



BRIGITTE

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 POONA '98 - In the Club
 of the Enlightened One
 8-page article with photos

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NUR NOCH EIN ROLLS-ROYCE

Im „größten energetischen Freizeitsport der Welt“ mit Begleitschiffen, Hühnern, Tai Chi gibt es so gut wie keine Kläden. Bergsteigen. Sie streifen die Süße der Meditation. Deshalb werden sie außerhalb der Koramnne betreut und dürfen ihre Eltern nur mittags besuchen

BRIGITTE 12/98 143

KEIN GRUPPENSEX WEIT UND BREIT

Oben rechts: Das Geburtstagsfest für Osho. Oben links: Meditation in Sasawadi, ebenfalls während Oshos, jetzt hier seiner Aushub. Mitte: Wer länger im Ashram bleibt, muß täglich sechs Stunden in der Kommanne arbeiten, wie hier in der Küche. Unten: Alles über Osho in Büchern, auf Kassetten und CDs gibt es im eigenen Shop der Kommanne

BRIGITTE 12/98 144

Auf zwei Extratage muß man sich gefaßt machen: Nur ein Rolls Royce nicht noch da, im Eingang zu Bhagwan Oshos ehemaligen Wohnhaus. Soll er nicht mal 75 oder 92 oder 105 gefahrt haben? Und kein Gruppensex weit und breit. Nicht mal eine Andeutung davon, wobei man auch schon eine ganze Woche lang. Dafür gibt es andere Überraschungen. Würde einem jemand 13 Hektar schenken und sagen: Bau dir darauf das Paradies, so wie du es dir vorstellst - es würde nicht sehr viel anders aussehen als das, was Bhagwan Schüler in Poona geschaffen haben.

Wie alle Japaner und Bombastanten sie geföhnt haben mögen 1909-1908 Die Kronen wachsen über dem gepflanzten Regen wässern und bieten immerwährenden Schutz. Schirmen abwärts in den Trüben, in japanischen Gärten kann man sich auf Holzbohlen ausruhen. Plänen spazieren herum. Nichts leuchten Tausende von kleinen Lichtern aus den Bäumen. Marmorene gibt es, von denen Wasser herunterplätschert, einen großen Swimmingpool, Whirlpools, Freiluftrestaurant, eine Cappuccino-Bar. Das Essen ist natürlich vegetarisch und wird streng ökologisch angebaut. Das Trinkwasser ist garantiert sauber. Das bedeutet viel in Indien.

BRIGITTE 12/98 145

POONA '98 In the Club of the Enlightened One

Bhagwan, later called Osho, has been dead for 8 years, but his ashram attracts more people than ever. The commune in Poona is the biggest tourist attraction in India, just second the Taj Mahal.

Now 8 years have already passed since their master left his body. This doesn't mean that he is dead, no, on the contrary: his spirit, his strength, his soul are always present because these are eternal. It is especially here in Poona that sannyasin feel his presence. Here they feel especially close to him: "Osho, sweet Osho, we love you so."

Osho wanted to have happy, laughing and dancing disciples. Hence they celebrate his birthday for a whole week. And they all sing with full heart: "Osho we love your love. Happy birthday to you." Osho used to be called "Bhagwan" until one day a year before he died he decided he doesn't want to be called "Bhagwan" any longer, or "God" or the "Enlightened One" for that matter. He wanted to be called the "Blessed One". Bhagwan and the sannyasins: immediately lots of pictures and questions are crowding my mind. Sannyasins? Do they still exist? There seem to be very few remaining of these oldies. They meet once in while in orange robes to reminisce in the old times, where they could present their master the next Rolls Royce, aren't they? Would they engage in a little group sex for consolation? For 16 years we could read almost daily about Bhagwan and his laughing sannyasins and the ashram in Poona. And almost always the question centered on the one topic: Are these nuts harmless nuts or dangerous nuts? But ever since then – dead meat!

Whoever thought that sannyasins would dissolve into thin air after Bhagwan died, has made a big mistake. Judging by numbers of visitors to the ashram, now called "Osho Commune International", has become the biggest tourist attraction in India just second to the Taj Mahal. The people are coming from 101 countries, in average 2000 people per day, 4000, 5000 per day alone in December when Osho's birthday is being celebrated – and in January up to 10 000 people are visiting to commemorate the day Osho died. There are more women than men. One third of the visitors come from Germany. The average age lies at 35. The "inner circle", 21 of Bhagwan's closest confidantes, continues the work.

Some visitors stay for a few weeks, some for a few months, some jet over to Poona after a swimming holiday in Goa. Many of them are sannyasins many are not. It is the mixture of spirituality and holiday camp that creates this attraction.

You have to be ready for two disappointments: there is only one Rolls Royce around here, at the entrance to Bhagwan's – Osho's former living quarters. Wasn't he supposed to have had 75 or 95 or 105 at one time? And there is no group-sex to be found anywhere. Not even if you look for a whole week long in every nuke and corner. Instead there are some other surprises. Imagine somebody would give you 13 acres of

land as a gift and say: "Build your own paradise just as in your dream - it would look hardly any different from what Bhagwan's disciples have created here in Poona. How many palm trees and bamboo may they have planted? 2000? 5000? The treetops grow together above the marbled pathways and offer permanent shade. There are swans swimming in the ponds and in Japanese gardens you can take a rest on wooden benches. Peacocks are walking around. At night there are thousands of small lights in the trees. There are marble rocks with water cascading down on them, a huge swimming pool, whirlpools, open air restaurants, cappuccino bar. Of course the food is vegetarian and grown strictly organic. The drinking water is guaranteed clean. This means a lot in India.

There are only few solidly built houses. Mostly buildings have a canvas roof and mosquito netting in place of walls. In each room there is a picture of the master, mostly two. Everybody, both men and women wear loose maroon dresses and at the swimming pool red swimwear, because Osho has said, "Red is the color of meditation." Some people even got themselves a red bag for their water bottles. The atmosphere is peaceful and friendly all over the place. The beauty and the silence descend also on those people who are less interested in Bhagwan's teachings. There is lots of laughter and you have to sleep outside the commune. 100 people at the most reside on the premises of the commune. The others retreat to a hotel or a private accommodation late in the evening when the gates are closing.

Nothing is dangerous here; just a few things are a bit peculiar. The sannyasins are not a cult. Because Bhagwan doesn't prophesize the imminent end of the world and survival only to his disciples, because everybody can come and go wherever and whenever it pleases, because nobody is forced to break contact with his former life, because each visitor is welcome. The fact that probably each sannyasin would have done blindly anything that the master demands is another matter. But then, Bhagwan didn't demand anything.

Many visitors come just "to charge their batteries again"; many participate in one of the meditations that start at 6:00 am in the morning, free of charge. Many participate in courses, which cost money. There is Tai Chi and there is Tibetan Pulsing, Breath Therapy or Zennis, a meditative way to play tennis. At the multiversity, some kind of esoteric university, you can learn a lot of the things that are also recognized in western countries: ayurvedic healing methods or hypnosis. But there is also the whole spectrum of esoteric disciplines: psychic massage, neo-astrology, and reincarnation courses, tarot. The old times where participants freaked out in dubious psycho groups so that they had to be admitted to psychiatric hospitals seem to be over. Now, above all, the great path is called: meditation. What is a bit unnerving is this endless hugging. Everywhere two people are pressing against each other – five minutes are nothing. Always with eyes closed, as if there is no tomorrow. You will soon learn that this is not necessarily love, but that it has to do with 'awareness' and with the fact that "there is nothing that stands between us".

They also talk quite strangely here. Even though the common language is English, the Germans converse in some kind of "sannyas slang"; German with mixed all kinds of English words.

Anybody, who says, "Osho is dead" is corrected immediately. "He has left his body" you must say. After a while you get used to it. Inside the commune everything is different from outside. Here is silence, there the Indian day to day life with peddlers, beggars, and cars, honking and rattling of thousands of auto rikshas. Inside the commune the "I" is surrounded by a holy halo. Who am "I"? What do "I" feel? What is happening inside me? The outside is only interesting in connection with a question about the inside. What does it do to me when I see somebody else feeling bad? "Stay with yourself" they call it and "meditation". There could also be a lot of egocentrism. But of course they all deny this.

Today Nico wants to become a sannyasin, and so do 25 others. Young, old, women, Koreans, Indians, Germans, and Americans: 3000 people have come to the buddhahall to celebrate with them. Everybody wears maroon, only the five women on the marble podium wear white. The voice of the master comes from an audio tape: "Sannyas is nothing but a love affair." Ma Zareen, one of the women in white calls up Nico as the first to come to the podium. The 22-year-old student from Greece seats himself with eyes closed opposite Ma Zareen. He is shaking. Ma Zareen, Indian and one of the 21 of the "inner circle", presses her hand on his chest. Not hard, but he is threatening to fall over, after all she is pressing on an 'energy point'. The women in white know their buddies. A cushion lies handy and Nico's back is supported with it. Ma Zareen places the mala around Nico's neck, a necklace of rosewood beads with a photo of the master as a pendant in the middle. With this Nico is shaking. He has received his certificate with his new Sanskrit name. In future he will be named Chaitanya. Chaitanya weeps. The other 3000 rejoice, dance and again they sing: "Osho, we love you so." Back at his place Nico first has to wipe his nose. 10 or 20 years ago when Bhagwan himself was having a hand in this the atmosphere could not have been any better.

Bhagwan. This guru has been playing the media and lived well off them. But the media fed also off him, from the rumors, the truths and the half-truths, the scandals, real and the unreal. Even today with a practically emotionless objective approach towards the matter it will be almost impossible to judge which rumor belongs to which category.

Did he con the world? Were the Americans right when they threw him out of their country in 1985 or were they just hysterical. Was he really secretly poisoned in the American prison? Was he a charlatan who misused thousands of people for his ideas? Or, on the contrary, was it him alone who was showing them a new, better way of life? And finally: was he a sex guru, or did he only show his disciples that almost all religions repress and suppress sexuality? And this is why everybody who feels like sleeping with several people at the same time should also do it? Is it maybe just a matter of opinion as in many cases? What Bhagwan really taught is not so easy to explain. Too many times he contradicted himself, which can be seen in his many books, in his 1800 discourses, which have been recorded on video. Live here and now. There is also a lot of Buddhism and Zen Buddhism in Bhagwan's teachings.

Some people call the ashram the "biggest esoteric holiday resort of the world", the sannyasin prefer to call it the Club Med meaning "Club Meditation". Doc Amrito, the personal physician of Bhagwan prefers to talk of the "last resort", the last refuge. Everybody raves about the "special spirit" that permeates the ashram, and the fact that Osho died didn't really change this at all. Only Vimal Bergmiller nags about everybody and everything – except Osho – he finds no fault with him, he is a wonderful wise man.

Vimal is here with his father, a successful builder from Munich who visits the commune once a year. Vimal actually wanted to stay for 5 months, "but I think I'm going to Goa with a friend."

Vimal was born in Poona barely 18 years ago. Both of his parents are sannyasins. When he was two years old they went back to Munich. When he was only 4 years old he was sent to a school in England which was run by sannyasins. While his parents were able to dedicate themselves to their self-realization, the child was raised according to Bhagwan's teachings. Vimal recollects: "The youngest child was two and a half years old and was crying constantly because it wanted to go home. I myself was terribly homesick, but when it subsided after some 6 or 7 months the school was closed down." Vimal returned to his parents and then went back again to England when he was twelve. The boarding school for sannyas children starting at the age of twelve is called Ko Shuwan and still exists today. After highschool at the age of 16 the pupils leave the boarding school. Now Vimal wants to become a carpenter.

What he doesn't like in Poona: one of his friends got thrown out supposedly because he smoked dope at a party. There is no "spirit" any longer since Osho left his body. That he has to pay 5 marks entry fee per day like everybody else. On top of this he has to work because he is a sannyasin and still under 18 – this is the rule: entry fee, 2 hours work plus one-hour meditating.

When Ma Bodhi Hanna arrived in Poona for the first time, her name was not yet "Conscious Grace", but Hanna Kistner. She was 51 years old, mother of two and a bookseller in Hamburg. A girlfriend persuaded her to visit the ashram. "When I arrived I immediately felt like a fish in an aquarium. All the heaviness from the West simply dropped off." One year later she became a sannyasin. She found fulfillment in Japanese archery. Since she retired 10 years ago, this pretty cheerful woman with silverwhite hair travels around the world – her two-meter long bamboo bow always with her. In Germany she spends only one or two months a year, most of the time she stays either in Hawaii or the commune. She is happy to have escaped "the misery number that prevails in Germany. This constant whining that 'things are getting worse, no money, no work' is really awful. Of course I can find work if I want – maybe as a cleaner – but so what?"

Sannyasins don't divide between good work and bad work, low work and prestigious work. After all Osho said: "It doesn't matter what you do, but how you do it. Do what you want to do, but do it consciously". Therefore for a sannyasin work is meditation – whether it is cleaning toilets or playing music. And you don't get money for either – some pocket money at the most. It is recommended that people who stay longer than just a few weeks do some work – 6 hours per day for 7 days a week, no matter what, no matter who. And so it happens that the attorney from Cologne bakes pizza, the professor of psychology sells books in the ashram bookstore which carries only Osho's works, the teacher from England waters the garden and the Indian student works in the bakery.

There are a few peculiar things. For example the AIDS test. Each visitor has to have his blood taken in the welcome center. Only those who test HIV-negative are allowed on the premises.

And then there are the children. Basically there are none. Of course not everybody aged between 20 and 40 must to have kids, but it is difficult to believe that out of these

thousands of people here hardly anybody has children. The explanations are wearing a bit thin: "The parents organize day care for their children outside the commune – and between 12:00 and 1:00 the kids are allowed to visit their parents inside the ashram." - "They would disturb the silence of meditation here." Most likely the explanation is elsewhere to be found. Many sannyasins really don't have children. Children mean commitment. And Osho said we should free ourselves from all obligations in order to find the way inside, to find the way to ourselves.

Sannyasins usually don't have apartments and they don't have homes. They only have places. "In my place" means "at my home". "On Hawaii there is a nice place," means "There are sannyasins living." It is striking that so many have homeless biographies, they travel around the world for years, from one "place" to the other, work here a bit, earn there a bit of money.

It is six thirty in the evening. 5000 people sit in Buddhahall immersed in meditation. Now they are all wearing white. The peak of the day is about to start, the "Whiterobe Brotherhood". It was always at this hour that Bhagwan spoke to them. A white chair, in which the master used to sit, is carried onto the podium. Nobody stirs and nobody coughs. 15 musicians start to play, on Indian sitars and Western violins, softly and slowly. The first people get up and dance, they are in bliss. Electric guitars and drums are joining, the rhythm grows stronger, the music louder. Soon everybody is dancing faces turned upwards, hands stretched towards the sky. Many are in trance and they are shaking themselves. The music grows louder, the rhythm stronger, the movements faster – for half an hour.

Then abruptly the music stops. 10000 hands are stretched towards the sky now, and 5000 voices shout "Osho! Osho! Osho!" Maybe one has to be a sannyasin in order to consider this beautiful instead of spooky. For an unprepared visitor this must choking his throat rather than opening it for the blissful shout. What most of the 5000 visitors experience as ultimate and blissful relaxation will be replaced in the unprepared with doubting. Is this not exactly the moment where even someone who is much less apt at being a guru than Bhagwan would be able to demand truly everything from his disciples and subsequently also get it?

Everybody sits down. A projection screen rolls down. Osho talks on video. All of his talks were recorded. He speaks intelligently, entertainingly and funnily for 45 minutes. He speaks about love, life, and the adventure of being a sannyasin. He often tells jokes. The sannyasins are laughing. At the end everybody leaves. Silently. This ritual repeats itself every day. The anxiety remains. Not with the sannyasins – on the contrary.