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Ron Geaves, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture: Glastonbury and New Spiritualities*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020; xiii, Pp. 233, ISBN: 978-1-350-26544-8, \$35.95(Pbk)

Donald A. WESTBROOK

San Jose State University, USA

Ron Geaves, Honorary Visiting Professor at Cardiff University's Centre for the Study of Islam, is a top academic authority on Prem Rawat (known formerly as Guru Maharaj Ji), the Divine Light Mission (DLM), and subsequent organizational iterations such as Elan Vital, Words of Peace International, and the Prem Rawat Foundation. His latest work, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture*, examines the circumstances that brought 13-year-old Prem Rawat, then leader of the DLM, to the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre, where on June 21 he spoke from the famous pyramid stage at an event similar to Woodstock in the US, marked more by music, revelry, free love, and drug use than spiritual exploration. Geaves ably demonstrates the connections between Prem Rawat's short but ultimately serendipitous visit to Glastonbury ("for little more than an hour" p. 1) and the surrounding counterculture within which New Age and Eastern spiritual movements found their footings.

Geaves is perhaps more qualified to do so than anyone else by virtue of the fact that, as a disciple, he accompanied Prem Rawat (Guru Maharaj Ji) that day to Glastonbury (also a pilgrimage site for Anglicans, pagans, and New Age believers), stood by his side on the stage, and witnessed the growth and decline of DLM in the years to come. On the other hand, as Geaves acknowledges, his status as an insider carries with it the obvious potential for bias in playing the part of "both interviewer and interviewed" (p. 6). With these considerations in mind, writing fifty years later about the events in question, Geaves has pieced together a balanced, engaging, and rigorous account that makes use of his own ethnographic perspective, available primary and secondary sources, and conversations with friends and colleagues who were also part of the DLM during this period. Along the way, he capably engages with theoretical concerns and the religious studies academic literature, such as the work of Steven Sutcliffe and in particular Stephen A. Kent's *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era* (2001).

Geaves' monograph certainly contributes to the academic study of Prem Rawat, but also to understanding the Glastonbury Fayre and Glastonbury as a sacred site. His volume will be of particular interest to new religious movement (NRM) researchers studying the history of the DLM in the UK, even though the focus is on the "case study

of Prem Rawat and his changing relationship with the counterculture throughout the decade of the 1970s” (p. 151), especially in relation to contested concepts such as “New Age,” “Easternization,” and “occulture” (cultural appropriation of the occult, engaging in particular with Christopher Partridge’s work). It is also appreciated that the author includes the full text of the guru’s speech (p. 126-28).

It is clear that the 1971 visit is now significant to Prem Rawat, his followers, and even Glastonbury itself, despite the guru’s initial “ambivalence” (p. 124) about making the trip. In June 2022, the Council of the City of Glastonbury honored Rawat with a presentation of the “Key of Avalon,” similar to a key to the city ceremony (see “Glastonbury Historic Award Ceremony,” YouTube, Prem Rawat Official Channel, June 17, 2022). Prem Rawat continues to spread a message, though now in more secularized ways that might be classified as self help or motivational speaking, and long ago traded in Indian robes for western suits. In September 2022, he was interviewed on CNN, quite favorably, and earlier in the same year gave a virtual talk at Google (“Hear Yourself: How to Find Peace in a Noisy World,” also available on YouTube).

Now that this former guru has transformed into a motivational speaker and peace promoter with a larger secular audience and emphasis, it is all the more important for DLM historians and NRM researchers to document and analyze these earlier years in the way that Geaves has admirably and carefully done. Doing so may allow us to discern a consistent theme in Prem Rawat’s messaging and self-consciousness. To borrow lines from his Glastonbury speech: “I am not a religious man. I am only saying that I am a spiritual man. I never believe in religions, because I believe religions divide men and men’s ideas into separate sects” (p. 127). Or, as Geaves puts it in his critique of Easternization and essentialism, Prem Rawat “does not see himself as ‘Hindu’ or ‘Buddhist’ and refuses most definitions of where he fits in the religious/spiritual spectrum, usually denying that he belongs to either” (p. 175).

In the end, Geaves offers an account of this moment of cultural and religious history that is both scholarly and personal, maintaining an academic distance but never hesitating to offer his own recollections alongside that of other perspectives. This book is recommended to historians, religious studies scholars, sociologists, and of course Glastonbury fans. It helps fill a lacuna in UK NRM history in the 1970s and should encourage others to more fully examine the legacy of the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre (now known as the Glastonbury Festival).