

Non-Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus in the West and Their Traditional Modern Advaita Critics

Phillip Charles Lucas

ABSTRACT: The Modern Advaita movement has undergone a split between two factions: one remains committed to a more traditional articulation of Advaita Vedanta, and the other has departed in significant ways from this traditional spiritual system. Over the past fifteen years, the Traditional Modern Advaita (TMA) faction has launched sustained and wide-ranging criticism of Non-Traditional Modern Advaita (NTMA) teachers and teachings. This article identifies the main themes of TMA criticisms and interprets their significance using insights from the social sciences and history of religions. I suggest that some reconfiguring of the Advaita tradition is necessary as it expands in transnational directions, since the structures of intelligibility from one culture to another are rarely congruent. Indeed, adaptation, accommodation and reconfiguration are normal and natural processes for religious traditions expanding beyond their indigenous cultural matrices. In the end, the significant questions for Advaita missionaries to the West may be how much accommodation is prudent, how rapidly reconfiguration should take place, and what adaptations are necessary for their spiritual methodology not only to survive but also thrive in new cultural settings.

KEYWORDS: Modern Advaita, Neo-Advaita, Advaita Vedanta, Ramana Maharshi, Papaji, Nisargadatta Maharaj, transnational religious movements, Satsang Network, Transcendental Meditation, North American Hindu Communities, Chinmaya Mission, James Swartz, Dennis Waite

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A well-attested development in the history of religious communities/movements is the tension between factions that attempt to preserve posited “original” beliefs and practices and those that seek to reform or recast tradition so that it communicates its liberating message and methods in new cultural settings. Western Buddhists following the Tibetan tradition, for example, have encountered resistance from traditional Buddhist lineage holders in their attempts to replace devotion to the teacher with a democratized institution that emphasizes the “collective wisdom of the sangha.”¹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918–2008), to cite another example, was criticized by leaders of the Jyotir Math, a traditional monastic order in India with whom he had studied, for his innovations in the Shankaracharya teaching tradition, including a meditation technique that putatively did not foster the mental control necessary for authentic spiritual realization.²

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Modern Advaita movement, whose teachers and organizations have proliferated throughout North America (and many Western countries) over the past twenty-five years. These teachers/organizations number over two hundred as of January 2013, based on careful tracking of Internet sources and various print publications.³ While some of these teachers come from Europe and Australia, a significant number hold *satsangs* (teaching meetings), seminars and retreats in, or at least have students and readers from, North America.

Modern Advaita, for the purposes of this study, delineates teachers/organizations who draw to a significant degree (though not necessarily exclusively) on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. This Indian spiritual system asserts that absolute reality is infinite, formless, non-dual awareness, and that the supreme goal of human life is to realize this awareness as the ground of one’s being.⁴ Many Modern Advaita teachers claim to have been influenced in some degree by at least one of three Advaita gurus of the twentieth century: Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981), and H. W. L. Poonja (a.k.a. Papaji; 1913–1997). These gurus are not the only sources revered by Modern Advaita teachers, but they are a significant line of transmission for their core teaching of non-dualism—the assertion that reality is a unified field of pure awareness and being.⁵ The Modern Advaita movement has experienced a split between two factions: one that remains committed to a more traditional articulation of Advaita Vedanta teaching and methodology, and one that has departed in significant ways from this traditional spiritual system.

Over the past fifteen years, the Traditional Modern Advaita (TMA) faction has launched sustained and wide-ranging criticism of Non-Traditional Modern Advaita (NTMA) teachers. TMA defenders, many of whom are Westerners, align themselves with Vedanta traditionalists in India such as the Chinmaya Mission, Sri Ramanasramam in Tamil Nadu,

Swami Dayananda Ashram in Rishikesh and the *mathas* (monasteries) of the Shankaracharyas, gurus who trace their lineage directly to the great Advaita sage Adi Shankara. Critics often cite the teachings of revered Advaita sages such as Adi Shankara (788–820), Vashishtha, Siddharameshwar Maharaj (1888–1936), Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ramana Maharshi.⁶ The NTMA faction is much less concerned with the teaching strictures and methodology of traditional Advaita Vedanta and tends to be more eclectic in its appropriation of teachings and methods, sometimes reaching into traditions as far afield as Sufism, Zen Buddhism and transpersonal psychology. In this sense, Non-Traditional Modern Advaita resembles in some ways what Liselotte Frisk identified in 2002 as “The Satsang Network.” Frisk argues that this transnational network is a post-Osho phenomenon, correctly linking several key Satsang Network teachers with Papaji and the eclectic spiritual teacher Osho (1931–1990), formerly known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.⁷ However, what I identify as the NTMA faction is more strongly influenced by Advaita Vedanta traditions and teachers than the more eclectic Satsang Network.

This article attempts to identify the main themes of TMA criticisms and to understand their significance using insights from the social sciences and history of religions. Of special interest is how these criticisms reflect well-attested debates that inevitably confront transnational spiritual movements when they seek to accommodate themselves to the norms and attitudes of cultural settings that bear little resemblance to their lands of origin. I suggest that some accommodation and reconfiguring of a tradition is necessary in these transnational migrations since the structures of intelligibility from one culture to another are rarely congruent, and if a tradition is to speak to individuals in new cultural settings some form of re-articulation/translation must occur. As Frisk observes, “Religions always change when they migrate to another culture. . . . A translation—of the language and the religion—can never be made literally. Something from the original is always lost, and something new is created.”⁸ The crucial question that transnational spiritual movements like Modern Advaita must confront, then, becomes how much accommodation and reconfiguration can occur before the integrity and efficacy of a spiritual system is compromised beyond repair. This question lies at the heart of the voluminous TMA criticisms of NTMA teachers. The critics can thus be understood as safeguarding a putatively proven methodology for enlightenment from NTMA gurus who, they claim, have distorted this methodology and rendered it ineffective.

ORTHODOXY VERSUS INNOVATION

Modern Advaitins are the successors of a long line of Vedanta-inspired teachers and movements in North America that reaches back to 1830s

New England Transcendentalists, the Theosophical Society (founded 1875), New Thought (originating in the late nineteenth century), Vedanta Societies (founded in the 1890s), Paramahansa Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship (founded 1920), Transcendental Meditation (founded 1959 in Los Angeles as the Spiritual Regeneration Movement), the Integral Yoga Institute (founded 1966), Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers (founded 1959), and many other teachers and movements.⁹ TMA proponents have witnessed the profusion of NTMA (sometimes pejoratively called "Neo-Advaita") *satsangs* and teachers in the past twenty-five years with a growing concern that the forms Advaita spirituality is taking in Western cultures may no longer be providing spiritual seekers with an effective methodology to achieve *moksha*, the ultimate liberation from the ocean of human suffering and rebirth (*samsara*). This article takes no position on the efficacy issue but seeks to examine various dimensions of tension between these two factions that might shed light on the larger phenomenon of orthodoxy versus innovation in transnational spiritual movements.

My sources for this study include primary texts such as NTMA teachers' and TMA proponents' books, articles, Internet discussions, websites and email exchanges, as well as participant-observation at various Modern Advaitin *satsangs* and oral interviews with TMA proponents and participants in NTMA events. My work as a scholar of new religious movements equips me with a long-term perspective on new and minority religious currents in American history, as well as a sense of the challenges and opportunities that spiritual "entrepreneurs" encounter in contemporary North American culture. As a historian of religions, I also am familiar with the anxieties of various "orthodoxies" in Western religious settings when their sacred traditions are confronted with innovation, adaptation, accommodation and reconfiguration. I am not a partisan of either faction and can appreciate the sincere motivations, intentions and concerns of both parties.

FIVE THEMATIC TRAJECTORIES OF TMA CRITICISMS OF NTMA

TMA criticisms can be plotted along five main thematic trajectories. The first of these centers upon NTMA teachers' alleged disavowal of *sadhana*, or spiritual effort, in the process of self-realization. TMA proponents claim that a time-tested method of mental purification/preparation is essential in Advaita, is incremental, and requires disciplined effort over a sustained period of time.

The second theme follows from the first and entails the charge that some NTMA teachers ignore the necessity for moral development as a prerequisite for authentic spiritual realization. Critics assert that efficacious

sadhana includes fostering specific virtues and allege that many NTMA gurus make insufficient reference to these virtues in their teachings.

A third theme criticizes NTMA teachers for their lack of grounding in Advaita texts, languages and traditions. Critics see this grounding as essential for any teacher who is to serve as an effective agent of Advaita awakening. Related to this criticism is the charge that too many NTMA gurus begin teaching within a short time of their first awakening experiences and thus lack the necessary ripeness for authentic instruction of others. Traditionalist critics argue that Advaita gurus should have the necessary training and skills for effective teaching.

A fourth theme focuses on the teaching events (*satsangs*) of many NTMA gurus and the alleged shallowness of the seekers who attend these events. Critics see the *satsang* format as limited, ephemeral and ultimately of little value. They allege that NTMA students eschew ongoing assistance in the arduous task of ego transcendence in favor of seeking an “instant enlightenment” that bypasses essential steps in spiritual development. TMA proponents observe that *satsang* attendees might be more concerned with psychological empowerment, self-help and the experience of spiritual community than authentic Advaita liberation.

A fifth theme is the charge that NTMAs make no distinction between absolute and relative levels of awareness, thus tending to devalue a life of engaged spiritual practice and balanced development of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the self. Critics allege that NTMA teachers and students place all their emphasis on the most advanced state of spiritual realization and hence are prone to “pre-transcendence,” the deluded assumption of ultimate spiritual liberation and a resulting premature de-personalization and disengagement from ordinary life.¹⁰

One could argue that each of these themes resonates with the others and that all five could be reduced to one overarching criticism: NTMA gurus strip away essential aspects of the Advaita system, leaving a pseudo-spirituality that is ineffective for the arduous task of achieving *moksha*, ultimate spiritual liberation. Nevertheless, a sequential focus upon each of these sub-themes will help to better understand the depth and breadth of TMA criticisms of NTMA.

Theme One: Disavowal of *Sadhana*

The first criticism centers upon NTMA teachers’ alleged disavowal of *sadhana*, or sustained practice, in the achievement of spiritual liberation. According to their critics, NTMA teachers wrongly contend that Advaita’s essential teaching of non-dual truth has been buried under a layer of myths, practices and symbols, which are culturally bound and

dualistic in their mindset. These teachers, it is claimed, assert that realization of absolute non-dual awareness can be gained instantly through their version of *satsang*, an intimate but public discussion between students and their teacher. Because of this, students do not need to learn foreign terms, master abstruse texts, or engage in mental preparation in order to “get it.” In fact, all the elaborate methodology of traditional Advaita *sadhana* is seen as inimical to spiritual realization since it fosters the illusion that there is someone to get to some future state of enlightenment. Full enlightenment is here and now, if one simply realizes Advaita’s ultimate truth that *atman* (the spiritual self) is none other than *Brahman* (Absolute Reality).¹¹

German-born painter, musician and NTMA guru Karl Renz articulates this view in his answer to the question: “Is there any necessity of inner work or development?”

For being what you are no work or development is required. All concepts, of way, development and even cognition, appear with the first I-thought. This first idea creates time, space and thus the entire universe. And as long as this I-thought appears to be real . . . there appears the desire for unity and herewith the longing for a way out, for an end of suffering. . . . By being what you are, or better, as you are, absolute, prior to all and nothing, all concepts are destroyed.¹²

A younger NTMA teacher, British-born Unmani (né Liza Hyde), gives a similar explanation for why practice is ultimately unnecessary:

Practice is a way of avoiding feeling the reality of what is, which can often be uncomfortable. If I feel pain or anxiety, thought will try to do anything to fix it, change it, just “witness it” or practice anything which has the goal of making it go away. But seeing the futility of thought and that there is no one here who needs the experience to be any different, all that is left is the actual raw painful sensation. There is no escape from it as it is. . . . While you still feel to practice and work on yourself, there is the hope that things will improve in some way. This message is a message of no more hope. It is the end of the road, the end of the spiritual path. . . . If we drop the question of whether or not practice is necessary for a moment, to ask the more relevant question—who am I? [. . .] Who is here right now? If I believe that I am someone who owns my problems and my suffering and my mind, then I will believe that I need (or could) do something to make a change in my life. But seeing that in fact there is no one here living a life at all, then the question of whether or not practice is necessary, becomes irrelevant. I am not suggesting that you don’t practice if you feel it is necessary. In answer to the question of whether there is any point in practice, I would say that as long as you feel that it is necessary, then it is necessary. But if you are ready to lose all hope and see that there is no escape from reality, then stop and ask yourself who needs any practice?¹³

TMA proponents strongly disavow these claims and emphasize the necessity of lifelong, sustained *sadhana*. An essential aspect of this *sadhana* is mental preparation, which entails the development of habits of discrimination (discerning what is real from what is only appearance), detachment (releasing attachment to the world of forms), calmness of mind and a profound desire for liberation. Only once this preparation is well underway can the student's mind fruitfully engage with advanced Advaita teaching. As put by American TMA teacher/author James Swartz, a one-time student of Swami Chinmayananda:

[I]t requires a mature adult with a one-pointed desire to know the Self. The reason for this insistence [in traditional Advaita] is based on the fact that enlightenment takes place in the mind. Therefore the mind must be capable of grasping and retaining the knowledge, "I am limitless Awareness and not this body mind." The retention and assimilation of this knowledge will necessarily destroy one's tendencies (*vasanas*) to seek for happiness in the world.¹⁴

Swartz also claims that the removal of the *vasanas* can take many years, and thus progress is usually incremental, rather than sudden.

Author Dennis Waite, British-based creator of the respected website Advaita Vision, is accepted as a discerning spokesperson for the TMA faction. Waite has pointedly criticized popular NTMA teacher Tony Parsons, founder of The Open Secret publishing enterprise, for his claim that efforts, doctrines and progressive spiritual systems only serve to perpetuate the illusion of separate self-identity. For example, Parsons writes that TMA teachers are misguided in their belief that

in order to resolve the real and constant sense of separation and become enlightened, the individual should choose to follow a progressive spiritual path. This path involves practice, meditation, self-inquiry and the eradication of ego and ignorance through a clear understanding of the scriptures and the guidance of a teacher. The Open Secret recognizes that the above beliefs and recommendations are generated out of an assumed and inconstant sense of being a separate individual who needs to attain something called enlightenment. It is also recognized that an investment in the above recommendations can reinforce and maintain the assumed sense of being an individual who can resolve its sense of being separate. . . . The Open Secret recognizes that there is no such thing as enlightenment or liberation, or an individual that can become enlightened or liberated. . . . Traditional Advaita is a teaching of becoming, The Open Secret is not, but involves the dissolution of the myth of seeking.¹⁵

Waite argues that practice in its traditional Advaita sense is mental *preparation*, which dissolves the conditioned and inborn tendencies so that authentic self-knowledge can emerge naturally. "When the self-knowledge

occurs, there is no practice involved; its happening is inevitable.”¹⁶ He also quotes Ramana Maharshi, who observed, “Self-realization itself does not admit of progress, it is ever the same. The Self remains always in realization. The obstacles are thoughts. Progress is measured by the degree of removal of the obstacles to understanding that the Self is always realized.”¹⁷ Put another way, *sadhana* and progress, according to TMA teachers, pertain to the degree to which misunderstandings and false perceptions have been removed from the student’s mind, not to the Self as it is.

Another essential aspect of *sadhana*, according to Waite, is the careful elaboration of Advaita doctrine by an authentic guru who leads students step-by-step to a direct recognition of non-dual truth. In most cases, association with the guru takes place over an extended period of time, so that students’ wrong views and deep-seated ignorance can be patiently and thoroughly questioned and rooted out. If students are given the ultimate Advaita truth that “you are the One Non-Dual Self or Brahman” before their preexisting beliefs in a dual world of independent forms and selves have been systematically removed, the truth simply will “not take” at any deep level since it runs so counter to ingrained habits of (dualistic) perception and experience.¹⁸

In the view of TMA proponents, Advaita methods for self-realization have been verified through practice over many centuries, thus there is no need for these methods to change with changing trends and conditions.¹⁹ According to Swartz:

[T]he essence of Vedanta, the teachings that remove Self ignorance, do not change because they effectively do what they are intended to do. . . . So in this sense Vedanta, like the Sanskrit its mantras are formulated in, is a perfected body of knowledge. Nothing needs to be added to it, no timely modifications are necessary to help it adapt to recent times.²⁰

To be sure, criticisms of this kind have plagued North American versions of Advaita Vedanta since Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) spoke at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and delivered his subsequent lectures in the United States in 1893–95 and in 1900. Influenced by nineteenth-century neo-Hinduism, Vivekananda attempted to combine Advaita Vedanta’s teaching of non-dual reality with a more Western concern for progressive activism. In articulating Vedanta to American audiences Vivekananda downplayed mythological and polytheistic dimensions of Hinduism as well as the Tantric and Kali-worshipping practices of his guru, Ramakrishna (1836–1886). Vivekananda was roundly criticized, both in India and in the West, for this recasting of Vedanta for Western audiences.²¹ French Perennialist René Guénon (1886–1951), ever a defender of esoteric orthodoxies, wrote the most

scathing of these criticisms, observing trenchantly, “This so-called Vedanta . . . which pleased the West all the better the more completely it is distorted, has practically nothing left in common with the metaphysical doctrine the name of which it bears.”²²

TMA proponents of Advaita Vedanta often cite Ramana Maharshi’s teaching on *sadhana*. His method of self-inquiry (*atma vichara*) entailed an introversion of the mind grounded in the question, “Who am I?” By following this inquiry with single-pointed focus, the root of the I-thought would eventually be reached, and the conventional ego-self would be seen as a relative position within the cosmic awareness of Brahman. But before inquiry could be practiced fruitfully, indifference toward sense attraction and a continual realization of the transient nature of the body and its pleasures must be cultivated. The development of these attitudes, combined with devotional practices and service to others, purified the mind, preparing it for effective self-inquiry.²³

American TMA proponent Timothy Conway of Santa Barbara, California, a former Buddhist monk and current *satsang* teacher, alleges that NTMAs “call off the search” prematurely, eschewing practice and substituting cognitive knowledge for authentic realization of the self. As a consequence, they remain confused concerning the real nature of the self and deeply mired in karmic habits of attachment and aversion.

Just to merely have “the Understanding” that “only the Self is Real,” or that “Consciousness is all there is” and think that there is nothing more to spirituality than this conceptual understanding and a corresponding “blanked-out” zombification is simply not sufficient for authentic awakening. . . . One must be thoroughly liberated into/as this Truth on the affective and motivational-behavioral levels, i.e., fully established in real freedom from binding *samskaras/vasanas* [inherited tendencies from the karma of previous lives].²⁴

A final critic, South African founder of Spiritual Humanism Möller de la Rouvière, contends that students who hear from NTMA gurus that *nothing must be done* (since non-dual reality is already the case) become confused and disempowered because their present experience of themselves does not reflect this absolute state. The very practices (self-observation and self-inquiry) that would help them discover what fosters the illusion of separate existence are not allowed because they are alleged to be ego-enhancing. After all, any personal effort assumes the existence of a separate personal self who is making the effort. Such eschewal of practice develops in students the “false sense that they are already free and it is this very false sense of intellectual freedom that frustrates and obscures the natural process of inner unfolding.”²⁵

Theme Two: The Necessity for Moral Development

The second critical theme claims that NTMA teachers ignore moral development as a prerequisite for spiritual realization. TMA proponents claim that efficacious *sadhana* includes the cultivation of traditional Vedic virtues such as faith, devotion and perseverance, and allege that many NTMA gurus not only lack these virtues but also fail to emphasize their importance. Some critics articulate the development of virtues employing the traditional practice of *Vaidika Dharma*, rules of conduct that govern human behavior according to a system of duties to society, the gods and one's family. TMA proponents contend that when a person sacrifices personal desires to serve the Divine and others, *vasana*-production becomes non-binding and therefore no longer an impediment to realization of the self.²⁶

TMA proponent and *Mountain Path* editor Christopher Quilkey, for example, warns that the passive and fatalistic approach to existence recommended by NTMA teachers can lead to hedonism and self-indulgence, both of which are inimical to spiritual growth.²⁷ By taking Advaita out of context, unethical and immoral actions can be justified as predestined and part of the Self's grand plan. The purity of mind required for authentic self-realization requires sustained efforts at meditation, ethical action, and devotion. To counter NTMAs who reject devotional (*bhakti*) exercises such as *puja* (worship), *bhajans* (devotional songs) and circumambulation of shrines, as well as carrying out everyday service duties to family and society, TMAs point to the examples of sages such as Swami Vivekananda and Ramana Maharshi, who incorporated devotional practices and service duties into each day. The ideal, they maintain, is a balance between head and heart, knowledge, devotion and practical service.²⁸

In response to the NTMA contention that no action is necessary since the person and world are illusions, TMA proponents cite Vedanta's longstanding teaching concerning the qualifications for authentic self-inquiry, including *samadhisatkasampatti*, a set of six virtues that bring about mental purity and qualify the student to hear and understand Upanishadic truths. As articulated by traditional Advaita guru Swami Dayananda, they include contentment or self-composure (*sama*), self-discipline and sobriety (*dama*), detachment from the desire to possess material things (*uparama*), the capacity to bear small difficulties with patience (*titiksha*), faith in one's teacher and the words of Vedanta to deliver true knowledge (*shraddha*), and the power of inner concentration so that the mind can become self-absorbed (*samadhanam*).²⁹ Chinmaya Mission teacher Swami Viditatananda emphasizes the pressing need to foster a pure and orderly mind free of likes and dislikes, lust, anger and greed. These distractions cloud the mind, making it unreceptive to transcendent knowledge, and they perpetuate unrighteous and

unmeritorious patterns of action leading to a life out of harmony with cosmic order. He includes harming others, ingesting intoxicants, lying, cheating, and stealing as unrighteous actions.³⁰

TMA proponents contend that teaching on the development of these virtues and ethical living is sorely missing from NTMA *satsangs*, and this inattention bypasses an essential step in the process of self-realization.³¹ Development of these virtues traditionally has been seen as prerequisite to the maturity required to “hear” Advaita teaching. TMA proponents maintain that although teachings claiming there are no prerequisites for self-inquiry, that the practice can be undertaken by anyone regardless of lifestyle or qualifications, and that little change of personal behavior is necessary may appeal to the libertarian, egalitarian and democratic attitudes of Western spiritual seekers, they are self-defeating. TMA author Dr. David Frawley, founder of the American Institute for Vedic Studies, asserts that Advaita tradition is unbending with regard to practices of asceticism and moral purification, unappealing as these may sound to Western attendees of weekend enlightenment seminars.³²

NTMA teacher and author Suzanne Foxton succinctly articulates the NTMA attitude toward the development of virtues and morality:

There is no right or wrong. There is what is. Including many differing ideas about what is right and what is wrong. However, compassion often seems preferable; yet if every apparent individual were consistently compassionate without exception . . . gag, barf! How dull would THAT be? [. . .] We live in Utopia. We are Utopia. We are the perfect, dualistic playground with every possibility shining, weaving, tearing, growing, destroying, creating NOW.³³

It is worth noting that former NTMA teacher Andrew Cohen (b. 1955), a one-time student of Poonja, rejected his guru’s teaching concerning the irrelevance of progressive moral development. Cohen began questioning Poonja’s insistence that worldly behavior had nothing to do with self-realization and that it was impossible to completely transcend ego-based actions. Poonja had allegedly argued that these actions would not matter to the enlightened person, since the person no longer identified with such action and did not suffer karmic consequences. All ethical standards were founded in a dualistic paradigm that assumed the reality of an individual moral agent. Since this paradigm was an illusion, such ethical considerations were only a distraction from true self-inquiry. In rejecting this teaching, Cohen, who now teaches a system marketed as Evolutionary Enlightenment that claims inspiration from teachers who spoke of evolution such as Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) and Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), came to emphasize the need for ethical behavior as a touchstone for authentic enlightenment. He demanded flawless behavior from his students and imposed compulsory ascetic practices, public humiliation and outright expulsion from

Swami Brahmananda	H.W.L. Poonja	Chinmayananda
Swami Swarupanand	Andrew Cohen	Dayananda
Maharishi Mahesh Yogi	David Godman	James Swartz
	Gangaji	Swami Vidadatmananda
	Mooji	Swami Tejomayananda
	Neelam	Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya
	Nirmala	
Siddharameshvar Maharaj/Nisargadatta Maharaj	Osho	Arunachala Ramana
Ramesh Balsekar	Tony Parsons	Nick Gancitano
Sailor Bob Adamson		
Wayne Liquorman		
Timothy Conway		
John Wheeler		
John Greven		
Dolano (German Zen Teacher)	Independents	U.G. Krishnamurti
Unmani	Suzanne Foxton	Karl Renz
	Möller de la Rouvière	
	I. M. Nome	
Shastriji Maharaj	Linked with Sri Ramanasramam and/or Ramana Maharshi Foundation, U. K.	Sri Ramakrishna
Yogiji Maharaj	Christopher Quilkey	Swami Vivekananda
Pramukh Swami Maharaj	Alan Jacobs	
David Frawley	John Grimes	
	Dennis Waite	

Figure 1. *Teaching Linkages (not necessarily guru lineages). Each separate column is to be read vertically, showing the linkages.*

his community for those who came up short. Cohen began to speak of his former guru as immoral and power-hungry, and called attention to the moral lapses of other prominent gurus such as Osho, Adi Da (1939–2008) and Swami Muktananda (1908–1982). In spirit at least, it appears that Cohen has come around to the basic teachings of traditional Advaita (and other traditional spiritual systems) concerning ethical behavior and the cultivation of virtue as integral to authentic spiritual life. He also appears to have accepted the Advaita doctrine that at the *relative* level of awareness/reality, moral action is necessary and efficacious for spiritual growth.³⁴

Dennis Waite roots this TMA teaching on ethical conduct in the traditional guru lineage system, or *sampradaya*, in which the teacher's guru is held in great reverence and the virtue of humility is fostered in this reverence. In India, belonging to a *sampradaya* constitutes a kind of

prima facie evidence for a guru's moral probity. Waite maintains that NTMA teachers who lack grounding in an authentic *sampradaya* will always face questions concerning their behavior. He also observes that newly "enlightened" teachers who have not undergone the rigorous moral training of traditional Advaitins may more easily succumb to the many temptations that beset roving gurus who are admired by young and attractive seekers.³⁵

Theme Three: Insufficient Grounding in Vedanta Traditions

A third theme criticizes NTMA teachers for their lack of grounding in the Sanskrit language and Advaita scriptures, and their concomitantly premature assumption of the guru role. TMA proponents see this grounding as essential for any teacher who is to be an effective agent of Advaita awakening. Without it, the Advaita system of self-realization gets watered down, key Sanskrit terms are misinterpreted, and NTMA teaching becomes little more than a psychological massage for stressed-out Westerners. Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, a frequent TMA commentator on various Advaita-oriented discussion forums, bluntly summarizes the TMA position: "In 'Advaita' you get enlightenment *only* through study of Upanishads and other Vedic scriptures. All other religious practices including meditations, etc. are considered at best a preparation of mind to understand the message of Upanishads and at worst superfluous."³⁶

In the view of TMA critics, NTMA teachers consider the rich methodology offered by traditional Advaita—including the study of Sanskrit, systematic understanding of the Upanishads, and careful study with a guru—as impractical "baggage" from an earlier era that is no longer necessary for enlightenment. The alleged NTMA disregard for traditional Advaita studies is well summed up by Sedona-based NTMA author John Greven:

Traditional Advaita—a kind of path using knowledge, reason, logic, investigation to dispel the clouds of false ideas so that the sun (Self) is realized. Neo-Advaita—a kind of path that pretends to ignore the clouds of false ideas and encourages seeing Oneness directly. . . . Neo, it seems, offers the opportunity of removing some traditional Advaita baggage that was born in a different era and culture. Ultimately, it is the One—not the temporal teaching or teacher—that removes the veil.³⁷

Sociologist Rodney Stark would agree that it is implausible to expect contemporary Western seekers to have the time, aptitude or inclination to follow traditional Advaita methodology fully. In his theory of how new religious movements succeed, a key factor is the need to establish cultural continuity with potential adherents. The study of an ancient sacred language, the systematic consideration of a large body of scripture written in

that language, and the multi-year apprenticeship to a qualified teacher for the purpose of mastering these scriptures are simply not culturally congruent for the vast majority of Western seekers. If Stark is correct, the putative success (at least in terms of adherents and book sales) of NTMA gurus stems directly from their willingness to make concessions to Western cultural norms and to tone down traditional requirements of Advaita study.³⁸

Waite disputes the NTMA argument in strong terms, insisting that Advaita teachers from a legitimate *sampradaya*

are qualified to pass on the teaching of that *sampradaya*. And the key point about such teaching is that it has been proven time and again to work. Thus, in order genuinely to “belong” to a *sampradaya*, one has to have studied with a teacher of that *sampradaya* for however long it takes fully to understand all of the aspects (i.e. many years). (In the past, this would have meant learning scriptures by heart, in the original Sanskrit, and knowing how to explain their meaning to a seeker.)³⁹

In Waite’s view, Sanskrit training also is highly desirable since there often are no suitable words in other languages to translate Sanskrit terms. Even when a relatively accurate word can be found, it likely will not carry the subtle nuances of the Sanskrit term. The use of an ordinary modern word also makes it less likely that the concept referred to will be examined thoroughly.⁴⁰

Swartz asserts that, because they were insufficiently grounded in the Advaita scriptural tradition, students of Poonja experienced moments of awakening and then quickly returned to North America to teach enlightenment to others. As a result, they were ill-prepared to maintain their state of awakening when their old patterns of dualistic thought returned in full force.⁴¹ According to Swartz, traditional Advaita emphasizes practices of sacrifice (*yagna*), which he understands as the need to sacrifice one’s ingrained ego desires and obsessions. Since this long, painstaking process was never enjoined on Poonja’s students, when they returned to the West they turned to the development of therapies aligned with Western transpersonal psychology to help clear up their students’ ego-related problems. Swartz argues that this work distorts authentic Advaita by applying its metaphysical concepts to the ego’s dysfunctional patterns, reversing traditional Advaita *sadhana*, which assumes a mature, healthy ego. It is only from this foundation that Advaita then attempts to reveal the true nature of the universal self. This occurs not by attempting to destroy the ego (as NTMAs often maintain), but by embracing a greater, impersonal self that allows the ego to function in its proper place.⁴²

Swartz maintains that Advaita scriptures are carefully designed to remove ignorance and guide self-inquiry. He cites Ramana Maharshi as an example of an enlightened sage who read, interpreted and translated Advaita scriptures into various languages for the guidance and

support of those who came to him. Swartz also discusses his own training under Swami Chinmayananda, including “three Vedanta classes a day, every day for two years.” During these classes, his teacher explicated the major Vedanta scriptures verse by verse. The swami would remain focused on a text until each student clearly understood it. Not surprisingly, Swartz finds NTMA teachers wanting, because they provide no systematic exposition of foundational Advaita texts and lack the required training in Sanskrit to qualify for such teaching.⁴³

Swartz also questions NTMA teachers who stand outside the ancient teaching tradition of Advaita. He maintains that a proper understanding of this tradition and how to communicate it in changing contexts has survived in the *sampradayas* of India; moreover, these traditional guru lineages have protected the teachings from innovators who believe it is necessary “to make them palatable for modern audiences or hide them for want of qualified aspirants.”⁴⁴ For Swartz, the genius of the Vedanta tradition is that it reaches humanity “where it lives, in the dream of duality, and provides an effective roadmap and method.”⁴⁵

Waite emphasizes the necessity of having a qualified guide who can carefully relate the scriptural tradition of Advaita to students, discuss their questions and clarify their understanding. A guide schooled in Advaita scriptures can provide students with a solid foundation for their private meditations on the tradition’s teachings. Just as it is not possible to see your own face without using a mirror, it is impossible to see the self without the mirror of scriptures and a qualified teacher to interpret them correctly. The qualified teacher can monitor the student’s ongoing progress, resolve misunderstandings, enable the assimilation of difficult teachings and help the student avoid straying from the path.⁴⁶

Waite is highly critical of NTMAs who essentially “wing it” at their teaching events and who provide no systematic explication of core Advaita scriptures and commentaries.

Neither *satsang* nor Neo-Advaitin teachers will usually refer to scriptures in any form or at any time. . . . It must be admitted and acknowledged that a skilled teacher, who is able to use the scriptures as a *pramana* (valid means for acquiring knowledge), is what is needed. . . . The scriptures are claimed to have no value by Neo-Advaitin [NTMA] teachers. The Neo-Advaitin argument is that: since there is no one to become enlightened and the Self is already free, it follows that the scriptures cannot serve any useful function. Such teachers have probably not read them and will certainly not have understood them.⁴⁷

Tony Parsons articulates the NTMA counterargument on this matter quite clearly:

Traditional Advaita appears to make proper use of logic, reason, belief, and experience, rational explanation, truth, and traditional wisdom, all

directed towards helping the seeker along the path to their enlightenment. The Open Secret's apparent communication is illogical, unreasonable, unbelievable, paradoxical, non-prescriptive, non-spiritual and uncompromising. There is no agenda or intention to help or change the individual. Its resonance is shared energetically, not through the exchange of ideas. It is prior to all teachings and yet eternally new.⁴⁸

Waite counters that Advaita tradition, although holding a high degree of reverence for its scriptural corpus, does not regard the scriptures as a perfect articulation of absolute truth that cannot be questioned or clarified. Rather, they are a "reliable source of self-knowledge in which one can trust until such time as the truth is realized for oneself, at which time they are discarded along with the ignorance they helped to dispel."⁴⁹ Rational questioning and clarification of scriptural teachings under the guidance of a qualified guru, in other words, is seen as a valid means for removing students' ignorance. In this way, Waite observes, Advaita teaching avoids making an idol of scripture, recognizing both its utility in the dispelling of illusion and its ultimate limitations.⁵⁰ In the TMA proponents' view, NTMA teachers' lack of respect for Advaita scriptures deprives them of a reliable guide to self-awakening for their students and a safeguard against their own self-deception and distortion of Advaita truths.⁵¹

Waite also draws attention to Shankara's admonition to seek the blessing of an enlightened one, but not if this person is unskilled in teaching methods passed down through an authentic Advaita guru lineage in which disciples lived with the teacher for a period of time and had the scriptures explained to them carefully, logically and thoroughly. A competent teacher is "one who was a competent disciple."⁵² Against NTMAs who claim that their teaching role "simply arose" and that their answers to student questions spontaneously come to them, Waite maintains that the "Self" does not authorize someone to become a teacher or give them the correct answers to student questions on the spot. Without proper training in Advaita method, the enlightened person may be a "mystic" but is not a "teacher" or guru. Simple knowledge of truth does not give the methodology and skill to communicate it effectively.⁵³ This TMA insistence upon scripture and its interpretation by qualified guides is, of course, a common traditionalist theme in battles within other religious communities between orthodox and non-traditional factions.

Another source of skepticism among TMA proponents concerning the "ripeness" of NTMA gurus is these teachers' claim to be in the lineage of Ramana Maharshi through their association with Poonja. Swartz, for example, observes that some of Poonja's students (who later became teachers) were ex-followers of Osho, a popular guru for Westerners during the 1970s and 1980s. After Osho died, many of his

followers moved to Lucknow, India, and gathered around Poonja, who was relatively unknown outside a small coterie of Indian students. In Swartz's view, these students "had virtually no knowledge of Vedic culture" and, in spite of their self-designation as *sannyasins* (renunciates), were not really known for renouncing anything during their time with Osho.⁵⁴ Although he acknowledges that Ramana Maharshi was indeed Poonja's guru, Swartz maintains that Poonja's version of self-inquiry involved much less persistence and moment-by-moment effort than that of Ramana. More problematic for Swartz is Poonja's admission that he did not give his students his final teachings because the students were "arrogant and egotistic," and basically unworthy, unqualified and unprepared to receive them.⁵⁵ In an interview with David Godman, Poonja admitted that he gave these jejune students "lollipops," bursts of *shaktipat* (spiritual energy), as a means of ridding himself of the "leeches," as he referred to his Western followers. Those who experienced these ecstatic states then interpreted Poonja's casual advice to go and hold spiritual discussions ("tea sessions") with their friends in the West as a kind of commission from their guru to become gurus in their own right.⁵⁶

Added to these putatively documented admissions is the well-established fact that Ramana Maharshi never trained his disciples to be teachers, never authorized anyone to teach in his lineage, and showed no interest in initiating students in the Advaita tradition. Swartz concludes that the claim of some NTMA teachers to be in Ramana Maharshi's lineage is no more than a clever invention designed to confer undeserved status and gravitas on immature teachers needing validation.⁵⁷ This questioning of teaching credentials—whether claims of "apostolic succession" in various Christian sects, guru lineages in yoga traditions, or authentic lines of dharma transmission in Buddhist sects—is another common point of contestation between traditionalist and non-traditionalist factions in religious communities worldwide.

The main difficulty with the TMA line of argument on this issue is that neither Ramana Maharshi nor Poonja (often cited by TMA and NTMA gurus as their inspiration and teachers) belonged to any recognized *sampradaya*. For this reason, NTMA teachers sometimes cite these respected gurus as proof that rigorous scriptural studies with a qualified Advaita teacher are unnecessary. Even Waite, respected by many in the Modern Advaita world for his adherence to Advaita traditions, concedes:

Not formally belonging to a *sampradaya* does not mean that a teacher is ipso facto not worthy of reading/listening to. What it means is that they are much less likely to have a complete grasp of all of the teaching methods and aides, stories, metaphors and so on that would automatically be handed down, learned and totally understood within a *sampradaya*. But they may still be a good teacher by virtue of their own

reading, understanding, etc. and because whoever taught them had a good grasp. The point is that the probabilities are imponderable outside of the *sampradaya*. It is unfortunately the case that there are many self-claimed [NTMA] teachers who are simply in the business of making money (a *sampradaya* teacher would never ask for money) and who are neither good teachers nor enlightened.⁵⁸

Despite this recognition that few Modern Advaita teachers have a legitimate *sampradaya* lineage, TMA proponents insist that scriptural training with a qualified Advaita teacher ensures that the full methodology of Advaita tradition will be competently and thoroughly communicated to students.

Theme Four: Shortcomings of the Satsang Format

A fourth theme of the TMA criticisms focuses on the shortcomings of the *satsang* format itself. The usual format of the NTMA *satsang* begins with a period of quiet reflection followed by mantra invocations/chanting and questions and answers from attendees. Some participants approach the raised platform where the teacher is seated and enter into an intimate dialogue with the teacher. As Frisk observes in her study of the Satsang Network, there is sometimes an element of entertainment and laughter in these events, often focused on questioners and their interactions with the teacher.⁵⁹ Music and dance also can be part of the program, although this was rare in my fieldwork experiences. The *satsang* format is well suited to North American seekers, who have been conditioned to the public confessional approach found on daytime talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Dr. Phil* and who may expect personal attention or “therapy” along with spiritual instruction from their teachers. TMA proponents question the core motivations of attendees and allege that many of them are simply seeking self-empowerment, “self-help,” and an ephemeral experience of spiritual community rather than serious engagement in the arduous task of ego transcendence. This judgment aligns with Frisk: “The postmodern self no longer seeks sacredness and freedom from sin, but rather an experience of excitement, closeness, and fantasy. This could well describe the Satsang network. Satsang is both entertainment and emotional closeness.”⁶⁰

TMA author and teacher Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya sees the *satsang* format as doomed to failure because it bypasses the necessary preparatory stage of purifying the mind. The “self-appointed saviors” of NTMA, in his view, claim that they can transmit their realization to attendees in their *satsangs* but in truth are only communicating intellectual insights that do nothing to burn out the ego’s identification with the body and its desires. Chaitanya warns his readers that the “parodies of ‘modern’ Advaita” rest on a fallacious logic that countenances a life of self-indulgence. *Satsang*

events never mention the words devotion, surrender, renunciation, and perseverance. They speak of “understanding” but never “self-realization,” in which false identification with the body form is completely eradicated. In the end, he argues, attendees return to their habitual lives of sensory pleasures and egocentric striving secure in the knowledge that they have “gotten it.”⁶¹

Timothy Conway echoes Chaitanya’s observations and asserts that NTMA teachers such as I. M. Nome created large organizations before they were “fully ripe” and that many fell into an abusive pattern of one-upping, “power-grabbing” behavior at their *satsang* events. He criticizes the charging of program fees and alleges that mastering the *satsang* discourse requires little more than ease in social settings, some knowledge of Advaita truth and learning how to employ certain dialectical questioning maneuvers.⁶² He and other critics allege that the disavowal of *sadhana* by even the few NTMAs who are able to “abide as the Self” during *satsang* events has made it difficult for them to remain in that state once the *satsang* is over. This can lead to very “un-self-realized” behavior once they have left the platform.⁶³

Dhanya, a TMA essayist and contributor to Dennis Waite’s Advaita Vision website, sums up the general TMA view of *satsang* attendees.⁶⁴ In her experience, many of the seekers were unclear about what to expect from the *satsangs* and were interested mostly in finding new friends, a sense of spiritual community, and a few moments of epiphany. Attendees engaged in a pattern of jumping from one NTMA teacher to another, comparing notes with other attendees concerning what they had experienced at each of the *satsangs*, and attempting to place all the teachings and experiences into some coherent framework of spiritual understanding. Dhanya questions whether attendees are receiving anything of lasting value, given that the common pattern of responses from NTMA gurus is off-the-cuff and idiosyncratic. She complains that no overview is given of basic Advaita principles and methods, and books and tapes published by these teachers do not help since usually they are simply transcripts/recordings of *satsang* events.⁶⁵

The vision of *satsang* by NTMA teachers themselves appears to conform to the TMA proponents’ charge that these events are primarily about an experience of “awareness” in the presence of the teacher and group rather than a systematic communication of traditional Advaita philosophy and methods. A representative example is Nirmala, a Sedona-based NTMA teacher (and student of Polish-born NTMA teacher and Poonja-student Neelam):

What is the most important part of *satsang* or any spiritual gathering? Contrary to what you might expect, the most important thing in *satsang* is not the spiritual teacher sitting at the front of the room. A true spiritual teacher is an invaluable blessing, but the teacher is not the most important

element. Similarly, the spiritual teachings being shared in are a great gift. But the words being spoken and the wisdom being shared are not the most important thing. And while the word *satsang* implies a gathering or community of like-minded souls, this community or *sangha* may be a tremendous support in someone's spiritual journey, but it is still not the most important thing.

The most important thing in *satsang* is you. Not the usual egoic sense of yourself, but the mysterious awakesness that is reading these words. . . . Any opportunity to gather in *satsang* is a tremendous blessing, whether it is a room full of people or a one-to-one conversation with a spiritual mentor or friend. There is a cumulative aggregation of this mysterious awareness. Whenever two or more are gathered, that can make the Presence and awakesness of consciousness into a palpable thing. . . . Awareness is the heart of *satsang*, and that is who you are.⁶⁶

Unlike many critics, Alan Jacobs, former chair of the Ramana Maharshi Foundation in England, believes that NTMA *satsangs* can at least serve to *introduce* attendees to Advaita teaching. *Satsang* attendance, flawed as it may be, does “undermine the ‘phantom ego’ intellectually at least.” At best, a partial surrender of the ego can be achieved, but without the full devotional component that leads to “total surrender when the mental occlusion is absorbed in the Heart.” Jacobs observes that many *satsang* attendees, after a period of chasing the latest hot NTMA teacher, do begin to earnestly inquire into the authentic Advaita tradition. He predicts that the NTMA movement will continue as a “valid, if imperfect stepping stone” that draws seekers into the net of deeper Advaita awakening.⁶⁷

It is clear that the adaptation of the traditional *satsang* format into Western cultural contexts inevitably must deal with the valorization of the individual self and its interests, which lies at the heart of the Western conception of the self. The promise of instant enlightenment for all at these events—so reminiscent of Christian evangelical aspirations to salvation for all who are born again—combined with special attention to the self and its problems may be necessary inducements for NTMA teachers to offer if they are to succeed in attracting attendees.⁶⁸ What occurs to that self and its identifications after repeated exposure to Advaita teachings at these events is not entirely clear, but the *satsang* format's continuing popularity suggests it is successfully addressing the self-perceived needs of a significant population of Western seekers.

Theme Five: Pre-transcendence, Depersonalization and Level Confusion

A fifth and final theme of the critics is that NTMAs make no allowance for the Advaita distinction between absolute and relative levels of

awareness. As a result, these teachers allegedly tend to devalue a life of engaged spiritual practice and the balanced development of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the self. By placing all their emphasis on the most advanced state of spiritual realization, NTMA teachers and students are seen as being prone to “pre-transcendence,” a premature assumption of ultimate spiritual liberation that leads to de-personalization and disengagement from ordinary life. California-based NTMA teacher John Wheeler articulates this radically depersonalized position:

The real clarity comes from seeing the absence of the person. It is the person that gums up the works and creates all the problems and supposed solutions. Just keep coming back to the fundamentals. Your nature is luminous, ever-present, radiant, perfect, being-awareness. This is fully realized and complete right now. . . . With the emphasis off of the mind and the [personal] conceptual story, you will be much more present, because there is no filter. There is no person with all of its preferences and partialities trying to negotiate every experience. But who is the one who is going to try to be wholehearted and fully involved? It would only be the separate person who would try to make an attempt to become something, even wholehearted and fully involved. Awareness, the light of life that you are, is always wholehearted and fully involved, because it is the factor that informs and supports all experience. There is no need to try to become something, even some more present and engaged person. This will subtly emphasize the sense of separateness, under the guise of trying to become something.⁶⁹

According to critics such as respected Advaita scholar John Grimes, the NTMA position ignores Advaita teaching by recognizing only *absolute* reality and dealing insufficiently with *apparent*, day-to-day reality. Therefore, NTMA teachers deny that there is a seeker, seeking, and something to be sought. But from the standpoint of the seeker, critics like Waite maintain, the apparent reality is real enough, just as the dream is real enough for the dreamer. Thus there is identification with the body-mind form, the search for enlightenment, and a very convincing objective world for most seekers. Pretending this is not the case does not help those whose moment-by-moment experience is deeply conditioned by this identification.⁷⁰

In traditional Advaita, the phenomenal world of objects and forms has a relative reality. It is neither real (in an ultimate sense) nor unreal. In the eyes of their TMA critics, NTMA teachers make a mistake when they deny the existence of this phenomenal level, insisting that only absolute reality exists. TMA proponents maintain that the strong delusion of relative existence (sometimes termed *maya*) requires strenuous effort to eradicate, and Advaita provides unarguable logic and various subtle methods designed to reduce the hold of the limited ego self. In

Waite's view, by prematurely forcing an unprepared mind to accept the absolute truth—for example by asserting that in reality there is no seeker, no doer, and no path, “this is it!”—students are left in a state of cognitive dissonance: they accept that the ego and the world of forms are illusions and that only Brahman is real, but the conviction persists that they are body-mind organisms existing as separate, discrete selves. It is of little use to deny the existence of a reality in which most people are trapped, asserting that it is a result of ignorance. Far better, Waite maintains, is to provide the means, methods and practices to dispel that ignorance through knowledge, as happens in traditional Advaita. Otherwise seekers are left in the position of the beginning math student who insists upon learning quantum mechanics before mastering elementary arithmetic.⁷¹

Timothy Conway believes that NTMA's misunderstanding of Advaita's relative and absolute levels leads to inadequate efforts to overcome the *vasanas* and continued rebirth and suffering at the relative level of empirical experience. Moreover, the compulsion to focus solely on the absolute level of reality neglects “the multiple worlds and beings emanated by the God-Self for the sake of Divine *lila* or relationship-play.” A resulting tendency to devalue human relationships can lead to a state of depersonalization, “a syndrome marked by a strong, pathological dissociation and detachment, apathy, and loss of empathy. Basic humaneness, warmth, and tender loving care vanish in a preference for a cool, robotic demeanor.” This state of pre-transcendence, Conway asserts, dishonors the significance of the Divine's expression as unique and beautiful human persons.⁷²

Conway also argues that NTMA's denial of the relative level of ordinary experience can lead to indifference toward what he terms “engaged spirituality,” the addressing of economic, environmental, gender, racial and political injustice in the world. Because in the Absolute level of reality such injustices are merely *maya* (illusion) or *samsara*, NTMAs can come to view political action in the world as absurd and not worth the trouble. For Conway, authentic spirituality requires detachment from the world and at the same time a paradoxically compassionate engagement with the relative world of sentient beings caught in webs of suffering. He cites the example of Ramana Maharshi, who carefully read the newspapers each day and listened to radio broadcasts out of a genuine interest in the welfare of human persons, society and the animal realm.⁷³

An even greater danger, in Conway's view, is that NTMAs may rationalize their own harmful behavior as “God's Will” or a *maya*-like dream. Conway cites Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta as two sages who taught that those who realize the Self must remain clear of desires and harmful behavior that are karmically binding. In response to NTMA Tony Parson's statement, “Once awakening happens it is seen that there

is no such thing as right or wrong,” Conway cites the admonitions of Shankara, Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta that, at the level of relative reality, disciples must be able to distinguish between right and wrong actions and their karmic consequences. In the end, responsible Advaita teachers instruct their students on the relative level concerning ethical behavior and the laws of karma and rebirth.⁷⁴

This last critical theme arguably has the most tenuous connection to traditional Advaita. The use of terms and concepts such as “pre-transcendence,” “depersonalization,” “engaged spirituality,” and the valorization of social justice issues in TMA critiques owes more to contemporary Western transpersonal psychological, progressive political, and engaged Buddhist discourses than to the Advaita teachings of the Upanishads and Shankara. Although Advaita teachings do discuss *karma yoga*, the fulfillment of dharmic duties, ethical living and a life of service in various ways, the understanding of these dimensions does not clearly relate to contemporary Western notions of psychological health and engagement with social justice causes. This is one example of TMA criticism where the Western cultural frame has already translated traditional Advaita teaching into modes of intelligibility accessible to contemporary Western concerns and agendas.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the remainder of this article, I analyze and interpret the criticisms of NTMA teachers and teachings using theoretical frames drawn from the sociology of religions, history of North American religions, and ongoing scholarly conversations concerning adaptations and distortions that occur when Hindu traditions move from their homeland to the cultural matrices of North America.

On one level, the spread of Modern Advaita (both NTMA and TMA) gurus and organizations is simply a manifestation of the entrepreneurial spirit that long has characterized the North American religious landscape. In a sense these teachers are engaged in niche franchising of the Modern Advaita message. This is the case because most teachers active in North American Modern Advaita circles today spent time as disciples of one or another guru from either the TMA or NTMA orbits. Typically a guru either commissions disciples to go and teach, or students have a falling out with the guru and begin their own unique *satsang* enterprises. Examples of these trajectories include Oregon-based NTMA guru Gangaji and Jamaican-born, England-based NTMA teacher Mooji, both one-time students of Poonja; John Wheeler, a student of NTMA teacher “Sailor Bob” Adamson; Wayne Liquorman, a student of Nisargadatta-disciple Ramesh Balsekar (1917–2009); and Nick Gancitano, a one-time student of NTMA guru Arunachala Ramana (1929–2010). Because there

are no established hierarchies (along the lines of the *sampradayas* or guru lineages of India) or “quality-control” mechanisms in place, persons claiming to be enlightened can put out their shingles and commence *satsang* events anywhere in the worldwide Modern Advaita network. From the perspective of this economic model of religion, TMA proponents’ attempts to delegitimize their rivals are part of an ongoing proprietary battle to maintain market dominance for their own teaching enterprises. Following the logic of this model, we can expect continued criticisms of NTMA from TMA writers and teachers, and spirited defenses from NTMA gurus themselves. After all, every Modern Advaita teacher represents “competition” for every other teacher’s message/product.⁷⁵

The tension between TMA and NTMA teachers, as argued in the introduction, repeats a well-attested historical phenomenon wherein new versions of an older tradition cause consternation and criticism from the upholders of orthodoxy. In many such cases, the most virulent criticisms come from those who see their religions as systems of interlocking and mutually reinforcing doctrines, rituals, ethical codes, scriptures, and spiritual methods. Selective choosing of these elements for either rejection or special focus is seen as a dangerous weakening and debasement of the entire religious system and an unwarranted attack on time-tested methods of salvation and awakening. Whatever the actual merits of the criticisms described in this article, they clearly constitute at the very least a *predictable defense* of a spiritual tradition believed to have proven methods for awakening and built-in safeguards against abuse of authority and self-deception. What these criticisms fail to address, however, is how to continue this tradition in transnational cultural settings that bear little resemblance to the distinctive historical and cultural matrix that is India. How realistic, for example, is it to expect that Westerners will become apprentices of trained teachers from a traditional *sampradaya* and master the scriptural corpus of Advaita Vedanta with its highly technical study of Sanskrit?

An interesting and relevant example of this tension between innovation and tradition is the Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Early in his life, the future Maharishi became a disciple of Swami Brahmananda (1870–1953), the Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math. This *math* (monastic organization) was one of four created by the great Advaita teacher Shankara in the eighth century and thus had impeccable credentials as an upholder of the orthodox Advaita tradition. Maharishi left Jyotir Math after the death of Brahmananda and eventually came to the West. As he built up the TM organization, he continued to associate himself with the Shankaracharya lineage. One way he did this was by directing TM instructors to perform a worship ceremony honoring the Shankaracharya tradition (and Brahmananda) before initiating new students. In spite of this open acknowledgment of

his legitimate spiritual lineage, Maharishi was roundly criticized by Brahmananda's successor, Swarupanand, for his departures from the Shankaracharya tradition. In particular, Swarupanand took issue with Maharishi's teaching mission since he was not a Brahmin and by tradition should not have been engaged in spiritual instruction and initiation. Swarupanand also criticized Maharishi for teaching Westerners who were not fit for advanced spiritual practice and for mixing worldly aims with the striving for ultimate liberation (such as charging money for spiritual instruction). Finally, Swarupanand strongly condemned the TM meditation technique, claiming it did not foster the mental control necessary for authentic spiritual realization.⁷⁶

One cannot help but hear echoes of TMA criticisms of NTMA gurus in Swarupanand's traditionalist condemnation of Maharishi; but, it also could be argued that Maharishi was engaged in an experimental yet necessary process of translating Advaita Vedanta teaching into Western modes of thought and convention. Whether he succeeded is an open question, but the point is that some form of translation/accommodation becomes the complex challenge for any spiritual tradition as it moves out from its home culture. This process becomes even more complex in the current era of transnationalism and globalism, since the home culture (in this case modern India) is itself in a process of rapid change as citizens migrate to the West in large numbers and then return to their homeland influenced by Western cultural ideas and practices.

Scholars of Hindu traditions in South Asia and the West also have advanced perspectives that are helpful for assessing NTMA and its TMA critics. Reid Locklin and Julia Lauwers, in their study of the TMA-oriented Chinmaya Mission, document the mission's use of Shankara's "conquest of the quarters" (*dig-vijaya*, or missionization of India) narrative to rationalize and promote Advaita Vedanta as a global movement. They observe that similar efforts at global diffusion of Hinduism across national boundaries have aroused two distinct and opposing responses from within India itself. On one side is the India-centered "geo-piety" of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and other forms of religious nationalism. Opposite is the more expansive and accommodationist Hindu universalism, associated with Swami Vivekananda and other twentieth-century Advaita Vedantins, which deemphasizes caste, culture and national identity. In Locklin and Lauwers' view, these two tendencies—one using Vedic tradition to promote more geocentric, exclusive, local and national identity formation, and another that attempts to universalize Vedanta as a contribution to global culture and development—have been harmonized by the Chinmaya Mission, whose founder Swami Chinmayananda sought to revive and defend traditional Advaita *for Indians* and to promote a universal Advaita message for all humanity. The former was accomplished by contextualizing his Advaita teaching in the local and particular

religious cultures of historical India. The latter was accomplished by presenting Advaita philosophy in the “universalist, objective language of natural science, meditative technique, and spiritual therapy,” which effectively translated ancient Upanishadic traditions into a contemporary Western idiom.⁷⁷

It might be argued that TMA opposition to NTMA has come about largely because, in their translation of Advaita spiritual insights into modes of expression and conceptualization accessible to contemporary Western seekers, NTMAs have neglected to retain the local rooting in the religious cultures of historical India that Swami Chinmayananda putatively accomplished. TMA criticisms—that NTMA erases the need for traditional *sadhana*, ignores development of personal virtues, neglects proper training of teachers (including study of Sanskrit and Advaita scriptures), distorts traditional *satsang*, and suffers from confusion about levels of spiritual reality—all resonate with this larger translation issue. It may be unrealistic, however, to expect North American and European teachers who have not experienced the cultural conditioning and education of their Advaitin counterparts in India to be sufficiently rooted in Indian spiritual traditions/methods. Moreover, to transmit Advaita spirituality successfully to North Americans, there almost certainly must be some degree of adaptation to Western cultural norms and conditioning. Since Chinmaya Missions primarily serve *Indian emigrant communities* around the world, they do not face the same translation imperative. Given all this, perhaps the relevant issue for both factions is how many elements of the Advaita system can be jettisoned before its efficacy as a means to spiritual liberation is unduly compromised. Perhaps this is the real underlying negotiation currently underway between NTMAs and their TMA opponents.

South Asian scholars Chad Bauman and Jennifer Saunders have noticed several trends in North American Hindu communities that also are relevant to this discussion. The first trend includes a tendency toward *ecumenization* that entails the use of English and Sanskrit rather than regional Indian languages in ritual settings; the blending of deities, scriptures, rituals, and ethnicities in temples in ways that would not be found in India; a representation of Hinduism as tolerant and peace-loving; emphasis on the *trimurti* (trinity) of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; and a focus on the health and environmental benefits of Hindu rituals. A second trend is the increased importance of temple attendance for North American Hindus, a phenomenon that may have to do with the temple’s crucial role as a preserver of cultural identity and communal solidarity for Hindu emigrants in North America. A third trend is the accommodation of Hindu ritual cycles to North American norms, including the celebration of life-cycle rituals (*samskaras*) on weekends and the paring down of these rites to the four or five deemed most significant. What all these trends tell us is that Hinduism (in all its diverse

manifestations) undergoes constant change, both in India and North America, and that adaptation, accommodation and reconfiguration are natural processes for religious traditions that expand beyond their indigenous cultural matrices. In the end, the significant questions for Advaita proponents in the West may be how much accommodation is prudent, how rapidly reconfiguration should take place, and what adaptations are necessary for the spiritual tradition to not only survive but thrive in new cultural settings.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

Given the pluralistic religious context of North America, it is certainly not without precedent to see a tendency toward sectarian divisions and fragmentation within new religious movements, as well as the “franchising” of popular spiritual methods and practices by energetic entrepreneurs. Without any legal or organizational tools to enforce conformity within Modern Advaita movements in North America, there is little TMA partisans can do other than articulate criticisms in public communications media—blogs, chat rooms, websites, lectures, television and radio interviews, books, magazines, journals and symposia. Whether TMAs’ criticisms of NTMAs will dampen the growth of this movement in the North American cultural sphere or bring NTMA gurus more in line with established Advaita traditions remains to be seen.

ENDNOTES

¹ See, for example, the article “Democracy and Vajrayana,” Protecting Nyingma, 27 November 2010, at <<http://protectingnyingma2.wordpress.com/2010/11/27/democracy-and-vajrayana/>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

² Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu-inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 83–87.

³ One source for these numbers is Sarlo’s Guru Rating Service, at <<http://www3.telus.net/public/sarlo/RatingsN.htm>>, accessed 6 May 2013. Another source is the Satsang Schedules website, at <<http://www.satsangteachers.com>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

⁴ Ramana Maharshi, *Ramana, Shankara and the Forty Verses: The Essential Teachings of Advaita* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002), 7–13. Advaita Vedanta is an ancient school of Hindu philosophical thought that was

consolidated, rearticulated and spread by the ninth-century sage Adi Shankara, who authored seminal commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita, and the ten principal Upanishads. He is also said to have founded four monasteries in India, which continue to be respected as authentic transmitters of Advaita Vedanta. Strictly speaking,

“Vedanta” means the end of the Vedas, and refers to the Upanishads (ca. 600–300 b.c.e.), the final portion of the Vedic corpus. Although a number of teachers created philosophical systems based on their readings of the Upanishads, it was Shankara who articulated the system of thought known today as Advaita, the school that focuses on the non-dual nature of Brahman.

Phillip Charles Lucas, “When a Movement is Not a Movement: Ramana Maharshi and Neo-Advaita in North America,” *Nova Religio* 15, no. 2 (November 2011): 110.

⁵ See, for example, Eckhart Tolle’s interview with John W. Parker, at <http://www.inner-growth.info/power_of_now_tolle/eckhart_tolle_interview_parker.htm>, accessed 11 October 2012. Some Modern Advaita teachers also reference Zen Buddhism as a significant source for their teachings.

⁶ Adi Shankara has been discussed above in note 2. Vashishtha is a legendary Indian sage and hero of the Advaita classic, *Yoga Vashishtha*. Siddharameshvar Maharaj (1888–1936), a student of Shri Bhauseheb Maharaj (1843–1914), a head guru of the Incheheri Sampradaya (lineage), was considered a realized master of Advaita. He also was the *satguru* (enlightenment guru) of Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981), a popular Advaita guru who lived and worked in Mumbai. Many Modern Advaitins considered Nisargadatta Maharaj to be a fully enlightened guru and flocked to hear his teachings.

⁷ Liselotte Frisk, “The Satsang Network: A Growing Post-Osho Phenomenon,” *Nova Religio* 6, no. 1 (October 2002): 64–81.

⁸ Frisk, “The Satsang Network,” 74.

⁹ For a recent and comprehensive view of these teachers and movements see Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation* (New York: Random House, 2010).

¹⁰ Timothy Conway, “Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita and Real Advaita-Nonduality,” *Guru’s Feet: A Meeting Place for Spiritual People*, at <<http://www.gurusfeet.com/blog/neo-advaita-or-pseudo-advaita-and-real-advaita-nonduality-timothy-conway>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

¹¹ Dennis Waite, *Enlightenment: The Path through the Jungle* (Winchester, U.K.: O Books, 2008), 3.

¹² “Karl Renz Interview,” 8 January 2013, at <<http://www.karlrenz.com/english/texts.html>>, accessed 6 May 2013 (Defunct).

¹³ Unmani, “Is There Any Point in a Practice,” *Die to Love with Unmani*, at <<http://www.not-knowing.com/is-there-any-point-in-a-practice-article#.UQAgeUr9nT0>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

¹⁴ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 37; James Swartz, “What is Neo-Advaita?” at <<http://www.shiningworld.com/Satsang%20Pages/HTML%20Satsangs%20by%20Topic/Neo-Advaita/What%20is%20Neo-Advaita.htm>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

¹⁵ Tony Parsons, “Traditional Not Two-ness versus Neo Not Two-ness,” at <<http://nonduality.com/hl3182.htm>>, accessed 20 January 2013.

¹⁶ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 31, 94.

¹⁷ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 31, 94.

¹⁸ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 44–47.

¹⁹ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 53–55, 112.

²⁰ Swartz, “What is Neo-Advaita?”

²¹ For further discussion of Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, see Jeffrey J. Kirpal, *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

²² Quoted in Harold W. French, *The Swan's Wide Waters: Ramakrishna and Western Culture* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), 145; Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 36–39; and Urban, *Tantra*, 163.

²³ B. V. Narasimha, “The Sri Ramana Gita of B. V. Narasimha Swami,” *The Maharshi* 20, no. 4 (July/August 2010): 2; Lucas, “When a Movement is Not a Movement,” 96.

²⁴ Conway, “Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita and Real Advaita-Nonduality.”

²⁵ “Spiritual Humanism vs. Neo-Advaita: A 3-way Discussion between Möller de la Rouviè, Tony Parsons and Alan Stoltz,” Advaita Vision, at <http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/trad_neo/humanism_moller.htm>, accessed 6 May 2013.

²⁶ Swartz, “What is Neo-Advaita?”

²⁷ *The Mountain Path* is published by Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai, India.

²⁸ Christopher Quilkey, “Ramesh Balsekar and Advaita,” *The Mountain Path* (October-December 2006): 101; Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati, “The Qualifications Necessary for the Study of Vedanta,” at <http://www.avgsatsang.org/hhsvs/pdf/The_Qualifications_necessary_for_the_Study_of_Vedanta.pdf>, accessed 6 May 2013.

²⁹ Swami Dayananda Saraswati, “Qualified Student of Vedanta,” at <http://www.avgsatsang.org/hhpsds/pdf/Qualified_student_of_Vedanta.pdf>,” accessed 6 May 2013.

³⁰ Swami Vidadatmananda, “The Qualifications Necessary for the Study of Vedanta.”

³¹ Anonymous, “Neo-Advaita Demystified,” at <<http://www.mountainrunnerdoc.com/page/page/5060965.htm>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

³² David Frawley, “Misconceptions about Advaita,” American Institute of Vedic Studies, at <<http://www.vedanet.com/2012/06/misconceptions-about-advaita/>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

³³ Suzanne Foxton, quoted in “Dennis Waite, Interview with non-duality magazine,” *non-duality magazine*, July 2010, at <http://www.nondualitymagazine.org/nonduality_magazine.denniswaite.interview.htm>. Foxton, born in Indiana, lives in England.

³⁴ See Ann Gleig, “From Being to Becoming, Transcending to Transforming: Andrew Cohen and the Evolution of Enlightenment,” in *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism*, ed. Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 194–195. Email communication with Krishna, an American TMA commentator, 15 August 2012.

³⁵ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 121.

³⁶ Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, “Watering down Advaita: Westerners Corrupt Hindu Terminology!” Sarlo’s Guru Rating Service, at <<http://www3.telus.net/public/sarlo/Yadvaita.htm>>, accessed 6 May 2013. The first entry is written by Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, but the whole seems to be Waite’s.

³⁷ Greven is quoted in Sailor Bob Adamson, “The Eternal State: A Very Silly Argument: Neo-advaita vs. Traditional Advaita,” at <<http://Beingisknowing.blogspot.com/2010/11/very-silly-argument-neo-advaita-vs.html>>, accessed 21 January 2013 (Defunct). Greven’s book, *Oneness* (Salisbury, U.K.: Nonduality Press, 2005), attends to such themes as the ego’s inability to control thoughts and ending the painstaking search for enlightenment by becoming aware of the immediacy of the “natural state.”

³⁸ Rodney Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11, no. 2 (May 1996): 133–46.

³⁹ “Dennis Waite, Interview with non-duality magazine.”

⁴⁰ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 104.

⁴¹ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 101; Swartz, “What is Neo-Advaita?”

⁴² Swartz, “What is Neo-Advaita?” Krishna, another commentator on Poonja’s influence, maintains that many of Poonja’s prominent Western students either did not develop specific transpersonal therapies for their students following their time with Poonja or were already practicing therapists before their encounter with him. Gangaji’s husband Eli Jaxon-Bear, for example, had long used therapeutic tools such as the Gurdjieff-derived enegram in his workshops. Krishna maintains that many Osho disciples who later studied with Poonja simply continued their former work as therapists when they returned to the West, adding Poonja’s non-dual perspective to their therapy tool-kit. Krishna’s main correction to this broader critique is that Poonja did not foster or create any psychotherapeutic technique for his students, but he also did not dissuade them from continuing therapeutic work upon their return to the West. Moreover, there were students of Poonja who did not engage in psychotherapeutic work when they embarked upon their NTMA teaching careers in Western countries. Email communication with Krishna, 15 August 2012.

⁴³ Swartz, “What is Neo-Advaita?”; see also “The Horse’s Mouth: An Essay on the ‘Lineage’ Game,” Shining World, at <<http://www.shiningworld.com/Home%20Page%20Links/The%20Horses%20Mouth.html>>, accessed 6 May 2013; and discussion of the question, “If I cannot know myself and there is no other what is all this?” Shining World, at <<http://www.shiningworld.com/Satsang%20Pages/HTML%20Satsangs%20by%20Topic/Neo-Advaita/Teaching%20enlightenment.htm>>, accessed 11 October 2012.

⁴⁴ Swartz, “The Horse’s Mouth.”

⁴⁵ Swartz, “The Horse’s Mouth.”

⁴⁶ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 24, 97.

⁴⁷ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 37–38.

⁴⁸ Tony Parsons, “Traditional Not Two-ness.”

⁴⁹ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 24, 37–39.

⁵⁰ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 40.

⁵¹ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 48

⁵² Waite, *Enlightenment*, 42.

⁵³ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 42.

⁵⁴ Swartz, "The Horse's Mouth." Examples of Osho students or admirers who became NTMA teachers include Arjuna Ardagh, Premananda, Neelam and Madhukar.

⁵⁵ Swartz, "The Horse's Mouth." Swartz observes that the withholding of advanced Advaita teaching from those unqualified is in line with Advaita tradition.

⁵⁶ Swartz, "The Horse's Mouth"; David Godman, interview with author, Tiruvannamalai, India, 3 January 2008. Krishna responds: "It is on record that [Poonja] told many people to teach, and he told Andrew Cohen and Gangaji that they were totally enlightened Satgurus, that they were in fact his successors, and that he wrote many letters to them confirming this, evidence which can be found in Cohen's book, *My Master Is Myself*, and on Gangaji's website." Email communication with Krishna, 15 August 2012.

⁵⁷ Email communication with Krishna, 15 August 2012; Swartz, "The Horse's Mouth"; and Lucas, "When a Movement Is Not a Movement," 114.

⁵⁸ "Dennis Waite, Interview with non-duality magazine."

⁵⁹ Frisk, "The Satsang Network," 67.

⁶⁰ Frisk, "The Satsang Network," 81.

⁶¹ Sadhu Tanmaya Chaitanya, "Modern Advaita: Its Lure and Snares," *Mountain Path* (Advent 2007): 58–59.

⁶² Chaitanya, "Modern Advaita."

⁶³ Aziz Kristof, "The Dangers of Pseudo-advaita," at <<http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/neo-advaita.html>>, accessed 17 September 2013.

⁶⁴ For more on Dhanya's biography and writings, see "Essays by Dhanya," Advaita Vision, at <<http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/durga/durga.htm>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

⁶⁵ Durga (now known as Dhanya), Comment on Guru Ratings Forum, at <<http://www.globalserve.net/~sarlo/yadvaita.htm>>, accessed 11 December 2010 (Defunct).

⁶⁶ Nirmala, "Satsang with Nirmala: The Heart of Satsang," Endless Satsang, at <<http://endless-satsang.com/>>, accessed 6 May 2013. More biographical information on Neelam can be found at "Neelam: about," at <<http://www.neelam.org/about.php>>, accessed 6 May 2013.

⁶⁷ Alan Jacobs, "Advaita and Western Neo-Advaita: A Study," *The Mountain Path* (Deepam 2004): 88.

⁶⁸ Frisk, "The Satsang Network," 76.

⁶⁹ John Wheeler, "No Person," Advaita Vision, at <http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/teachers/noperson_wheeler.htm>, accessed 6 May 2013.

⁷⁰ Waite, *Enlightenment*, 53–55, 112; John Grimes, *Ramana Maharshi: The Crown Jewel of Advaita* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2010), 61–63. Grimes taught at Michigan State University and University of North Dakota before retiring in Chennai, India.

⁷¹ Dennis Waite, “Traditional versus Neo-Advaita,” Advaita Vision, at <http://www.advaita.org.uk/discourses/trad_neo/neo_advaita.htm>, accessed 6 May 2013.

⁷² Conway, “Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita.”

⁷³ Conway, “Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita.”

⁷⁴ Conway, “Neo-Advaita or Pseudo-Advaita.”

⁷⁵ For a complete treatment of the economic model of religion, see Larry Iannacone, “Economy,” in *Handbook of Religious and Social Institutions*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh (New York: Springer, 2006), 21–40.

⁷⁶ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, 83–87.

⁷⁷ Reid Locklin and Julia Lauwers, “Rewriting the Sacred Geography of Advaita: Swami Chinmayananda and the Sankara-Dig-Vijaya,” *Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 179–228.

⁷⁸ Chad M. Bauman, with Jennifer Saunders, “Out of India: Immigrant Hindus and South Asian Hinduism in the United States,” *Religion Compass* 3, no. 1 (2009): 116–35.