

# The soft power of yoga

In a conflicting world, yoga is a uniting force



By *Meenakshi Lekhi* | Issue Date: March 26, 2023 | Updated: March 19, 2023 11:43 IST

March 13, 2023, marks the 100-day countdown to the International Day of Yoga, 2023. The proposal for the International Day of Yoga was first introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly. Modi said, “Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition.” Recognising its universal appeal, on December 11, 2014, the United Nations proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga.

I equate the culture of any nation to a human body. As per the Bhagavad Gita, we believe that the body is the chariot, which means it is just a carrier to reach a destination; however, the charioteer is the soul. What we see, that is the body, is the tangible heritage of any nation. The intangible cultural heritage of any nation is tantamount to the soul of its civilisation, people and history. Yoga is that soul of our civilisation, which is aeonian.

While the body dies, the soul continues to live and that is how India sees its intangible cultural heritage—a living wealth of knowledge, know-how and skills that are transmitted from one generation to the next.



Illustration: Job P.K.

Among India’s most significant global contribution has been the gift of yoga drawing on its ancient culture and civilisation.

Modi had once rightly said that yoga belongs to everyone and everyone belongs to yoga. In a conflicting world, yoga is a uniting force bringing people together through compassion and kindness. It is all-inclusive and respects diversity. Practising yoga brings joy, good health, and inner peace. It deepens

the connection between an individual’s inner consciousness and the external world. For when we look inside, we find answers to questions of the external world.

Physical movement is mere one-fifth of yoga as a whole, as it is more about finding an understanding of oneness with the world and nature itself. Yoga enables one to truly connect with oneself. It enables an expansion of physical and mental abilities and helps us become the best version of ourselves. After all, inner tranquillity is the pre-requisite for global peace.

While yoga has always been India’s own way to fitness, today, the world realised the importance of yoga, more so during the pandemic. When I travel, I have noticed the growing reach and acceptance of yoga across the globe. Today, yoga is found in the curriculum of schools, in the training of armies, and in the motivational techniques of global corporations at an international level. Many could defeat Covid-19 due to high immunity gained through regular practice of yoga.

Beyond its immediate impact on physical health, the pandemic also exacerbated psychological suffering and mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, as pandemic-related restrictions continue in various forms in many countries. The message of yoga in promoting both the physical and mental well-being of humanity has never been more relevant. Many people around the world embraced yoga to stay healthy and rejuvenated and fought social isolation and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Yoga, an Indian tradition that we gifted the world, is a powerful tool for inner-engineering, through which one can explore the metaphysical and achieve spiritual oneness.

India celebrated the International Day of Yoga in 2022 on a grand scale with 75 Union ministers practicing yoga at 75 iconic locations. I practiced yoga at Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari, with around 2,000 people. This year, too, government of India plans to take this further for maximum involvement from the general public. It is our responsibility as a civilisation to keep this cultural gem alive, because it is unique to us and has the power to transform the world.

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