

Anupam Barlow response to this article, which I just sent to The Guardian:

I am responding to your article labelled "The free-love cult that terrorised America – and became Netflix's latest must-watch" by Sam Wolfson, printed in The Guardian on Saturday 7th April.

You start with a short description of Osho's teachings, with the words: "You're likely to find his works next to the crystals and yoga mats in your local hippy shop". Actually, every major bookstore in every country almost certainly carries Osho books, including Barnes and Noble, Powell's and Borders in the US, and Blackwells, Foyles and Waterstones in the UK. There are 650 books of which Osho was the author, as he spoke on more than 50 religions and spiritual leaders, many of whom I had never heard of before. His books have been translated into multiple languages, and over the years his books have surpassed the best-selling books in several countries.

To continue with your article, you clearly have no understanding of the meditation methods that he recommended to seekers around the world. The idea of catharsis, movement and laughter for releasing repressed emotions and tensions is not new. It is also very effective for people who feel crippled by the straight-jacket approach to emotions adopted by so many repressive societies. Or perhaps you prefer that Victorian type of conditioning?

You call the spiritual seekers around Osho a "cult", and compare them to Scientology, Jim Jones and Charles Manson. Why? I think you're confusing the thousands of seekers who chose to live close to Osho with the 12-15 so-called leaders of the community who committed the crimes covered in detail in Wild Wild Country, as though all 5000 were responsible for those crimes. Here's an example of how you do this: "...by episode four the commune has engaged in the sedation of thousands of homeless people, immigration fraud, failed assassination plots, and the largest bio-terrorist attack in US history. The cult infected 751 people with salmonella..." This is simply not true, and is an example of journalistic reporting at its worst. It was not "the commune" who carried out these despicable acts, it was Sheela and her group. The other 4, 985 people who lived on the Ranch knew nothing about this, were not involved in any way, and would certainly not have condoned it. I lived there for 2-3 years and can assure you I had no knowledge of what Sheela and her crazy friends were doing on the Ranch. It was a big place – 64000 acres to be exact – and Sheela occupied one building in the entire city.

And how can you imply that Osho was also responsible for Sheela's activities? There is nowhere in the 650 books that were created from his own talks where he would have encouraged that type of behavior. He was silent for 3.5 years on the Ranch, and in fact was the one who invited the FBI onto the Ranch to investigate all her crimes.

You quote Rick Ross, who also confuses the vast majority of sannyasins with the actions of a small group around Sheela, and then goes on to describe them as a "malicious", "methodical", "deliberate" group who "terrorized America". You describe Osho as "still manipulating his followers" without any basis at all in fact or truth. In

my experience and observation he would be the last person on earth to manipulate his followers in any way, quite the opposite to your style of reporting, where I find the words you use to describe the members of the community and Osho himself as offensive, biased and with no factual evidence whatsoever to back them up. This kind of approach is, frankly, not worthy of a newspaper that claims to be one of the few remaining unbiased, objective and independent newspapers left on the planet.

Anupam Barlow
Boulder, CO, USA