

## From World Rejection to Ambivalence: The Development of Millenarianism in the Brahma Kumaris

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JOHN WALLISS

**ABSTRACT** *This paper aims to trace the development and international expansion of the Brahma Kumaris, a new religious movement (NRM) of Indian origin, from its inception to the present day, focusing particularly on its shift of orientation from a situation of 'world rejection' to what is referred to as 'world ambivalence'. The history of the group is presented and it is suggested that this shift is related ostensibly to its changing relationship with the outside world, in particular its internationalisation programme. Examples from fieldwork research are given of two contemporary reinterpretations of the original Brahma Kumaris millenarianism, one from within the group and another from a break-away group.*

### Introduction

In this paper I intend to trace the development and international expansion of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University from its inception to the present day based on my PhD fieldwork.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I will focus on its shift of world orientation from a situation of 'world-rejection' to what I shall refer to as 'world-ambivalence'. In doing so I shall be directly addressing the development of its millenarian message, specifically the material conditions surrounding its creation, elaboration, and reinterpretation.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I shall present an overview of the inception of the Brahma Kumaris, focusing on its founder's early visions of imminent world destruction and the manner in which this developed through interaction with local persecution into a spiritual message of world-rejection and millenarian spiritual elitism. In the second section, the outline of the University's development will be brought up to date through addressing in particular its work with the UN. Finally, through a discussion of my fieldwork, I will describe how the original message of the Brahma Kumaris has been reinterpreted and I will show the tensions engendered by the interplay of these two orientations as well as possible future scenarios in the development of the University's 'world ambivalence'.

### Spiritual Outcasts

The story of the Brahma Kumaris begins with its founder Dada Lekhraj, a retired diamond merchant, seen by Brahma Kumaris (BKs) world-wide as "the incarnation and descent of God, the World Father, into the corporeal world" (Chander, 1983: 13). In 1936, at the age of 60, Lekhraj began to recount frequent visions of

the Hindu deities Vishnu and Shiva as well as, more importantly, visions of the destruction of the world via natural catastrophes, civil strife, and what has been later interpreted as nuclear holocaust. These visions of destruction were followed by others of a future earthly paradise completely unlike the contemporary world, where for the tiny population, there would be food in abundance rather than famine, peace, and happiness, rather than competition and strife, equality rather than inequality, and where death would be painless and followed by rebirth into the world of perfect happiness.

Initially unsure of the significance of these visions, he decided to retire and sell his business to his partner in Calcutta. On his return to his home in Hyderabad, he quite uncharacteristically got up and walked out of one of his Guru's discourses. A relative followed him and later reported that Lekhraj seemed to be light and bodiless, glowing red and speaking in a different voice saying

I am the Blissful Self, I am Shiva, I am Shiva ... I am the Knowledgeful Self, I am Shiva, I am Shiva ... I am the Luminous Self, I am Shiva, I am Shiva ... I am the Form of Self, the Form of Knowledge, the Form of Light. (Chander, 1983: 42)

Following this event, he began to act in ways that seemed odd to those around him. He began telling everyone, including his wife and son, that they were souls. After a few days, others, particularly women from the wealthy families of Hyderabad, came to listen to him speak and experience similar visions.

Lekhraj's message to them was that, as the incarnation of the soul of Krishna, God had descended into him with a new message for humanity regarding the nature of the present age. This centred mainly on his original vision of natural disaster followed by a new, glorious age, but later developed into the belief that he had experienced the 'forgotten', hidden truth within the Hindu sacred text, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which, he claimed, had become distorted, diluted, and full of errors in the 5,000 years since it was delivered orally (Chander, 1983). In recognition of his medium status, Lekhraj told his followers that God had renamed him *Prajipita Brahma* (the Father of Humanity), while those who joined him became known as *Om Mandli*.

However, Lekhraj's message was not received well universally. Almost from its founding, the movement has been subject to often violent reactions from the surrounding community. Indeed, Chander's (1983) official biography of the movement appears to be mainly an exercise in decrying the persecutors as well as simultaneously valorising the purity, blamelessness, and innocence of the movement in the face of such opposition. Frank Whaling (1995), while not going so far, points out a number of cultural factors which may be seen to have led to such a societal reaction.

Primarily, due to the largely female following, and particularly after an article in *Newsweek* magazine which portrayed Lekhraj as a modern-day Krishna surrounded by admiring *gopis* (Whaling, 1995), the movement was seen as a justification for Lekhraj to set up a harem comprising females from the upper-classes of the community (Babb, 1986). However, once the movement's emphasis on celibacy became known, the opposite criticism arose. As Babb (1986) notes, husbands would return home from business trips to find that their wives had taken vows of chastity, were intent on turning their homes into

temples, and wished to live with them in a celibate manner in a way similar to the a-sexual love practised by (according to Lekhraj) the deities Lakshmi and Narayan. Another significant gender-related factor in the persecution of the proto-Brahma Kumaris was the significance placed on female religiosity which, as both Babb (1986) and Whaling (1995) note, was seen as both an offensive and a direct challenge to the male-led social order and in particular to the role of women within the family and community (see also Babb, 1984).

In reaction, the husbands, intent on destroying the fledgling movement, formed an *Anti-Om Mandli* group. The tactics they used to this end, Chander (1983) states, included sending intimidators from door to door with the message that families would be ousted from their caste if they allowed their wives or children to attend the movement's meetings, beating up members, as well as putting pressure on civic leaders and local newspapers to run campaigns in favour of banning the movement. On the 21st June 1938, the 'Anti' Party burnt down Lekhraj's meeting place. As a result, meetings moved to another building which the 'Anti' Party picketed in August for three days. The District Magistrate charged those involved, including Lekhraj, with 'disturbing the peace', although after appeal in November, the charges were dropped. Effectively driven from Hyderabad, the movement, now numbering around 300, relocated to Karachi, purchasing five bungalows to live and meditate in. However, hostility was to arise towards them here also, due to a number of female members 'fleeing' from their homes in Hyderabad to join the University in their new home.

The remainder of this period of the University's growth was characterised by a continuation and expansion of its persecution.<sup>2</sup> This rejection from the outside world may, however, be seen to have affected the group then and subsequently in a more subtle way. In a dialectic with their rejection by the outside world they—to use a term borrowed from Roy Wallis (1984)—developed as a *world-rejecting* organisation. As Babb (1986) notes, during this period of persecution, the doctrinal system of the University was formulated, with Lekhraj claiming to channel messages from God in his daily spiritual lecture to the group, the major theme of which was the separation from the outside world. Indeed, in comparison to Norman Cohn's (1993) work on millenarian groups during the middle ages, it may be seen that the early Brahma Kumaris clearly manifest a strikingly parallel image of salvation as

*Collective*, in the sense that it will be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity; *terrestrial*, in the sense that it is to be realised on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven; *imminent*, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly; *total*, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself; [and] *miraculous*, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies. (Cohn, 1993: 13; emphasis added)

Thus, Lekhraj told members that the world was going to be destroyed in the immediate future and that, although all life on earth would die, the lucky few would be reborn into a paradise on earth. He drew on the Hindu notion of the *kalpa*<sup>3</sup> to explain that human history repeats itself continuously on a predetermined cycle of 5,000 years, in which humanity 'falls' from a pure to an impure state. At the end of each of these cycles, God descends into his, that is Dada

Lekhraj's, physical body to prepare those spiritually pure souls (the Brahma Kumaris) for both the destruction of the world and their rebirth into the 'Golden Age' of the next cycle *ad infinitum*.

In this future age, a small number of souls will exist in *Bharat* (India) in a perfect system based on a spiritual hierarchy of divine values, with each member being ascribed the role befitting their natural qualities, with some being subjects and others being rulers; a place where "there is no sorrow, but there is a difference between wealthy and less wealthy people... There will be differences, but no one will have sorrow" (Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, 1996: 44). Under the kingship of Lekhraj, in the guise of Narayan, it will be a perfect human state; a system "held together like a perfect, Crystal lattice [where] everything is at its highest stage of purity and beauty [and] concepts such as value, profit and loss, misery, property, sorrow and death do not exist" (O'Donnell, 1995: 83). This society will know no shortages, ill health nor famine and trade and exchange will be carried out purely for the purposes of distribution. It will be

the peak of human civilisation in every field of human endeavour; teaching, music, government, drama, linguistics, painting and science ... [where] ... only the best materials are used in the construction of perfect architecture, the best that nature can provide: gold, diamonds, rubies, etc ... [and] art, dance and music are at their most expressive. (O'Donnell, 1995: 84)

As all souls will exist in a vision of universal brotherhood and live by the law of love, there will be no need for law or law courts. Similarly, there will be no need for political or religious philosophies, as the monarchy will "treat their subjects as their own mothers and fathers would". There will be no need for "ministers or advisors because of [the monarchs'] inherent wisdom and divinity"; moreover, although "there are meetings to organise and programmes to attend, there is no concept of the word 'problem' nor the word 'advice'" (O'Donnell, 1995: 85). Thus, there will be no imposition of order or authoritarianism, but a 'vision of brotherly love', a society in tune with each other; indeed "The very idea of 'challenging' [will] not exist ... [as] natural law is at work" (O'Donnell, 1995: 86).

In order to prepare themselves for this paradise, such souls must, however, return to their pure *soul conscious* state; that is they must remember their true, forgotten<sup>4</sup> identity as souls by detaching themselves from the impurity or *body consciousness* of the outside world and lead an introverted, spiritual life. Lekhraj told members that they had undergone 'death-in-life' when they joined the University; that they had died to their worldly lives and families and been reborn as members of a 'divine' family, and, to signify this, they were given new (divinely inspired) names. Again, Hindu mythology was drawn on to explain and symbolise the group's enforced, and yet rationalised as necessary, detachment from the external world. Lekhraj told members that Krishna's 16,108 'wives' were really his most favoured followers (the total number of Brahma Kumaris that there will be 'at the end'), the water-polished souls in whose form Vishnu is represented (*saligram*s) symbolise the souls of the Brahma Kumaris, while the Hindu rosary (*mala*) symbolises his 108 stainless followers. Similarly, the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, was reinterpreted, or rather its 'original',

'true' meaning was rediscovered, so that the Pandavas were the Brahma Kumaris, the Kauravas the Indian population, while the self-destructive Yadavas with their 'magical club' were in fact Western peoples, especially Western scientists. Indeed, the 13 years of forced exile of the Pandavas at the beginning of the *Mahabharata* were interpreted by Lekhraj as an historical *memory* of the exile and persecution of the Brahma Kumaris (Babb, 1986).

The distinction between the *internal* and the *external*, or, on the one hand, remembrance and soul consciousness and, on the other hand, amnesia and body consciousness, lies at the heart of the Brahma Kumaris brand of millenarianism. Within the theology that the group developed during their 13 years of persecution, all that is bodily—that is external, transient and physical—is seen as both a source of impurity and also as an image of the corruption and fate of the world. In contrast, the internal, represented by the soul or true self, delineates all that is immortal and pure, the ideal state that will be brought about by the millennium. The body thus represents symbolically both the present corruption of the spirit and the boundaries of the inner purity *vis-à-vis* the corrupting world (Douglas, 1970). Moreover, the use of timetables, yoga, and dietary and sexual restrictions provided a means to both discipline the body and symbolically delineate the internal from the external world or that which would live on and that which would perish at the end.

### **'World Ambivalence'**

However, following the partition of India and the move of the Brahma Kumaris to their current headquarters at Mt. Abu, Rajasthan, a subtle shift occurred within the group. As with the Padavas, their exile was coming to an end after 13 years and, as a result, the group's original attitude of world rejection became tempered with a new spirit of liberalism. Thus, whereas Lekhraj had previously emphasised isolation, by 1952 he began to emphasise active proselytization or 'world service' as it came to be known.<sup>5</sup>

A number of reasons for this change of direction may be postulated. To some extent, there is the questionable viability of a second generation of a movement of celibates. It follows logically that a movement of celibates cannot grow from within itself, but rather has to, at one point or another, accept outsiders into its ranks (Babb, 1986). However, this would appear to be a questionable motive when considered in relation to the immanence of Lekhraj's eschatology. Rather, a more important factor would seem to be the changing relationship with the external world at this time. Whereas the early years of the University were characterised by animosity from the surrounding community, their change of location effectively moved them away from and beyond such opposition. Therefore, in finding themselves in more hospitable surroundings the Brahma Kumaris may be seen to have let their defences down and began interacting with the outside world.

As would be expected, however, 'world service' began in quite a low-key manner with friends and relatives of members who had relocated from India inviting members to their areas to discuss their beliefs. However, national expansion began in earnest two years later with the opening of centres in six cities, including Delhi. By the mid 1960s, this had grown into what Whaling (1995) has referred to as 'more sophisticated methods of outreach', such as

exhibitions of artwork taken around the country and displayed at various seminars and conferences. Nevertheless, suspicion still remained of the movement among the Hindu community, particularly regarding the 'un-Hindu' nature of their active proselytising. However, this *local critique* was beginning to become relativized, if not largely offset, by *international acceptance and growth*.

Following Lekhraj's death in 1969 the movement also spread overseas, opening centres in London, mainland Europe, and the rest of the world. At the time of writing, there are around 4,000 centres in 77 countries attended by, according to an official source, 450,000 individuals on a regular basis. This is also linked with the Brahma Kumaris becoming more active on the world stage generally, particularly at the level of international affairs. In the 1980s, the organisation became affiliated to the Department of Public Information of the United Nations (1980) and gained consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (1983) and with UNICEF (1988). The early 1990s saw senior BK Dadi Janki among those given the title of *Keepers of Wisdom* at the 1992 *Earth Summit* in Brazil, while in the following year, Dadi Prakashmani was appointed as one of the presidents of the World Parliament of Religions.

For the past 15 years, the University has also organised a series of annual Universal Peace Conferences at its headquarters. Similarly, in 1986, during the United Nations Year of Peace, the University inaugurated *The Million Minutes of Peace* which raised over one billion 'minutes of peace' from millions of people in 88 countries participating in prayer, meditation, and positive thoughts. For this work, the University was awarded one International and six National 'Peace Messenger' Awards from the UN. Two years later, as a continuation of this work, it launched the *Global Co-Operation for a Better World* project from the United Nations HQ in New York and the Houses of Parliament in London, which aimed 'to increase communication and co-operation between nations, between communities and between people'. This project involved thousands of people from 129 countries, the results of which, in the form of essays, quotes and paintings, were synthesised into the United Nations Peace Messenger publication *Visions of a Better World*.

The University is currently involved in a range of activities on both the international and national level, such as the aforementioned *Global Co-Operation for a Better World* project, the *Sharing our Values for a Better World* project, and the *Living Values: An Educational Initiative* project organised by UNICEF, which aims to improve values, attitudes, and behaviour through education. On the national level, the University runs training sessions in confidence building and character development within schools, workshops in stress reduction and relaxation in hospitals, homes for the elderly, drug clinics, community centres and prisons as well as meditation and integrity discussion groups for business people.

This is the nature of what I have referred to as the 'world-ambivalence' of the Brahma Kumaris. By this I mean that it appears to entail two distinct and unresolved orientations towards the world.<sup>6</sup> Primarily, as I have outlined in the first section of this paper, the University's theology and world view are based on the visions of its founder, the most important of these beliefs being the end of the world by apparent nuclear holocaust or environmental catastrophe; this is being seen as *essential, desirable* and indeed *pre-determined* in the nature of things. Thus, the current, spiritually impure world *has to be destroyed* in order for the new age of spiritual purity to come about. Lekhraj's visions were clear: the

current world is ending and the Brahma Kumaris must prepare themselves for life in the glorious new age rather than attempting the impossible of halting the inevitable destruction. However, on the other hand, to cite Whaling, "there is the spectacle of a University which has the word 'spiritual' written into its very name *becoming increasingly involved in frenetic activity* on behalf of the world that is deemed to be *beyond redemption in its present form*" (Whaling, 1995: 15; emphasis added). To take an example, the campaign to raise *The Million Minutes of Peace* in 1986 would seem a worthless gesture in the face of what is held as the inevitable and indeed desirable destruction of the world by *ipso facto* un-peaceful means. In this way, I would summarise the world ambivalence of the Brahma Kumaris as an interaction of its original state of *world rejection* with a new spirit of *liberalism* or 'accommodation' towards the outside world. For example, where western scientists were, and still are to some extent, referred to as the self-destructive Yadavas of Indian mythology (see Babb, 1986: 136), they are now actively courted by the University on the international stage as well as being offered special courses on spiritual values.

### In Pursuit of the Millennium/Millennia

Having examined the historical creation and elaboration of the millenarian message of the Brahma Kumaris, I would like to address its current status in the final section of this paper. I will sketch two ongoing re-interpretations of the original message: one from within the movement and another by a radical break-away sect known as 'the Advance Party' or 'the Shankar Party'.

As previously argued, the internationalisation of the Brahma Kumaris has resulted in it operating with a somewhat ambivalent orientation towards the world; believing on the one hand in a radical and immediate eschatology and on the other hand campaigning with the UN for world peace. This ambivalence is also manifested, as I have found in my fieldwork, in the nature of the courses run for the public at local Brahma Kumaris centres. Alongside and as a preliminary to courses in the 'official' theology of the movement, there are more instrumental courses in 'stress-free living' and 'positive thinking'. The organisation that once referred to membership as 'death in life' now offers 'success in life' or 'empowerment in life'. Indeed, most of the events organised by the University at present are based on themes of personal empowerment and human potential.

At such events and courses, the University's original millenarianism is conspicuous by its absence. Moreover, in general, students attending such courses on a regular basis would only encounter it after three months of weekly sessions. In all other contexts, it is presented, if it all, in a much more user-friendly way through the New Age metaphor of 'self spirituality' (Heelas, 1996). For example, the envisaged future holocaust is represented as 'world transformation' or as 'the New Age', soul consciousness becomes 'empowerment', 'being positive' or 'being stress-free', while body consciousness is identified as 'the individual's identification with the negativity and stress of external world'. To quote from a recent (Spring 1998) newsletter from the Sheffield Brahma Kumaris centre

We live in the most exciting of times—ever. The *old ways of thinking and being are breaking down*. The world is going through great social,

political, economic, moral, technological, environmental and climatic changes. Even time seems to be speeding up as we approach the new millennium.

We are entering uncharted waters, drifting without a compass. As the global tide of change threatens to engulf us, *new ways of thinking and being are opening up. The old, rational, mechanistic approach to life is giving way to a more creative, holistic, intuitive and spiritual approach, which goes beyond organised religion and might even be replacing it.* There is a huge open-mindedness that is reflected in the huge sales of spiritual books. Never have so many books been available on such a wide range of spiritual subjects from past life therapy and reincarnation to meditation, angels, conversations with God and everything in between.

*Human beings are turning 'within' to explore the last frontier, i.e. the forgotten world of the soul and of God and the need to re-establish the connection that has been lost over time. Here can be found the source of peace, love and happiness, which will see us through these difficult times; here we will find the answers to all the social and moral dilemmas that we now face; here we can rediscover our values and our sense of purpose and so transform ourselves and the world.* (emphasis added)

This is not to say, however, that the original message has lost its importance to the Brahma Kumaris. Lekhraj, speaking to the University from beyond the grave via a medium, still continues to proclaim the imminent millennium, and there is no shortage of members willing to interpret almost any event as a sign of 'the end'. However, while this is the case, my fieldwork has shown that this is increasingly expressed through the New Age metaphor, as shown above. As a result, Lekhraj's original message of separation, spiritual introversion and violent destruction followed by a Golden Age becomes repackaged as the emergence of a New Age, the age of Aquarius, through self-understanding and self-development. This new direction has, however, caused some discontentment within certain segments of the University. The most vocal of these being the self-styled 'Advance Party' who, through their critique, offer a new, radicalised rendition of the original millenarian message.

In many ways, the Advance Party may be seen as a sectarian response to the Brahma Kumaris. A central theme, reiterated throughout their website,<sup>7</sup> is what they see as the increasingly worldly and therefore corrupt nature of the University, manifested particularly through their UN work and increasingly New Age orientation. Again, using the metaphor of the cycle they assert that the University has 'fallen' from its original (in the era of Lekhraj) purity to a state "where adulteration of Godly knowledge and subtle corruption is rampant and ignorant students are being exploited by the higher-ups" ('Advance Party' website: Churning Points V). Moreover, through a close re-reading of Lekhraj's communications to the University, they claim that God has manifested Himself through another body in order to not only correctly interpret the original Brahma Kumaris teachings, but also to reveal to the Advance Party, amongst whom He is currently living, the 'true' nature of future events.

This focuses particularly on Lekhraj's original eschatology, although differing at specific points. Primarily, where Lekhraj is said to have given no date for the end, although 1976 was the unofficial line, the Advance Party promote 2001.



Similarly, while the Brahma Kumaris hold that the world will recognise Lekhraj as God incarnate shortly before the end, the Advance Party present a more radical vision. They claim that it will be God's *present* incarnation, an Advance Party member, that will be revealed to the world and that, as a result, the Brahma Kumaris, recognising their error, will merge with them. Finally, in contrast to the Brahma Kumaris view that at the end, all life on earth will die, the Advance Party claim that they, that is the Advance Party, will survive in order to prepare the world for the Golden Age which will begin in 2036.

Here are two completely differing versions of the same original millenarian message: one seemingly a reaction to the other. Thus, on the one hand, there is very much an egalitarian, world-affirming message of self-spirituality and human potential, while on the other hand, there is a somewhat reactionary message of world-rejection and mass destruction. Looking more closely, one may also detect the re-emergence of themes concerning spiritual exclusivity: the 'chosen few' who will survive the mass-destruction in order to populate the future paradise. However, as I have shown, this is far from a recovery or reclamation of the original message, but rather marks a re-interpretation in response to contemporary issues. Whereas Lekhraj's original message was ostensibly a reaction to external persecution, an 'imaginary vengeance'—to cite Nietzsche (1956: 170), the Advance Party may be seen as an internal response to the University's world ambivalence.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have aimed to trace the historical development, elaboration, and reinterpretation of the millenarianism of the Brahma Kumaris through an analysis of the movement's shift in world-orientation from one of rejection to one of ambivalence. In doing so, I have argued that this process may be seen to be related to the changing socio-cultural factors in which the movement has developed.

The original message may be seen as a reaction to external persecution. The key to this is the emphasis placed on spiritual elitism and separation as well as the radically shortened *kalpa*, which serves psychologically to re-invest the present with an urgent meaning, with limited time being left for the individual soul to both reach spiritual purity and endure persecution and sufferings (Babb, 1986; see also Kinsley, 1993: 90). In contrast, the root of the current ambivalent orientation may be located in the process that brought the University onto the world stage: their internationalisation programme. The movement has retained its attitude of millenarianism and world rejection, as crystallised in its theology, but possibly through the desire to increase membership or promote itself, it has had to re-package it in the terminology of the New Age and self-spirituality. As a result, the University appears to be embracing and promoting two contradictory orientations to the world: one which seeks to *transcend the world* and its materialistic evils, the other to *empower the individual in the world* so as to achieve, among other things, material success.

Further, the world-ambivalence may be seen as an important factor in the Brahma Kumaris/Advance Party schism and the latter's radical reinterpretation of the original millenarian message so as to provide a metaphor for its critique of the former. In this way, as with the Reformation, the aim is to terminate what

is seen as the corruption and worldliness of the organisation and to return to the purity of the original message. In the long term the result may, however, be the complete reverse, as the movement may be institutionally weakened, both through defections and by opening the floodgates to a variety of theological reinterpretations.

Thompson has noted that millenarianism is "the consolation of the persecuted"; a "genre born out of crisis, designed to stiffen the resolve of an embattled community by dangling in front of it the vision of a sudden and permanent release from its captivity" (Thompson, 1996: 14). Similarly, the millenarianism of the Brahma Kumaris may be understood alongside many other historical examples as a product of socio-cultural factors and as a metaphor through which the hopes and anguish of the oppressed or persecuted are expressed. From this we may therefore postulate, following the model of the early Christian Church, that as the Brahma Kumaris become more accepted internationally, their original millenarianism will continue to be pushed to one side, with the literal millennium giving way to the metaphorical or symbolic. Similarly, following the model of religious revival and innovation proposed by Stark & Bainbridge (1985), we may also speculate that as this process continues, attempts, such as those by the Advance Party, to re-establish what is seen as the true, uncorrupted or forgotten message of God are very likely to continue.

*John Walliss is currently a postgraduate student in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. His current research, on the sociology of the New Age and New Religious Movements, in particular the process of identity negotiation (Reflexive Traditions: Detraditionalization, Identity and the New Age Religious Life) addresses (re)creation of adherents and the creation of 'reflexive traditions'. Correspondence: 29 Shirland St., Stonegravels, Chesterfield S41 7NH, UK.*

## NOTES

1. A short version of this paper was originally delivered as a 'work in progress' to the BSA (British Sociological Association) annual study day at Bath Spa University College, Bath, on the 21st November, 1998.
2. For example, the official Brahma Kumaris biography provides details about the 'Anti' party's attempts to 'pay off' various local ministers and officials to put pressure on the prime minister to outlaw the group, the prime minister agreeing to 'look the other way' while the 'Anti' party attempted to cut funds to the group from outside sources, the blackmailing/bribing of numerous local newspapers and officials, the presenting of lawsuits by irate husbands for the return of conjugal rights, the hiring of local rowdies to beat up members, the outlawing of the group, as well as an unsuccessful attempt on Lekhraj's life (Chander, 1983).
3. In Hindu mythology the earth is said to pass through four *yugas* of progressive decline; *krita yuga* (lasting 1,728,000 years), *treta yuga* (lasting 1,296,000 years), *dvapara yuga* (lasting 864,000 years), *kali yuga* (lasting 432,000 years and including the present day). Thus, the four *yugas*, or one *mahayuga*, last in total 4,320,000 years. One thousand *mahayugas* (4,320,000,000 years) are said to represent the *kalpa* or one day in the life of Brahma (see Kinsley, 1993:90).
4. For an in-depth discussion of the conception of history of the Brahma Kumaris as a process of amnesia and remembrance, see Babb, 1982.
5. This was not entirely new for the University; Lekhraj had from the very beginning published numerous pamphlets and written a huge amount of letters to important national and international figures in which he interpreted contemporary events with reference to his revealed

knowledge. Rather, this marked an *intensification* of the process, with seven-lesson courses in the group's teachings being offered to *outsiders*.

6. My use of the term 'world ambivalence' builds on the work of Whaling (1995:15–16) who refers to 'ambivalences' within the Brahma Kumaris outlook.
7. <http://www.shivbaba.com>

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