From believer to seeker

INTERVIEW Sathguru Jaggi Vasudev spells out his philosophy and the tenets of the Isha Foundation.

Sridhar Chaama

Isha Foundation recently offered an introductory flagship programme in Chennai between September 13 and 15, the second in two years, in the presence of its founder Sathguru Jaggi Vasudev. More than 15,000 people were initiated into the ancient Yoga technique of Shambavi Mahamudra by him, paving the way for their better physical and spiritual health. Similar large scale programmes have been conducted in the past in places such as Madurai, Tiruchi, Coimbatore, Puducherry and Mumbai.

Excerpts from a conversation with him:

On philosophy:
People always aspire for more. I help them to transcend this ‘thirst for more’ by providing their inner self ‘all.’ Bringing together 15,000 people under one roof is no big thing. I look back with satisfaction at the momentum with which the need to know more about ourselves has picked up.

It is true that the word ‘yoga’ is now popular around the globe but the one I am interested in is a spiritual process. One more area of activity is there -- the spiritual enterprise -- which is unavoidable in this age of competitive commerce. We also do spiritual enterprise, promoting and selling certain things which are good and soothing. When I sell those things, like, say a bottle of Isha pickles, I clearly tell people that it is part of the ‘Isha Business’ and has nothing to do with the spiritual process.

On tolerance and discipline...
There is a general perception that values and the character of an individual in India have taken a nosedive in recent years. If you look at ancient Indian history, you will find that we never had a rigid set of morals. We have been self-controlled and self-disciplined. We have been a nation of seekers, not believers. India is a billion of such self disciplined citizens. Issues such as terrorism and religious intolerance are not new to India or the rest of the world. Don’t you remember our enemy who ransacked the Nalanda University, which had the biggest collection of books in the world, for two and a half months? Then he learnt that nearly 4,000 monks had memorised the contents of those sacred books; so he burnt their homes. Just remember, all good things from Indian culture were razed to the ground by others. Even the birth of this nation resulted in the slaughtering of some half a million people. So violence has been there for a long time. When you start thinking in terms of killing someone just because he belonged to other belief or faith, you become a believer and are no longer a seeker.

The Foundation...
Every human being should have at least a drop of spirituality in him or her, irrespective of religion, nationality, colour, caste or creed. The Isha Foundation strives for this goal. The nucleus of our activity is Tamil Nadu because I want to proceed slowly. In the next few years, there should be no one in Tamil Nadu who does not have at least a drop of spirituality, completely irreligious and purely scientific in him... that’s my goal. We started with 14-day course, now we have simpler courses lasting seven days, three days, one day, just three hours and so on. In the U.S., we have gone in a detailed way and give online topics. No yoga can be taught online, so we just give some preparatory material and ask them to go to our centres when they need to experience and understand it deeper. In India, we concentrate on direct coaching.

Just understand one thing. We are a nation of seekers, not believers. About 50 years ago, every Indian child was into spirituality, because his parents taught him so. Now the present generation has nothing to offer and simply sends its wards to school and coaching centres. What we have been experiencing for thousands of years has now been forgotten. The rot has set in there. All clashes of today are due to this disease. So if you want to stay happy, wise, peaceful and contented, go to your roots. It is never too late.