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Wegen  
Geschäftsangabe  
geschlossen



Die verkauften Jünger

# Poona am Ende

# THE LAST DAYS OF POONA

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Drop-outs from all over the world came to India to rid themselves of their western fear. They sought their happiness in Poona and became followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. But when their guru took off for the United States, the illusion of another life was destroyed.

The famous ashram in closed because it has gone out of business. Has the master betrayed and sold out his followers?

Caption page 13: One of the sunnyasin who had been initiated by Bhagwan packs together his things. All he has left of his master is a cheap poster  
Caption page 14: A Guru has the Dolls Dance - Those were the great times in the ashram in Poona. Bhagwan is initiating a follower to be a sunnyasin. In the process, he touches the third eye in the middle of the forehead. In this manner, Bhagwan's energy is transmitted to the believer. The others reach a state of ecstasy during the ceremony.

Caption page 17: The end of a promise. Once dozens of Bhagwan's followers lived in this bamboo hut. After the guru's flight, the followers left their primitive housing on the Mula River in Poona. All that was left behind was the chaos of cheap used furniture. In the background on the bamboo wall there are still a few family pictures and Bhagwan posters left.

Caption page 18: Selling Out in Front of the Gates of the Ashram. Many disappointed followers of the master don't have enough money for a flight back to the west. In the streets of Poona, they sell their last possessions to the natives; a blanket, a bookcase a few books and clothing.

Caption page 20: Relaxed in the Here and Now. Bhagwan and his American wife arrive in the Mercedes 280 in "Rajneesh's Castle" near Montclair, New Jersey. The tax evader from India has been living in this luxury villa since the beginning of July. Bodyguards protect him from the public and from his followers.

A REPORT BY RAINER FABIÁN WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAY ULLAL.

Up until July 28, 1981, paradise was in India. That is where the frustrated children of capitalism made their pilgrimages. They prayed to their God, spoke only of love, and forgot the world.

Last week the ashram in Poona was closed down. This is how Bhagwan, the "enlightener" wanted it. The monsoon is coming to an end. Water is dripping from the trees in Foreagon Park. Mosquitoes stick to the windows in the evening. In the ashram, the sunnyasin lived the life that they called "energy". During the day, they still manufacture malas, the necklaces with Rajneesh's photo in the pendant while the roof overhead is being dismantled. They translate Bhagwan's texts into all languages of the world and behind them boxes are being nailed together, fans are being unscrewed, houses are being torn down. In the clinic, the sick people are dosing and in the next-door room, the medical cabinets are being dismantled. The city of deliverance is dissolving.

Daily trucks are leaving the ashram with unknown destinations and are moving away with the possessions of the Rajneesh Foundation. The furniture and machines from the carpentry, printing workshop, from the electrical works and the bindery, from the film and video section.

"Most westerners think that Rajneesh just took off and left his followers in the lurch," says Swami Satyapanda. However for the ex-Stern reporter Jorg Andrees Elten, the opposite is true. "The largest commune in the world is only changing places. The ashramites are being spread throughout the whole world, to Australia and elsewhere. And the feeling is that when the master calls, they can regather in 48 hours."



Where? Well, I don't know. We are very relaxed in the here and now?

"In the ashram, everyone floats in bliss. I have the feeling that I'm floating through a white cloud. We all love each other," says Ma Bhagwati, the press liaison person. The ex-computer programmer from Austria is experiencing that is it really great not to know what's going to happen. Fear of the future? Never. "Stay in motion! Go! Go forward into the unknown!" Bhagwan said.

For the sunnyasins, the followers initiated by Bhagwan, life is a happening. "Just let yourself go! Don't swim against the river! But go with it. Accept everything and have no fear. When you want no more, then everything comes to you," says Ma Hari Chetana, the ex-movie actress, Mascha Rabben from Munich.

The physical therapist, Ma Avodo, which means "servant of ecstasy" from Hamburg has no idea what the next day will bring. "But that doesn't matter, we have no fear!" A German woman is in the infirmary seriously ill and her child is playing outside in the ashram. There is no one in Germany waiting for the sick woman, but anyhow she is happy, says Ma Avodo. She laughed all day long. There are news of the master daily, he is doing well in the west, one hears and he is wearing jeans and watching TV all day. He also got married to a Greek shipowner's daughter, named Kirtan, who has an American passport. And did he shave his beard? You can expect anything from the enlightened rouse. And the ashramites are very amused. Isn't it great how the master can do things.

Some of the people are making their first encounters with the outside world. One sunnyasin wanted to stay overnight at the Sheraton Hotel in Bombay, but the receptionist wouldn't let him. They have had bad experiences with unpaid bills so there are no rooms for sunnyasins. Well, he wanted to at least have a cup of coffee in the hotel. No coffee for sunnyasin. After a while, the chosen one remembered what he had been taught and said to himself, "In a hotel that has such shitty vibrations, I don't want any coffee."

For the city of Poona, a boom is ending. The ashram and its visitors contributed almost two million marks to the economy of Poona every month according to official estimates. Now the seven fat years are over. At the end of July, rickshaw drivers are selling their vehicles and kiosks are closing. Business men are moving to Bombay. Landlords who were taking Bhagwan followers for a ride have had to tighten their belts and the 500 tailors who made orange robes, shirts, and pants are looking for new markets. Many Indians only became sunnyasin in order to milk the holy cow that came from the west. They speculated that believers would prefer to buy from believers. The mala could be seen hanging from the necks of rickshaw drivers and beggars. A book dealer in Center Road would wear orange and gave his business a new name, "Bhagwan Das" which means "Servant of Bhagwan".

The grey haired Indian, Matham D. Bukani, who employed a dozen Indian families in tailor work, now wants to open a business in San Francisco. Whatever he could not sell in the last days in Poona to the sunnyasin, he is sending to his brother in America who will sell the orange clothing to the ashramites on the west coast that say they are made in India.

Hundreds of Indians went to the Koreagon Park towards the end of July and went through the deserted housing of the followers. In a country where used newspaper is sold in order to insulate the barracks in the slums, everything has value. The Indians picked up nails, drawing pins, and drage the wooden and bamboo poles away. They don't understand that some of the sunnyasin are burning their housing down. "Well, I built this hut and I'll burn it down," said one of the sunnyasin in the last days.

When the rumor came that the ashram would be moved to the ocean, the tailors developed appropriate clothing. When the first photos from the Himalayas showed up on the black board, they began considering warmer clothing. On the Mahatma Gandhi road in Poona sunnyasins bought wools for winter pullovers. Suddenly, knitting was in, according to the Times of India.

By the beginning of 1981, according to one of the sunnyasin from Hamburg, everything had become flat. In the Buddha Hall, people from Hamburg fell in ecstasy. They only had one thought - "How can I get my father to understand that I am staying in Poona and that I need coal?"

On June 1st, 5000 sunnyasin were peacefully sleeping in their beds when their master left. Bhagwan boarded a Pan Am aircraft in Bombay. The ticket had carefully been bought in New York. No one was to know of his travel plans. In the first class section, there was an oxygen tent for the asmatic guru. Food was not allowed to be served. Stewardesses who were wearing perfume had to keep their distance. Bhagwan's closest confidants rode in the economy class. At the same time, twelve tons of personal luggage and his Rolls Royce were shipped to New York. His library of 30,000 books was already on its way across the ocean.

"He didn't even say good-bye to us." One morning Bhagwan was simply replaced by a portrait and by his voice on a tape," said one of the sunnyasin. From then on, his followers had to bow before a life sized color photograph in the Buddha Hall. At the end of their meditation, they touched their foreheads to the marble podium upon which their now disappeared master used to reign.

For the ashramites, Bhagwan's flight is a coup which is worthy of the master. For he can lie like a trooper and deceive all. He is mischeivous and heartless, according to Prem Prasad, a psychologist from Germany. And afterall, life is a happening.

But a lot of murmuring still happened. Was it possible that the master who disappeared like a UFO had cancer of the larynx? Had his concern for deliverance become too great? Was he fleeing from the Indian government which demanded 5.1 million marks in back taxes? Or did he want to free his sunnyasin from their dependency?

Here we get words from the chairman: "The Day will come when you must kill me in your selves."

The elite does not ask themselves such questions, for donations of \$15,000 the gods in orange have the right to live in the ashram and participate in the rituals of self realization. In addition they got to clean, got free food in the canteen, pills for dysentery and a daily dose of energy. The privileged ones were treated in the ashram clinic and could use the ashram sauna. They sent their children to their own school, ate at the Vegetarian Epicure and parked their motorcycles in a reserved parking area. The elite consisted of the therapists, the group leaders, the bodyguards of the ashram, and the samurai guards trained in karate.

At the top of the heirarchy, there were a dozen chosen ones. They had the power of command, organized Bhagwan's departure and flew with him to New York. The people of the sunnyasin have to live in bamboo huts along the river, in decrepit hotel rooms for which they paid inflated prices in the slums of Poona. Many who set up housekeeping in the over grown gardens of Koreagon Park and on the damp lawn, suffered from diarrhea, ameobic dysentery, yellow fever and herpes. No former doctors, academicians, or engineers lived in this environment, but only those less fortunate children of comfort. The pariahs of the guru came from Goa and disappeared into the subculture of the ashram. In their huts there was always a small of hash and opium.

The elite have no plans for the future. The ashram trusts today in the net of the commune. Swami Satyananda has a notebook with addresses of sunnyasin in the whole world. "If I land at the airport in Frankfurt, I'll just throw a few cents into the nearest telephone booth and call a few people - that's all." For Satyananda, this is a feeling of brotherhood as among the Masons.

Star therapists are going on tour. Group leaders go into the prewarmed nests of Bhagwan's centers. The eggheads of the group will work with the master on his visions of the future in America; for instance, his plan to have the morning lectures, live, via satellite for all the meditation centers on earth.

Prém Prasad is also returning to the west as a chosen one. He is convinced that humanity will commit suicide. The great catastrophe is only a question of time. His Noah's Ark is the ashram. It doesn't matter where it is. "I think Bhagwan only started this movement because he knows that the crisis is coming and the survivors then will be ripe for a change of consciousness."

Those who came to Poona in the last few years because they had enough of the rat race for success like Andy Elten, burned their bridges behind them in the west. They gave up their families, sold their possessions, gave up their jobs. They went on a trip of no return like people in a science fiction film who leave the space ship earth in order to settle in another galaxy. "Just slip out of your past like a snake out of its old skin," said Bhagwan, "and don't even turn to look back."

Today the star of Poona is as uninhabitable as the moon. Many don't even have enough money for a flight home. All around the ashram everything is being converted into money. Sale...Sale..Sale. Notes are hanging on the blackboard in the smokers corner - they are stuck up on trees. Sunnyasin auction off their clothes in the street. For two rupees they invite Indians into their bamboo huts for flea markets. Motorcycle helmets, mirrors, plastic cups, bamboo curtains, etc all are sold, as well as the published consciousness of the years of Poona. Books of 2001, collected sayings of Indian Gurus, tapes and meditation music. Orange robes mildew on fences. Bicycles rust in the rain and family pictures and Bhagwan pictures still hang on the straw mats - already beginning to wrinkle and warp from the moisture.

The exodus goes into the unknown. Many are drawn to Hawaii - many to Goa, Kashmir to a houseboat community in South India, the address of which is sold in Poona like a sure racing tip. Some of them want to start therapy groups in the west - others want to return to their old profession. Whoever has very little money books a ticket in Bombay with his last rupees and just takes off. If the money is only enough to get to Athens (then), it'll have to be Athens.

#### "THE ASHRAM HAS TREATED THE WORLD LIKE A WASTEBASKET"

A German soldier who deserted three years ago wants to hide in India. After all, in Germany, jail awaits. Ma ARchana from Berlin has kept herself going in Poona by giving massages. The twenty-seven year old woman lives with her friend and ten cats in a tree house. She kneaded away the worries of broken up sunnyasin pairs and massage away the pain of the sterilized ashramites. "Who will help me now?" she asks. She only owns three hundred rupees and that is enough for three days.

However Norbert Kauschwitz from Frankfurt is in even worse shape. I met him in the Cafe Delite which is pigeon English for delight. Norbert is making himself a joint. On the metal table of the delite, there are puddles of mango juice. He was excommunicated from the ashram for using drugs. His mala was taken away. Since then he begs in the streets of Poona. At night he sleeps on a primitive bed and Bhagwan's picture smiles down on him. He pays 100 marks a month for his lodging and has been living this way for

three years.

"The ashram treated the world like a wastebasket," says a doctor in the Sasson hospital. "What it did not need and could not use, it threw away. Yesterday three morphine addicts were brought in. One of them needed 1200 rupees a day worth of morphine - that approximately 360 marks, in order to keep him alive, we had to give him the full dose. In February, a young Frenchman was brought to the hospital, he complained of stomach pain and died before the doctors could even examine him. Countless times we called the ashram, but they hung up on us. The autopsy was therefore performed on a John Doe. Two weeks later, after we had found out his name, his mother came from France and the unbelievable happened. She became a sunnyasin before she left India."

Every dead sunnyasin who was cremated in Poona is registered in a dirty bamboo hut down by the river. This also happens to a Japanese - Uchikura. On his death certificate it says "22-769, male, married, 29, opium - reason". A few steps further on, there is a tin roof hall with six cement columns - two crematorium's places are here. Yesterday evening the corpse of Ichikura was cremated. This morning early the Japanese from Poona went into the water and strew the ashes into the river. Cause of death - suicide by overdose of opium.

Not far from the ashram there is a psychiatric clinic with 4000 patients behind its walls. Like in the ashram, the inmates all wear one color, but not orange, instead, white. Green barracks that stand in the large area under broad leaf trees, like holy cows. For many sunnyasin, this area is the last station. For instance, for a young German woman committed suicide in the state mental hospital of Geroda. She hung herself from the window. Of another sunnyasin woman, who is still today behind barbed wire in the mental hospital, the doctors only know her name. When she was brought in, one was afraid of suicide and took her mala away from her. Liane Licosi is as if petrified. Only her lips move and only one word comes out of her ("Montana").

Dr. Deshmukh suspects psychic depression. In the ashram, one would say "She's not [it] No more energy."

END OF ARTICLE