

Commercialisation of yoga: Boon or bane?

From the tranquil environs of a forest or mountains, yoga is now increasingly moving to air-conditioned enclosures within homes, fitness centres or attractive resorts. While commercialization has surged the popularity of yoga, glamorizing it to suit modern taste, this has also taken away the authenticity of the age-old discipline, say experts.

Nupur Sikka, director of Ganga Kinare, a riverside boutique hotel in Rishikesh - a city touted as 'World Capital of Yoga' and home to many ashrams and spiritual gurus - feels that "commercialization has both positive and negative impact".

"We really need to treasure the traditional yoga style and maintain its authenticity rather than mixing up different styles of yoga," Sikka told IANS.

The origins of yoga - which helps in physical and mental well-being - have been speculated to date to pre-Vedic Indian traditions. Later, yoga gurus from India introduced the discipline to the west. It is estimated that 250 million people around the world practice yoga, over 20 million of them in the US.

It has evolved into forms like hot yoga, power yoga, Ashtanga yoga and more.

Now, with the world ready to celebrate International Yoga Day on June 21 - proposed to the UN by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and accepted with acclamation - experts hope its popularity gets a further boost.

"The affirmation coming from one of the highest offices in the country surely helps people shed their cynicism and develop an honest inquisitiveness. The fact that Modi himself is a trained yoga practitioner has further helped in promoting yoga," Manisha Kharbanda, a 28-year-old practitioner and proponent of yoga for almost two decades, told IANS.

Kharbanda, who founded BrahmYog, a Patiala-based initiative committed to spread the benefits of yoga, stressed that "yoga is an education and commercialisation of any type of education is not good".

There are some, like IT training company Koenig Solutions, who give free yoga classes not only to their employees, but also to underprivileged children.

On the flipside, a major benefit of the commercialization of yoga has been the increased accessibility of the practice to the masses. Today, yoga is being offered in more venues, in more styles and of course more teachers, but Kharbanda believes that to keep a check on ensuring the promotion of authentic yoga, certification of yoga teacher from right institute must be a prerequisite.

"The idea of certifying yoga teachers through the ministry of AYUSH will be a welcome step and will ensure that people learn yoga the way it was evolved by our forefathers," added Kharbanda, who holds four batches of yoga classes everyday.

Also, with the burgeoning popularity of yoga among the young and old alike, it has created space for multiple training centres.

Bikram Yoga, an international chain, has opened its first franchisee in India. For a monthly membership of Rs.6,000 exclusive of taxes or an annual membership of Rs.50,000 plus tax, it is attracting customers.

"Till now, 50-plus people have joined the classes in a period of one month while over 150 have taken a trial and have liked it. Many are eager to join. We have members from various age-groups ranging from 13 to 70," Bikram Yoga owner Pallavi Aggarwal told IANS.

The fact that yoga is turning out to be a huge business globally is also proven by the variety of designer apparel and practice mats available in the market. And it's only poised for growth.

"The interest of yoga in western countries is much more than India. In fact, yoga in the west has already taken off... It has much to do with government's initiative because that is a force which guides people in a certain way," Navneet, assistant general manager, Kairali Yoga at Kairali Ayurvedic Group, told IANS.



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