

## [Temple Bells](#)

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# Temple Bells

Daughter of famous South Indian movie director, Major A. Satyanarayana, and sister of Telegu actor/producer A.V.N. Prasad, it was only time before Uma Bharati would try her hand at movie-making. Temple Bells is this world-renowned classical Indian dancer's first, very original and very "in-the-family" telefilm. Her father produced it, her brother co-directed it and she, her daughter and students of her dance school starred in it.

Temple Bells, Aalaya Naadalu, (in Telegu) is a modern-day Hindu family movie, focusing on the conflicts between teens eager to Westernize and parents confused and frustrated by behavior and lifestyles alien to them. Viewers will be surprised by some of the arrestingly frank dialogue between family members with bold, emotional footage shot in India and Texas. Blue-jeaned girls disco to Michael Jackson on rooftops, talk back to parents, frequent bars and stumble home in the wee hours of dawn.

Though it's mainly about the experience of several NRI girls returning to India to absorb more of India's cultural richness-allowing for lots of religious and temple scenes-the teen culture conflicts are not restricted to them. India-born youth are also portrayed grappling with the same Western influences. Expectedly, the film and plot is permeated with Indian dance-from folk to classical, in temples and outdoors. Temple Bells is a dance-lovers treasure.

Uma Bharati told Hinduism Today in a telephone interview that her inspiration for the movie was to visually persuade youth and parents that learning a traditional Indian art form such as dance catalyzes deeper understanding of Hindu culture and religion." But this is not a movie about how bad the West is," she cautioned. "It's about balancing the modern and traditional." She should know. Mother of two US-born children-9 and 14-and "aunty" to dozens of girls enrolled in her Archana

Dance Academy based in Houston, Texas, dancing with the emotional tugs and pulls of NRI teens is for Bharati a daily lila.

Hinduism Today also spoke with two of the girls who starred in the movie. Both are studying dance with Bharati. Madhuri Viswanadhan played one of the NRIs who return to India to absorb more Indian culture. She loved acting in the film but felt, "There could have been deeper treatment given to the specifics of the differences between the two cultures. For example, one specific thing about American culture that is good-that could have been shown-is how open-minded people are. I have Jewish and Muslim friends. India still divides people on basis of caste and religion." Asked how dance has helped her understand her religion better, she said, "One simple example is a Krishna dance where one of His wives calls Him back to her. This teaches me about the soul, how it is longing for union with the Paramatma."

We also spoke to Leana Ahmed who plays Janaki, the sassy disco-girl who, initially, loathes Hindu tradition as backward and boring. Interestingly, Leana's parents are Muslim. She is studying dance as part of her own spiritual search, and because she just loves dancing. "Since dancing, I have gone to the library and read more about Hinduism and how Hindus believe God is everywhere in all things." Just the way Bharati says it is supposed to work!

It is thrilling to see talented people like Uma Bharati bringing sensitive family issues to the screen-and doing it so creatively and professionally. And for those not close to this field, movie-making is not easy-especially getting financial backing. Producers still cold-shoulder directors like Bharati trying to get dharma on the screen, using the lame excuse that only killer/ thrillers make money.

And for those monitoring the touchy debate over whether parents and elders are ever justified using slapping as an exasperated, rare, last resort, you will find five instances of slapping in this movie to fuel family discussion. We asked Bharati how she personally felt about these scenes. "Yes, I think in one scene when a mother slapped her insolent daughter, I think the slapping was justified. But in other scenes, slapping was definitely wrong and the movie shows that wrongness."

(Available from: Archana Dance Academy, 10030 Sagemark, Houston, Texas, USA 77089. US \$18.95. English subtitled edition coming.)