

Pritha Singh

Guyana: playwright, director, and co-founder of the Rajkumari Cultural Center

Object: mala prayer beads

[SAT - CHIT - ANANDA ~
Truth, Consciousness, Bliss]

(Sanskrit)

I am an East Indian born in the former British Guiana. My ancestors came from India to work there on the sugar plantations. After the abolition of slavery in 1838, Christianized Africans got involved in civic society, while the Hindus became isolated on the plantations, where they preserved all the culture and rituals, down to the smallest grain of rice. In the mid-1960s, there was a lot of violence in Guyana that the politicians were not able to control. It was unsafe to walk on the streets. So we moved to the sugar plantations in the country for about five years. That is where I connected with Indian folk traditions.

I had grown up in the theatre. I started writing plays in school in Guyana for the Christmas, Easter, and Catholic holidays. I wrote my first serious play when I was sixteen. Later, my father came to New York, sponsored by my uncle who was a lawyer. Then, in 1970, I came to stay with him as well. I went to drama school while I was doing English literature at the university and a minor in theatre arts. I studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts directly under Herbert Berghof.

The mala is symbolic, just like a rosary. I use it every day. It has 108 beads traditionally made of the wood of the tulsi tree. It has a beautiful aroma and is used in meditation to create a vibration of life. So we start at the first bead and repeat: ham yam ram vam lam. These are the chakras. They are important for our functioning. We need to activate them to keep the pulse going. If the mind, body, and spirit work in harmony, we are going to be in harmony.

It's about bringing these three things together.



Bio:

Pritha Singh is descended from a family whose members have been distinguished leaders in Indian and Caribbean political, intellectual, and cultural life for five generations. Pritha is a multi-disciplinary artist with an extensive work history in arts management, theater and television production, corporate management, and marketing. Particularly interested in neglected heritage art forms, many of them unique variations of originals evolved from the East Indian Diaspora in Guyana, Suriname, the Caribbean, and New York, Pritha and her brother, the late Kathak dance exponent and cultural activist Gora Singh (1950-1997), founded the Rajkumari Cultural Center in 1995. She continues to pursue her passion for playwriting. Among her projects are: Women of the Mahabarata (2003), and The Vivaha (Wedding House) Series of dance-dramas. rajkumari.weebly.com