Diaspora
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CULTURE

A New Sparkle In Her Twirl

In 1994 Aditi Hanumante completed six years of learning bharata natyam in New Orleans, but her heart wasn't in it--until she attended dance camp at Yogaville, the Virginia headquarters of Swami Satchidananda. Her nervousness--"What if I'm the worst dancer here?"--faded as Aditi, now 18, arrived. "It's truly an enchanting place on God's little Earth," she recalls. Unlike the usual dance-and-go-home style classes, students here follow the gurukulam style, living with renowned dance gurus V.P. and Shanta Dhananjayan for one month. Aditi rapidly found inner peace in daily practice of hatha yoga, bhajanas and dance. She got to know her roommates. "It was refreshing and reassuring to see 30 other girls from all over the US who hold Indian culture in such high esteem. Like myself, they were all devout Hindus, and the ashram atmosphere brought me closer to Divinity than I'd been before." She also enjoyed cultural tips, with the Dhananjayans daily answering questions like, "Why is it important to wear a bindi?" Aditi plans to attend her fourth and final camp this year.

NEPAL

Shake Up at Pashupatinath

On May 22, Ananta Krishna Yog Shastri was officially appointed the new high priest of Pashupatinath Siva temple--Nepal's

holiest shrine. He replaced Subramanyam Shastri Markandeya, who served for 31 years and resigned amid embezzlement charges. Millions of dollars are offered each year for the temple's upkeep by devotees (per capita income is less than US $200 a year.) On Sivaratri night alone, nearly US$1 million is donated. Markandeya was charged with swindling US$500,000 (some say millions) in donated cash and jewelry, even building a five-star hotel in Mumbai, India. Members of Parliament could stand it no longer, and petitioned King Birendra for the priest's removal. Now, a trust registers all temple contributions. Previously the priests collected, counted and kept all offerings.

INTERVIEWS

Mela's International Pilgrims

What is amazing about the Kumbha Mela is that all sorts of people, poor, rich, not so rich from all parts of India and other countries too have come here," said Justine and Lizzy from the United Kingdom. They were two among many international visitors to the Mela, some there as tourists, but most as earnest in spiritual purpose as any Indian Hindu. Justine and Lizzy took a holy bath in the Ganga every day, attended arati, visited with saints and remarked, "This teaches us there is a different way of living." Dagmar Rungen and Ralph Hug of Freiburg, Germany said, "We believe good talk creates good vibrations. People we see here want a good and friendly world. We'll

carry this message home. Haridwar is clean. People are happy. The administration and police are really prepared." Melanie Rice of California bathed in the Ganga, but found "no magic in the bath." Rather, she said, "The magic is in the people who believe in spirituality." "Hinduism fascinates me," offered Matthew Wilson from London, "because there is truth in it. India is the storehouse of religion. It has the whole of spirituality compressed into one at the Mela." Bernice and Eric, from France, "loved wandering around and meeting common people." But they complained, "I saw an old lady taking her bath and worshiping, and they dragged her out. They could be more respectful. For the people taking bath in the Ganga is spirituality. They do not disturb anyone, so why disturb them?" "It is so peaceful," said Christine of London [photo right]. "I am not a Hindu, but I came here and walked around with a feeling that there is a still greater force, more powerful people than us. I saw a sadhu who held his hands in the air for 25 years. It is faith and patience. In just the five hours I have been here, I see so much sense of community, so different from my culture!"

VIDEOS

Goldie Finds Her Elephant

She's not acting. In the PBS video, Elephants of India with Goldie Hawn, the Hollywood superstar documents her own personal quest to seek out a special elephant that she had fallen in love with during her first trip to India. Of course, her irrepressible mirth is part of the package, and it makes for a soft-spoken piece on the Asian elephants' plight. But the charm is in seeing elephants, India--and even Ganesha--through Goldie's ever expressive eyes.

PBS HOME VIDEO, 1320 BRADDOCK PLACE, ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314 USA. www.PBS.ORG

UNITED STATES

Jackson Visits Jersey Temple

In the spirit of nurturing kinship between multicultural communities, US politician and minister Reverend Jesse Jackson attended the 108th birthday of the late Yogiji Maharaj, fourth spiritual guru of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha (BAPS), on May 24, 1998 at the Swaminarayan Temple in Edison, New Jersey.

Impressed with the temple, he said, "When you leave here, you may be an engineer, doctor, teacher, but here in the temple you find common ground--you're God's child and that's enough. While we maintain kinship to our mother country of India, Africa, Europe or Australia, we live in America now, and must work on an American agenda together now, here in New Jersey."

THAILAND

A Lot of Baht

The Thai government has told the nation's 300,000 Buddhist monks to save money by ceasing construction of new monastery facilities and focusing on religious duties instead. Buddhist temples spend more than two billion baht (US$47 million) annually on construction, mostly with public donations and a 327 million baht government allocation. "During this economic crisis, spiritual development should replace material development," said the Religious Affairs Department. Some monks have come under criticism for using donations to support luxurious life styles.