

RAJNEESH FOUNDATION

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BHAGWAN'S DISCIPLES UNDER NO PRESSURE TO SMUGGLE DRUGS,
STATES RAJNEESH FOUNDATION

"Bhagwan's disciples are under no pressure from our organization to either smuggle drugs or to obtain money," said Ma Yoga Laxmi, Managing Trustee of Rajneesh Foundation, the charitable trust which administers activities at Shree Rajneesh Ashram, in a statement to the international and Indian press.

She was replying to allegations made recently by British and French newspapers that disciples were being subjected to psychological torture and brainwashing methods, and then forced to smuggle drugs in order to provide the Foundation with money. The story first appeared in the French news magazine L'Express in January this year, and was later taken up and sensationalized by the Daily Star and several other British newspapers.

"Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh teaches that the freedom of the individual is sacred, so we never interfere in the private lives of his disciples," she said. "No one has ever smuggled drugs on our behalf, or at our instigation. Drugs are strictly prohibited inside the ashram, and Bhagwan himself has often spoken against the use of drugs."

Ma Yoga Laxmi accepted the fact that three female disciples had been arrested in Paris recently for drug smuggling, but pointed out that over 40,000 people from Britain, Europe, America and many other countries visit the ashram every year, and that no attempt is made to investigate their backgrounds or to impose a code of behaviour on them.

"Our gates are open to everyone--to the sinner as well as the saint," she explained. "The fact is that if everyone who came here was already pure in heart and mind, there would be no need for them to come to Bhagwan in the first place."

Referring to the Paris cases, which involved three British girls--named as Judith Ashton, Ann Kurland and Margot Gordon--Ma Yoga Laxmi said that letters had been received from them apologizing for the "distorted and dishonest" versions of their stories which had appeared in some British and French newspapers.

One of the women also pointed out that all their statements in court had been submitted in French by their lawyers, so they were not aware of the full implications of what was being said on their behalf.

"It is clear to us that the responsibility for these drug smuggling activities was thrown on the ashram simply as a legal device to save these girls from long terms of imprisonment," said Ma Yoga Laxmi. "We do not blame them for adopting such tactics, but we must make it clear that all these stories are complete fabrications."

She also denied the allegation that the Foundation pressurizes disciples and visitors for money. "It is true that we cannot provide thousands of people with food, accommodation and therapy programmes for nothing, but this is a simple economic fact of life--it has nothing to do with pressure," she explained. "Wherever you go in this world you need money, and Poona is no exception."

She also acknowledged the fact that disciples and visitors become vulnerable and open-hearted through participating in the ashram's therapy programmes. "Through love everyone becomes open, tender and soft," she said. "But Bhagwan is also teaching awareness, so if people have understood him properly there is no risk that--after experiencing therapy--they will fall victim to unscrupulous smugglers looking for international carriers.

"Bhagwan teaches love and awareness together, and he leaves his disciples utterly free to think and act for themselves. He is not brainwashing anybody. On the contrary, he encourages individual responsibility and total freedom of thought."

Ma Yoga Laxmi laughed at the suggestion that the ashram's "serenity" tanks were akin to a form of torture used by Nazis in the war. "These tanks were developed in the Sixties by Dr. John C. Lilly and other leading American psychotherapists, and are very popular in the United States," she explained.

"They help people to experience a state of total relaxation and bliss. The only torture one could impose would be to tell people to get out of the tanks before their time is up."

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