

Client's comment on Dussman: Kulturkaufhaus

In his book **The Dancing Mirror**, Martin Papenheim describes the comprehensive and eventful history of the Bhagwan/Osho movement in Germany between 1970 and 2020.

The ashram of the Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (later known as Osho) in Poona and the town of Rajneeshpuram in Oregon (USA) developed into centres for meditation and therapy that attracted attention throughout the Western world. In Germany, the movement reached its spectacular peak around 1980 with some 30,000 Neo-Sannyasins – roughly a third of the global following – 400 of whom lived in their own communes.

This analysis focuses on the German Neo-Sannyasins, including their development and how they were received by society, the political sphere and the media. Although the movement has since disintegrated in its institutional form, Papenheim demonstrates how the image of the German Neo-Sannyasins continues to have an impact to this day.

The German Sannyasins were initially part of the alternative, spiritual and political currents of the post-war period, which either rebelled against social norms or were in the midst of an identity crisis whilst searching for meaning. The rejection of authoritarian structures within the family, the church and schools motivated many to turn towards a seemingly freer spiritual life. The inner psychological motives, emotional dynamics and socio-psychological mechanisms of those involved are examined in this context from the perspective of the psychology of religion. These include psychological needs for wholeness, meaning, healing, belonging and transformation.

Papenheim's study also fills an important gap in research into the history of religion, as there are very few German-language works on this subject. For his study, he draws on archive material, eyewitness accounts and documents that have previously been little explored. This enables him not only to depict the rise of the guru-centred cult, but also to illustrate the shift towards a diffuse spiritual scene and to trace the resulting decline of the movement.

The book is also highly relevant from a religious studies perspective, as it demonstrates how the new religious movement was able to establish itself institutionally, ritually and socially within the West German context. The syncretic, charismatic and non-denominational Bhagwan/Osho movement combined Eastern practices with Western psychotechnics and forms of therapy. Meditation, dance, sexuality and physical exercises were regarded as sacred practices. Specific clothing, language and music served to facilitate spiritual self-identification. The movement deliberately positioned itself in opposition to conventional traditional institutions, which were perceived as repressive or, at worst, hypocritical. The establishment of ashrams and communes was the order of the day.

Martin Papenheim's **The Dancing Mirror** is a well-researched and academically significant work. It combines historical source research with cultural analysis and offers both academic specialists and interested lay readers insight into a complex movement. In doing so, the Neo-Sannyasins are not portrayed as misled victims, but as active agents who forged new paths amidst the tension between crisis, searching and self-realisation.

<https://www.kulturkaufhaus.de/de/detail/ISBN-9783506796899/Papenheim-Martin/Der-tanzende-Spiegel>