kumaris had always refused. In Mr. Deva's opinion, this was "because they know nothing about these things. The Brahma Kumaris and traditional Hindu religion are opposites." Public debates are

standard practice among rival Hindu religious schools. They showcase theological distinctions between sectarian schools and help to establish their reputations. A school such as Mr. Deva's would likely lose face if they did not issue regular challenges for open debate.

The Brahma Kumaris are unlikely to accept such a challenge. Brahma Kumaris teach that all religions--including Hinduism--are thoroughly misguided and that the most misled of theologians are those who cling polemically to their scriptures. Debates with such persons would serve no useful purpose. For the Brahma Kumaris, there is nothing to debate. God has come, and God personally tells the Brahma Kumaris what they need to know, directly through the lips of a medium whose body God possesses.

Read together, these criticisms expressed by Mr. Deva, Mr. Sharma, Mrs. Patel, and other community members reveal three major, overlapping boundary issues that distinguish the institution from its local context in Mount Abu. The first boundary is a social boundary segregating the organization from the community. The next boundary is fiscal and points to the organization's macro-economic strategies that disrupt local customs. The third boundary is made up of a composite of religious differences, all of which may be referred to as common among new religious movements. The Brahma Kumaris simply do not believe as other community members do, practice the same rituals as they do, or view sexual propriety as most of the locals do. The Brahma Kumaris are "other" to their local hosts, separate and unlikely to be integrated into local life. This state of affairs seems to suit the Brahma Kumaris just fine, as it frees them to pursue their own goals.

A Brahma Kumaris Response

The Brahma Kumaris are well aware of the criticisms raised against them. Persisting in the face of local disapproval--especially from local traditional religious, social, or cultural

leaders--has been a constant endeavor for them ever since Dada Lekhraj founded their movement in 1936. It may even be fair to say that the Brahma Kumaris understand their mission, in part, as dedicated to overturning what they view as the small-mindedness and parochialism of their detractors.

While driving together with one of my Brahma Kumaris consultants,⁹ I mentioned several of the criticisms I had been hearing about the organization from local residents. In response, I was told that public disapproval stems from jealousy and a reluctance to give respect where respect is due. The Brahma Kumaris are successful and growing rapidly. They operate a fleet of vehicles and run two large campuses plus the spiritual museum and other satellite facilities.

I was also told during the drive that many people are intimidated by the Brahma Kumaris practice of celibacy. "Think about it," she said, "Hindu monks,¹⁰ even those who smoke intoxicants,¹¹ are honored because they are celibate. Well, if the Brahma Kumaris were accepted as celibate, they would be due the same honor." She continued by explaining, "the Brahma Kumaris practice celibacy in an unusual way, with men and women living together. Some of them are married couples. Usually, only men can practice celibacy, and they live only with other men. But in the Brahma Kumaris, men and women live together, even though they stay celibate. People are jealous of that, even though the people in Mount Abu are benefiting from all of the money that the facilities and pilgrims bring in."

⁹The date of this conversation was November 19, 2003.

¹⁰She said "sannyasis."

¹¹She said "a chillam."

Chapter 3: Outreach in Southern Town

In contrast to the prominence of the Brahma Kumaris presence in Mount Abu, the presence of a Brahma Kumaris center facility in Southern Town¹ was hardly detectable.² The center was located in a small, two-story brownstone house (with a street-level living area and a basement-level program area) that appeared to have been built as part of a suburban development in the 1940s. It was on the east side of a busy four-lane divided highway leading into the city center. In front of the house was a lawn about thirty feet deep from sidewalk to stoop, and two identical houses were located on either side. A church steeple could be seen about two miles up the highway to the north, a church that probably sat on the town square of an independent city more than half a century ago, before it was absorbed into Southern Town's suburban sprawl.

Viewed from the outside, the house appeared nearly indistinguishable from the other small single-home residences that lined the street. The only mark that identified the building as a Brahma Kumaris center was a small metal sign planted in the lawn near the driveway with a small organizational logo (a red circle with sixteen short red lines radiating away from it as if they were rays of the sun) that read, "Brahma Kumaris Meditation Center," and included the organization's telephone number. The sign would likely attract the attention only of those who were looking for it. In Southern Town, architecture and operational logistics were not likely to generate much interest in their organization.

¹A pseudonym.

²I completed fieldwork in Southern Town from December 1999 through December 2002.

The Brahma Kumaris in Southern Town impressed themselves on their local community less directly, and they strove to target the groups they wanted to contact more precisely. Existing members would sometimes invite their family, friends, or co-workers to special Brahma Kumaris programs that were open to non-members. These events helped the Brahma Kumaris identify a few new persons whom they could offer the Course, but these events were invariably small, limited to a maximum of twenty-five participants, and the Brahma Kumaris offered them only a few times each year. The Brahma Kumaris devoted much more of their time and resources to offering management training courses to the largest corporations and government agencies in their metropolitan district and to participating in interfaith events hosted by other religious organizations. Thus the Brahma Kumaris made their public contacts through a combination of management training programs delivered at their clients' locations, participation in religious events hosted by other religious groups, and by hosting their own training programs that were open to the invited public. All of these outreach strategies helped to ensure that the persons whom the Brahma Kumaris contacted were either business or governmental professionals, persons with an interest in interfaith dialog, or persons whom existing members already knew.

In part, the Brahma Kumaris were motivated to pursue those outreach strategies by their sincere desire to make the world a better place to live. Brahma Kumaris knowledge teaches that humanity and the planet are on the cusp of a Golden Age, and many Brahma Kumaris are genuinely inspired by that knowledge to work diligently for the creation of a more peaceful world. Moreover, the Brahma Kumaris believe that the keys to creating a better world lie not only in purifying intentions, but equally in sharpening leadership abilities. However, my observations and interviews also demonstrate that these three types of

program activities also helped to shape the demographics of Southern Town's membership in ways that often privileged persons with higher educations, specialized vocational training, and lucrative professional careers. The Brahma Kumaris emphasize family as a metaphor for their organization, and in Southern Town (as elsewhere throughout the organization), the family tends to be a distinguished lot.

The Centers

I conducted field research at Southern Town for three years, between December 1999 and December 2002. Most Brahma Kumaris centers are named after their host city, so I refer to the center where I did my field work in the United States as "Southern Town." During the summer of 2002, I also spent one week at the Brahma Kumaris' regional headquarters for the Americas, in Northern Town,³ which serves primarily as retreat facility. At the time I began my field work in the United States in 2000, both the Southern Town center and Northern Town retreat center were fairly new facilities for the organization. The Southern Town center had been established only a couple of years previously, and the purchase of property for Northern Town had not yet been finalized.

The membership of the Southern Town center was small. On typical days, I observed between four and sixteen members in attendance at morning discourses. The total membership was higher, as many members attended events only sporadically each week. During special events hosted at the center facility, I observed between twenty-five and forty members in attendance, most of whom were members. Once or twice a year, the center would host an event on their premises to which non-members were also invited.

³A pseudonym.

The Southern Town center helped to organize larger events hosted by nearby governmental agencies, corporations, and religious groups. The largest of these that I observed, such as the center's activities associated with the United Nation's International Year for a Culture of Peace, reached an audience of more than three hundred persons. Few of those participants were Brahma Kumaris members, and many of them likely had little to no idea who the Brahma Kumaris were prior to attending.

The center-in-charge of Southern Town center was Sister Charlotte,⁴ who had never headed a center before. Perhaps because of her relative inexperience, a second, more senior, center-in-charge was also attached to Southern Town, although her broader responsibilities to the organization called her away frequently to other centers. This elder center-in-charge, whom I call Sister Lydia,⁵ was in residence for a total of only a few months every year.

Sister Charlotte carried primarily responsible for the Southern Town center, and she had been hand picked for the job: Her parents had been members of the Brahma Kumaris, she had surrendered to the organization seven years prior to accepting her role as a center-in-charge, she had worked for government and private corporations prior to her surrender, and she was proficient at cultivating the kind of relationships with public and private sector leaders that the Brahma Kumaris wished to nurture in Southern Town.

Sister Charlotte's most important duties were to serve as an example of the organization's values, preserve the purity of her center's physical environment and the peacefulness of its emotional atmosphere, to lead its discourses, and to coordinate its growth as a local branch of the Brahma Kumaris institution; so when I asked Sister Charlotte to tell

⁴A pseudonym.

⁵A pseudonym.

me about some of her early experiences with the Brahma Kumaris, she responded by describing some of her childhood memories of her then-local Brahma Kumaris center. Her responses inform our understanding of that center and her goals for Southern Town. She said,

I started to go and visit the center sometimes. It was very peaceful; but most importantly, not only the peace was evident but a feeling of cleanliness, innocence, purity. You didn't know where it was coming from, but it was all over the place.⁶

All of the Brahma Kumaris whom I encountered were quite consistent with their messaging, and thus to some degree, Sister Charlotte's response was merely the expected one; but in my experience, Sister Charlotte's center was indeed characterized by many of the qualities she identified.

More significant than my own impressions, however, are the corroborating responses of another surrendered Sister in the organization, Sister Savannah,⁷ who had traveled to Southern Town from another center in the South to help Sister Charlotte with some special projects. Sister Savannah knew three centers well, and when I asked her to describe what qualities the centers held in common and what made them distinctive, she responded,

With a lot of people, they have a very good feeling. They don't know what it is, but they have a very good feeling when they come to visit the meditation centers. Often that is tapping in to their truth. It is tapping in to their reality of virtue and peace. So they have an experience of what it feels like to be clean and open and honest. Then they want to have that experience more. So then

⁶I conducted this recorded interview on February 20, 2000.

⁷A pseudonym.

they will find out how to create that for themselves, rather than having to take it from elsewhere.⁸

Sister Savannah's comments make explicit what Sister Charlotte only suggested, namely that according to the Brahma Kumaris, the positive atmosphere of their centers mirrors the innate purity of individual souls. For the Brahma Kumaris, reaching new members has much to do with creating an environment in which new participants may taste the kind of meditative experiences and gentle social relationships that the organization seeks to cultivate.

When I asked Sister Savannah to continue addressing the differences she saw among the centers with which she was familiar, she replied by emphasizing how consistently each center nurtured an experience of family and suggested that the only significant differences among centers stemmed from the idiosyncratic problems that individual members brought with them as a part of their personal backgrounds before becoming members. She said,

Everything sort of has its own uniqueness, but the beauty of this organization is that there are a lot of similarities. There are certain programs, and behavior, and respect towards each other—as unique as individuals are, that is definitely maintained—and the students that come, and the family. We consider this to be one big family, so it is just like little units of the same family.

Then we all have our own little unique talents or things that we bring to the group or gathering as well. Differences? Not so much except that some of us are more in to following everything and some of us still have some things that we are holding on to from the past. Perhaps that would make for

⁸I recorded this taped interview on February 28, 2000.

differences rather than similarities. But basically, they are run in a very similar manner.⁹

Two more of my consultants, both of whom had traveled internationally to several different centers around the world, expressed similar sentiments. They acknowledged that from center to center, the languages sometimes changed and that each center made some small adjustments to their outreach programs in order to meet the cultural expectations of their host societies; but the affective experience of each center remained remarkably the same.¹⁰

One of the strongest affirmations of how thoroughly integrated Brahma Kumaris centers are came from comments made by the organization's regional director for the Americas, during a retreat at Northern Town. The regional director strongly emphasized the familial unity of all Brahma Kumaris members and centers while leading a discussion session in front of two hundred Brahma Kumaris members. During the discussion, a young member asked The regional director when she thought she might visit her center. The regional director responded by saying, "It is not your center. It is my center. There are many centers, but there is only one family. It is my center. I have no where else to go."¹¹

This heartfelt response addressed more than merely the importance of family sentiments among members: The regional director's words also suggest that she felt comfortable enough about her status in the organization to express a view that, in the literal sense of the words, claimed ownership over Brahma Kumaris centers. That sentiment raises

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Personal communication, February 13, 2000, and recorded interview, February 21, 2000.

¹¹Personal communication, September 1, 2002.

the question of order and power in the family. With regard to our present concerns, however, the regional director's comments underscore the organization's commitment to creating consistent environments from center to center such that they may all be understood as different homes shared among the same family. In their outreach programs as well, the Brahma Kumaris strive to extend their experience of family to those whom they contact.

My observations also demonstrate that the Brahma Kumaris tend to attract interest from mostly the middle- and upper-classes. One of the reasons why the Brahma Kumaris are so effective at inspiring interest among those classes is the importance they place on leadership skills, which are in high vocational demand. The Brahma Kumaris also target their outreach activities specifically to those groups. However, some of the Brahma Kumaris with whom I spoke were reluctant to acknowledge their organization's focus on persons of higher social standing.

For example, even though Sister Charlotte said in an interview that the Southern Town center served mostly political officials and business persons and that their grassroots efforts had not been very successful at generating interest among their local metropolitan lower- and working-middle classes, she claimed not to know why the demographics of her center were as they were. She did speculate, however, that only a few local persons may have expressed an interest in center activities because their locally grounded world views were characterized by greater fear of unfamiliar movements, such as the Brahma Kumaris. She said,

I have realized here, at our center, eighty percent of our students are professionals or upper class. We haven't done it, we haven't chosen it to be like that. I have felt that we don't have any grassroots people coming here. No

one from the lower class income comes here and I don't know why. I think maybe people who are in a particular surrounding which all they know is their neighborhood and they haven't really exposure much to the world, something like meditation, yoga, self management; these things can be challenging, or challenging to their selves. We don't even stop there. So I don't know. We don't aim to serve only one kind of soul, but it is universal soul. Anybody comes.¹²

Sister Charlotte was aware of her center's demographics, but she didn't acknowledge that the type of outreach programs her center offered played a key role in attracting the interest of some persons rather than others. She continued her explanation by saying,

Sometimes we go out and we do programs at the business offices of international governmental funding agencies and global venture capital companies.¹³ They like the program so much that they come to the center. We don't choose who are to come and who not to come. This is a universal study. Because it is all about the soul, which is the energy that exists inside of every one of us, it is universal. So everybody can take benefit from it. It is not just for one particular religion or gender or society kind of person.¹⁴

Sister Charlotte was absolutely correct regarding her statement of Brahma Kumaris doctrine: Brahma Kumaris teachings do indeed emphasize that distinctions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, language, or locale make absolutely no difference with regard to the potential

¹²Recorded interview, February 20, 2000.

¹³Sister Jenna mentioned particular agencies and corporations, which I have glossed to preserve anonymity.

¹⁴Ibid.

for any soul to achieve perfect peace, purity, and intimacy with God. In these senses, Brahma Kumaris teachings are perfectly consistent with Sister Charlotte's universalistic declaration. However, as Sister Charlotte's examples reveal, the Brahma Kumaris choose to express their universal values primarily among the leadership and staff of the most powerful political and corporate organizations they can reach. It is little wonder, then, that persons from under-privileged backgrounds would only rarely find Brahma Kumaris activities relevant to their daily lives.

The premium that the Brahma Kumaris place on higher education and professional training is clearly evident in the backgrounds of the Southern Town center's leadership and members. Sister Lydia brought more than two decades of corporate experience to her role as both a center-in-charge and regional administrator.¹⁵ Sister Charlotte brought a graduate degree and years of experience as a public servant in national government.¹⁶ One of the most senior dedicated members of the Southern Town center had just completed a MD degree and a masters degree in social work.¹⁷ The visiting Brahma Kumaris leader of an in-house training program was a retired professor from a university business school.¹⁸

The Brahma Kumaris members of Southern Town were also a credentialed lot. Among the members whom I got to know were a PhD engineer who worked for an aerospace corporation,¹⁹ a certified public accountant who ran his own business out of a strip mall

¹⁵Recorded interview, April 1, 2000.

¹⁶Personal communication, June 23, 2002.

¹⁷Personal communication, July 21, 2002.

¹⁸Personal communication, January 11, 2000.

¹⁹Personal communication, October 8, 2000.

storefront,²⁰ a computer programmer employed as a writer of enterprise-class operating systems,²¹ a medical doctor,²² a graduate student pursuing a PhD in international relations,²³ a self-employed entrepreneur who dedicated his free time to volunteering,²⁴ a former stock market floor trader turned computer engineer,²⁵ a commercially successful artist (a painter),²⁶ a professor of psychology at a nearby university,²⁷ two government clerks,²⁸ and a social worker.²⁹ Members of this professional caliber would be hard to find by canvassing local general publics for persons interested in attending personal development programs.

Brahma Kumaris administrators at higher levels than centers are well aware of their organization's preference for serving the upper social, educational, professional, and governmental classes, as illustrated by a story that several of my consultants in both Southern Town and Mount Abu told me. The story refers to an occasion on which the then-joint administrative chief³⁰ of the Brahma Kumaris, Dadi Janki, was attending an interfaith

²⁰Personal communication, October 6, 2000.

²¹Personal communication, October 8, 2000.

²²Personal communication, April 8, 2001.

²³Personal communication, February 13, 2000.

²⁴Personal communication, July 7, 2002.

²⁵Personal communication, February 12, 2000.

²⁶Personal communication, March 19, 2000.

²⁷Personal communication, July 21, 2002.

²⁸Personal communication, July 7, 2002.

²⁹Personal communication, April 8, 2001.

conference at the Vatican. During the conference, a representatives from another religion challenged Dadi Janki to explain why the Brahma Kumaris do not do more to uplift the disadvantaged. In reply, Dadi Janki said cheerfully, “someone has to serve the elites.” Four different Brahma Kumaris members told me this story,³¹ and another senior leader repeats the story also on a video recording of a leadership training class.³² Within the organization, it is no secret whom the Brahma Kumaris are trying to reach.

Outreach Programs

Brahma Kumaris outreach programs include conferences for governmental and non-governmental organizations, workshops for corporate clients, in-house leadership training programs for members and their invited guests, and participation in interfaith dialog events. Among the workshops titles they offer are Stress Management, Self-Management Leadership, and Positive Thinking. The largest conferences I observed the Brahma Kumaris to sponsor were inter-governmental panel presentations on the importance of promoting peace through international cooperation, one of which was attended by approximately three hundred participants,³³ and the other by approximately one hundred participants.³⁴ Another large workshop I documented was a Self Management Leadership program delivered to the

³⁰Two years ago, the other then joint administrative chief of the Brahma Kumaris, Dadi Prakashmani, died. Now, Sister Jayanti has assumed responsibility for the international operations of the organization, and Dadi Janki has assumed leadership of the organization as a whole.

³¹I first documented this story on February 13, 2000.

³²B. K. Jayanti, “Incarnation of Economy,” *Classes from 2001–02*, vol. 2, CD-ROM (Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 2002).

³³February 24, 2000.

³⁴September 30, 2000.

staff of a large Catholic Church, which numbered approximately eighty participants.³⁵ The rest of the outreach programs I documented were considerably smaller, averaging between ten to twenty participants. However, regardless of number or type, Brahma Kumaris programs were all designed to increase their participants' sensitivity to the importance of peaceful living, to provide them with practical management tools to help them implement programs of peace at the personal and group levels, and to imply (and always only to imply, never to state explicitly) that participants might learn more about what the Brahma Kumaris offer by coming to a Brahma Kumaris center and learning more about the organization.

International Non-governmental Conferences on World Peace, Sponsored by the Brahma Kumaris

The Brahma Kumaris are proud of their involvement with the United Nations, which includes their formal membership in five United Nations organizations.³⁶ One aspect of their relationship with the United Nations involves sponsoring conferences that further their shared agenda of promoting world peace. The United Nations is a non-sectarian organization, and their conferences are secular. The Brahma Kumaris are perfectly comfortable sponsoring these conferences, partly because they affirm the value of peace independently of whatever motives may inspire it, and partly because, as an esoteric spiritual organization, the Brahma Kumaris do not reveal details pertaining to their teachings to anyone until after they have completed the Seven Days Course.³⁷ Thus, the Brahma Kumaris view their secular participation in United Nations related events as perfectly consistent with their outreach

³⁵April 8, 2001.

³⁶The Brahma Kumaris participate in ECOSOC, DPI, United Nations Information Centers (UNIC), UNICEF, and United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

³⁷I discuss the Seven Days Course in Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

strategy: The Brahma Kumaris seek to demonstrate their organization's usefulness before they recommend to anyone that they become more deeply involved.

As mentioned above, one of these conferences was attended by approximately three hundred participants. Sister Charlotte served as a panelist, alongside four officials from prominent international non-governmental organizations. After the conference was over, Sister Charlotte explained,

When we held that conference, we didn't say we have the truth, we have the discourses, here is the knowledge, and you better shape up and come see us with cash or else you are going to get it [from God]. What we did was plant a seed of peace. That's all. We have an obligation to be present in front of any number of people and be peaceful.³⁸

My observations at the conference confirm Sister Jenna's observation. Sister Charlotte did wear her white sari and Brahma Kumaris lapel pin to the event, and she did identify herself as a speaker for the organization. However, she made no claims about the Brahma Kumaris other than to say that what she has learned there is that we are all inherently peaceful, and that we don't need to invent peace or to look outside of ourselves to find it. All we have to do, she said, is to look within ourselves and nurture the peace we discover.

Later during my field work in Southern Town, I attended a smaller conference sponsored by the Brahma Kumaris. It was attended by about one hundred participants and was convened on behalf of an international non-governmental organization involved with regulating international financial transactions. A few days after the conference, I spoke with Sister Savannah about it, and she gave the following account:

³⁸Personal communication, February 24, 2000.

It was a wonderful group of participants. The speakers all had little things to say. Even though nobody sat and rehearsed, they all had complementary conversation. Basically, talking about the responsibility that the individual has for creating a peaceful self. They were encouraging, inspiring and motivating others to take up that responsibility within themselves. Then the entire group gathered and introduced themselves and gave a little bit about what their interests were. Then the speakers gave a little closing, and answered questions. It was all moderated very nicely. Then there was singing. Both one we didn't expect to sing, and one we planned to sing. It added to a very diverse event.

There were students, young people, older people, big professional people, a [minister from an African country],³⁹ and one of the speakers was a former presidential candidate. They were very diverse, interesting people. They all had a commonality. They were all interested in peace and discovering how we can create that within ourselves and the responsibility we have to create that within ourselves. Then, where we [the Brahma Kumaris] come from, we were saying that that's really truly who we are, that we are peaceful beings and that we need to see that in ourselves and see it in others. That was also introduced, which was nice; rather than saying we have to go outside for peace. It is already there, and all we have to do is re-emerge that peace that is already there.⁴⁰

³⁹Name withheld for confidentiality.

⁴⁰September 30, 2000.

The Brahma Kumaris' role in these two conferences illustrate that when the Brahma Kumaris choose external events to sponsor, they are interested in events that are consistent with their own organization's core values, including the creation of a more peaceful world. By sponsoring such events, the Brahma Kumaris seek to associate their organization with others in the international community that share the same basic values and to distinguish their organization as having specialized knowledge about how to achieve peace through personal development and cultural outreach. By these means, even though the Brahma Kumaris do not issue open invitations to come to their centers to learn more, some participants are likely to have their interests piqued, and a few of these are likely to call their local center to learn more.

Inter-religious Events, Attended by the Brahma Kumaris

In addition to sponsoring and participating in outreach activities held on behalf of international non-governmental organizations, the Brahma Kumaris in Southern Town also participated in inter-religious events sponsored and hosted by other religious organizations. One of the events I observed was an inter-sectarian cultural festival held at a prominent Hindu temple in the region. Another was a formal interfaith forum held at a Sikh gurudwara.⁴¹ The settings and occasions for these events were markedly different from the secular events held on behalf of international non-governmental organizations, but the Brahma Kumaris' motives for participating and their manner of presentation were remarkably similar: The Brahma Kumaris sought to minimize the visibility of their doctrines and sectarian identity, preferring instead to exemplify the values they affirmed in their behavior and speech. Rather than being something to talk about or debate, the Brahma Kumaris view

⁴¹A *gurudwara* is to the Sikhs as a mosque is to Muslims, a church is to Christians, or a temple is to Jews, Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists.

their religion as something to do, something to be; and by acting in a manner consistent with their values, the Brahma Kumaris seek to inspire interest in their organization by exemplifying their ideals.

On one occasion, the Brahma Kumaris from Southern Town participated in an inter-sectarian cultural event at a large Hindu temple in the region.⁴² Representatives from about one dozen Hindu organizations were invited, all of whom setup information booths around the edges of the main hall. The program for the day included a fire ritual, Indian classical dance presentations, live music performances, and some lectures. A catered buffet lunch was available for a small fee. I estimated that somewhere between one hundred and fifty and three hundred persons attended the event sometime during the day.

The fire ritual was the first item on the program, which started about ninety minutes behind schedule. Toward the end of it, the voice of the Hindu priest was reverberating loudly over the public address speakers, peppered with static. His chanting was nearly incomprehensible through the audio distortion, but he seemed to be rushing through the final few verses. His attendants, all of whom appeared to be volunteers from the community, stood by, waiting. In the audience, the mostly middle-aged assembly sat together and talked, some of them sitting sideways in their seats in order to address someone behind them. A few others appeared to have fallen asleep.

When the ritual ended, the temple staff began clearing the stage. The Master of Ceremonies walked over to the Brahma Kumaris booth and told Sister Charlotte it was her time to speak. He led her to the where the microphone had been relocated on the audience floor near the far corner of the stage, then left her to attend to some task. The room was a

⁴²The date of this event was February 27, 2000.

bustle of discordant activity as the stage was cleared, the next event was being prepared, and people moved in and out of the main hall.

When Sister Charlotte began to speak, her voice was barely audible over the public address speakers, as if the gain were set too low on her microphone. Her voice could be heard, but it would have been difficult to make out her words even if the room were otherwise quiet.

Back at their booth, one of Brahma Kumaris volunteers suggested to Brother Walker⁴³ that he should fix the problem before Sister Charlotte was finished speaking and everyone in the audience missed her message. Brother Walker nodded and began walking toward the stage and Sister Charlotte, but he moved haltingly. He walked halfway to the stage down the center aisle and back, then halfway down the right aisle and back, and then found someone to sit beside in the middle of the left row.

Meanwhile, Sister Charlotte had switched the microphone off and was speaking directly to the small crowd of fifteen or twenty persons who had gathered around her. I could not hear what she was saying from my position across the hall beside the Brahma Kumaris booth, but her audience appeared to be listening intently.

I never did learn if Sister Charlotte's microphone actually malfunctioned or not, but her performance was emblematic of Brahma Kumaris style. The contrast between Sister Charlotte's speech and the ritual she followed could hardly have been greater. The ritual included a priest who was rushed to finish, several attendants, a fire altar with a variety of implements, an inattentive audience, and a public address system amplified so loud that feedback and distortion were nearly more audible than the priest's voice. Sister Charlotte, in

⁴³A pseudonym.

contrast, stood calmly and spoke without amplification directly to the attentive audience who had gathered close to hear. “Can you see now,” she later asked me, “how much knowledge differs from devotion? How the experience that devotees like these have in their worship differs from the experience that Brahma Kumaris have of God as simply a point of light?”⁴⁴ Certainly, the difference in her presentation style was readily apparent, a difference that corresponded with how the Brahma Kumaris sought to inspire interest in their organization.

Another outside religious event that I observed was a conference convened for interfaith dialog. The conference was hosted by a Sikh gurudwara in the region that attracted Sikhs of predominately Punjabi heritage.⁴⁵ Sister Charlotte had some previous experience with a few of the members of this gurudwara's community, and during the car ride to the gurudwara, Sister Charlotte commented that its members were bolder and more assertive than other Indians whom she knew. Their style wasn't reserved and disciplined like the Brahma Kumaris.

The gurudwara community only seldom invited the Brahma Kumaris to participate in their events. Sister Charlotte explained that they did not cooperate often because their values and principles were too different. Still, the previous week, the community had invited the Southern Town center to come and speak at the conference. “I'm not sure how it will work out,” she said.⁴⁶

We arrived at about 2 p.m., half an hour before the conference was scheduled to begin. We took off our shoes in the entryway (as is the custom at gurudwaras), and Sister

⁴⁴Personal communication, February 27, 2000.

⁴⁵I observed this event on March 11, 2001.

⁴⁶Personal communication, March 11, 2001.

Charlotte covered her head with the white shawl she had brought. Brother Walker and I had not brought head coverings, so we picked out bandannas from a bin to wear. In the lobby, about twenty people were milling about, drinking refreshments, and chatting. The conference began about thirty minutes later in the next room, with about fifty people in attendance.

There were six panelists, including a Jain, a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu, and two Sikhs. The format of the conference was typical, with each panelist speaking in turn at the podium. The panel lacked an effective moderator, however, and members of the audience often interrupted the panelists with impromptu questions, many of which were raised in an accusatory tone. The atmosphere was tense.

The event was marred by two angry displays. During the first display, one of the panelists refused to surrender the podium when the moderator signaled that his time was up. The panelist was an elderly man, and his face reddened in anger as one hand gripped the podium, his other hand holding tightly to his sheaf of notes. He waved the moderator off and squared his stance, delivering the rest of his talk in a clipped, forceful tone, his posture and expression suggesting that no one should dare try to stop him before he was done.

Sister Charlotte referred to the second event as the “scarf incident.” During the middle of another panelist's presentation, a man in the audience stood up in an obvious display of anger and began shouting at another man at the back of the room, telling him to cover his head. He launched into a rant, expressing his outrage that anyone would come into the gurudwara without covering his head. The guilty man seemed to shrink in his chair, unable to move. He remained there, weathering the angry man's verbal barrage until a third man brought him a bandanna from the bin in the entryway to cover his head. Some of the angry man's acquaintances calmed him down, and the conference continued.

Sister Charlotte was the next speaker. She spoke for only about five minutes, but she captivated the audience almost immediately with her calm demeanor, her smooth voice, and her gently urgent claim that all God wants from us is to be peaceful, to be pure, and to shine as examples of peace and purity for others to follow. The shift in the emotional tenor of the room—from edgy to introspective—was nearly palpable. Sister Charlotte later reported that when she returned to her seat, the Jain panelist who was seated beside her (and who had worked with Sister Charlotte on previous occasions) leaned close and said, “see what a woman can do,” to which she replied, “see what God can do.”⁴⁷

The next morning, Sister Charlotte shared her experience of the previous days' conference with everyone at the Southern Town center before giving the daily discourse.⁴⁸ Her comments revealed her understanding of how the event served the Brahma Kumaris' outreach efforts. She said,

When that man [the man who was yelling about the scarf] got so angry, I could respect what his concern was, because every religion has their ways, and it makes sense to observe other people's ways when you are visiting their home. But it is precisely people like that man who, if they had God's knowledge [i.e. Brahma Kumaris teachings] could be such good examples of the best of their religion, because when people come to your place, you don't need to say anything. You just have to show them the best of what your religion is all about.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸I discuss discourses in Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

So after everything was over, I went like 'this' to the man who had been so angry about the scarves [Sister Charlotte recreated her action by holding up her finger and crooking it back and forth, beckoning].

He looked at me like, “what do you want to talk to me for?”

But I called him. He came.

I said, “I want you to promise me something. I want you to promise me that from now on you will be the best example of the Sikh religion.”

He said, “but I am Punjabi. I was raised to act this way.”

I said, “no, you must promise me now that you will shine brightly as the best of what the Sikh religion has to offer.” He couldn't speak. I think it was because he wasn't ready to promise like that. You were there, Brother Walker.

In addition to reaching out to the man who had caused the greatest disturbance, Sister Charlotte also touched many of the conference participants in the audience. She reported that the second hand of the gurudwara said he had been to many conferences and meetings, but he had never heard anyone [meaning Sister Charlotte] speak like that. Who trained you? He asked. I said, God. He said, no, no. Where did you get your training? I said, God. He said he wanted to come and learn what I know.

Additionally,

After the panel was finished, I got some very good responses. I was asked if Brahma Kumaris are only for women, and I answered that question. One woman said she was grateful that a woman was there. Another wants to put

the Brahma Kumaris classes on his website. Another wants to start taking classes. Out of about fifty people in attendance, forty must have come up to me after to get a flier, or more info, or express appreciation.⁴⁹

Clearly for the Brahma Kumaris, understatement is high art. I never observed the Brahma Kumaris to be dogmatic (or even merely doctrinal) in any of their outreach activities, yet through Sister Charlotte's soothing presence and simple messaging, she managed to convey her points with great efficiency and effectiveness. On the ride back to the Southern Town center from the gurudwara, Sister Charlotte said, "Everyone doesn't have to become Brahma Kumaris. But everyone must have this knowledge about God and souls and how to have a relationship with God. Once everyone gets that, there will be no need to talk about world peace, because there will be world peace."⁵⁰

⁴⁹Personal communication, March 12, 2001.

⁵⁰Ibid.

Chapter 4: Membership

Chapter Two discussed the outer boundaries of the Brahma Kumaris institution, primarily as viewed by non-members. Chapter Three discussed how the Brahma Kumaris presented their organization to the audiences whom they wanted to reach. This chapter examines internal boundaries that structure the organization for its members at Southern Town. The next chapter carries this examination through to the world headquarters in Mount Abu.

The first boundary I discuss is the boundary that separates Brahma Kumaris members from non-members. The Brahma Kumaris mark this boundary by requiring anyone who is interested in participating in their programs to first complete a simple catechism, called the Seven Days Course. No one can attend internal Brahma Kumaris events or participate in the religious life of their center's community until they have completed the Course, and thus the Course serves as the first and most important of the organization's internal boundaries, which is the boundary separating non-members from members.

Another membership boundary lies between regular members (who have taken the Seven Days Course) and “dedicated” members. Dedicated members are regular members whom others in the organization have come to recognize as particularly devoted and who live particularly exemplary lives.

A third membership boundary pertains to “surrendered” members. Surrendered members are persons who have given their lives wholly over to the organization, who live on

Brahma Kumaris premises, and who devote their full time efforts to advancing the organization's mission.

All members are expected to participate in their organization's most important religious activity, which I call their discourses.¹ All Brahma Kumaris centers hold discourses every morning, beginning about 7 a.m. and ending around 8 a.m. Non-members are not permitted to attend discourses, but members are expected to attend as regularly possible, preferably daily. Sustained daily attendance at discourses is one of the most important ways that members signal their commitment to the organization and begin to raise their status within the organization. Members who attend discourses daily for a sustained period, often spanning years, distinguish themselves by indicating their willingness to cross a threshold of commitment in service to the organization. During the question and answer phase of morning discourse, members also make comments and raise questions about God's words, which gives the Sisters who lead discourses opportunities to evaluate members' spiritual progress and to teach compliance with the organization's teachings. In all of these ways, the Brahma Kumaris create, maintain, and navigate the boundaries that structure their organization and give shape to the lives of members at Southern Town.

Seven Days Course

Completing the Seven Days Course amounts to crossing the organization's most basic outer boundary and becoming a member of the religion. Membership, however, must be understood loosely. After completing the Course, there are no papers to sign, no rituals to complete, no insignia to wear. Regarding membership, completing the course merely permits

¹The Brahma Kumaris use the term *murlis*, which literally means “flute” in Hindi. The name refers to a popular Hindu myth in which God takes the form of a shepherd who plays a flute to attract his devotees.

a new member to attend daily discourses and other in-house events such as training workshops, classes for members-only, planning sessions for upcoming public events, special meditation sessions, and the like.

Thus, completing the Course could not be equated with conversion because the Brahma Kumaris do not consider their religion a “faith.” Rather, they view their teachings as knowledge. Brahma Kumaris teachings contain knowledge about the world which can be understood and acted upon without requiring faith. Indeed, it often happened that new members retained their faith commitments to other traditions even after they completed the Course and participated more fully in the organization’s activities.

Requiring new students to complete their Course accomplished two important objectives for the organization. The policy ensured that everyone in the center understood the basic principles that guided the organization, which prevented them from making egregious errors of interpretation. Teaching the Course to all new members also gave the organization's senior members the opportunity to evaluate new members and to establish bonds of trust and supervision between them.

Usually, members completed the Course at the same center where they attended morning discourses. However, sometimes tourists, business travelers, or pilgrims took an interest in the Brahma Kumaris while they were away from their home town. These persons took the Course at whatever center they were close to at the time, with the expectation that they would attach themselves to their local center when they returned there. I never knew this to happen at the Southern Town center, but it occurred frequently at the world headquarters in Mount Abu.

Whenever this occurred, the Sister who administered the Course wrote a letter of introduction for her student to take with her back to her center, where it served as a letter of introduction and certified that the student had completed the course. Without such a letter, someone new would not be allowed to participate in center activities until she had taken the Course, even if the new person knew a lot about Brahma Kumaris knowledge. The Course is only partly about information; the Course is also about assessing a new member's character and integrating her into the organization's social network.

The Course is divided into seven sections and is accompanied by a standard textbook with seven lessons.² At the Southern Town center, the Course was usually given over a period of two months, with classes meeting twice a week, typically in the evenings. One lesson was covered each class, and the eighth class was for new members to ask any questions that were not adequately addressed in previous weeks. The eighth week was also for orienting new members to the daily routine of the early morning discourses that they would become eligible to attend after completing the Course.

The Course could be taught according to other schedules. In Mount Abu, tourists and pilgrims would rarely remain in town for more than a few days, so the Brahma Kumaris could adapt the Course to suit their schedule. For tourists and pilgrims, the course was usually given in seven, one-hour sessions spanning three or more consecutive days. In such cases, new members only rarely would begin attending morning discourses or other classes in Mount Abu, although it did sometimes happen that way. More commonly, after new members finished the Course in Mount Abu, their instructor would write a letter of

²One version of the printed Seven Days Course is by the corporate author Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *One Week Course: For Attainment of Complete Purity, Peace, and Prosperity* (Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India: Pandav Bhawan, 1996).

introduction for them to take back to the center-in-charge of the center closest to their homes, where the new members would begin attending morning discourses if they wished.

Brahma Kumaris consider the knowledge taught by the Course to be merely introductory. The Course does raise several of the most important topics about which new members need to know before they may make informed choices regarding whether they would like to participate further in Brahma Kumaris activities, but the Course can hardly be said to present a comprehensive or rigorous examination of what God has told them. I discussed these basic points of knowledge in Chapter One. Moreover, the Brahma Kumaris only value knowledge when it is coupled with consistent practice: Completing the Course merely qualifies new members to begin attending daily morning discourses, where they listen directly to words that were spoken by God, very few of which are included in the Course.

The Course is a social boundary, a filter that protects the sanctity of the organization's members from a general public that in almost all cases would not understand what the Brahma Kumaris do together every day without the orientation that the Course provides. The Course protects the organization by helping to control the public's view of it. Detractors are not admitted to organizational events that could provide them with fodder for criticism, and persons who are under-informed about the organization are not given the opportunity to construct grossly false impressions about them on account of having no idea how the Brahma Kumaris understand themselves.

Still, the Course is far from an indoctrination. When the Course is taught, students read brief discussions pertaining to the basic points of Brahma Kumaris knowledge, and their teacher endeavors to find ways to relate those points to them in a manner that each new student can understand. For example, on several occasions at Southern Town and Mount Abu

alike, I observed surrendered Brahma Kumaris speaking with persons who expressed an interest in the Course. If the student seemed sufficiently interested, the surrendered member would try to identify who among their peers might be best suited to give the course and arrange for the new student to take the course from whomever seemed best able to communicate with the new student.

Brahma Kumaris knowledge is inseparable from conversation, discourse, and the backgrounds of local members who make up every center's community. In practice, the Course is a device to establish bonds of trust and understanding between new members and surrendered members. Without the enlivening capacity of those personal bonds, Brahma Kumaris would consider the information contained in the Course useless at best and hazardous at worst: Useless because it did not lead the new student into relationship with God, which can only come through social participation in Brahma Kumaris activities; hazardous because without the interpretive guidance of surrendered members and God, the Brahma Kumaris believe that new students could cause harm to themselves or the organization as a result of their faulty understanding.

Three Basic Member Types

Everyone who completes the Seven Days Course is a member, and all members may participate in center activities. However, even though the Brahma Kumaris require everyone to take the Course before participating in their organization, completing the Course does not confer upon new members any particular status within the organization. Completing the Course merely permits someone to cross the boundary separating outsiders from insiders; it does not attribute to new members any other distinctions.

After gaining admittance to the organization, it is up to each new member to grow in their own way. Aside from the weighty and seriously-imposed requirement that all members must adhere as fully as possible to God's doctrines—one of the most important of which is the directive to attend morning discourses as frequently as possible, preferably daily—the Brahma Kumaris seek to encourage members to achieve their full potential by climbing the administrative hierarchy, by increasing their value as a supportive member of their “family,” or by pursuing purely spiritual growth through meditation.

These three modes of within the organization each offer unique opportunities through which members may grow and increase their influence, or “role,” within the organization. Among these modes, the Brahma Kumaris say they value the “university” mod of spiritual development the most, contributions to the family mode next, and attainments through the administrative mode the least. I discuss the relationship among these three avenues of achievement in Chapter One, where I also suggest that administrative status plays the largest role in maintaining the social boundaries that structure the organization and shaping how social power flows through the institution. Administrative distinctions also mark the difference between the three basic types of members that the Brahma Kumaris recognize.

The first type of members are regular members, or those who have completed the Seven Days Course but have not yet demonstrated themselves to be thoroughly committed to the organization and its goals. Regular members might even be considered “part-time” Brahma Kumaris because they participate in center activities only insofar as their other lifestyle demands permit. Regular members may come to discourses regularly and participate often in Brahma Kumaris activities, but otherwise they continue to pursue their outside lives and interests as usual. Their commitment is partial, and they do not live their lives fully in

accordance with God's doctrines. They may smoke, or drink, or take food from restaurants. They may have sexual relations with their spouses, or participate in another religion's activities. They may not prioritize commitments to their local center above their other responsibilities, or they may not strive to understand Brahma Kumaris knowledge fully.

The second basic type of member pertains to “dedicated” members. Dedicated members are members who are known to be fully committed to the organization and its doctrines, without reservation. They practice celibacy, even if they are married. They do not take food from restaurants, and they do not drink or smoke. They meditate every morning and attend discourses daily. They volunteer to help their centers regularly, they prioritize center agendas as highly as possible, and they strive to incorporate doctrine into their lives as fully as they can. Their life circumstances may not permit them to devote all of their time, effort, and resources to the organization, but they earnestly endeavor to contribute everything they can to God by serving the organization and exemplifying its ideals.

The boundary separating regular members from dedicated members is not sharply drawn. The distinction is largely subjective, drawn by other members. Dedicated members do not receive any formal recognition from the organization: They are not awarded with a badge or receive a plaque; but they are called upon to serve the organization in ways that regular members are not. For example, because dedicated members adhere diligently to doctrine, the Brahma Kumaris consider the home of dedicated members as “pure.” If some Brahma Kumaris are traveling to another center that does not have facilities available to house them, visitors often stay in the home of dedicated members. Food prepared in the homes of dedicated members is also considered pure, and it may be shared with other Brahma Kumaris.

The third basic type of members are “surrendered” members. Surrendered members may be considered “full time” Brahma Kumaris. They live in Brahma Kumaris facilities, adhere fully to doctrine in their lives, perform the organization's essential work, and serve as living examples of Brahma Kumaris ideals for their members and the publics to whom they reach out. Surrendered members include the full range of administrative staff, including finance, management, research, development, logistics, and all other roles typical for a large international organization such as the Brahma Kumaris with 4,522 centers³ in over sixty⁴ countries with 407,285 members,⁵ 168,810 of whom⁶ are “surrendered”⁷ members.

The most important administrators for almost all dedicated and regular members is their “center-in-charge,” the surrendered member of the organization who runs their local center's day-to-day operations, keeps tabs on her members, implements policies and programs as directed by her superiors, and endeavors to expand its operations. Under most circumstances, she guides their spiritual growth, evaluates their progress and potential, mediates communications between members and the higher administration, and facilitates or inhibits their opportunities within the organization.

³Figure cited from Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Introduction and Addresses*, inside back cover.

⁴Ibid., 1.

⁵Ibid., inside back cover.

⁶Ibid.

⁷I discuss the distinctions between “surrendered” and other types of members in Chapter Four.

Discourses and Daily Routines

As described in Chapter Three, Brahma Kumaris administration is remarkably consistent from center to center, and Southern Town was no exception. They followed the same basic routine from as other centers follow every day, routines that reinforced conformity with their core values, doctrines, and practices.

The centerpiece of Brahma Kumaris routine is the daily performance of discourses. Every morning, at every Brahma Kumaris center throughout the world, the Brahma Kumaris meet between approximately 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. to listen to a transcript of God's words as read by one of their center's Sisters. The transcript contains an edited and abridged record of words that God spoke on previous occasions while possessing the body of a designated trance medium. Attendance at these discourses is only permitted to members who have completed the Seven Days Course and regular, sustained, daily attendance at discourses is the single most significant criterion for identifying who has crossed the boundary separating regular members from dedicated members. Morning discourses are also one of the main ways that centers-in-charge maintain order within their centers.

There were three basic types of discourses. The first type, called embodied discourses, were held during the lifetime of Dada Lekhraj, when he served as God's trance medium. The second type, called disembodied discourses, occurred after Dada Lekhraj's death whenever his pre-designated trance medium, usually Dadi Gulzar, was possessed jointly by God and the soul of Dada Lekhraj. The last type, simply called discourses, occurred every morning when the Brahma Kumaris read an abridged transcript of previous embodied or disembodied discourses.

Each type of discourse encoded several distinct voices. God's voice dominates all three types, and the Brahma Kumaris value discourses primarily because they convey God's words. In addition to God's voice, embodied discourses also expressed Dada Lekhraj's voice because it was through his lips that God spoke. After God had left his body, Dada Lekhraj often claimed that he had no memory of what God had said; Dada Lekhraj's consciousness was suppressed during the possession. On other occasions, however, Dada Lekhraj retained self awareness, and thus the words spoken by his lips were a mixture of his and God's. Embodied discourses encode a mixture of God's words and Lekhraj's. Sometimes Dada Lekhraj indicated when the words he spoke were his and when they were God's, but oftentimes Dada Lekhraj's speech did not clearly differentiate between God's words and his.

During disembodied discourses, which occurred after Dada Lekhraj's death, the souls of God and Dada Lekhraj both possessed the body of their pre-designated trance medium, and they both spoke through her lips. (On almost all occasions, that trance medium was Dadi Gulzar). To inexperienced listeners, it was even more difficult to distinguish between God's voice and Dada Lekhraj's during disembodied discourses because God and Dada Lekhraj did not identify themselves as separate speakers. However, unlike embodied discourses (when Dada Lekhraj was possessed by God), the Brahma Kumaris claim that the trance medium for disembodied discourses (usually Dadi Gulzar) did not add a new voice to God's and Lekhraj's: During disembodied discourses, the trance medium's consciousness was said to be entirely suppressed such that only God's words and Dada Lekhraj's words are heard. Dadi Gulzar (and the very few additional trance mediums who have sometimes served as mediums for God and Dada Lekhraj) are highly respected by Brahma Kumaris for their service as mediums, but Brahma Kumaris never confuse the mediums with God or Dada Lekhraj, and

their words while in normal states of consciousness are never confused with God's. In recent decades, the Brahma Kumaris have been extremely diligent about scheduling visits from God and Dada Lekhraj in advance of their appearance, so there is very little room for confusion regarding when a medium is possessed and when she is not.

Disembodied discourses do not add an additional voice to God's and Dada Lekhraj's, but regular discourses add two: Regular discourses add the voice of the Sister (or sometimes, the Brother) who reads the transcript; the transcript itself also adds the corporate voice of the institution because the transcript reveals traces of its abridgment, editing, and reformatting at the hands of the Brahma Kumaris' Discourse Department prior to their distribution throughout the organization for reading during morning discourses.

When morning discourses were read, they always followed the same format, and thus they implicitly expressed the corporate voice of the institution: All morning discourses were associated with a song, which was played prior to the reading. The transcript also always included an “essence” (a short statement of the discourse's central message), a “question” (a simple question that introduced the central message), and an “answer” (another short statement that rephrased the central message in slightly greater detail). Then came the body of the discourse, which varied in length from about thirty-minutes to sixty minutes in length when read aloud. After the body, another “essence” was offered (as one or more main points that expressed central themes in the discourse), a “blessing” (a short explanation of how the discourse's main message should be understood as offering a gift of knowledge), and a “slogan” (a one-sentence statement intended to be remembered and thought about during the day).

This structure was imposed on the transcripts by the staff of the institution's Discourse Department, which was responsible for converting embodied and disembodied discourses into abridged, edited, and reformatted transcripts for use during morning readings. All Brahma Kumaris centers throughout the world read the same discourse transcript to their members each morning, and thus everyone in the organization received the same institutionally approved message every day.

Several of my informants told me that the institution maintained enough discourse transcripts to support a five year cycle of daily readings. Each year, approximately nine to twelve new disembodied discourses were held at their world headquarters, and after each one, the discourse department wrote a new transcript and inserted it into the five year cycle of readings.⁸ In this way, the institution's set of daily discourses were renewed while also maintaining consistent messaging from year to year.

Regular discourses thus include the voice of God, Dada Lekhraj, and the corporate voice of the Discourse Department; in addition, they also include the voice of the Sister (or Brother) who read them: When discourses were read every morning, the Sister who read them always interjected at least a few of her own interpretative or elaborative comments. One of the most senior members in the organization, who read discourses in Mount Abu occasionally, was renown for adding almost as much (or more) of her own commentary than the words spoken by God in the day's reading.

⁸I have some evidence to suggest that the Discourse Department was perpetually engaged in subtly revising discourses from month to month to adapt their message to reflect contemporary world events and their institution's constantly updated agendas, and thus that the five-year cycle of discourses was far from fixed, operating more like a five-year framework of guidelines than a set canon. However, I cannot pursue this line of analysis in this dissertation without revealing more proprietary knowledge about the organization than my agreements permit.

Still, I never once heard a Sister attempt to pass off her commentary on a discourse as if her words were God's (and I listened to more than three hundred discourses over four years, delivered at five centers⁹ by more than a dozen Sisters); Sisters who read discourse transcripts were always very careful to distinguish between the interpretations and commentary they offered and the words spoken by God or Dada Lekhraj in the transcript. The name, Brahma Kumaris, translates as "Children of God," and members assemble each morning to listen to what God has said, not what their institutional administrators think (although that may be a secondary concern for some members).

Nonetheless, because members were instructed to listen to the reading of discourse transcripts as if they were being spoken by God at the same moment as they were being read, the task of distinguishing between the authority of God's words from the authority of what the Sister said in her commentary ultimately fell upon listeners. The privilege of reading discourses thus conferred upon the Sister who read them a powerful position from which to teach her readers to view God's words through the interpretive lenses she offered.

Consequently, the Brahma Kumaris generally preferred to have the most senior of suitably talented surrendered members read discourses, so there was a loose correlation between overall status within the organization and the Sisters selected to read discourses; but especially on the three campuses in Mount Abu where there were plenty of qualified senior Sisters, some Sisters were more highly regarded as discourse readers than others, usually because they had a talent for reading them in a lively way without distracting from God's words with unnecessary commentary or wooden delivery. At smaller centers such as Southern Town, discourses were usually read by one of the centers-in-charge (either Sister

⁹The five centers I refer to are Southern Town, Haines Falls, and three in Mount Abu, including Madhuban, Gyan Sarovar, and Shantivan.

Charlotte or Sister Lydia), although discourses were also sometimes read by visiting members from other centers or by Sisters who had only recently surrendered to the organization and were thus given a chance to display their talents or hone their skills.

Regardless of who read the discourses, one affect of their performance was to reenact the days when Dada Lekhraj was living. Every morning, by vocalizing God's words, a senior Sisters in residence would demonstrate how members could serve as mouthpieces for God, as Dada Lekhraj had done while he was alive. The Sisters who read regular discourses never attempted to suggest that they were actually possessed by God or Dada Lekhraj. The Brahma Kumaris were much too disciplined to permit any such heresies to find a home in their organization. However, the line separating actual possession from its mimetic performance was a fine one: I never witnessed a Sister to cross that line, at least not literally; but because Sisters were reading words that God had actually spoken during previous embodied or disembodied discourses, Sisters who were skilled at such readings were affective at generating an impression that God and Dada Lekhraj were indeed possessing her as she spoke.

Under these conditions, the Sisters who delivered morning discourses exercised considerable practical authority among her member listeners, who were listening to her words as if God were speaking them. These Sisters never in my experience attempted to convey their own insights pertaining to God's words as God's own, but intermingled as they were with God's words, the authority of a Sister's commentary benefited from God's implied sanction because God's words and her words issued from the same Sister's mouth. Sisters who read discourses, particularly Sisters who also served as centers-in-charge, leveraged the

authority granted to them as the speaker of God's words to maintain order within their centers and to hasten the growth of their members.

Discourses at Southern Town

Morning discourses are remarkably consistent from center to center. The transcript for each center is identical from day to day, and the sequence of events is the same for all centers. What differences there are stem from the idiosyncrasies pertaining to facilities and personnel at each center. Some centers are larger than others in terms of their total membership and the size of their buildings. The languages in which discourses are conducted may differ from country to country, and the kinds of questions that members may ask in response to each day's teachings may reflect the local and personal concerns of each center's members. What follows is a portrait of a typical morning discourse at the Southern Town center.

When members entered the Southern Town center through the side door of its small brick house, they stepped onto a wooden landing in the basement level. Ahead of them, stairs led up to the first floor of the house, where a door at the top of the stairs was labeled with a computer-printed sign that read, "Authorized Personnel." To the right, a few steps led down to a short hallway with a coat closet, a cork board, and a door with another sign reading, "Private." That door was usually closed. To the left of the entryway, a few steps led down to a similar small hallway with a door leading into a small kitchen, with its own door leading off the kitchenette to a full bath.

The left and right hallways led around the stairs to open into the center's main activity room, which was about 18 feet wide and 36 feet deep. Four small windows with lacy curtains were located high along the far wall of the room, leading to the ground level outside. In the

middle of a shorter wall, a four foot framed image of God was hung, rendered in the typical Brahma Kumaris style as a pin-point of white light against a backdrop of red. During morning discourses, this image was back lit, brightening the the pinpoint of white and casting a deep red glow through the background. The glow was enhanced by four night lights with red translucent covers plugged into the walls near the floor. To the right of the image was a framed painting of Dada Lekhraj with a golden star on his forehead; to the left hung a framed print of a robed female figure, her cupped hands holding a sphere of white light.

Beneath those images on a low platform raised about six inches off the floor was a finely crafted, wooden sitting chair. The chair had a tall back, elegant arms, a cushioned seat, and decorative carving. Similarly crafted end tables with fresh-cut floral arrangements flanked the chair, which were themselves flanked by two large floor vases on either side of the platform with tall arrangements of dried willow stems and gold tinsel.

The chair was reserved for the Sister who led morning discourse. The chair was also used by other surrendered members when they were leading official events. Sometimes, regular members would be invited to sit in the chair to speak about experiences relevant to the organization or to lead a discussion. Otherwise, the chair remained unoccupied.

The center of the room was filled almost to capacity by two columns of folding chairs, oriented to face the image of God hung above the wooden chair on the platform. Each column of chairs was four chairs wide by five chairs deep. During discourses or other events, women were expected to sit on the chairs in the column against the far wall, under the windows. Men were expected to sit on the chairs in the near column, closest to the hallways.

Members would trickle in to the center between approximately 6:55 a.m. and 7:15 a.m. After entering, they would quietly remove their shoes and hang their jackets in the

hallway closet. Usually, instrumental electronic music would already be playing in the main room. Sometimes, members would go through the door marked “Private,” which led into a small, thickly carpeted room, called “Baba's Room” because of the large back-lit image of Dada Lekhraj displayed there. Baba's Room was for silent meditation only, and some members who arrived early at the center chose to sit there and wait for the discourse to begin. Other members would choose to walk directly to the main room and sit in the conference chairs to meditate.

After everyone had been seated in the main room and the discourse was about to begin, a surrendered or dedicated member would turn off the meditation music and the Sister who would be leading the discourse would enter the room, walk purposefully down the aisle and onto the dais, and sit on the chair beneath God's image, facing the group. At Southern Town, Sister Charlotte most often led discourses, but Sister Lydia also led some discourses when she was in residence. Sisters Charlotte and Lydia always wore their plain white saris when they led discourses, with the addition of a white shawl or sweater if it was cold.

As soon as Sister Charlotte or Sister Lydia was seated, another Sister would play a tape recording or compact disc recording of two songs. The transcript for each morning's discourse always indicated which two songs were to be played, and the songs' lyrics were intended to correspond with that morning's discourse. All of the songs specified in the discourse transcripts were written and recorded by the Brahma Kumaris in Hindi, in the style of popular Indian radio tunes. Occasionally at Southern Town, one English song might be substituted for the Hindi song indicated in the transcript, although the English songs were also always recorded by the Brahma Kumaris and were almost always in the same musical style. Regardless of language, the songs always expressed love for God, the beauty of souls,

the wonder of the Golden Age to come, or another theme in keeping with the Brahma Kumaris' basic tenets.

While the music was playing, another Sister (usually a dedicated member) would carry a small, three-legged copper table forward onto the dais and set it down to the right of the Sister leading the discourse. The table was partially covered by a white cloth with red borders, on top of which was a flower, often a long-stemmed red rose. Underneath the cloth were food offerings, made not to the Sister on the chair, but to God, on whom all of the assembled members were supposed to be meditating.

After setting the table down, the same Sister (or another) would almost always return with a vase of fresh-cut flowers to set down on an end table next to the Sister leading the discourse. After these preparations were complete, the Sister would return to her seat and the assembled members would continue meditating until both songs were finished playing.

When the songs ended, someone would raise the lights, which until then had been kept dim to ensure that the room was filled with a reddish glow, and a Sister would retrieve the small table with the food offering and take it away. The discourse leader would then bid the members good morning, and make any necessary announcements. For example, at Southern Town, a few members were not fluent in English, so Sister Charlotte would announce that the Hindi discourse would be held upstairs and request that everyone who wanted to attend it should go now. The discourse leader might also tell the group if any special classes or workshops were scheduled for later in the day and request that members remain after the discourse to participate in them.

Hindi Discourses

At this point in my description of a typical Southern Town discourse, a few words about Hindi discourses are needed. When discourses were attended by only one or two members who were not fluent in English, then Sister Charlotte would typically request that they go upstairs by themselves and read silently a copy of the day's transcript, written in Hindi. If more Hindi-only speakers were present, then Sister Charlotte would usually ask the most senior among them to read the Hindi discourse aloud to the rest of the Hindi-speaking group upstairs. If Sister Lydia were in residence, she would lead the Hindi discourse while Sister Charlotte led the English discourse downstairs.

Sister Charlotte was the primary center-in-charge for Southern Town, but she did not speak Hindi. God has consistently taught the Brahma Kumaris that language is no barrier to knowledge, and that Brahma Kumaris teachings may be rightly understood in any language. God happened to possess Hindi-speakers from India, but there was nothing particularly sacred about Hindi or any other language. Thus in terms of doctrine, there was no reason why centers-in-charge must speak Hindi, and a few of the organization's highest status members did not speak the language; but as a practical matter, about half of the members at Southern Town were Hindi-speakers of Indian descent, and my informants told me that most of their international centers serve a high percentage of Hindi speakers as well. There was no doctrinal imperative for members to speak Hindi, but it is a valued skill nonetheless.

Sister Charlotte told me over tea one day that her seniors had asked her to learn Hindi. They hadn't told her why, but they had given her a grammar book to study. Sister Charlotte said she didn't understand why her seniors thought it necessary to learn Hindi because even though cultures and languages differ, knowledge remains the same. Still, Sister

Charlotte said she knew that sometimes the stories told in the English discourse transcripts differed from the stories told in the Hindi transcripts, because sometimes after her Hindi-speaking members had come back downstairs from their Hindi language discourse readings and rejoined the main group, they would sometimes raise points or questions about the day's discourse that didn't make sense in the context of the English reading.

My readings of Brahma Kumaris literature confirms that when the Brahma Kumaris translate their texts, they translate semantically, not literally. In other words, English language texts omit references to many Indian cultural traditions, such as Hindu mythological tales. Sometimes, those references are replaced with allusions to Western cultural traditions, but usually they are not.

Sister Charlotte said that one day, God had said in the English transcript that people who do not correctly understand Brahma Kumaris knowledge eat unripe fruit. Sister Charlotte explained her understanding of this metaphor by saying that people who do not understand knowledge correctly take things that are not theirs; they grasp after things that are not appropriate for them to have. In contrast, Sister Charlotte said that when the first-language Hindi-speakers came back downstairs after their discourse reading, they expressed a different understanding of God's point. Sister Charlotte said she could not understand their interpretation because it didn't make sense in the context of what the English transcript had expressed. For Sister Charlotte, the exchange between herself and the first-language Hindi-speakers on that day was frustrating. "What about the new people?" she asked rhetorically. "What are they supposed to think? We should not be giving them the impression that the English discourses are not the real discourses."¹⁰

¹⁰Personal correspondence, October 6, 2000.

Some of my own observations at Southern Town confirm that the first-language Hindi-speakers expressed different understandings of each day's discourses than the first-language English speakers. Sister Charlotte requested that I always attend the English discourse readings, so I was unable to identify from what source some of the first-language Hindi speakers derived their questions about a reading. Some of the Hindi-speaking members of Southern town told me separately that they preferred discussing doctrine with Sister Lydia because she spoke Hindi as her first language and thus she more fully understood the Indian cultural idioms God invokes when speaking.

Discourses at Southern Town, Continued

After Sister Charlotte finished her announcements and after any first-language Hindi speakers had gone upstairs to read or hear the discourse in their first language, Sister Charlotte gave a short synopsis of the morning discourse's main points and then read the transcript, which was delivered in the style of a letter written by God (Brahma) and sent to the “children” (Kumaris).

It would not be appropriate for me to provide a detailed account of what God says in discourses—not in the public forum that a dissertation provides. The Brahma Kumaris take confidentiality seriously, and for the reasons given above, discourses are not intended for public consumption. However, even though each day's discourse does make some unique points (within the five-year cycle of discourses), their uniqueness stemmed more from differences in phrasing, emphasis, and metaphor than from revealing new doctrines. Among the more than three hundred discourses I have listened to and read, almost all of them reinforce the same basic teachings contained in the Seven Days Course, a summary of which is located in the “Knowledge” section of Chapter One.

Of greater concern to my interest regarding how discourses generate and maintain social boundaries within the institution are some instructions that Sister Charlotte once gave to the Southern Town members regarding how they should conduct themselves while listening to the discourses. On several occasions, Sister Charlotte taught that whenever members came to listen to God's words, they should behave as if they had literally come to sit near God and listen to what God says. She taught that members should strive to imagine, as vividly as possible, what it would feel like if they were literally in the presence of God. How would they sit? What would they say? What would they do with their eyes, what would they do with their hands, and how would they look at God? Sister Charlotte emphasized the need to have a powerful sense of respect for God's wisdom and teachings.¹¹

While discourses were read, many members take notes in notebooks they reserved exclusively for that purpose. Sometimes, especially at the Mount Abu campuses and at Northern Town, some members would also use audio recording devices to capture the readings. After a reading ended, Sisters who were leading the discourse would often ask members to share with the group some of the points they had noted in their books. At Southern Town, if any first-language Hindi speakers had been upstairs during the reading, they would return at this time to participate in the sharing of points, which would sometimes develop into a group discussion of the discourse and how best to understand it.

After the question and answer period, someone would lower the overhead lights again, returning the room to its reddish glow. Another song would be played, during which time the members were expected to meditate on the insights they obtained during the discourse.

¹¹Personal communication, February 6, 2000.

When the song ended, the main lights were raised once again. The formally discursive portion of the discourse was over, but the members were invited and encouraged to remain for at least another ten or fifteen minutes to accept an offering of food. At least a portion of the food served was taken from the food initially offered to God at the beginning of the discourse. Sometimes, the gift of food was as simple as a few pieces of fruit, or a baked sweet. On other occasions, and usually on weekends, the offered food also included some bread and a cool but cooked vegetable dish.

At Southern Town, the food was usually served on simple tin plates with a spoon. One of the dedicated Sisters typically distributed it by carrying a plate over to where each member was sitting. When she handed a member a plate, the member would also take hold of the plate, and the two would look into each other's eyes, maintaining each other's gaze for at least several seconds. The Brahma Kumaris believed that maintaining eye contact was important because it facilitated the non-verbal communication of pure intentions and best wishes among giver and receiver.

At larger centers such as Northern Town and Mount Abu (and sometimes at Southern Town as well), the process of distributing blessed food was more streamlined. The Sister who led the discourse would keep her seat, and one of her assistants would return the tray of blessed food to her side. Members would then queue up to stand or kneel before the Sister, meeting her gaze while holding out their hands to receive a small piece of fruit or baked sweet on a napkin.

According to this method of receiving blessed food, the Sister who distributed food was generally thought to be more spiritually pure than the other members who received it

from her, and thus the meeting of gazes had more to do with receiving the benefit of the Sister's good intentions than in exchanging them with her.

Discourse Discussions

After a discourse was read, the Sister who read it asked the assembled members to share with the group something they heard in it that seemed especially important to them, and the Sister would generally respond with words of encouragement and affirmation. Members would usually respond by quoting or paraphrasing one of the discourse's teachings for the day, with little elaboration. For example, members observed that the discourse reminded her of her good fortune, or helped her to discover her good fortune every day, or reminded her of God's generosity, or clarified the importance of recognizing themselves and God as souls.

Routine answers such as these were welcomed, but occasionally a member would express a point that seemed inconsistent with the discourse's teachings or that seemed to imply some disagreement with the doctrines expressed. In these cases, the Sister who read the discourse would provide gently spoken feedback regarding how the member's views were inconsistent with doctrine. The feedback was always kindly delivered and I never heard a Sister chastise a member for having unorthodox views; but her feedback did always clarify for the group the boundaries of acceptable behavior and interpretation. Four examples are discussed below. The first example illustrates how centers-in-charge responded to interpretations of God's words that arose from other religious commitments, and the second example illustrates responses to interpretations arising from secular commitments. The last two examples pertain to inappropriate emotional responses, including romantic attraction and anger.

The first example involved a question and answer exchange between Sister Charlotte and one of her Hindi-speaking, Indian heritage members. Prior to the exchange I observed, Sister Lydia had informed me that some of the center's members still held quite strongly to traditional mainstream Hindu views, including the practices of daily scriptural study.¹² God has told the Brahma Kumaris that little value can come from studying the scriptures of any religion because all scriptures are riddled with errors. Instead, God recommended that the Brahma Kumaris listen only to what God says to them directly, through the voice of pre-designated trance-mediums and delivered to the Brahma Kumaris through discourses. Scriptures may have been helpful to some persons who loved God in the past, but now that God comes and speaks to the Brahma Kumaris personally, scriptures no longer serve a useful purpose.¹³

At Southern Town, if Sister Lydia were away, separate Hindi discourse groups would only be held if there were members in attendance who were not conversant in English. Otherwise, everyone would attend the English discourse, even the members whose first language was Hindi. On most days, then, the English discourse reading was attended by between one and eight members whose first language was Hindi and whose cultural heritage was primarily Indian. As mentioned above, Sister Charlotte sometimes experienced difficulties communicating with those members because occasionally they associated the discourse readings with Indian (and generally Hindu) cultural references with which she was unfamiliar. When this happened after a Hindi-speaking member had just returned to rejoin the main discourse group after having listened to the discourse in Hindi, then Sister Charlotte

¹²Personal communication, January 11, 2000.

¹³Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *One Week Course*.

generally remarked that there were some cultural differences in how discourses expressed the same points of knowledge, and that member should strive to focus on the essence of the teaching rather than the cultural wrapping; but when members with Indian heritages attributed an interpretation to an English language discourse reading that they had heard, Sister Charlotte would correct their misinterpretation.

One morning, after listening to the English reading of a discourse,¹⁴ one of the Hindu-heritage members told Sister Charlotte that she¹⁵ enjoyed hearing God explain how milk is churned to make butter. For those who know something of Hindu myths, it is easy to recognize this allusion to a popular Hindu myth that likens spiritual growth to the solidifying effect that churning has on milk when it is turned into butter. However, the English discourse contained no references to the myth on that day, and thus the member who alluded to it was adding something new to the content of the discourse that did not appear in the original transcript.

However, before she could finish describing her interpretation, Sister Charlotte interrupted her and said that she should not bring outside information into her comments about discourses because the discussion period following discourse readings is for thinking about the points that God made, not the perspectives of others. The difference is very subtle, Sister Charlotte said, but when outside perspectives are brought in, the meaning of the whole discourse is changed. Sister Charlotte said the point she was making about the importance of processing only God's knowledge is subtle but essential. I was seated behind the member to

¹⁴I observed this exchange on October 8, 2000.

¹⁵Throughout this dissertation, I generally use *she*, instead of *he*, to refer to anonymous consultants, regardless of the consultant's actual gender. Readers should not assume that the pronoun I use correlates (or does not correlate) with the members I reference, unless a gendered issue is explicitly under discussion.

whom Sister Charlotte was speaking. She must have looked chastised, because Sister Charlotte then added that she did not intend to upset her, but the point she was making was important.¹⁶

Based on the dozens of English discourses I observed Sister Lydia to lead, I reckon she would have responded to this member in much the same manner as Sister Charlotte had. The Brahma Kumaris are remarkably consistent with their messaging. However, because of their shared Indian cultural background, the member probably would not have felt as chastened if Sister Lydia had told her not to bring in outside knowledge than when Sister Charlotte told her the same thing. The exchange between this member and Sister Charlotte thus helps to illustrate that linguistic and cultural differences do influence social interactions among Brahma Kumaris; but the exchange also provides one illustration of how centers-in-charge are trained to ensure that God's teachings are taught as written in the discourses, without modification.

In addition to raising questions inspired by religious traditions that differed from God's teachings, members sometimes raised questions inspired by secular sources. However, when such questions were raised, the Sister leading the discourse often handled them differently. Instead of seeking to shut down such comments, Sisters often attempted to avoid discussing the matter further by claiming ignorance with regard to the source of the secular interpretation, or to attempt to co-opt the interest of the questioner by inviting her to participate in the construction of a Brahma Kumaris response to the secular source.

For example, one morning,¹⁷ after the discourse had been read and Sister Charlotte was asking the assembled members to share the points of wisdom they had gleaned from the

¹⁶Personal communication, October 8, 2000.

reading, one member asked if Sister Charlotte had read an article about new religious movements and the Brahma Kumaris in a recent edition of the Atlantic Monthly. When Sister Charlotte said that she had not read the article, the member began speaking rapidly about it.

She said that the Atlantic Monthly was the country's oldest magazine, and that it goes more into depth than Newsweek. She said that “scholars and intellectuals” highly respect the Atlantic Monthly, and thus that if anything is published there about the Brahma Kumaris, the organization must take it seriously. Sister Charlotte requested that she read only the passage that mentioned the Brahma Kumaris specifically, but the member tried to explain all of the points the article made while interjecting several of her own interpretive comments, such as how glad she was to be attending discourses because the Brahma Kumaris were an important religious movement, as evidenced by their mention in the Atlantic Monthly. She was looking down at a copy of the article as she spoke, so it was difficult for Sister Charlotte to catch her attention, and Sister Charlotte's expression displayed some strain as she struggled to identify anything in her member's summary that might relate to God's message for the day. After about three minutes of listening to her member's monologue, Sister Charlotte kindly but firmly asked her to please stop reading for now, and to postpone her comments until after the group's closing meditation. The member stammered to a stop, and Sister Charlotte signaled her assistant to begin playing some music for the closing meditation. The lights were lowered, and the group fell into a restless silence for several minutes.

After the meditation, blessed food was distributed as usual. While eating, the woman continued to express her interest in the article. Sister Charlotte went to her and sat beside her, where she announced to the group that everyone should think about how the organization

¹⁷I observed this interaction on July 7, 2002.

might respond to the article, perhaps by sending a letter to the editor. For the next several minutes, Sister Charlotte listened attentively as the woman spoke, and a few other members sat nearby to listen and ask questions. The woman did not seem interested in writing a response letter, but Sister Charlotte encouraged her, and asked some other members to help. When no one committed to taking responsibility for the task, conversation on the topic dwindled away. The members who had come to participate in the conversation left to wash their dishes or to speak with other members about other topics.

During the discourse, Sister Charlotte had asked her member to stop talking about the article for one of the same reasons as she had told her other member to stop explaining her Hindu-informed interpretation of the discourse; namely, because the information conveyed by the member was not consistent with God's discourse. However, unlike the way Sister Charlotte suppressed her member's religiously-informed explanations, Sister Charlotte merely postponed a discussion of her member's secularly-informed comments until after the discourse was over. Then, during the subsequent discussion, Sister Charlotte sought to co-opt her member's interest by encouraging her to write a letter to the editors of the magazine, in which she would provide a Brahma Kumaris response to the issues the article raised. If the member had accepted the task, Sister Charlotte would have succeeded at ensuring that the article's viewpoints were considered “other” or outside the domain of proper Brahma Kumaris discourse (as defined by God's words) and at deepening her member's commitment by convincing her to interpret the article through the lens of Brahma Kumaris knowledge rather than allow the interpretation of that knowledge in the Atlantic Monthly to remain unanswered.

It makes little difference that the member did not commit to writing such a letter, because Sister Charlotte's actions were sufficient to illustrate the organization's differing approaches to religious and secular challenges to God's discourses. Competing religious interpretations were suppressed, but competing secular perspectives were embraced as opportunities for buttressing awareness of Brahma Kumaris teachings among members and the public. Similar organizational responses were discussed in Chapter Two insofar as the Brahma Kumaris rejected invitations to inter-religious debates offered by local religious schools, while managers praised their organization's skill at adapting their teachings to meet the expectations of various occupational and lifestyle groups. Chapter Three showed how the Brahma Kumaris were at ease while participating in secular events with organizations such as the United Nations, but events hosted by other religious organizations were much less comfortable for them.

In addition to ensuring that members do not stray far from God's words in discourses, the Brahma Kumaris also used the question and answer period during discourses to ensure that members behaved in accordance with doctrine in their personal lives, especially regarding the practice of celibacy and the suppression of anger. During my four years of field work, I never once heard dedicated or surrendered members raise these concerns, but regular members occasionally hinted at them.

One young member of the Southern Town center in her late twenties, for example, once spoke about how she sometimes felt that she has “unfinished karma” associated with some of her relationships, and that even though the “need” to resolve the associated karma might be “temporary,” nonetheless she experienced those needs as real and their results as healing for all concerned. While she was speaking, Sister Charlotte's expression seemed

somewhat strained, as if she were listening intently for the member to make even the smallest reference to anything God had actually said in that morning's discourse. When the regular member who raised the topic finally did mention God by name, Sister Charlotte swiftly interrupted her and said that there is a big difference between feeling as if "I" can give someone what they need and becoming a clear channel through whom God may serve others, with no thought of "I" to limit the purity of God's teachings. In other words, Sister Charlotte called on the member to recall the second lesson of the Seven Days Course; namely, that the true identity of all persons lies in their immaterial soul, and thus that the only true service we may give each other is to help end bodily identification and transfer self-awareness to spiritual, non-material selves. Sister Charlotte's response to her member revealed again how centers-in-charge use the question and answer period following morning discourses to shore up the doctrinal and behavioral boundaries that distinguish Brahma Kumaris from the general public, and to do so uncompromisingly, even when members raise issues pertaining to their personal relationships.

Anger is another emotional boundary that dedicated and surrendered members would not cross, but that regular members sometimes raised. For example, at the end of one morning's discourse, which had focused on the theme of determination, Sister Charlotte asked what God had taught about being dedicated. One of the members in the assembly explained that, in her past, anger had clinched her determination. She was careful to say that she doesn't use anger like that anymore, but she used to. Sister Charlotte responded deftly with a humorous tone, saying, "that wasn't the answer I was looking for," and everyone in the group chuckled good naturedly.¹⁸

¹⁸I observed this exchange on April 8, 2001.

Later on in the discussion, a regular member asked how best to manage an angry family member. Sister Charlotte responded by saying that if one's spouse is angry, then a Brahma Kumaris should not try to engage them in argument. Then is not the time, Sister Charlotte said, to “face” them. Rather, it is better to accommodate them, to tolerate them, or to withdraw temporarily from them, until such a time when the cause of their anger may be discussed without emotions getting in the way of clarity. The emotional tenor in the room was already somewhat light because of the earlier discussion about anger, and thus one of the dedicated members joked that no, if a spouse approaches you in anger, “it is time to fight.” Everyone laughed when he said this, and a couple more members agreed with him in jest. Once more, even though she was smiling too, Sister Charlotte corrected everyone and explained that, contrary to what everyone had just heard, the proper response to anger was to demonstrate loving tolerance.

Boundaries at Southern Town

According to my consultants, Brahma Kumaris management at the center level is remarkably consistent from center to center throughout the world, and my field work at Southern Town, Northern Town, and Mount Abu tends to confirm their impression. I discuss the Mount Abu campuses in the next chapter, but many of the points I make there build on the conclusions I draw here: With regard to routine management practices for maintaining basic social boundaries, Southern Town is typical. The Brahma Kumaris maintain their most significant boundary (the boundary between members and non-members) through the Seven Days Course. The Course introduces new members to the organization in a controlled manner, and it enables senior members to evaluate the character of new students. After having been admitted, new members gradually come to realize that there are three tiers of

members, including regular members, dedicated members, and surrendered members. New and senior members alike meet together daily in the mornings to participate in discourses, which involve reading an abridged and edited transcript of words spoken by God during previous spirit-possession performances. The transcripts for each day's discourses are identical for each Brahma Kumaris center throughout the world, ensuring that the organization as a whole receives the same ideological messaging, even though there are some differences in the cultural connotations invoked by the discourses, depending on the languages in which they are read. Discourse sessions also include a question and answer period, during which a senior Sister offers guidance to the members who attend discourses at her center. This guidance often comes in the form of ideological correctives offered by the senior Sister, which are intended to ensure that members adhere to both the letter and spirit of God's words as delivered through the discourse transcript. Regular attendance at discourses is thus one of the most important ways that members display their commitment to the organization and signal their readiness to accept greater institutional responsibilities.

Chapter 5: Core Management

Chapter Two described the outermost boundary between the Brahma Kumaris and one of its host communities, Mount Abu, India, as viewed by local outsiders. Chapter Three presented the same boundary as viewed from the perspective of Brahma Kumaris members in Southern Town, who maintain it as a service and recruitment threshold. Chapter Four discussed how new participants cross that threshold to become members and described several different types of members.

This chapter, Chapter 5, analyzes the heart of Brahma Kumaris management philosophy and practice. I base my analyses in this chapter on three lengthy interviews I held with three senior managers, all of whom carry quite different responsibilities for the organization. Brother Billy¹ began participating in Brahma Kumaris activities as a young boy and now directs a high profile department within the central administration of the organization's world headquarters. Sister Daisy² serves as a senior manager of the Brahma Kumaris' worldwide operations from the organization's international coordination office in London, England. Brother Graham³ has been a dedicated member of the organization since 1981, but he does not hold any administrative posts because he works as the chief executive officer of a highly successful international strategic marketing firm. In that capacity, Brother

¹A pseudonym.

²A pseudonym.

³A pseudonym.

Graham pioneered a management training program called Self Management Leadership, which has become the backbone of Brahma Kumaris management philosophy.⁴

Brothers Billy and Graham and Sister Daisy occupy distinctive positions within the organization, but they all exercise an authority and influence over the organization exceeded only by the Dadis.⁵ These three leaders report to the Dadis, but it is they and a small coterie of their peers who implement most of the organization's directives and oversee its corporate culture and daily operations. Consequently, their accounts of their management experiences and methods can be taken as representative of how the organization as a whole is managed, a conclusion reinforced by the consistency of their views relative to the diversity of their posts.

Throughout the organization, it is common to hear Brahma Kumaris speak of "earning their fortune" in the Golden Age to come. This fortune is not a private fortune of individual wealth, but a purity of soul expressed through a spirit of selfless service that benefits everyone. God teaches the Brahma Kumaris that the most pure among them will be

⁴The fact that two of these three interviewees are men should not suggest that two thirds of Brahma Kumaris managers are men; indeed, the vast majority of senior Brahma Kumaris leaders are women. The gender of my interviewees reflects only my own relative inability as a field researcher to win the confidence of any but a tiny minority of women leaders, including Sister Daisy and my center directors in Southern Town, Sisters Charlotte and Abigail, plus two assistants to center coordinators, Sisters Savannah and Carolina. I strongly suspect (although I cannot possibly prove) that if I had been a woman, most of my senior interviewees would have been women as well.

⁵As described in Chapter One, the *Dadis* (a term literally meaning "Aunts") are the trustees of the Brahma Kumaris' financial foundation, a registered religious institution chartered as the World Preservation Trust. The Dadis are also the titular heads of the Brahma Kumaris' secularly oriented institutional nongovernmental organization, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. Most of the Dadis currently serving the organization have maintained their posts ever since Dada Lekhraj originally chartered the Brahma Kumaris' first trust, called Om Mandali, in 1937. Obviously, all of these original Dadis are now quite advanced in years, although they still exercise ultimate authority over the organization as a whole, an authority derived from their lifelong relationship with God and Dada Lekhraj.

reborn as leaders among the 900,000 souls who will reincarnate during the Golden Age and enjoy 1,250 years of peace and plenty on earth. The leaders of the Brahma Kumaris today understand themselves as the rulers of heaven on earth tomorrow.

The Brahma Kumaris provide their most senior members with prime leadership positions. Brother Billy, for example, directs a high profile department spanning all three campuses of the Brahma Kumaris' world headquarters. The Brahma Kumaris call these three campuses Madhuban,⁶ located in the town of Mount Abu, Gyan Sarovar,⁷ located in the nearby village of Salgaon, and Shantivan,⁸ located in the nearby city of Abu Road. The grounds and facilities of each of these campuses is larger than most small colleges, and together they can accommodate approximately 20,000 conference participants simultaneously. The Brahma Kumaris maintain a fleet of buses, trucks, automobiles, and other vehicles to link each campus with the others, and department directors must coordinate their staff's activities on each campus to ensure that appropriate services are rendered where and when needed. Brother Billy directed one of the most high profile of these departments, the services of which were required at almost every conference or event at all three campus locations. On some single days, more than a dozen major events were held across the three campuses.

I interviewed Brother Billy in Madhuban.⁹ With Brother Billy's permission, I recorded the interview. Brother Billy's first language is Hindi, but he requested that we speak

⁶*Madhuban* means "Forest of Sweetness" or "Forest of Honey."

⁷*Gyan Sarovar* means "Sea of Wisdom."

⁸*Shantivan* means "Abode of Peace."

⁹I recorded this interview on April 5, 2003.

in English in order to make the interview easier for me. When I asked Brother Billy to describe his responsibilities, he said,

I am the manager of the...department since 20 years. I have three teams. I have three places: Maduban is one team, another team is in Gyan Sarovar, another team is in Shantivan. I work really hard for twenty years, and now I am managing, organizing this department....

Since five years, I am managing mostly, not working. But on a really special day or really special occasion..., when they need my help, I am working. Otherwise, I am just managing. Getting the directions from Dadaji¹⁰ and then giving directions and managing all the three...places.¹¹

Brother Billy's extensive management experience granted him a high measure of respect among the rest of the approximately five hundred full time staff members of the world headquarters. Most of his duties are now executive, although he does help with the physical tasks in his department whenever needed and as an expression of his management style.

Serving the organization as a senior manager brings high status to a leader, in part because of the occupational influence that a manager wields. However, among the Brahma Kumaris, holding a high managerial position also conveys high religious status. When I asked Brother Billy about what benefits come with being a senior leader, he replied:

Subtle benefits. We are getting self satisfaction.... [We are able to say to ourselves,] "Oh, I am a good manager," [and] "I am a successful manager...."

¹⁰Brother Billy meant Dadi Prakashmani, now deceased. At the time of our interview, Dadi Prakashmani was the joint administrative chief in charge of the organization's operations in India.

¹¹Ibid.

God has said that you will be king of king, the power of management—the power of ruling and controlling—is related with the king position in king of king. Those [who] are having very good managing power [by] ruling and controlling power in [the] Confluence Age [our current decades], they would be the ruler in Golden Age. That is why there is a very big benefit....

We are enjoying that. We are developing our [leadership] qualities, we are developing our efficiency potential and by the result of that, we are creating our fortune and others' fortune also; then for the Golden Age also, we are creating our role, [our] royal and gentle role.¹²

According to Brahma Kumaris theology, the one hundred years between the founding of their movement in 1936 and the expected apocalypse in 2036 is the time during which those souls who will be the kings of the Golden Age following the apocalypse will become known by two signs: their skills as spiritual leaders and their closeness to God and God's organization, the Brahma Kumaris administration. The Brahma Kumaris recognize more styles of religious leadership than only administrative acumen, but management remains the most widely embraced norm within the organization for estimating who is more or less likely to have cultivated a Godly soul.

I will return to a few additional insights expressed by Brother Billy during our interview later in this chapter; but now, after having heard why the Brahma Kumaris value managerial skills so highly, I will turn to my interview with Brother Graham in order to better understand how the Brahma Kumaris learned to manage their organization. The story Brother Graham told me is important to this dissertation because it demonstrates how deeply

¹²Ibid.

embedded the Brahma Kumaris leadership is in the secular leadership of global governance and multinational corporations. In other words, the Brahma Kumaris' endorsement of leadership (at the highest possible levels of the world-system) as a core spiritual virtue is not empty rhetoric; they practice what they preach, and they are dead earnest in their endeavor to prove themselves as capable global governors by innovating in the field of management.

Brother Graham is the founder of a practical approach now called Self Management Leadership, and this approach guides how the Brahma Kumaris manage themselves. As we will see, Self Management Leadership has also become an exceptionally influential management training program for both multinational corporations and national governments in both the East and West.

During the mid- to late-1980s, when Brother Graham developed the Self Management Leadership program, Brother Graham had already served in the military, held an executive office with a global marketing and strategic consulting firm, and been a full member of the Brahma Kumaris for nearly a decade. As Brother Graham explained to me, he drew on his experience and expertise in all of these areas of endeavor as he developed the Self Management Leadership program.

Brother Graham spoke at some length about how the Self Management Leadership program developed, and his words are worth including here (with minor abridgements) for both the quality of his story telling and for their analytical value.¹³ In all of my three years of fieldwork with the Brahma Kumaris in two countries, including dozens of interviews, hundreds of observations, and scores of texts read, none of my sources explained more clearly than he why the Brahma Kumaris manage their organization as they do.

¹³I recorded this interview on March 18, 2003.

The Self Management Leadership program constitutes the core of the Brahma Kumaris' administrative practices, and as Brother Billy indicated, accomplishing a first-rate managerial style is one of the most straight-forward indicators of a Brahma Kumar's or Kumari's probable destiny in the Golden Age to come. As Brother Graham explained toward the very end of our interview,

The main champion of the program is Dadi Janki.¹⁴ Over Christmas and New Years, as I do most years, I run Self Management Leadership for Brahma Kumaris, including all of Dadi's direct generals.... They go through the course on a regular basis, and it is pretty well entrenched. It has a very, very powerful effect in that kind of context.¹⁵

All of the organization's core administrators at the very highest levels routinely take the Self Management Leadership course every year, and Brother Graham is their program facilitator.

Here is Brother Graham's explanation of the Self Management Leadership program's origins, growth, and purpose, for both the Brahma Kumaris and the world at large. Brother Graham explained:

At its core, what Self Management Leadership was developed for—and one large part of what it continues to be used for—is the training of leaders to coach them in how to lead others during times of turbulence and change. It is based upon the principle that you can't change other people. You can only change yourself; and as a leader, you can only provide the tools, the

¹⁴Dadi Jenki is now the senior joint administrative chief, and she is in charge of the organization's operations in India. At the time of our interview, Dadi Jenki was the joint administrative chief in charge of international operations.

¹⁵Personal correspondence, March 18, 2003.

circumstances, the context, and the permission to enable someone else to recognize why they need to change themselves, how to change, and in which direction. These are things which are very easy to talk about, [but] they are exceptionally difficult to put into place....

To explain it fully, maybe it is useful for me to give you some background as to how it emerged. I have been a student of the Brahma Kumaris since 1981, and my business was large scale change process[es] in organizations, governments, and corporations. In the early days, when we first started working with this..., we were the management consulting arm of one of the biggest US advertising agencies, and our business was strategy. We worked with the big brands, the big corporations; and we advised them on their marketing—their strategic marketing directions. Largely, how to penetrate a new country, how to enter a new market, how to take over an existing local operation and bring them into a global operating context; and that necessitated changing people who had always had a local orientation into an international orientation.¹⁶

Brother Graham, the originator of the Self Management Leadership program, was working as a strategic consultant for some of the largest of multinational corporations. He had been a Brahma Kumaris for several years, but his first business was for-profit global enterprises. Out of that context, then, emerged Brahma Kumaris management philosophy. However, as Brother Graham explained, there is more to the story:

¹⁶Ibid.

As time moved on through the early [19]80s, that work became much more complicated. The strategic work that we were doing necessitated changing organizations' structures, and in many cases changing their entire direction and profile—not just profile, but their direction and context as an organization, [including] different products, sometimes different brands, sometimes entirely different businesses. It was like rebuilding a ship while it is still at sea... If you could put it most simply, the work that we were doing went from putting into place strategies that required an incremental change... in the margins—you know, “get better, do it harder, do it in a more focused manner”—to much more fundamental changes, more transformational changes, chang[es in] what they were all about.

That was new for me.... It was new for everybody.... This whole thing which is now so common place, of change process and working with change and managing change; that was never heard of before. That just wasn't in the vocabulary; and so we were kind of picking this up as we went along, and the turning point came in our field of work globally because the consulting company that I was running at the time was a global organization.

It was happening simultaneously within the United States, in Europe, and in Asia. The biggest challenge that we faced was not any longer what the right strategy was; it became how do we implement this strategy. And the biggest challenge was not how do you get the resources, or how do we get

access to the technology. It was, “how do we get people to change, to do this?”¹⁷

Brahma Kumaris knowledge teaches that the world is on the brink of a catastrophic total transformation, characterized by violent environmental and man-made upheavals. They view themselves as the only truly pure souls alive today and as the only souls who are capable of coming through the coming cataclysms with the purity of their souls intact. In other words, the Brahma Kumaris view themselves as the world’s true rulers, rulers whose highest priority currently is leading their organization peacefully through the coming apocalypse. It is fitting, then, that Brother Graham should have formulated their core management philosophy as a response to especially trying times in the global economy and world polity.

Brother Graham continued to explain the circumstances under which he developed the Self Management Leadership program by describing the specific people he was working with and the nature of the problem he was working with them to solve. He said:

The specific context which led to the development of what’s become known as the Self Management Leadership program was our engagement by the Australian government to support them in their process of microeconomic reform in the mid-1980s.... With the massive growth...occurring in the Southeast Asian region..., the Australian government became very worried: Australia was not competitive. We were seeing the early stages of globalization occur, and Australia was just way behind the mark. It was what the United States was working up to also, pretty much about the same time,

¹⁷Ibid.

but because it [the United States] is so much bigger, it took a little longer to move. Australia moved very fast on this.

It was in the global environment at the time of...Thatcher and Reagan, and economic rationalism was sweeping the globe, [including] the weakening hold of the unions and the urge toward privatizations—or at least commercialization of government-sector enterprise. This was what was picked up by the Australian government, and they initiated a very broad, wide-ranging initiative in which various sectors of the Australian economy were targeted for complete and total reform. They were energy, transport, airports and aircrafts, telecommunications, the banking sector, and...probably others.

We were directly involved with energy..., which was completely...state-controlled. All power stations and all power companies...were all state-run bureaucratic monopolies; and we also worked in the reform of the telecom industry as well; but it was [while] working in the energy sector [that] we developed a process called “strategic focusing,” which worked with the top levels of an organization..., with strategy and structure.

[We were asked,] “What is the new strategy to take a bureaucratic, monopolistic, engineering-driven organization and turn it into a competitive, not-quite-privately-owned, but commercialized operation that has customers...?” Before, they just had consumers.... Electricity: pump it out. Now, they had to compete....¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid.

Brother Graham was working at the intersection of global economics, national governance, and the need to transform the way Australia delivered their country's energy utility services to their citizens. The job thus provided Brother Graham with an ideal and irreproducible opportunity to develop a management philosophy and method that could bind together government, business, and civil society into a single administrative strategy.

As you [can] probably imagine..., one [problem] was figuring out what...kind of organizational structures...these massive organizations would have to move to.... Before we started, there were seventeen layers of management from the top person down to the person who drove the coal trucks or worked on the factory floor in the power station; seventeen levels.... Within three months, it was down to 6 levels.

There were just massive changes for flattening...organizations, and there were a lot of layoffs; and so, therefore, there was a huge amount of fear, a lot of confusion; and...there was also just tremendous resistance to this. Whereas most people—and I am now talking about the top executives, the top management—[understood] what had to be done at a macro level to make Australia competitive in the global marketplace, the fact remains [that] these people were engineers. They were not salesman. They did not think about customers. They thought about engineering solutions. That was their value set.

It had never occurred to them about maybe they wouldn't have a job. They started to work for the government. They were protected employees, and now suddenly their jobs were under threat. They were learning completely new things, of business process reengineering [and] total quality management.

There was so much new stuff that was coming at them. So individually (as well as collectively), these people were in just complete overload; and at the same time, these people had responsibility for managing and leading tens of thousands of people.¹⁹

Here, after having set the global stage for his narrative and the significance of the times, Brother Graham inserts himself as a key player, and his story reads as an allegory for how the Brahma Kumaris intend to manage their organization as a training ground for purifying the souls of future world leaders. Brother Graham said:

I was working with the chief executive officer, the president and his closest team, and I remember exactly the day that it happened. It was obvious to everybody that there were serious problems in this organization: There was so much fear, and loathing, and dysfunction; and the top management were not really coping with what was going on. There was a lot of in-fighting, a lot of back biting, a lot of the usual kind of stuff that you see with all of this. Stress levels were unbelievably high.

The day before the meeting that...led to the development of the Self Management Leadership program, I had met with the company doctor who had just completed a diagnostic of the top level of management, the top 250 managers of this big organization, and he was really angry with me. He said, "You have no idea what you are doing."

I have a military background, and so did he. He was a part-time officer in the Australian army, in the medical corp. He said the average stress levels

¹⁹Ibid.

were “level 5 stress.” Level 5 stress is basically a level of stress—physical stress—that is expected that a soldier will experience the first time he or she experiences combat, the first time the bombs start going off and you’re exposed to live enemy fire. It is assumed that the first-timers will experience level 5 stress. And it is expected [that] with their training, and their youth, and their preparation, they will be able to cope with that for upwards of 10 days. After that, it is expected that their judgment will be impaired, that their discrimination and judgment will start to be affected, and they are going to have to be rotated out—particularly the officers.

He said, “Here we have in this situation the top command of this organization experiencing level 5 stress. These are not 20-year-old soldiers who are fit, trained, have been prepared for this, put into combat with good leadership, and are going to be recycled after 10 days. Most of the people have been carrying these stress levels for more than a year. They are in a median age of 45 to 55. They have not been prepared. They are not physically fit. They don’t know what they are doing. They have been in the job for a year, and they’re nuts. Why do you expect that they’ll make good decisions? Do you expect these people honestly to be able to lead others? You have got to be kidding me.”

That was really good preparation for the meeting I was to have the next day with the chief executive.... On our agenda to discuss was literally the next level of change that had to come into this organization; because in addition to the mandated changes that had been put into affect as a result of

the government's decision to commercialize these operations, there was then another layer that had to go on top of that, [including] a whole lot of environmental and greenhouse regulations, which provided even greater restriction on them being able to operate commercially; and this was completely new.

I mean, Australia sits on the greatest reserves of coal in the world—free, you know—and now [they were told,] “you are going to have to find alternative ways of using this....” These people, they could not believe how much upheaval just came into their lives, literally just overnight.... I met with...the chief executive about this, about how [to] break the news to these people....

What he said to me was..., “You know, these people are not coping.”

I made the comment, “Well, okay; maybe we need to get another kind of training into place here.” We're not training consultants. My background is not training at all. My background is strategy and structure.... I said, “So, we are going to have to find a way of training these people, to help them cope with this.”

I will never forget his reaction. He went blue in the face, and he almost threw his coffee cup against the wall. He said, “For Christ's sake, don't tell me we need more training. We have had every kind of bloody training imaginable. We have been TQM'd [Total Quality Management]. We have been re-engineered. We have had everything. We all know what we have to

do. We just don't know how to do it. There is something that is blocked inside.”²⁰

Brother Graham's clients had already tried all of the best that the business world had to offer insofar as training and expertise was concerned and found them all wanting. As Brother Graham tells the story, his clients needed something more, something new, something they had not yet tried but held the promise of solving the quandaries stymieing them:

He said to me..., “What I think we need is something that you do.”

Honestly, it never occurred to me what he was talking about because, although at that stage I had been a Brahma Kumaris for about 6 years, I had really kept it quiet. I had kept a very clear demarcation between my spiritual practice—my meditation—and my professional work; and to be honest, I never really saw a connection between the two. I would do service, but I would do 7 Day Courses and things like that. I followed all the Brahma Kumaris principles, and [they probably thought it was] something of an oddity that I didn't eat meat and that I didn't drink, and maybe they picked up that there was something a little bit different also in my way and approach to things, because I never talked about it. I never really knew anybody had noticed anything.... Apparently, what had happened [was] this CEO had actually done some investigation around what I was doing.

He said, “I think we need some of that mediation stuff.”

I said, “What are you talking about, ‘mediation’?”

He said, “You know, you go to these mediation classes.”

²⁰Ibid.

I do work as a negotiator, you know, so I was trying to put this together, and I said, “I am not sure that mediation is what is required here.”

He said, “You know, ideas: Something that works on the inside. You know, some morning meditation is what we need.”

I said, “Do you mean, ‘meditation’? Is that what you mean?”

He said, “Yeah. Is that it? I don’t know. Whatever it is called.”

That is pretty typical of the level of recognition there was of any of these kinds of things in this world.

I was really actually shocked around this [and] a little bit nervous.

This is too long of a story.

Cutting it short: What it led to was the development of a program. I did it about a week later for these top executives, and it was called, “The Eye of the Storm.” It was based upon the principal [of Brahma Kumaris teachings].²¹

Brother Graham developed the Self Management Leadership program, initially called “The Eye of the Storm,” after having been asked by the top management of Australia’s government and its partners in the business world to draw on his spiritual knowledge and apply it to solving problems created by a chaotic world; and the story he tells reveals all of the key features of Brahma Kumaris theology and practice: At the time when Brother Graham developed the program, the world was undergoing traumatic shifts in the nature of its global economy. The Brahma Kumaris view such global challenges as harbingers of the cataclysm to come. As predicted by Brahma Kumaris theology, Brother Graham’s clients

²¹Ibid.

were panicking, unable to cope with the changes the world was demanding of them. In their midst, however, was Brother Graham himself, who was already a dedicated member of the organization. He made no efforts whatsoever to communicate his identity as a Brahma Kumaris, but even the practical-minded engineering executives could perceive something different about him, something valuable. It was the benefit of Brother Graham's spiritual practices that his client's needed in order to save themselves, and it was Brother Graham's spiritual acumen, honed to a keen edge by the Brahma Kumaris themselves, that enabled him to lead his clients to safety:

It was actually that weekend, after that conversation, [when] I picked up a magazine article.... There was a story in there about Hurricane Gilbert, which around that time had just hit the Gulf of Mexico; and it was the most devastating hurricane that had ever been experienced.

It was a fascinating story. It was about a ship that had survived Hurricane Gilbert, and it survived not because it was more sea worthy, or [because] it was anything else. It survived because the Captain knew exactly what to do. He had been trained and prepared before this storm hit. Hurricane Gilbert...was the most devastating not just because of the destruction it caused on land, but it swept into one of the main shipping lanes, and many ship were caught at sea and sunk....

This magazine article was about one of these ships, and it was an incredible story about how this Norwegian freighter—the Captain—when it occurred to him that he was about to be overtaken by this hurricane and he

wasn't going to be able to get to a port in time, he turned his ship around, and he drove his ship straight into the face of this bloody thing.

I have lost the magazine article since then, but it was an amazing story about the reactions of the crew, because they had such confidence in their Captain, that this guy must know (let's hope he does!), know what he is doing because [if he does not, then] we're going to get killed here.

He did know what he was doing, because the only place you can survive a force of nature like that is right in the middle of it. He found the eye of the storm.... He then said, forget about our charts, our destination. Here we stay. We have just got to go with the storm; and that is how he kept his ship afloat....²²

The story about the Norwegian captain that Brother Graham had found provided a ready metaphor for him to use in his repackaging of Brahma Kumaris knowledge as one part of a corporate management training program, and the metaphor captured the gist of how the Brahma Kumaris view spiritual development. Individuals and groups are besieged by a world in decay and disruption, and unless they can face the hazards confronting them with the calm assurance that the only peace they will find during these trying times is within their own souls – the eye of the storm – they risk being destroyed by a world caught up in the midst of a violent purgatory transformation:

It occurred to me that this is exactly what is happening in the lives of these people [the engineers of Australia's energy sector]. This is exactly what is happening. These people had their charts perfectly clear. They knew where

²²Ibid.

they were going. They [had] joined the government; they had become an engineer, run a power station, produced electricity. [Their] kids [were to] grow up [and] go to universities. Suddenly, this bloody hurricane just hit them. And they don't know where they are going. There was no compass.

So I used this as a metaphor, and I built this course around it that was based upon the first few lessons of the Raj Yoga course,²³ [namely,] that you have to be [under] control. In order for you to be able to lead others and give others a compass for where they are going, you have to find your own compass, and you have to—during hurricanes like this—you have to be able to find your own way into the eye of the storm.

So that provided the rationale and the context for learning how to meditate, for learning how to be a soul. Then [came] just observing, to first keep the ship afloat; and I built a series of exercises around that again....

We didn't call it meditation, we called it "reflective inquiry"; and then we gave a number of, in fact, meditation commentaries which took people into that deep, self-conscious, alpha state in which they explored themselves, made...journals, and so forth; and in many cases, they had quite a spiritual experience. They came up with their own plans, and we continued meeting on a regular basis, and it had really quite a dramatic affect.

Several of them left. They said, "This is not where I want to be," which was exactly the right decision for them to have made; and others...are still around today....

²³Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *One Week Course*.

So that very long winded story was how this actually started, and it still maintains that integrity now. The course eventually became the Self Management Leadership program, and it is being employed in that way in 61 different countries. There are over 150,000 people that have been through the course. It is used [for example] as the cornerstone of the government reform process in Mexico, [as soon as] Vicente Fox came into power....²⁴

Brother Graham explained more about the role of the Self Management Leadership program in Vicente Fox's Mexican government later in the interview, and I will turn to that topic later in this chapter; but already it should be apparent that the Self Management Leadership program begins with the assumption that the world is undergoing traumatic transformations, whereby the old, outdated models of how to succeed must be jettisoned in favor of new approaches that, not incidentally, only the Brahma Kumaris are in a position to provide. Moreover, except when the Brahma Kumaris themselves are participating in a Self Leadership Management program as attendees, such as when Brother Graham facilitates the program on an annual basis for Dadi Jenki and the organization's top leadership, the contributions that Brahma Kumaris knowledge have made to the program are occluded.

There is nothing inconsistent or hypocritical about this practice: The Brahma Kumaris teach that the only spiritual beings in existence are souls and God. All souls are equal as souls, and God is the spiritual father of all souls. Only some souls, however, will ever realize the truth of those teachings, and because the world is absolutely predestined to repeat its entire human history every 5,000 years, souls who are not receptive to the full range of Brahma Kumaris knowledge never will be ready for it. There is nothing the Brahma Kumaris

²⁴Personal correspondence, March 18, 2003.

can do to convert anyone, because only those persons who are predestined to become a Brahma Kumaris will recognize the deeper truths in the Self Management Leadership for what they are and then ask to more about the organization through continued study in other, specifically Brahma Kumaris, programs. Meanwhile, the non-sectarian – even secular – packaging of the Self Management Leadership program provides Brahma Kumaris facilitators with an opportunity to refine their own skills as world leaders by guiding their program participants on their own journeys of self discovery.

Brother Graham confirmed this analysis when he explained:

Self Management Leadership [and] Brahma Kumaris knowledge only works with leaders. Believe me about that. I mean, you'll find out that...for every 1,000 people that come through the doors of the Raj Yoga [Brahma Kumaris] Center, within two years, there will be ten; and those ten are people are destined to follow this, and they are leaders, just by definition and understanding of the cycle.²⁵

“By definition,” the only true leaders of the world are Brahma Kumaris members; the world may not yet be run exclusively by them, but by “understanding of the cycle” it is only a short matter of time before the predestined cycle of human history repeats, the world is transformed, and only Brahma Kumaris souls take new human bodies to enjoy the purity and perfection of the Golden Age. Meanwhile, any souls who take the Self Management Leadership Course but are not destined to become Brahma Kumaris souls cannot possibly be influenced to try and become Brahma Kumaris because their future is already predetermined:

²⁵Ibid.

The people who recognize this knowledge and inculcate it, they are not going to follow anybody else's track. They will cut their own path through the jungle.

It is number wise, of course [meaning that those Souls who are destined to be closer to God than others will express more interest in the program and the principles on which it is based]. So when you present somebody with the [Self Management Leadership program,] they're not going to go off on a course of becoming a deity in the Golden Age as an objective.

That's not setting their own course. They won't do that.²⁶

This is important. The Self Management Leadership program is not a catechism; it is not a conversion program in disguise. The Brahma Kumaris do not believe in conversion because according to their knowledge, conversion is not possible. The only possibilities available to any particular soul are exactly those same possibilities that were open to that same soul in every other iteration of the predestined 5,000 year cycle in the past, present, and future. Under these conditions, the only service the Self Management Leadership program can provide is aid each soul to recognize whatever is true for them, whatever goals are compelling to them, whatever destiny is theirs to follow. Far from intending to convert anyone to anything, the Self Management Leadership program is designed only help individuals to more fully realize who they already are:

The Self Management Leadership program is built around a sequence that says, know where you are, clarify your purpose in life (basically get your compass, find out which way is North for you). Then, identify the values that

²⁶Ibid.

will support choices and decisions in line with that purpose.... When you imagine that, clarify what it looks like in the future if you head down this track, and you'll then start to develop some idea of the direction that you want to go. [Finally,] bring it back to earth. Identify what other barriers are going to prevent you from being able to live like this, and follow that track. Set yourself some short-term milestones and targets that you need to reach. Identify the choices that you need to make, the decision you have to make to back up those choices, and identify the actions you have to take immediately to get there.

It's your own plan. You know you're not prescribing to anybody the lifestyle of a Brahma Kumaris. Not that many do [become Brahma Kumaris]. Raj Yoga knowledge [Brahma Kumaris knowledge] is the ultimate form of self-management, and this is self-management. If it is part of your recognition that a spiritual lifestyle, which involves the kinds of principles and spiritual support system that is offered by the Brahma Kumaris is appropriate for you, then people will recognize that. People will deal with that.

It is not the intention [or] objective of Self Management Leadership to turn people into Raj Yoga [Brahma Kumaris] students. Not at all. It shouldn't be the intention of even giving the Seven Day Course to do that. We don't need to. Whether somebody becomes a student of the Brahma Kumaris—whether a person becomes a Brahma Kumaris—that's a matter between that soul and God. What the Self Management Leadership program does do, from a service point of view, and the reason why we have pursued it enough, is that

it holds people still long enough to get an experience of themselves and an empowering experience of God. As they say, “I’ll hold ‘em, you hit ‘em.”²⁷

As Brother Graham’s story about the origins of the Self Management Leadership program among the executive leadership of the Australian government’s energy utility sector already suggest, one advantage of the Self Management Leadership program for the Brahma Kumaris is that it does not attempt to dictate any specifics to its participants, including any theological specifics. However, as Brother Graham has explained and as I am emphasizing, the Self Management Leadership program did indeed grow out of Brahma Kumaris convictions, and it remains entirely compatible with those convictions, which are not ideologically neutral. The Brahma Kumaris, for example, would not permit a Christian who believes in the saving power of grace to teach the Self Management Leadership program in such a way that its participants received the idea that if they did not make the “right” choices in their process of self-inquiry (“right” choices relative to the Christian imperative to accept redemption through grace), then their approach to the world would remain “wrong.” A Brahma Kumaris facilitator would not try to prevent any of their participants in their Self Leadership Management program from concluding for themselves that salvation through the acceptance of grace was the only right path for them, but the Self Management Leadership program itself cannot work under such an assumption.

I mention this now because, as Brother Graham indicated, the Self Management Leadership program has already been taken by more than 150,000 participants in more than 61 countries, and many of those participants come from global business or governance backgrounds. As I discussed in Chapter One and will explain further in Chapter Six, the

²⁷Ibid.

global worlds of business, governments, and especially the voluntary sector of non-governmental organizations also cohere around particular values. Here I suggest that the values underpinning the Self Management Leadership program are themselves remarkably consistent with the values of global civil society, and thus the Brahma Kumaris have found their growth and expansion through the international system of non-governmental organizations quickened.

Brother Graham's explanation was echoed by Sister Daisy, a senior manager with the international coordinating office of the Brahma Kumaris. She also affirmed that the purpose of Brahma Kumaris activities is only to enable participants to deepen their own spiritual life, not to make converts:

Really, since the 1980s, there has been [within the organization a] huge aspect of outreach, where we are sharing with people spiritual tools that they can use in their lives. They may not take up Raja Yoga [Brahma Kumaris] teachings, and that is fine. [They may not take up] the Brahma Kumaris lifestyle, and that is also fine; but they can learn how to think more positively, they can deepen their own faith in God within their own religious context, they can bring values more into their lives, and they can have more peace of mind.²⁸

With this point, Sister Daisy expresses the organization's remarkable commitment to flexibility, which encourages them to serve as best they can, wherever they feel able, and without worrying about whether their service will result in new members for their own organization. Of course, such service does always serve at least one of the Brahma Kumaris' most important goals: Regardless of their programs' foci, content, or outcome, Brahma

²⁸I recorded this interview on March 19, 2003.

Kumaris facilitators always lead their participants along whatever path the participants are traveling. Brahma Kumaris programs are designed to benefit participants, but they always deepen the Brahma Kumaris' own leaders.

The Brahma Kumaris seek to improve their leadership skills in preparation for leading the entire world (of 900,000 souls) during the Golden Age to come, and one of the best ways to obtain this type of leadership experience is by leading national leaders through the Self Management Leadership course. As Brother Graham mentioned earlier in our interview, he and a few other fortunate Brahma Kumaris had precisely this opportunity when they developed a working relationship with the Mexican national leader, Vicente Fox. Working with Fox demanded that the Brahma Kumaris setup new logistical arrangements to ensure that Mexico's Catholic majorities would not be alarmed by their influence on Fox's government, but this presented little difficulty for the Brahma Kumaris, as Brother Graham explained:

In Mexico, it's a funny kind of situation.... How it happened in Mexico is that Vicente Fox, when he was Governor in the state of Guanajuato, [had] a member of his inner team and cabinet, [who] had good talent but...was dysfunctional. I mean, he was so bloody clever. He was too clever, and his nature was that he wasn't a team player. He wasn't really able to gel. He was arrogant. He was one of these young guys who thinks so fast and further ahead than anybody else and gets incredibly impatient when people are not at the same speed as him. Fox recognized his talent, but that talent would only be realized if he was able to modify his nature.

[Fox] had heard about this Self Management Leadership course, [and] Brother Ray²⁹ and I had been invited to Guanajuato to give a talk at the Innovation Congress there. We gave our own respective talks [which covered] ideas in the Self Management Leadership program, and that's how [the state officials of Guanajuato] heard about the Course.

Then the Governor [that is, Vicente Fox,] sent this guy to the Oxford program.³⁰ It had a huge affect on him. I mean, he really changed completely his whole nature. He had many realizations, which is common. It happens a lot with people. His performance, his nature, people recognized so much positive change in him. So they sent three more, and the same kind of story [ensued]. Then [Fox's staff] invited us over to work with his cabinet, and...when he became elected President of Mexico, he asked me to come in and work with his cabinet....³¹

The problem was that up until that time, my relationship with him had been through the Brahma Kumaris; but now he was President, and he wanted to use...not only Self Management Leadership, but the whole strategic focusing thing, and his party was the center-right, Catholic party. They're sufficiently fundamentalist for them to have a fit about Brahma Kumaris.....

²⁹A pseudonym.

³⁰Brother Graham is here referring to the Self Management Leadership program as “the Oxford Program” because the program is administered by a separately chartered nonprofit organization called the Oxford Academy. The Oxford Academy is headquartered in London, England.

³¹Recorded interview, March 18, 2003.

So we went there, but it had to be done within the context of a commercial enterprise. So, we set up a branch of a consulting company there. But the fact of the matter is, most of his senior people have...been to Oxford for the Brahma Kumaris program. Many have been here to Madhuban.... So the Brahma Kumaris have had a huge influence in the reform process there [in Mexico].... We have trained 90 facilitators from the government who are running these programs, 25,000 people, all the top level of government throughout the entire country have been through the course, and it's having quite an astonishing affect....³²

Success stories like these send the Brahma Kumaris the message that their knowledge and practices are truly the solution to the world's problems, particularly its problems with right governance. God has told the Brahma Kumaris that the world will purify itself through a cataclysmic upheaval. Impure souls will similarly cleanse themselves from the face of the earth through total nuclear war and other violent atrocities. These events are predestined, and beyond the control of any Brahma Kumar or Kumaris. What is in their control, however, is their capacity to govern the purest souls in the Golden Age that will follow the global transformation, and it is only the concrete experience of actual influence over world leaders that can indicate to the Brahma Kumaris that they are, indeed, achieving the mastery they seek.

Brother Graham, Sister Daisy, and Brother Billy each hold quite different types of posts within the organization. Brother Billy has lived most of his life in Madhuban, Mount Abu, as a manager of a high profile department within the central administration of the world

³²Ibid.

headquarters' campus facilities. Sister Daisy serves as a senior manager in the international coordinating office in London, England. Brother Graham does not hold an office in the organization because he continues to work as the chief executive officer of a prominent international strategic consulting firm, but he runs annual training programs for the organization's highest-level managers every year, and he oversees the organization's delivery of his Self Management Leadership program to governments, businesses, and non-profit organizations worldwide. Each of these three interviewees view the organization from distinctive perspectives, and they have little reason to interact directly with each other, but together they expressed insights into the organization's management philosophy and practice that are remarkably consistent with each other. Management among the Brahma Kumaris means teaching each soul how to come to terms with their own perception of their destiny, and then using that knowledge to lead others who share a similar destiny.

Within the organization, this management philosophy suggests that the most senior administrators within the organization, the senior most leaders of the organization, are the most likely candidates for top jobs in the administration of the Golden Age to come; and indeed, Brahma Kumaris' administration is a hierarchical, command-oriented system of status and power. However, as the example of Brother Graham himself illustrates, it is not necessary to hold an administrative office within the organization in order to exercise tremendous influence within it. Moreover, power within the organization signifies actual potency only because the organization as a whole is able to demonstrate its capacity to provide leadership for the world at large. The Brahma Kumaris seek to rule the world, not merely themselves (even though their knowledge teaches that soon the two populations will

be one and the same). The Brahma Kumaris are genuinely motivated to serve the world because such service makes leaders of them.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Brahma Kumaris management and institutional structure combines spiritual ideals, a hierarchical administration, daily religious instruction, and sibling-style familial relationships into a single institution with spiritual and secular objectives that engage the lofty offices of global economic and political power while maintaining clear boundaries between themselves and their local host communities. As a religious organization, they practice spirit-possession in order to listen to God's knowledge and apply it to their own lives. As a secular organization, the Brahma Kumaris adapt their service activities to meet the needs of their clients and keep their knowledge to themselves. They make participating in their organization as simple as attending a public function or taking the Seven Day Course, but advancement in the organization demands thorough acceptance of their knowledge, a demonstrated capacity to maintain familial relationships with peers, and advanced leadership skills. They do not discriminate on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, language, or place of origin, but they nearly exclusively promote women only to administrative posts. As unlikely as this combination of institutional features may seem, have quickened the organization's growth and facilitated its expansion worldwide.

The total membership of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is not exceptionally large. In 1996, the organization claimed 4,522 centers¹ in over sixty² countries

¹Figure cited from Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, *Introduction and Addresses*, inside back cover.

²*Ibid.*, 1.

with 407,285 members,³ 168,810 of whom⁴ are surrendered members; but the Brahma Kumaris have never aspired to be counted among the largest of the world's religions. They would prefer to be counted among the most valued, as assessed by leaders of global businesses, governments, and non-governmental organizations. The Brahma Kumaris seek to attain that status by serving as consultants and advisors to the most powerful persons and organizations they can reach; and their reach has grown far into the governments of Australia, Mexico, and five departments of the United Nations, including the Department of Public Information (DPI), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The Brahma Kumaris have successfully inserted themselves into global affairs by offering their expertise in management and providing a highly refined and socially secure environment at their Centers for members and invited guests to pursue their individual spiritual goals. The core motivation behind both of those endeavors is no one other than God, who regularly and frequently visits the Brahma Kumaris and speaks with them through the lived performance of spirit-possession. God teaches the Brahma Kumaris that the world will be entirely transformed through a cataclysmic millennial event extremely soon, and thus that the Brahma Kumaris must commit themselves to purifying their souls and establishing their expertise as world leaders now, while there is still time. The urgency of God's teachings motivate the Brahma Kumaris to pursue their objectives with extraordinary focus, discipline, and earnestness, which in turn encourages to maintain a high degree of order within their organization.

³Ibid., inside back cover.

⁴Ibid.

The Brahma Kumaris maintain order first by securing the outermost boundaries of their organization. Brahma Kumaris teachings are available to members only, and candidates for membership must first complete the Seven Days Course under the supervision of a trusted surrendered or dedicated member before new members may participate in morning discourses or other members-only events. New members never sign any membership documents or participate in initiation ceremonies; thus, even though the Seven Days Course provides a diffuse initiatory experience for new members, their membership status is not confirmed beyond the minimal acceptance of their participation in events allowed only to Brahma Kumaris members. From there, new members must increase their own status within the organization through demonstrating familial loyalty, leadership excellence, and spiritual purity. By studying God's knowledge, new members learn what the organization values; by studying management philosophies such as those conveyed by the Self Management Leadership program, new members learn how the organization's administration works.

One caveat to this dissertation's focus on Brahma Kumaris administration, management philosophy, and practice is that the Brahma Kumaris do accept that some of their members hold high status in the organization on account of their contributions to the organization's family experience, or because of their extraordinary spiritual attainments, such as meditative acuity or masterful understanding of God's knowledge. Climbing the ranks of the organization's administration is not the only route that members take on their journeys toward greater peace and leadership, and influential members of the organization's network of sibling-style family relationships and particularly skilled adepts in Brahma Kumaris methods of spiritual meditation serve as important social counter-weights to the command-oriented influence of senior management; but the social capital wielded by non-

administrators operates only within the safe boundaries cultivated by the administration. Family and meditation may provide the organization with comradeship and focus, respectively, but the administration brings coherence to the organization and catalyzes their growth and power worldwide. It is world rulership that the Brahma Kumaris seek primarily, not social bonding or meditative transcendence.

As a successful new religious movement, the Brahma Kumaris provide a case study for how global values and the institutional structures of international non-governmental organizations are taken up and reinterpreted by religious organizations. This dissertation's concern with power and its administrative exercise reveals how Godly knowledge motivates the Brahma Kumaris to integrate their organization into the world and civil society in both secular and religious ways. The Brahma Kumaris, as a successful new religious movement with global reach, suggest that worldly power is becoming more difficult to identify as either secular or religious in its expression. The power exercised by governments, corporations, and non-governmental organizations (including religions) all share the same institutional forms. Power flows through human organizations in similar ways, regardless of an organization's purposes. The Brahma Kumaris are one organization who appears to have learned this lesson, and they are now teaching it to other global organizations with remarkable success.

These successes help explain why the Self Management Leadership program enjoys such a positive reputation: The ability to manage and control one's own personality correlates favorably with one's ability to manage and control their worldly projects; and this correlation holds true for the Brahma Kumaris just as well as it holds for governments and multi-national corporations. As souls improve their self-mastery, they improve their mastery over the world.

Moreover, the Brahma Kumaris have concluded that doctrinal assertions are socially divisive and thus counterproductive to their primary goal of building coalitions and leading conglomerated networks of cooperation. In their view, it would be counterproductive to reinforce any distinctions of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or language. Identities built upon those distinctions separate and divide rather than unify and coordinate. The Brahma Kumaris celebrate difference insofar as each soul makes a unique contribution to the world seen as a cosmic drama. Individual distinctiveness is to be cherished as specialties, not as species distinctions. All souls, the Brahma Kumaris argue, are equally the children of God, whether they realize it or not; and thus all souls must first and foremost be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of the views they may hold. These views quicken the organization's efficiency as they grow and expand into new nations, new businesses, new relationships with governments worldwide.

The Brahma Kumaris maintain order through an authoritarian command hierarchy, but the pragmatic directives they issue down their chains of command are not intended to be totalizing. As we saw in chapter three, the Brahma Kumaris practice a dynamic management style that rewards innovation at the local, center level. National and regional level managers monitor local programs and innovate new methods to suit local conditions. Successful innovations are reported upwards through the administration and are sometimes adopted as best practices for the organization as a whole. Local centers are not permitted to alter Brahma Kumaris knowledge or conventions, but they are free to interpret them and implement them in a manner suitable to their local cultures. Local centers thus strike a balance between ideology and interpretation and between conformity and innovation. At the center level, God's teachings are viewed as directive, not dictatorial.

Perhaps most importantly, God's dynamic relationship with the Brahma Kumaris ensures that it runs according to provisional principles only. God can change the direction of the organization at any time because God visits frequently, in person, to convey new directives to Brahma Kumaris members. Thus, it is very unlikely that the organization will become rigid or fail to adapt to changing times. The Brahma Kumaris have no scripture beyond God's word; they have no rituals beyond what God or members propose as best practices. Highly ordered but yet extraordinarily flexible, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University gives every indication of continuing to serve the world's needs for effective spiritual leadership well into the future.

Bibliography

- Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Babb, Lawrence A. *Absent Lord: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture*. Vol. 8, *Comparative Studies in Religion and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- . “Amnesia and Remembrance in a Hindu Theory of History.” *Asian Folklore Studies* 41, no. 1 (1982): 49–66.
- . “Brahma Kumari.” In *HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*, edited by Jonathan Z. Smith, 126. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- . *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.
- . “Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (1981): 387–401.
- . “Indigenous Feminism in a Modern Hindu Sect.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9, no. 3 (1984): 399–416.
- . “Part Two: Amnesia and Remembrance among the Brahma Kumaris.” In *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*, 93–155. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- . “The Physiology of Redemption.” *History of Religions* 22, no. 4 (1983): 298–312.
- . *Redemptive Encounters: Three Modern Styles in the Hindu Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Babb, Lawrence A., and Susan Snow Wadley. *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

- Bargen, Doris R. *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.
- Becker, Penny Edgell. "Congregational Models and Conflict: A Study of How Institutions Shape Organizational Process." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 231-256. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Behrend, Heike, and Ute Luig, eds. *Spirit Possession: Modernity and Power in Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.
- Bernstein, Jay H. *Spirits Captured in Stone: Shamanism and Traditional Medicine among the Taman of Borneo*. London: Boulder, 1997.
- Beyer, Peter F. *Religion and Globalization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.
- Boddy, Janice. "Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 407-34.
- Boli, John, and George M. Thomas. *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Bromley, David G. "Transformative Movements and Quasi-religious Corporations: The Case of Amway." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 349-363. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Brown, Michael F. *The Channeling Zone: American Spirituality in an Anxious Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

- Castillo, Richard. "Spirit Possession in South Asia, Disassociation or Hysteria? Part 1: Theoretical Background." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 18, no. 1 (1994): 1–21.
- . "Spirit Possession in South Asia, Disassociation or Hysteria? Part 2: Case Histories." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 18, no. 2 (1994): 141–62.
- Chaves, Mark. "Denominations as Dual Structures: An Organizational Analysis." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 175–94. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Clarke, Peter B. "'Success' and 'Failure': Japanese New Religions Abroad." In *Some Remarks on the Church of World Messianity*, edited by Peter B. Clarke, 272–311. Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000.
- Collins, Elizabeth Fuller. *Pierced by Murugan's Lance: Ritual, Power, and Moral Redemption among Malaysian Hindus*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997.
- Collins, James C. *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. New York: HarperBusiness, 1994.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Copley, Antony. "A Study in Religious Leadership and Cultism." In *Gurus and Their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India*, edited by A. R. H. Copley, 3–29. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Cormode, D. Scott. "Does Institutional Isomorphism Imply Secularization? Churches and Secular Voluntary Associations in the Turn-of-the-century City." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of*

- Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 116-131. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Csordas, Thomas. "Imaginal Performance and Memory in Ritual Healing." In *The Performance of Healing*, edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, 91–114. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Davidson, James D., and Jerome R. Koch. "Beyond Mutual and Public Benefits: The Inward and Outward Orientations of Nonprofit Organizations." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 292-306. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Demerath, N. J., III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, eds., *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Demerath, N. J., III, and Terry Schmitt. "Transcending Sacred and Secular: Mutual Benefits in Analyzing Religious and Nonreligious Organizations." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 381-400. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Demerath, N. J., III, and Rhys H. Williams. "Cultural Power: How Underdog Religious and Nonreligious Movements Triumph against Structural Odds." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 364-377. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- DiMaggio, Paul. "The Relevance of Organization Theory to the Study of Religion." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 7–23. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Douglas, Mary. *How Institutions Think*. 1st ed. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986.
- Duke, James T., and Barry L. Johnson. "Religious Transformation and Social Conditions: A Macrosociological Analysis." In *Religious Politics in Global and Comparative Perspective*, edited by William H. Swatos, 75–109. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Erndl, Kathleen. *Victory to the Mother*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Esposito, John L., and Michael Watson. *Religion and Global Order*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd Vintage ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Freed, Stanley, and Ruth Freed. "Spirit Possession as Illness in a North Indian Village." *Ethnology* 3 (1964): 152–71.
- Friedson, Steven M. *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Harris, Margaret. "Religious Congregations as Nonprofit Organizations: Four English Case Studies." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 307-320. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- Hassija, Jagdish Chander. *Adi Dev: The First Man*. 2nd English ed. Mount Abu: Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1983.
- Howell, Julia Day, and Peter L. Nelson. "Structural Adaptation and 'Success' in the Transplantation of an Asian Religious Movement: The Brahma Kumaris in the Western World, Part 1." *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 8 (1997): 1–33.
- Jayanti, B. K. "Incarnation of Economy." *Classes from 2001–02*, vol. 2. CD-ROM. Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 2002.
- Jepperson, Ronald L. "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism." In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, 143–63. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Kapferer, Bruce. *Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Kniss, Fred. "Root Paradigms and Intrad denominational Ideological Conflict: The Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites." *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* 2 (1990): 67–93.
- Knott, Kim. "Raja Yoga; and the Teaching and Practice of Meditation in Raja Yoga." In *Hinduism in Leeds: A Study of Religious Practice in the Indian Hindu Community and in Hindu-Related Groups*, 193–95. Leeds, UK: University of Leeds, 1986.
- . "The Teaching and Practice of Meditation in Raja Yoga." In *Hinduism in Leeds: A Study of Religious Practice in the Indian Hindu Community and in Hindu-Related Groups*, 218–24. Leeds, UK: University of Leeds, 1986.

- Laderman, Carol, and Marina Roseman, eds. *The Performance of Healing*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Lambek, Michael. "From Disease to Discourse: Remarks on the Conceptualization of Trance and Spirit Possession." In *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, edited by Colleen A. Ward, 36–61. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1989.
- Levy, Robert I., Jeanette Marie Mageo, and Alan Howard. "Gods, Spirits, and History: A Theoretical Perspective." In *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*, edited by Jeanette Marie Mageo and Alan Howard, 11–77. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Lewis, I. M. *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. New York: Routledge, 1971.
- Mageo, Jeanette Marie, and Alan Howard, eds. *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Matsunaga, Louella. "Spiritual Companies, Corporate Religions: Japanese Companies and Japanese New Religious Movements at Home and Abroad." In *Japanese New Religions: In Global Perspective*, edited by Peter B. Clarke, 35–73. Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000.
- Mayaram, Shail. "Recent Anthropological Works on Spirit Possession." *Religious Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (2001): 213–22.
- Mazur, Eric, and Phillip E. Hammond. "The Market Paradigm and the Future of Religious Organizations." In *Religion, Mobilization, and Social Action*, edited by Anson D. Shupe and Bronislaw Misztal, 67–84. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998.

- Morgan, Peggy. "The Authority of Believers in the Study of Religions." *Diskus* 4, no. 1 (1996): 1–10.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. "Psychocultural Exegesis of a Case of Spirit Possession in Sri Lanka." In *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, edited by Vincent Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison, 235–94. New York: John Wiley, 1977.
- Ornatowski, Gregory K. "On the Boundary between 'Religious' and 'Secular': The Ideal and Practice of Neo-Confucian Self-cultivation in Modern Japanese Economic Life." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, no. 3–4 (1998): 345–76.
- Paper, Jordan. *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Parsons, Arthur S. "The Secular Contribution to Religious Innovation: A Case Study of the Unification Church." *Sociological Analysis* 50, no. 3 (1989): 209–27.
- Pearce, W. Barnett. "On Thinking about Systems: Some Implications for the Study of Religion in the World Order." In *World Order and Religion*, edited by Wade Clark Roof, 281–296. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya. *Introduction and Addresses of Some of the Centres in India and Overseas*. Mount Abu, India: Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1996.
- . *Landmarks in the History of Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya*. Mount Abu, India: Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1996.
- . *One Week Course: For Attainment of Complete Purity, Peace, and Prosperity*. Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India: Pandav Bhawan, 1996.

- Robertson, Roland. *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.
- Robertson, Roland, and JoAnn Chirico. "Humanity, Globalization, and Worldwide Religious Resurgence: A Theoretical Explanation." *Sociological Analysis* 46 (1985): 219–42.
- Robertson, Roland, and William R. Garrett. *Religion and Global Order*. New York: Paragon House, 1991.
- Rouget, Gilbert. *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber, and James P. Piscatori. *Transnational Religion and Fading States*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.
- Schiffelin, Edward L. "Performance and Cultural Construction of Reality." *American Ethnologist* 12 (1996): 707–24.
- Shah, Ramesh N., ed. *New Light for a Better World*. Mount Abu, India: Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya, 1995.
- Sharp, Lesley A. *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Smith, Frederick M. "The Current State of Possession Studies as a Cross-disciplinary Project." *Religious Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (2001): 203–12.
- . *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Srinivas, Smriti. *The Mouths of People, the Voice of God: Buddhists and Muslims in a Frontier Community of Ladakh*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- Stanley, John M. "Gods, Ghosts, and Possession." In *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*, edited by Eleanor Zelliot and Maxine Berntsen, 26–59. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Stout, Harry S., and D. Scott Cormode. "Institutions and the Story of American Religion." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 62–78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Swartz, David. "Secularization, Religion, and Isomorphism: A Study of Large Nonprofit Hospital Trustees." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 323–339. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Swatos, William H., Jr. "Losing Faith in the 'Religion' of Secularization: Worldwide Religious Resurgence and the Definition of Religion." In *Religious Politics in Global and Comparative Perspective*, edited by William H. Swatos, 147–53. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Swatos, William H. *Twentieth-century World Religious Movements in Neo-Weberian Perspective*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Turner, Edith. *The Hands Feel It: Healing and Spirit Presence among a Northern Alaskan People*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996.

- Vaidyanathan, T. G., and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds. *Vishnu on Freud's Desk: A Reader in Psychoanalysis and Hinduism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Viswesaran, Kamala. *The Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Wallis, John. "From World Rejection to Ambivalence: The Development of Millenarianism in the Brahma Kumaris." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14, no. 3 (1999): 375–85.
- Whaling, Frank. "The Brahma Kumaris." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10, no. 1 (1995): 3–28.
- Winkelman, Michael. *Shamans, Priests, and Witches: A Cross-cultural Study of Magi-Religious Practitioners*. Tucson: Arizona State University Press, 1992.
- Zech, Charles E. "Four Economic Models of Organization Applied to Religious Congregations." In *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams, 256-268. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Zucker, Lynne G. "The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence." *American Sociological Review* 42 (1977): 726–43.