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Lifestyles: Batting for Bhagwan



Sannyasins: Swami Anand Deva Prabodh, Ma Prem Surup, and their daughter Sohani.
(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

ago. Ma Prem Surup became a Sannyasin in 1978. She was living in New York City with her one-year-old daughter; a single parent who didn't know what to do. "It seems that he (the Bhagwan) enters into a lot of people's lives when they are at a crossroads," she said.

They feel that, other than how they are obtaining their "spiritual satisfaction," their lives are not that much different from most other Americans. "I want to make lots of money," said Ma Prem Surup with a smile.

Ma Prem Surup has a degree in nursing, a B.S., but she is "into holistic medicine now."

In addition to her B.S. in nursing, he, Prabodh, has an associate degree with emphasis in accounting and communication. He is articulate and knowledgeable in the fields of world history, astronomy, astrology, eastern religions and biblical history. It is uncertain whether or not they are the type of people you would expect to ascribe to the Bhagwan's requirements of those who wish to be his followers. These, according to Ma Prem Surup, are: wearing the colors (red, pink and purple), wearing a mala (a necklace of beads which has a cameo with the Bhagwan's picture on the front and back sides), getting a new name or retaining your own (depending on the Bhagwan's wishes), and doing one of the different techniques — "meditations" — consistently. She said some of the main meditations are Dynamic, Kundalini, Nadabrahma and Nataraj. One meditation, called a "Mala Meditation," she said, consists of looking at the picture on the mala, the Bhagwan, for 45 minutes. She added, "It's an esoteric thing."

Prabodh speaks of living in other times and they both believe in reincarnation, although his belief is more profound than hers. A sensitive person with keen eyesight, he laid to rest the myth that all of Rajneeshland is love and goodness.

According to Prabodh, the organization "is made up of the super-rich, the rich, and ordinary people." There are the eccentric, the ones lavishing the Bhagwan with gifts, and the ones whose prejudices arise out of culture differences, he said.

He said he became agitated about all the gifts of cars the Bhagwan was receiving, because all around him there was so much suffering. "[But] I was in New York City and didn't know what was going on. It bothered me," he said. "As a black man I don't know if I can ever be totally satisfied. My struggle is...with America, Africa, the world."

Their attraction to Sannyasin and the Bhagwan is hard to discern. She comes "from a rebellious family." She speaks proudly of her ancestry — about how even during slavery some (through devious means) became educated. Her father, James Holland, divorced her mother when she was two years old, and "is or was the Deputy Mayor of Gary, Indiana." Nevertheless, the attraction, she said, "is spiritual. It's about being connected with your inner self. I just feel something for this person [the Bhagwan]," she said. "I can't explain it."

According to Prabodh, two very important things need to be clarified. One: you can denounce the teachings of the Bhagwan without fear of reprisal; and two: followers of the Bhagwan are accepted and not ridiculed in places like New York City and Washington, D.C.

by Nathaniel Scott

Rajneeshes is what we hear — at least in Portland, if not throughout the state of Oregon, the people wearing those red, pink and purple garments with necklaces ("malas") around their necks are called Rajneeshes: followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. But two followers of the Bhagwan strenuously denounce the Rajneesh terminology. They ask that the record be set straight and that they be addressed as "Sannyasins — Neo-Sannyasins." They are 24-year-old Swami Anand Deva Prabodh, his 25-year-old common-law wife Ma Prem Surup, with their six-year-old daughter Sohani. They came to Oregon from New York City for the Rajneesh festival which was recently held at Rajneeshpuram.

Prabodh claims the media, here in Oregon, dreamed up the Rajneesh terminology when the organization took up residence on the Big Muddy.

Another popular lie, he claims, is the misconception about worldly goods: "You don't have to give up your worldly possessions to be a Sannyasin," he said. "We are not followers of the Bhagwan." By way of clarification, he offered, there are some followers (of the Bhagwan) who "voluntarily" give up their worldly possessions, buy the Bhagwan his umpteenth Rolls Royce and live on the ranch, Rajneeshpuram — the "commune" — as followers of the Bhagwan. The difference being, he said, "I am a Sannyasin who works outside as well as inside the organization. I am here to get my own thing started." His choice of words, "outside as well as inside," needs to be qualified because his reference is to talking about the teachings of the Bhagwan — not actual physical labor — whatever the dimension, because, according to him, you can't straddle the fence. You either live "commune" style, which can and frequently does require members to work 12 hours a day, or you live the life of a Sannyasin, totally independent. Those who live "commune" style, he said, have their every need met; it is an exchange of goods for services. Prabodh became a member approximately two and a half years

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