

Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh: Study in contrast and similarity

Prabhakar Deshpande

Abstract: Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh were two religious and spiritual leaders of 20th Century India. But they could not be more different. And of course one compares people who are similar, else the comparison does not make sense. Swami Chinmayananda was celibate, traditional, conservative, communal and national, whereas OshoBhagwan Rajneesh was sexual, modern, liberal, secular and international. However the comparison is more interesting than can be captured in this short abstract.

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I. Introduction

Osho Bhagwan Rajneesh



Swami Chinmayananda



India has been a centre for religion and spirituality for thousands of years. However the second half of 20th century saw a proliferation of Religious and Spiritual Leaders who not only became famous in India, but all over the world because the world was receptive to Indian Knowledge and Wisdom after India gained independence.

There are at least 100 such major spiritual leaders in 20th century who made waves in India and World. But two of them are particularly interesting - Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh. The two are at extremes of adherence to tradition and regulation. Other spiritual leaders fall somewhere in between and hence would not make as interesting a comparison.

But both of them are very similar too. Both Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh were very well educated and modern, unlike say NeemKaroli Baba or NisargDuttMaharaj. Again both were very well read and politically informed. Both were teachers of meditation rather than prayer. Both were erudite and trained in philosophy. Both were intellectuals and intelligent. And that is where the similarity ends and contrast begins.

Swami Chinmayananda: Swami Vivekananda of 20th century

Swami Chinmayananda was born as BalakrishnaMenon in Kerala in 1916. He got post graduate degree in literature and law. He joined the Indian Independence Movement in 1942. He joined National Herald, founded by Nehru as a journalist. He met his Guru when he went to cover Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. He was also taught by Swami TapovanMaharaj. Swami Chinmayananda started Chinmaya Mission in 1951. He

began to conduct lecture sessions all over India and world. He established an ashram in Mumbai in Powai. He founded Vishwa Hindu Parishad in 1962. He supported the demolition of Babri Masjid.

Swami Chinmayananda was supposed to speak at World Parliament of Religions in August 1993 to mark centenary year of Swami Vivekananda's address to Parliament of Religion in 1893 in Chicago. However he passed few days before the conference. Some would argue that since he was supposed to address Conference of Religions exactly after 100 years after Vivekananda addressed it, he could be called as Swami Vivekananda of 20th Century.

OshoBhagwan Rajneesh: The Sex Guru

OshoBhagwan Rajneesh was born in 1931 in a Jain family. He acquired post graduate degree in Philosophy and was a professor of Philosophy in Madhya Pradesh. In 1960s he began to travel across India preaching his version of spirituality, rejecting sexual repression and indeed arguing that sex could be a gateway to spirituality. While in early 1970 he operated out of Mumbai, soon he moved to Pune to establish an ashram with his Indian and International disciples, where all forms of religion and spirituality were practiced and ashram was notorious for free sex. In 1981, he moved to Oregon in United States. The commune ran into conflict with local people and serious crimes were performed and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh was arrested and deported in 1985. After 21 nations refused him entry, he returned back to India in 1986. He died in 1990. OshoBhagwan Rajneesh is perhaps the first and only religious and spiritual leader who questioned and challenged sexual repression advocated by religions and hence the tag of 'The Sex Guru' describes him the best.

Sex: Extremely Opposite



Swami Chinmayananda is the extreme in sexual control and advocacy for celibacy. After all he was disciple of Swami Sivananda, who has written more books on celibacy than anybody else. Religious people are known to advocate celibacy, but they are usually not as educated and modern. Swami Sivananda was a medical doctor and his arguments on retention of semen seem rather odd.

Swami Chinmayananda seems to have taken off from where Swami Sivananda left. His diatribe against sex are legendary with his BMI chart containing the V term for Vasanas or Lust to be overcome before one reaches God. His espousal of celibacy was extremely strong and perhaps the Kerala connection is obvious because Shankaracharya dismissed women as body of flesh and vomit.

Other traditional religious groups even when urging sexual control are not at such extremes. After all Catholic church does conduct marriages. RamkrishnaParamhansa, the guru of Swami Vivekananda was actually married. Hare Krishna people allow marriages among their followers. But Chinmaya Mission stands strongest in condemnation of Sex.

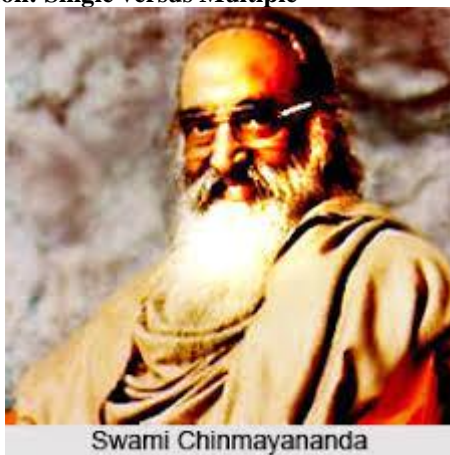
OshoBhagwan Rajneesh was extremely hedonistic about Sex. All religions permit sex to an extent, but OshoBhagwan Rajneesh, was hedonistic about it almost insisting on free sex, open nudity and multiple partners. His Ashram was a place of immoral debauchery with lots of open free sex between consenting partners.

Actually OshoBhagwan Rajneesh did not start as bad. His most controversial series of lectures – Sex to Superconsciousness – pointed to the impossibility of celibacy and suggested Love as a way of controlled sexuality to reach Meditation.

However very soon he seems to have lost the sense of moderation and morality and his teachings began to permit free immoral and immoderate sex, without any connection to love and marriage.

Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh are extremes in the way they approached sex. And average human society can neither live up to celibacy standards of Swami Chinmayananda or fall down to the hedonistic debauchery of OshoBhagwan Rajneesh.

Religion: Single versus Multiple



Swami Chinmayananda



Swami Chinmayananda was a Hindu preacher. And Swami Chinmayananda stuck to Hinduism. His main focus was on BhagvadGeeta. He also wrote commentary on Upanishads, which are at end of Vedas and hence it is called Vedanta. Swami Chinmayananda was philosophically inclined to AdiShankaracharya and his Advait Vedanta.

Chinmaya Mission however permits prayers and bhajans and does not so much insist on Meditation. Chinmaya Mission activities include study of religious texts of Swami Chinmayananda which consists of his commentary on Upanishads and BhagvadGeeta.

In fact Chinmaya Mission is as Indian and Traditional as it gets and sticks to Hinduism very vehemently. Indeed Swami Chinmayananda was founder of Vishwa Hindu Parishad and was supposed to represent Hinduism at World Parliament of Religions. Swami Chinmayananda did not hesitate to criticise Buddhism or Christianity and indeed openly approved of demolition of Babri Masjid.

OshoBhagwan Rajneesh was born a Jain, but he taught from various religions. He borrowed his teachings from Buddha and his Dhammapada. He also taught from Vedanta and Yoga of Hinduism. He spoke from Christianity. He also spoke on Lao Tzu's Taoism and his favourite was Zen, which is something of an amalgam between Taoism and Buddhism. He spoke on Tantra and Jewish Mystics. He covered almost all religions and mystics of the world.

However if his exploration of various religions may cause you to think that he was religious in traditional ways, he was not. He rebelled against religions and thought that religions were instruments of oppression used by politicians and priests to control people and his vision was of irreligious world.

But his rebellion against religions did not prevent him from conducting discourses on various texts of various religions. He used religious texts to create his own brand of irreligion. Unlike JidduKrishnamurti who stayed entirely away from religions, OshoBhagwan Rajneesh flirted with religions, romancing religions when it suited him and rebelling against religions when he so preferred.

National: Indian versus International

Swami Chinmayanada was as Indian as it gets. While other Indian religious and spiritual leaders – Mahesh Yogi, Swami Prabhupada, Goenka, NeemKaroli Baba, SwamiMuktananda managed to get a huge international following, surprisingly Swami Chinmayananda did not get much International following.

This is surprising because Swami Chinmayananda spoke only in excellent English and not Indian languages. Of course the Chinmaya Mission is spread all over the world in many nations. However in these nations too Chinmaya Mission has following only among Indian diaspora and not among people of these nations.

Perhaps Swami Chinmayananda's refusal to compromise on Sex and Hinduism made it insular. Perhaps he did not market his version of religion well for International audience, or perhaps he branded it so well for Indian audience that it became impossible for International audience to connect to him.

OshoBhagwan Rajneesh started by speaking in Hindi, but soon International crowd started getting attracted to him. And gradually OshoBhagwan Rajneesh became very less Indian and lot more International. Indeed later he stopped speaking in Hindi and spoke in English.

In fact at Osho Commune International there are hardly any Indians and the place is rife with foreigners. Perhaps this is because of his free sex doctrine which even liberal India finds difficult to digest. Perhaps because he became rich man's guru and his commune was very expensive for Indians. Perhaps he showed differential treatment towards foreigners and hence Indians were sidelined. But OshoBhagwan Rajneesh is very little Indian and almost entirely International.

While other religious gurus – Prabhupada and Goenka – etc attracted both Indian and International audience, Swami Chinmayananda largely attracted Indian audience and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh largely attracted International audience.

Controversy

Almost all Indian Gurus have huge controversies. Hare Krishna have cases against them of sexual abuse. SatyaSai Baba had case of Sexual abuse of children. Muktananda and Mahesh Yogi have had their share of controversies.

Swami Chinmayananda has stayed away from controversies. There are almost no scandals about Swami Chinmayananda or Chinmaya Mission. Internet is rife with Gurus and their misdeeds, but Chinmaya Mission, one must give credit is free on any scandals or mishaps.

OshoBhagwan Rajneesh made controversy his marketing tool. Controversy was OshoBhagwan Rajneesh's calling card. If for other religious gurus, controversy was a small speck to be erased, with OshoBhagwan Rajneesh controversy was all of OshoBhagwan Rajneesh with nothing that was even remotely non-controversial.

Law

Swami Chinmayananda adhered to the law in letter and spirit. Apart from other kinds of controversies there are no violations of law that haunt Chinmaya Mission.

With OshoBhagwan Rajneesh, law was a puppet to be manipulated. That he was in violation of law in spirit of law by permitting vulgar and obscene sex is known. But he was also in violation of law in letter. Of course what happened in Oregon, USA, was gross violation of law, with murders, electoral malpractices, financial embezzlement, immigration law violations and the entire works. However even before going to USA, the Rajneesh Ashram was in violation of laws with men involved in drug peddling and women engaging in prostitution to make money to support their stay in Pune. Besides of course tax law violations.

Politics: Secular versus Communal

That Osho was secular should be obvious because he flirted and romanced almost all religions of the world. He was close to the Congress party, at least the Gandhis.

However that Swami Chinmayananda should be communal is not very obvious. After all he started his career with National Herald of Jawaharlal Nehru. But slowly he moved towards the RSS and BJP. He founded Vishwa Hindu Parishad and also commended and approved of demolition of Babri Masjid.

Swami Chinmayananda was the most communal of religious and spiritual leaders of India.

II. Conclusion :

Both are Failures

Both OshoBhagwan Rajneesh and Swami Chinmayananda will be judged as failure. While in their times, Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh commanded great attention and followers, after their death, their respective organisations have little attraction.

For instance now in 21st century, while Sri Ravishakar or SadhguruVasudev or even Swami Ramdev capture attention, the Chinmaya Mission has very few followers judging by their social media attention. And similarly OshoBhagwan Rajneesh hasn't created any great leader among his disciples.

Perhaps Swami Chinmayananda and OshoBhagwan Rajneesh represent two wrong extremes of religion and spirituality and the modern world needs moderation and morality that neither of them even remotely approached. Hence both are failures.