Millions World Over Roll Out Their Yoga Mats with The Art Of Living

Bengaluru, Karnataka: Millions of yoga enthusiasts the world over, including India, Japan, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Lebanon, US, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Nepal, New Zealand, and other nations attended yoga sessions conducted by yoga teachers from Art of Living on the 5th International Day of Yoga celebrated on June 21, 2019.

Yoga is proving to be a medium to break all barriers between national and international borders, religious beliefs, urban and rural areas, and between the rich and poor. People of all ages, sizes, shapes, and social backgrounds could be seen on 21st morning, yoga mats tucked under their arm, enthusiastically rushing to a venue of their choice to participate in the IDY celebrations.

People in the rural areas had no fancy yoga mats or uniforms, but their enthusiasm far surpassed that of their urban counterparts, with many of them participating in such a celebration for the first time, thanks to the Yavatnacharya and rural teachers of The Art of Living who have been making consistent efforts to take yoga to every nook and corner of India.

Yoga sessions were held in any venue imaginable, including schools, street corners, parks, stadiums, hospitals, prisons, etc. While ITBP personnel performed Yoga on International Yoga Day at an altitude of 19000 ft near OP Dorjil in Sikkim at minus 15 degrees Celsius early in the morning, another team of Art of Living was conducting a yoga session for about 1000 Navy officers ashore INS Viraat, the erstwhile Aircraft Carrier. The IDY was observed in all the 700 free schools of The Art of Living, NCC cadets joined hundreds of other participants at the celebrations in Bengaluru Ashram. A delegation of 40 International Media personnel joined hundreds of local yoga enthusiasts at the event organized by the Ministry of Tourism, in association with The Art of Living, at Lalbagh Botanical Gardens in Bengaluru.

Apart from the Common Yoga Protocol, about 9000 Art of Living volunteers across 20 locations performed the Warrior I pose (yoga) simultaneously, holding it for 3 minutes.

Rejuvenating the Lifeline of Gadag – Tunga and Malaprabha

Gadag, Karnataka: The Art of Living’s River Rejuvenation team has been approached by the district authorities in Gadag to take over water management in the area. Gadag district, which lies to the east of the Western Ghats, falls in the rain-shadow region and is generally drought prone. A major part of domestic and agricultural water needs in this district are met from groundwater and water management is an integral part for all round socio-economic development of the region.

The River Rejuvenation team led by Nagaraj Gangoli comprises of geologists, hydrologists, and soil experts. It has a 360 degree approach that not only focuses on water management but also gives new direction and a renewed sense of well being amongst local people, reviving agriculture and bringing hope for the future.

The multi-dimensional approach of the organization includes building artificial recharge structures, undertaking extensive afforestation focusing on native species, and training the local farmers on sustainable agriculture as part of the river-revival initiatives. Brining a spiritual awakening in these communities to build youth and community leadership stands at the core of these efforts and is the key to the success of the projects so far.

Right now, in the summer of 2019, work is in progress in 15 panchayats under which 300 structures are complete and 750 structures are to be built in the area.

To further make the rejuvenation work fruitful for the villagers and for long term gains the team has taken up the task of teaching the farmers natural farming methods. 1200 families from 120 panchayats have been identified to undergo training in natural farming techniques and growing crops that are suitable for the region and availability of resources. This will help them to improve their income and double their earnings. An app has been created with the data of every single family which will help the team monitor their progress over a period of six months.

Not only this, 10 families have been identified for the pilot project. These families have been helped with cows and trained to keep bees. The Banks and Local District authorities are supporting the project. The Forest department has provided one Lakh sapling. These will be distributed to the families- 100 saplings per family and once the rains begin plantation will be done in the catchment areas.

Legend has it that Lord Varaha sat on the hillock after a hard fought battle with the demons and the sweat that flowed from his left and right brow became Tunga and Bhadra. Armed with modern technology and a will to serve the society the team has taken upon itself to sweat it out to bring water back into the streams that once irrigated the fields of Gadag.
On a global scale, the third largest business, after the petroleum and arms trade, is the illegal ‘business’ of drug-trafficking, with an estimated turnover of $500 billion. Socially, the drug-trafficking industry causes violence and loss of human potential; the economic and community-health ramifications are numerous; in families, it causes irreplaceable damage, social difficulties and dysfunction; and at the individual level, it traps the addict in an unhealthy existence, with loss of agency, direction and self-esteem.

Unfortunately, drug addiction has now severely affected rural India too, especially women, who are becoming addicts in increasing numbers. The actual number of female drug-addicts could actually be higher than officially projected, as girls are often not sent to rehabilitative centers. Female addicts, not all women come forward to take treatment. To compound the human tragedy, sometimes whole families become addicts. The reasons for this epidemic are many. Easy and cheap availability of drugs is one. Other causes are curiosity, stress, peer pressure, social values which encourage the habit, and also, perhaps, a chronic female addiction. A recent study has shown that women are more vulnerable to addiction than men.

The success rate of rehabilitation at the Art of Living’s De-Addiction Centers is around 60%, pointing to the advantage of Sudarshan kriya and spirituality offer in helping addicts overcome their addiction. Research shows that in many cases, addicts can manage abstinence outcomes, and prevent rehabilitation from getting disrupted by relapses. Along with other methods outlined above, the De-Addiction Programs can help bring back India’s ‘lost generations’ to the mainstream.

**How can we, as The Art of Living, boost access to finance in rural India?**

The Art of Living per se is a brand name today with a credible reputation in the market. Its volunteers work with awareness, devotion, commitment and belongingness towards the objective of creating a humanitarian society. Because of this credibility over the years, it has become easy for banks and other financial organisations to work closely with it. Thus, The Art of Living can play the role of a catalyst. It can provide the much needed confidence and trust to the banks and financial institutions that its trained volunteers, teachers and others at the grassroots level, who want to engage in business or start-ups, can leverage from it and have access to finance. Apart from that, in India, micro-enterprises are becoming addictive in increasing numbers. The actual number of female drug-addicts could actually be higher than officially projected, as girls are often not sent to rehabilitative centers. Female addicts, not all women come forward to take treatment. To compound the human tragedy, sometimes whole families become addicts. The reasons for this epidemic are many. Easy and cheap availability of drugs is one. Other causes are curiosity, stress, peer pressure, social values which encourage the habit, and also, perhaps, a chronic female addiction. A recent study has shown that women are more vulnerable to addiction than men.

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Jalna, Maharashtra. Nikhil comes from an agricultural background. In working in a small scale sugar factory to a successful rural entrepreneur, he has come a long, long way in a span of two years. It was the summer of 2017. It was the summer of 2017. Nikhil was fascinated by the idea. There was no solar shop within the circumference of around 40 kms of his village. He convinced his parents to let him attend the training program which was free and in a field he was fascinated by. He started his tenth grade. He was happy that food and stay for the 3 months duration would be taken care of too. He shared happily how the training program is so complete and comprehensive that he must start off on his own business venture. On completion of training, he had two campus placements offers but he was very clear in what he wanted to do which was to go back to his village and electrify the community.

Nikhil is just one of the many success stories of Sri Sri Tattva that is currently running 95 skill development centers with over 90,905 enrolments, providing training in installation and repair of solar appliances, under the PMKSY at the Art of Living India’s 2nd Regional Center, Bengaluru. ‘Nikhil, “When you have an interest in something and are passionate about it, it is possible,” says Nikhil Mishra, a young man from village Tirathpuri of district Jalna, Maharashtra. Nikhil comes from an agricultural background. In working in a small scale sugar factory to a successful rural entrepreneur, he has come a long, long way in a span of two years. It was the summer of 2017. It was the summer of 2017. Nikhil was fascinated by the idea. There was no solar shop within the circumference of around 40 kms of his village. He convinced his parents to let him attend the training program which was free and in a field he was fascinated by. He started his tenth grade. He was happy that food and stay for the 3 months duration would be taken care of too. He shared happily how the training program is so complete and comprehensive that he must start off on his own business venture. On completion of training, he had two campus placements offers but he was very clear in what he wanted to do which was to go back to his village and electrify the community. Nikhil has started selling and servicing solar home systems, solar hybrid water pumps, solar on-grid systems and more, through his business venture, Nikhil Solar Agency. Today, he earns between 30 to 40 thousand rupees a month. He is confident that with the technology becoming cheaper, he has just taken up full double his income within a month or so.”

Surya Mitra Pulls Youth Out of the Doldrums

**Surya Mitra:**

In rural India, be it cottage industries, handicrafts, agriculture activities, allied agriculture activities, etc, I have observed that the scaling up is very less. Most of them remain only in the subsistence level and do not venture into commercial production. This is where startups in the rural sector will have a very significant role to play. Startups can identify these areas where they can bring in technology to serve the needs and conveniences of the last person standing and also support in reaching out to an unlimited market. Startup owners can make people tech savvy and then carry out such initiatives that will be very inclusive in nature where everybody can participate, thus increasing people's livelihood and also giving a push to the economy by generating a large outreach. India is a labour intensive country, hence, such startups are needed that engage technology to enable employment.

**What are the few guidelines that budding micro-entrepreneurs should keep in mind?**

First of all, people will have to ideate and find out what they want to do, something that is close to their heart will sustain their interest. Second, meditation is very important. It helps one reach within and find out what is that which they like. If the enterprise is guided by one's liking, they will be self motivated to do better. Third, networking is very important. Entrepreneurs should not feel that they are themselves only. Jyagga should be very alive like a small child and they should not miss an opportunity to learn from others and experts in the field. Fourth, a business plan is required that should align one's passion and the market. Fifth, they should have a steadfastness in their goal and do not venture into commercial production. This is where startups in the rural sector will have a very significant role to play. Startups can identify these areas where they can bring in technology to serve the needs and conveniences of the last person standing and also support in reaching out to an unlimited market. Startup owners can make people tech savvy and then carry out such initiatives that will be very inclusive in nature where everybody can participate, thus increasing people's livelihood and also giving a push to the economy by generating a large outreach. India is a labour intensive country, hence, such startups are needed that engage technology to enable employment.

**What can we do as a company, not just as an individual, rather as a consumer,**

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Surya Mitra Pulls Youth Out of the Doldrums

- Tubherna Sharma

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Volunteers Join Hands with Nashik Municipal Corporation in Devrai Afforestation Program

On February 16, 2019, Nashik Municipal Corporation launched the Devrai Project, an urban afforestation program under which trees would be planted in various areas of Nashik. The Art of Living was one of the NGOs which was handed the responsibility of planting and conserving trees in the Nashik Road Division, one of the six areas chosen for afforestation.

Ashok Gavali, Art of Living faculty in Nashik, was put in charge of the project. He took up the task with great zeal and enthusiasm along with the help of other Art of Living teachers and volunteers.

After holding discussions with the volunteers on the type of saplings to be planted, the Corporation supplied the saplings. Ashok Gavali mentions that although planting was a one-time simple task, managing and conserving the planted saplings was the real challenge. The team took up the task of planting and day-to-day caretaking of 250 saplings. Three months have elapsed since the project began and all the plants are being taken care of in a very efficient manner.

Initially, the project faced tough resistance from the local people as the land earmarked for planting was serving as a playground for the children. The heroism of overcoming this obstacle was taken on by The Art of Living volunteers. They visited every single home in the area and explained to them about the need for the project. They were told about the importance of trees and its benefits for future generation, for animals and birds, and for environmental balance. Their untiring efforts convinced the local people who finally assented to the project. Not only did they give their approval for the project but they also actively participated in the same.

As mentioned by Ashok Gavali, the project will be of immense benefit to the inhabitants of Nashik. In the first instance, it will compensate for the number of trees cut down in Nashik during road constructions. Secondly, it will provide shelter to a large number of birds and animals. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the area will have more oxygen to breathe.

Barren Land Transformed Into a Green Paradise

The Art of Living’s International Academy for Human Values (IAHV) has been doing an incredible afforestation work at Tvela, Navi Mumbai. Their efforts have converted a barren land to a green paradise! The tree plantation project started in 2017 and continues to date. In 2017, during one of their meet ups with the Maharashtra Government regarding one or their other projects, IAHV came across this stretch of land in Rabale which was under severe encroachment by the laborers in and around the industrial area. Heavy encroachment and industrial activities had caused the temperature to rise and the area was much hotter than the other areas in Mumbai. There was an urgent need to stop encroachment in this area and initiate afforestation, and project Tvela came into existence.

After careful deliberation on the type of plants to be planted in order to restore the lost biodiversity of the region, a variety of indigenous plants were chosen. A scientific approach and over 18,000 saplings have been planted over the last 2 years in an area spread across 33 acres.

Mr. Nagesh Vankadari, who has been associated with IAHV for the last 4 years, gave us some updates about the ongoing urban afforestation in Rabale. Though IAHV has done some remarkable afforestation programs in the past, the Rabale project is unique. IAHV joined hands with Hariyali, an NGO that is specialized in the processes of reforestation, plantation and environmental protection. The most obvious challenge one could face during such projects is the maintenance and sustained development of the plantation which requires free flow of funds. Art of Living is a partner in this project helping to maintain the greenery in the peak of summer using special techniques. In addition to this they have also applied to Maharashtra Forest Department for taking the project to further heights through proper maintenance of the plantations.

The department is also emphasizing on CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) to ensure that the project moves smoothly and there is steady and sustainable growth and maintenance of the plantations.

Presently, this is one of the biggest urban afforestation projects in India. The plantation site is spread across 33 acres. Due to drip irrigation and other methods trees look green in the peak of summer too. The survival rate of plants is 85% to 90%. All the 18000 plants are tagged and a bio diversity of butterfly park have been created.

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It was the festival of Diwali, a barely eleven year old Anukriti had just stepped out to deposit the trash in the municipality trash can, when she found this rag-picker urchin, fallen and bruised all over. Wanting no time, she held him in her arms, cleaned his wound, and applied medicines. From the next day onwards every morning as she headed to school, the urchin would come singing and dancing to greet her on her way, without fail. It was young Anukriti’s first brush with the immense power that service and love hold in the world. It augmented what she witnessed her policeman grandfather and businessman father do day and night, toiling to answer people’s call for help.

This urge to further shape her understanding of life for the years to come.

As the years rolled by Anukriti aspired to become an academician. With aspiration gleaming in her eyes, she moved from her home in Barabigha, Bihar, to Ranchi, Jharkhand, where her maternal grandparents lived. While she pursued her Post Graduation in Economics, she would coach undergraduates simultaneously. One day, in one of her coaching classes, she was introduced to The Art of Living workshop. She debunked the idea in one go, all who could possibly know the art of living. She thought it better to stay away from the possibility of a scam. But her peers dragged her into it and an unforeseen story unfolded.

“Nature too conspired, mysteriously”, Anukriti adds with a beaming heart, “my uncle relaxed my background”.

*After completion of B.Tech everyone went ahead to pursue higher education while I chose to remain a dedicated RSS Pracharak!” Chaitanya doesn’t stop at that.

He supported The Art of Living’s projects. He supported farmers were looking towards him for inspiration. As a Sri Sri Natural Farming, he was introduced to Sri Sri Natural Farming trainer.

Talking about agriculture, Chaitanya says that it has been a love-hate relationship for most part of his life. He grew up in a family where agriculture was the prime source of livelihood. Most years his family faced losses in agriculture and struggled to meet ends and provide the children with a good education. These unpleasant memories had, for a long time, made him stay away from the prospect of being an agriculturist. It wasn’t until he was introduced to Sri Sri Natural Farming, that he realized that agriculture done in the right way could actually bring prosperity to many. As a Natural Farming trainer, he creates awareness among the farmers to work upon and very soon his folks and other farmers were looking towards him for inspiration. The tables had turned and agriculture, and no longer spelled doom for Chaitanya.

Chaitanya didn’t stop at that. He worked day and night to help materialize several of The Art of Living’s projects, so many times she had dreamt of being able to do that. And then came the gratitude in the eyes of the participants that was also expressed in multiple words. Anukriti knew at once that there was no turning back from there. She was meant to do this.

In a month’s time she joined The Art of Living Social Projects office in Ranchi. Soon, she was assisting her team of Outreach volunteer trainers of Project Pavitra, dividing responsibilities among themselves to reach out to as many schools as possible.

The project was being co-ordinated in several districts of Jharkhand. Coordination among the team was required, logistics of daily operations had to be looked into, cooperation and permissions had to be sought from the District Administration, and above all a sharp presence of mind to deal with the hundreds of young girls sitting in front of you and also their teachers and guardians, who were not always on the supportive side. Learning each step of the way, Anukriti scaled high to become one of the best performing trainers across India and within a month and half was recommended to become a Master Trainer of the project.

The biggest achievement however, Anukriti says is the way in which it has been possible to bring light into the lives of these girls. “They ask so many queries and they have and the lack of information they struggle with, Anukriti realised for herself how important menstrual education is. Now she is determined to reach as far as she can to impart menstrual education to the girls. No girl should suffer in health and lost opportunities because of lack of knowledge. She is grateful to Gurudev for guiding her in discovering herself.”

Chaitanya adds that he has always had his eyes set on larger goals and had the conviction that he was at the right age where he had the willingness to take risks and the energy to execute them.

Chaitanya was the quintessential born leader. During his growing up years in Surupat, Telangana, he was greatly influenced by his grandfather’s service activities as a Sarpanch. As early as in school, the leader in him found a unique expression. He would teach his friends and classmates who weren’t performing well and in the process complete his own studies. A leader in sports too, he headed the captain’s hat in his school cricket team. He always had his eyes wide open to the multiple challenges that people around him were facing. There were several students who, though brilliant, were unable to focus on their studies due to the financial constraints that forced them to engage their time and energy looking after the needs of their families. Whenever Chaitanya came across such a student, he would make it a point to raise funds to support them.

Soon after completing his M.Tech., Chaitanya became an Art of Living teacher and began travelling to several parts of the state to conduct programs and facilitate social development projects. Over the years he has travelled extensively in the districts of Khammam, Suryapet, and Ranga Reddy, in Telangana. He now teaches a large bouquet of programs including the Happiness Program, YES!, Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP), Sri Sri Yoga, Know Your Child, and Know Your Teen. He is also a Sri Sri Natural Farming trainer.

The construction of more than 500 toilets in Khammam rural mandals and is currently facilitating the ‘Ambedkar Jeevan Padham’, an ambitious initiative where youth are provided a Psychometric Analysis and guided towards making the right choices for training, employment, and entrepreneurship. So far the project is operational in 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh and has touched the lives of more than 5000 youths. The thought of bringing the youth together had played on Chaitanya’s mind for a long time. After some deliberation he thought sports would be the best medium to achieve this.

Thus, two years ago he started organizing a YLT Sports Day, which is attended by 150-200 young girls and boys and players from the nearby 30 villages come and participate in about 10 different games. The idea turned out to be a huge success among the residents and Chaitanya now has bigger plans for it. Chaitanya’s family too has eventually come to accept this leader’s unique way of life. On his part, he feels his resolve on the path just got stronger with his newly wedded wife walking the path alongside him.