The Weight of the Guru: Commercialism and Communal Ties in Two Pune Ashrams In Pune City, India

Zac Chapman

The sheer diversity of guru worship practiced across the Indian subcontinent is akin to the range of designs found in a child’s kaleidoscope. Yet Max Weber’s principle of charisma, in conjunction with Victor Turner’s concept of structure, provide a lens through which one can understand the diversity of Guru ideologies and practices. In the study of two guru movements within the Maharashtrian city of Pune—the Ramkrishna Math of Swami Vivekananda and the Osho Meditation Resort of Bhagwan Rajneesh (Osho)—we see the patterns of the aforementioned authors maintain their validity despite the differentiation of ideology and socioeconomic context. However, while the process of structure may follow a near archetypal path, the way in which these religious structures interact with the greater community of Pune seems to be in diametric opposition. I label the structure of these movements as communal and commercial, respectively, and argue that, due to the commercial nature of the Osho Meditation Resort and Osho’s teachings, their interaction with the greater Pune community seems to be severed. Such a study is a platform to describe the increasingly consumerist nature which many New Age religious movements across the globe have adopted in order to ‘perpetuate the charisma’, to speak in the tradition of Weber.