

Generation Bhagwan

On March 8, 2026, KRO-NCRV scheduled the documentary "Generation Bhagwan," a film by Dutch filmmaker and author Maroesja Perizonius. It exposes the sexual abuse of minors that occurred in some communes of the Bhagwan movement in the 1980s.

Although, in our opinion, no sexual assault or rape occurred, the transgressive behavior that some teenagers experienced from some adults in some communes caused them great mental distress. The victims from that time are now speaking out as people in their fifties.

Anyone who reads Maroesja's story wonders whether Osho (Bhagwan) was aware of this aspect of commune life, what he thought of it, and whether he felt responsible for it. And since our primary task is to inform people about Osho's vision, primarily through www.vrienden-van-osho.nl, we feel compelled to address these legitimate questions.

With some exceptions, media coverage of Osho has exhibited a negative pattern for decades. Even in 2025, examples of this can be found in articles about the documentary in the national press. Sensational clichés like "semi-criminal, totalitarian cult" and "systematic sexual abuse of minors within the sect of the Indian sex guru" paint a picture that we, and many friends who lived in Osho communes or regularly visited them, do not recognize ourselves in. Moreover, it completely ignores the fact that Osho, through his words (books, video, audio) continues to inspire countless people on their path of meditation.

This does not alter the fact that we take the accusations of Maroesja Perizonius et al. seriously and believe that their nature and scope deserve further investigation. We sympathize with the women and men involved, who, after forty years or more, are still burdened by unpleasant memories of the transgressive behavior they experienced as teenagers in Osho communes. Their voices, as expressed in the documentary, are heard and acknowledged by us.

Four points stand out in the documentary and in the reporting on Osho in general:

- Osho's view on sexuality ("sex guru");
- The suggestion that this view was bound to lead to sexual abuse;
- The disparaging labeling of the Osho movement as a "cult";
- The lack of understanding that the zeitgeist of the 1980s differed drastically from what we consider desirable and normal today. It stemmed from the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

We elaborate on these points in the attachment to this message.

Would you like to respond? Please contact the board of the Friends of Osho at info@vrienden-van-osho.nl.

ANNEX 'Generation Bhagwan'

Osho's View on sexuality

Osho has often spoken about sexuality. As early as 1968, long before the 1974 founding of his world-famous ashram (commune) in Pune, India, he addressed tens of thousands of his fellow countrymen in Mumbai about a more natural attitude toward sex and about sex as a path to spiritual transformation. This led to considerable uproar and to his reputation as a "sex guru." But in reality, Osho was simply dusting off an ancient Indian tradition of Tantra. Osho: "The love you express first expresses itself through your body. It becomes sex. It is called love when it is expressed through the mind, which is higher, deeper, and more subtle. Expressed through the soul, it becomes devotion."

Didn't the free sexual atmosphere automatically lead to the abuse of teenagers by adults?

It's important to emphasize that Osho, of his own accord, nowhere in his numerous statements on sexuality does he address, let alone condone, free sexual relations between adults and minors. Adults with bad intentions can never rely on Osho's statement to justify their sexual advances toward minors.

Yet, in some communes, particularly in Rajneeshpuram, incidents have occurred to which the leadership, in this case Sheela, Osho's secretary, apparently failed to respond adequately. The perpetrators were not confronted about their behavior, which sent the wrong message to all commune members. This kind of behavior was apparently part of the process, some parents also thought. But it did not align with Osho's vision.

For when Osho speaks about sex and young people, he indicates that they should be able to freely explore their blossoming feelings with each other, as he himself observed during his visits to an isolated indigenous community in the forests of the Central Indian region of Bastar. The adolescents lived together in a house in the center of the village. There they could experiment sexually, but they were only allowed to be with one partner for a few days. An adult supervised this. Over time, they had all been intimate with each other and had developed a better sense of who was best suited to whom. A stable relationship could then be formed with that person, which usually lasted a lifetime. Because of this childhood experience, the tendency to cheat later disappeared.

Osho treats sexuality and eroticism as something completely natural, a life force that should not be suppressed, not hidden, about which one should not feel guilty. When children are given free rein to engage in sexual relationships, they are no longer shy and become decisive, according to Osho. The stories reveal that the girls in the commune could also behave provocatively. But adult men are expected to handle this sensibly. How often things went wrong in this regard needs to be investigated. It's not inconceivable that the Osho communes' reputation at the time as a "permissive society" also attracted men who, consciously or unconsciously, were not primarily focused on spiritual growth.

Was Osho aware of the abuses?

Rumors and allegations circulated outside the commune, but his response ("This is insulting and disgusting") to a journalist's question about this suggests that Osho considered such abuses completely unrealistic. A judicial investigation followed, but was dropped due to a lack of evidence.

It should be noted that Osho lived in seclusion in his communes. He stayed there as a guest, surrounded by a small staff of caregivers. There was only daily contact with his secretary, who

was also the head of the almost entirely female leadership, who may have kept uncomfortable issues from him. It was impossible for average commune members to approach Osho directly.

Osho's Sexual Relationships

The literature contains testimonies from women with pleasant erotic memories of Osho. The documentary features two women whose experiences were less positive. However, Osho made it clear in a 1985 interview, when asked, that he was not celibate. He occasionally shared a bed with one of his (adult) female sannyasins. Incidentally, he had already explained on another occasion that connection with another person was a "secondary experience" for him. "The real joy is to be alone with oneself."

Celibacy is the suppression of nature, and Osho did not approve of that. Only when abstinence arises from a state of full consciousness is it called Brahmacharya, and celibacy is natural.

Is or was the Bhagwan movement a cult? And if so, did this contribute to the abuse?

Many decades ago, the term cult had a neutral meaning: a school (of thought), doctrine, or school. But for years, the term has been used disparagingly, associated with coercion, money-making, introspection, fanaticism, and brainwashing. In practice, this usually proves to be largely untrue, as a 1984 parliamentary inquiry also revealed. This inquiry advocated for the use of the term "new religious movement."

In the first half of the 1980s, the Bhagwan movement was a striking phenomenon in the Netherlands, with 26 communes and approximately 15,000 red-clad, mostly well-educated, and sometimes nationally known adherents (sannyasins). There was no proselytizing. Those who left were not harassed. It was not a single organization, but a loose association of independent foundations. Except for 2 or 3 percent, sannyasins lived and worked in civil society. Communal life offered a degree of intensity and concentration that is difficult for the single seeker of the spiritual path to achieve. For the same reason, monastic orders were once established within various religions. Monastic life presented numerous limitations for the ordained priests and sisters, which they willingly accepted. However, the label "cult" was never applied to it in the negative sense mentioned above. Double standards?

Even before Osho's death in 1990, most communes were closed, the red robes were abolished, and the spiritual quest became an "everyone for himself." Osho's insights and meditation techniques continue to be a valuable source of inspiration for many. Those interested can choose to participate in retreats and courses focused on personal growth, organized by qualified teachers in various locations, read Osho's books, and watch or listen to his talks. No one will bother you to ask if you might want to become a sannyasin. Conclusion: there hasn't been such a thing as an Osho movement for a long time, and it has never been a cult (in the stigmatizing meaning of the word).

But the establishment of the large Bhagwan commune Rajneeshpuram and the resulting conflict with American society did lead to management derailments that gave the commune a sectarian character for a time. Reasonable criticism was not accepted, which, for example, caused vigilance to wane. Phones (including Osho's) were tapped, and attacks on Osho's caregivers and people outside the commune were planned or committed. When the situation became untenable, this management, led by Osho's secretary, Sheela, suddenly left in September 1985. Osho denounced everything and labeled the exiled commune leadership a "fascist gang." It had

been a harsh lesson in the corruption of power. Osho clearly acknowledged his responsibility for this. But it was Sheela who was imprisoned for four years, while Osho, due to a lack of evidence of involvement, was banished from America after a harshly enforced twelve-day pretrial detention. He was fined for violating immigration law (allowing sham marriages).

After his return from America, Osho, even before his death, laid the groundwork for a very different kind of commune. Not a utopian alternative society, but a meditation resort, a comfortable "Club Med" where one can take a spiritual vacation for a few days or weeks to recharge. This was realized approximately ten years after Osho's death on the site of the former ashram in Pune and remains a magnet for seekers on the path today.

But what about the personality cult?

The phenomenon of the guru and the master-disciple relationship, well-known in India, sparked many a Western pen with the rise of Bhagwan. In this post, we must confine ourselves to the observation that the treatment of Jesus as a master in Christianity was never a problem, but that Bhagwan, especially in the West, caused everyone's hair to stand on end. Jesus possessed a self-evident divine status, while Bhagwan was scornfully mentioned as meaning "god" in Sanskrit, while it also means "the blessed one." Jesus is to be followed ("abandon your nets; let the dead bury the dead"), while Bhagwan, on the other hand, is considered totalitarian.

The fact is that Osho, in the early stages of his ministry, emphasized surrender and trust in the disciple, and later he wanted to be regarded not as a Master but rather as a friend and an ordinary person. "But your followers seem to worship you," a journalist said in one of Osho's many interviews. "Yes, that's my problem. But what should I do?" was the reply. "Just tell me."

At his request, the photos of Osho that hung here and there in the Resort were removed after his death, as they were removed in the reprints of his books. Osho didn't want the focus to be on him personally, but on his message of meditation.

The Sexual Revolution

Meanwhile, the sexual revolution had taken place outside the communes.

It is important to realize that what happened to Maroesja Perizonius and her fellow victims in the Amsterdam Osho commune in 1985, and before that in Osho communes abroad, took place in a world that no longer exists. The sixties, seventies, and eighties were a period of sexual liberation throughout the Western world. The advent of the contraceptive pill in 1963 gave women much more leeway to experiment with relationships. The churches rapidly lost their authority, which was reflected, for example, in looser marriage morals and in fashion (miniskirts, monokinis). The membership of the NVSH (Dutch Society for the Reform of Sexuality) grew rapidly, and organizations like the COC, which represented the interests of homosexuals, and the pedophile association MARTIJN made significant progress. Politicians followed this social development.

A striking example of this was provided by the newspaper Trouw on November 6, 1985. On the same page, on page 15, we find an interview with two self-assured and, at first glance, not unhappy teenagers, Maroesja Perizonius (then still Chandra) and her friend Shanti, in the Amsterdam Osho commune, alongside a rather lighthearted article about a bill by Minister of Justice Korthals Altes (VVD (liberals)) to decriminalize sexual intercourse between adults and teenagers. "Children between the ages of twelve and sixteen should be able to decide for themselves whether they want to have sex with an adult," the minister stated at the time. But he was overruled. Anyone who takes a closer look at the social climate regarding sex and minors

will discover that the lenient 1985 bill never reached the House of Representatives and sparked a backlash that led to a tightening of the sexual offenses law in 2002. Member of Parliament Nicolai (VVD) later commented on this in an interview: "In the 1970s, there was a widespread belief, including among psychologists and throughout society, that a consensual sexual relationship could do very little harm, that a 14-year-old could easily determine whether a relationship, for example, with a 40-year-old, was harmful or not. But now it's widely recognized in society, including in scientific circles, that at fourteen, you can't adequately assess its significance. The consensual sexuality of minors is very relative; these are often the first sexual encounters, and it's very difficult to assess." It's striking that in the mid-1980s, legislators were still struggling with sexual morality and related moral legislation, while at the same time, a clear policy regarding sex with minors seems to have been lacking in the Osho communes in Amsterdam and elsewhere. This indicates that life in the commune reflected not only Osho's views (against sex with minors), but also the zeitgeist of the society at the time. Anyone who delves into the history of sexual morality will sometimes be surprised at how understandingly sex between minors and adults was viewed in the 1970s and 1980s. But the major scandals had yet to come to light: the Dutroux affair, child abuse in the Roman Catholic Church (investigated by the Deetman Commission), #MeToo, and more recently, the Epstein affair.

Trouw 6 nov. 1985, p.15

Shanti en Chandra zijn bezorgd over Bhagwan



Chandra en Shanti, dit keer in zwart-wit. Foto: Paul Rabelewsky

„Ik voel me heel verdrietig. Ik snap niet waarom ze Bhagwan gearresteerd hebben. Wat heeft ie misdaan? Hij zit nu in een cel, zonder zijn stoff, alleen een slijten bed. In de gevangenis reken de bewakers sigaretten. En Bhagwan kan daar absoluut niet tegen. Ik ben heel bezorgd over zijn gezondheid.“

Shanti (14) zit samen met Chandra (13) in de ontmoetingsruimte van de Stad Rajneesh, het nieuwe onderkomen van de Bhagwan-val-geligen in Amsterdam-zuid. Met hun paars-rode kleren, het bordeaux-rode laflekkeedje en het donkerrode glas vruchtiensap voor zich een kinerfoto waard. Chandra: „Bhagwan heeft eens gezegd: Gearresteerd worden is het enige wat ik nog niet heb meegemaakt.“ En nu zit hij in een cel. Het enige wat we kunnen doen is afwachten.“

Shanti heeft als reactie op de arrestatie van Bhagwan een brief van een oude schoolvriendin gekregen. „Ze vroeg of de commune nu niet uit elkaar zou vallen en of ik dan weer bij mijn vader ga wonen. Ik vind het leuk brieven van haar te krijgen, maar ze snapte niet waar ik mee bezig ben. Natuurlijk valt de commune niet meteen uit elkaar en voortgang blijft ik ook lekker hier wonen.“

Op school en in de buurt waar Shanti en Chandra vroeger woonden, hebben de kinderen goed begrepen wat die twee meiden in Bhagwan zagen. „In dat je op“, schreeuwden de jongens bij Shanti in de klas als ze haar 'mala' met een foto van Bhagwan om haar nek droeg. „Ik mocht ook nooit op verjaardagen komen. Die voor nodigen we niet uit, zelden ze dan. Door dat pes-

ten heb ik mijn 'mala' daar op een gegeven moment maar afgela-ten.“

Ook Chandra heeft dichte her-inneringen aan haar vroegere le-ven. „Ik heb tegen mijn vrienden nooit kunnen zeggen wat ik echt van ze vond. Altijd werd er om de hete brij heengetrapt. Binnen in-neringen aan haar vroegere le-ven.“

Bhagwan-school naar Nederland

Omdat de meeste kinderen van de school afkomstig zijn uit West-Europese landen is ons land gekozen voor de nieuwe behuizing. Er wordt nu gezocht naar een land-goed in een mooie natuurlij-ke omgeving om vijftien-derd kinderen en begelei-ders onder te brengen.

de muren van de commune kun je je wel inden. Of je nu verdrietig, gelukkig of kwaad bent. Alleen komt dat laatste niet zo veel voor.“

Shanti en Chandra zouden zus-sen kunnen zijn. Ze zijn op bijna dezelfde manier bij Bhagwan be-recht gekomen. Toen hun beide moeders gescheiden waren kwa-men ze via-tia in contact met de sekten van Bhagwan. Shanti's moeder begon zijn boeken te le-zen terwijl de moeder van Chan-dra enthousiaste brieven van een vriendin kreeg die bij Bhagwan in India zat. Dit nieuwsgierig-heid zijn ze er met hun dochters naar toe gered en als 'sanyas-sin' teruggekomen. „Ik was toen zeven“, zegt Chandra. „Ik wist nauwelijks wat het inhield. Maar ik ben nu blij dat ik het gedaan heb.“

Chandra is op dit moment even over uit Engeland. Ze zit daar op een speciale 'Bhagwan-school'.

Het gaat er daar heel anders aan toe, vertelt ze. „We hebben niet elk uur een ander vak maar een hele ochtend of middag computere-rondreis of timmeren of elek-troonische. Ikzelf heb in drie maanden goed leren koken en ik leer nu hoe ik de administratie moet doen. De docenten zijn trouwens veel opener tegen je dan op een gewone school.“

Shanti 'stuurt' op dit moment voor telefonie in de hal van Stad Rajneesh. Soms valt dat werken niet met Chandra. „Als ik er genoeg van heb ga ik een weekendje bij mijn vader logeren. En dan blijft ik urenlank in mijn bed liggen. Lekker een hele dag niets doen.“

Trouw 6 nov. 1985, p.15

NIEUWSLAND

Een groen blaadje mag best met een oude bok

Geef toe, het is even wennen als een meisje van zestien door haar vriend van dertig wordt opgehaald bij school. Boze tongen spreken er schande van dat ze regelmatig een weekendje op stap gaan. „Zullen ze ook wel met elkaar vrijen.“

Nog bozere tongen zouden de dertigjarige vriend voor de rechtbank kunnen slepen, omdat hij 'seksueel contact' heeft met een minderjarige. Er staat zelfs een gevangenisstraf van maximaal acht jaar.

Minister van Justitie Korthals Altes heeft eind vorige week voorgesteld het vrijen tussen volwassenen en tieners niet meer strafbaar te stellen. Kinderen tussen de twaalf en zestien jaar moeten zelf kunnen beslissen of ze met een volwassene willen vrijen, vindt hij.

In sommige gevallen blijft sex tussen volwassenen en tieners wel strafbaar. Bijvoorbeeld als een volwassene cadeaus be-looft in ruil voor sex, een smoesje gebruikt

(„Vrijen is goed voor je“) of misbruik maakt van zijn of haar overmacht.

Het CDA voelt er niets voor om de leef-tijdsgrens voor sex te verlagen. Deze partij vindt dat een kind van twaalf niet zelf kan beslissen of het met een ouder iemand wil vrijen. „Er kan tussen een kind en een volwassene nooit een gelijke relatie be-staan. De volwassene is altijd de baas.“ Het is opvallend hoe hardnekkig het CDA over 'kinderen van twaalf tot zestien' blijft praten.

De VVD en de PvdA vinden dat deze rege-ringspartij een beetje ouderwets re-de-neert. „Vrijen tussen tieners en oudere mensen in Nederland komt al zo veel voor. We moeten zoiets accepteren“, aldus de VVD.

In het nieuwe wetsvoorstel blijft sex tus-sen volwassenen en kinderen onder de twaalf jaar wel strafbaar.