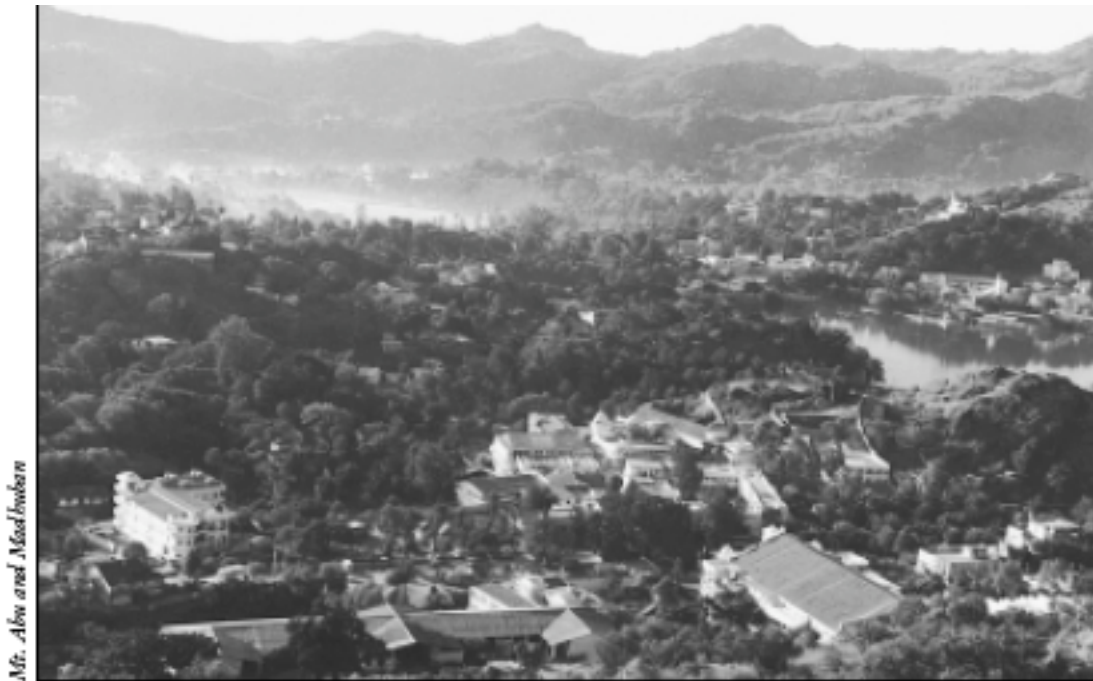


# Interreligious Insight

## October 2004 Edition

# MADHUBAN

Brahma Kumaris, World Spiritual University



**M**ount Abu lies in the Aravali mountain ranges of Rajasthan, India. It is home to the headquarters of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University – an organization that has over 5000 centres in more than 80 countries. The setting provides the perfect backdrop for the many thousands of visitors a year that make the journey there to experience a truly spiritual retreat.

Indian scriptures are filled with myths and legends of how the gods would retreat to the mountains and immerse themselves in solitude and gain spiritual power through meditation.

Sister Jayanti Kirpalani, European director of the Brahma Kumaris and a frequent visitor to Mount Abu, says it is a theme that resonates in the traditions of many faiths around the world: “Great sages, saints and prophets from the different religions achieved inspiration or enlightenment in such an environment. As much as mentally, sometimes you need to be able physically to withdraw yourself from the rest of the world, really to be able to give yourself that full attention, to discover what is going on inside you”.

It is an approach that many have found essential in establishing a sense of balance in their lives. Raja Yoga meditation, the particular form of meditation practised by the Brahma Kumaris, is essentially an ancient technique that continues to have a very modern application. It is based on the understanding that every

human being is essentially a point of light, a soul. Every soul has within it an original set of powers – its spiritual genetic makeup. They are: peace, purity, love, happiness and wisdom.

Through Raja Yoga meditation, these powers are energised and are experienced through thoughts, words and actions. It may all sound very nice, but does it really work in the context of the world we live in today? Janet is a teacher in London. She says it does: “Living in the West, the pace of life is very fast. It is so easy to be caught up in stress and anxiety – constantly worrying about family and work. It can be a real juggling act and meditation for me is what helps me stay focussed and not become a victim of my emotions, but rather someone who is able to use my inner strengths to sustain myself and those around me. The experience of coming to Mount Abu for a couple of weeks a year is essentially like a battery being charged within me – it keeps me going for another year!”

So what is the significance of Mount Abu and why does it hold a special attraction to the many thousands of visitors it has a year?

Mount Abu has a truly rich and diverse history. It was once part of the Chauhan kingdom of Rajasthan and served as a summer resort for the kings of the region. It was the favourite summer destination for the British during colonial times, also serving as a sanatorium for the troops.

But it is its spiritual heritage that Mount Abu has become most known for. It is a place of pilgrimage to many across India. There is the Jain Dilwala Temple, renowned for its intricate architecture. Other temples at Achalgarh, Guru Shikhar, Gaumukh and Adhar Devi are equally sought out by tourists, each having their own significance in India’s spiritual history.

The original site of Madhuban – the name of the Brahma Kumaris’ original complex in Mount Abu – consisted of just a few small buildings and a courtyard converted from two stables. But over the years it has expanded considerably. Brahma Baba, the founder of the organization, died in 1969, but it was actually after that time that the organization began to grow rapidly. In the 1970s, the first centres outside India were established: in the UK, East Africa, Hong Kong, Germany and America. To accommodate the first visitors from overseas, more buildings were built. “Om Shanti Bhavan” opened in 1983, a hall that can seat 3,000 people. It has since hosted many international conferences on human values, self development and spirituality, as well as event in honour of UN initiatives like the International Year of Peace in 1986. Soon afterwards, the University opened the Global Hospital and Research Centre, which became the first hospital in Mount Abu to offer modern medical treatment and services free of charge to large numbers of people and at subsidised rates to many others.

The University’s “Academy for a Better World” followed. It is a purpose-built, selfsufficient complex in a different part of Mount Abu to the original site of Madhuban. It serves as the perfect retreat place for the University’s members, which now number more than 600,000 globally.

Retreats are also held for people from different professions, including government and politics, media, business, health, law and the environment.

The villages in and around Mount Abu have also benefited from the organization’s expansion. At the foot of the mountain, the BK’s biggest, and newest, complex is in the village of Taleti. Its central feature is a giant hall that can seat 15,000 people and can be seen from several miles away. Called “Shantivan”, the complex uses solar power from the world’s largest solar cooker to be able to cook meals for up to 30,000 people at a time. The same technology has enabled many homes in the villages to have solar panels on their rooftops – ensuring that for the first time they have free electricity to help develop their land and improve their economic situation.

All of the BK’s activities – including the village outreach healthcare projects, the retreats, seminars, courses at its centres in India and abroad – are free of charge. The BK’s are funded through voluntary contributions from members and supporters of the organization, which has enabled it to serve millions of people around the world. The organization is run entirely by volunteers. As well as Mount Abu, there are retreat centres in the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Australia – giving people around the world the chance to have a retreat experience nearer home.

For more information on the Brahma Kumaris, go to: [www.bkwsu.com](http://www.bkwsu.com)

Photos for this article were supplied by the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.



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