

Shiva, Parvati and Krishna

A young filmmaker teaches his audience to slow down and focus on feelings | By Harald Franzen

Director Krishna Saraswati went in search of the lives of his parents. He came back with an unusual love story and many small lessons about life.

Krishna Saraswati, 28, has a beautiful olive complexion, round glasses, unruly brown hair and he is probably the only person named Krishna in his small town in southwestern Germany. He is the son of an Indian guru and a German hippie and has made an award-winning documentary film that delves into their two worlds but transcends them both.

Early on in Saraswati's film, we meet Wolfgang Schneider, who sits at his neatly arranged breakfast table and peels a boiled egg with the care of a surgeon. He is the very picture of the straight-laced, stuffy German. But it wasn't always so, he tells his nephew: "Back then, I tried everything that was on the market: marijuana, LSD, Mescala-

line - I even had my own bong. The only difference between your mother and I was that she went to India and I went to Tübingen."

It was a choice that would have far-reaching consequences. Wolfgang's sister, Renate, went to India. And at an ashram, she met Nithiyanand Saraswathy, a guru, fell in love and stayed. Saraswati is the product of their love.

Schneider is one of six people who tell the story of the unusual love of Saraswati's parents in the documentary, "The Legend of Shiva and Parvati." The film uses the legendary love of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati as a parallel to that of Saraswati's parents. Both couples came from different worlds and their love was deep and passionate but also tempestuous. In the legend, Parvati surpassing all other ascetics in penance (even her detractors attest to Renate's extraordinary focus and dedication to life in the ashram) and eventually wins Shiva this way. They marry, she tames the wild Shiva and moves to his mountain home as Renate did. The similarities in the two

stories were so striking that locals began to call Saraswati's parents by the names of the two gods.

Three years ago, after the premature death of both of them, Saraswati embarked on a journey to discover their story. The film school project, which was supposed to take a year, took more than twice as long. But the result merited the effort.

Saraswati has created an award-winning film that forces the viewer to slow down and focus on feelings rather than facts. "We [in Germany] live in a culture here, which is always very strongly geared toward knowledge," said Saraswati. But in this story, the facts where not what mattered most to him - he did not bother to introduce people, places or dates. "We have focused on what was very important to me and that was the emotional and the universal hidden in the story of my parents," he said. "My intention was that in the end, the story only functions as a mirror for the viewer: that they think about their own lives."

The protagonists telling the story come from both of Saras-



Krishna Saraswati directed the documentary film "The Legend of Shiva and Parvati."

The story they recount is not a perfect one. Renate and Nithiyanand did not live happily ever after but we get a sense from letters and the accounts of those around them that they never stopped loving each other. Similarly, their spiritual journeys were not without detours. Back in Germany, Renate eventually traded the simple life with Keck in for a more conventional, middle-class existence. Nithiyanand, the ascetic, eventually began to care about money, something that shocked his disciples. "Maybe your father left the path that I would have suggested as the ideal path," Maier says in the film.

"But that is my idea of his path, not his own." The film does not celebrate the German Parvati and her Shiva but it lauds them for daring to take the road they did. As Saraswati put it: "I think the greatest treasure that one can leave behind is to have lived a life that is worth being retold." In that, they have succeeded. ■

and eventually his friend. In India, there are Vivekananda-Baba and Charles D'Silva, two yogis who are former disciples of Saraswati's father. And between the two worlds, much like the filmmaker himself, there is Krishna's younger sister Namanda, who grew up in Germany but has also lived in India.