

HOMES

JOBS

AUTOS

CLASSIFIEDS

ADSEARCH

Thursday, May 11, 2006

DENVERPOST.com

Denver, CO

NEWS

BLOGHOUSE
 BUSINESS
 COLUMNISTS
 FRONT PAGE
 LOCAL NEWS
 NATION/WORLD
 OBITUARIES
 SPECIAL REPORTS
 WEATHER

FEATURES

BOOKS
 ENTERTAINMENT
 FOOD/DINING
 HEALTH
 LIFESTYLES
 MOVIES
 TRAVEL
 TV LISTINGS

OPINION

COLUMNISTS
 EDITORIALS
 LETTERS
 PERSPECTIVE
 KEEFE CARTOON
 MESSAGE BOARDS

SPORTS

AVALANCHE
 BRONCOS
 COLLEGES
 COLUMNISTS
 NUGGETS
 PREPS
 RAPIDS
 ROCKIES
 SCORES
 OTHER SPORTS

SERVICES

ARCHIVES
 CONTACT US
 ABOUT US/HELP
 E-MAIL NEWS
 SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISING

AUTOS
 HOMES
 JOBS
 MARKETPLACE
 MEMORIALS
 NEWSPAPER ADS
 WEDDINGS
 YELLOW PAGES

HOME

Problems? Call 800-896-5587 or [Send e-mail](#)

Denver Post, The (CO)**Self-denial, poverty, riches**

January 20, 2006

Page: F-08

Michael Booth

Denver Post Staff Writer

Since the compelling documentary "**Naked in Ashes**" offers us the numbers right upfront, we might as well do the math.

India has 13 million naked yogis who wander the nation from snowy mountaintop to scorched desert, living on the charity of others and serving as spiritual icons for a nation of seekers.

Imagine, by proportion, nearly 4 million intensely religious, determinedly nonmaterial wanderers crisscrossing the United States, attracting countless teenagers as disciples with their parents' blessing.

Since it is so impossible to imagine - Deadheads don't count - "**Naked in Ashes**" may be the only ticket to the beginnings of enlightenment.

Filmmaker Paula Fouce, who has trekked through some of the world's harshest places to explore her love of Eastern religions, brings us wholeheartedly into the midst of India's iconic yogis.

Like snowflakes, no two yogis are alike. There seem to be a few basic rules: Denial of self, in the form of wearing almost no clothing even in the harshest weather, and holding no material possessions beyond a robe and a few religious symbols. Pursuit of understanding through meditation, ritual and study with higher yogis. Service to others through blessings and ritual. Reliance on charity for basic needs.

Other questions seem to have 13 million answers. Yogis mix and match Hindu religious practices with equally ancient yoga principles.

Some yogis carry out superhuman feats and give them the intriguing phrase "performing austerities." In Fouce's movie, one disciple hasn't sat down for years; another has kept his right hand raised above his head for 13 years; another sat still for nine days without eating, drinking or going to the bathroom.

The star of the film is Shiv Raj Giri, a powerfully built yogi with a spring in his eternal step. His assessment of the modern world: "Nowadays, people are eating too much, walking around too much, talking too much rubbish!" Far from a curmudgeon, Shiv Raj Giri exudes charisma, declaring that "all prayer is beneficial during the present dark age."

Other yogis live near the cremation grounds along the sacred mother Ganges river, constantly bathed in a flow of crematory smoke. Fouce's camera is admirably neutral, demanding that we respect the various yogis' dedication without requiring us to worship their same gods.

My only quibble with "**Naked in Ashes**" may be unfair: asking it to be a different kind of movie than it intended. I would like to see the flip side of Indian society, in other words, all the average worshipers who make the yogi system possible through both material support and spiritual reverence.

Who seeks the yogis' blessings, and why? How do they fit into India's modernizing society? Does the hurly-burly business world of India, fast becoming a high-tech power, have any use for the old system?

Still, "**Naked in Ashes**" does so much of what we want from documentary - it teaches us new ways that lives can be lived. And religion or no, that always expands the spirit.

Staff writer Michael Booth

can be reached at 303-820-1686

or mbooth@denverpost.com.

"Naked in Ashes"

NOT RATED with nudity during yogi ritual scenes 1 hour, 58 minutes
DOCUMENTARY Directed by Paula Fouce; featuring appearances by

numerous Indian yogis and disciples Opens today at Starz FilmCenter at the Tivoli.....

All content © 2006- Denver Post, The (CO) and may not be
republished without permission.

Send comments or questions to [NewsLibrary](#)

All archives are stored on a library system from NewsBank Media Services.