

'Yoga is for all and not any one guru'

Last week, full-page advertisements by coaching institutes in Kota showcased students who had secured top ranks in this year's Joint Entrance Exam. But all the glossy publicity cannot hide the ugly reality: in the past five years, 57 students have committed suicide in this town. Nationally, 8,032 student suicides were reported in 2014, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Taking note of this alarming trend, **Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev**, who set up the Isha Foundation, is introducing an easy form of yoga in 30,000 schools across India, including coaching centres in Kota. Ahead of International Yoga Day, he talks to **Shobita Dhar** about how empowering students with techniques of inner well-being can not only pull them back from the brink but also help them grow into happier, stronger adults

■ What kind of yoga are you introducing in schools?

This practice is called 'upa yoga' or pre-yoga or sub-yoga. It is a series of free-flowing movements and simple breathing exercises. It activates the joints and the energy system. We have made DVDs of a 20-minute daily routine, which are used to train teachers who will then share these videos with students and help them ease into this routine. Our target is to reach out to 30,000 schools and 45,000 teachers. In Kota, we have collaborated with a centre with 65,000 students. We have already trained the teachers. The students will be introduced to the practice in the coming weeks.

■ How is upa yoga different from regular yoga?

It is a series of movements similar to yoga asanas but without a spiritual dimension. When there's a spiritual dimension then the practice needs to be precise, otherwise it can harm you. When you say yoga, people ask who is your guru, your teacher etc. We believe that the tools of self-transformation should be with everyone and not with a particular guru. These tools should be like your toothbrush. Once you realize the importance of brushing teeth, you will brush on your own. We just help with that realization.

A few weeks practice of upa yoga will create a noticeable improvement in your health. Your blood chemistry will improve and you will feel more energetic and balanced.

■ Why are students ending their lives?

In our country a lot of women have been committing suicide also. For some reason society thinks it's normal. Farm-

ers have been committing suicide. We think it is their fate. Now, even children below 16 are ending their lives...this means we are doing something fundamentally wrong. I see India's education system as the main culprit. Today, education is no longer about learning but earning unrealistic marks. Our education system is shortsighted. It was crafted to create clerks to serve Her Majesty's Service. It puts children under tremendous stress.

■ A lot of people see yoga as a tool to propagate Hindutva. Your comments...

Yoga predates dogmatic religion. It's being labelled as "Hindu" by people who feel insecure and are always seeking controversy. We just need to ignore such people and groups.

The fact that the UN created the International Yoga Day is a guarantee of its secular nature

At this point we need to understand who is a Hindu. Hindu is a geographical identity, not a religion. The land between the Himalayas and the Hind Mahasagar was called Hindu. These two geographical features protected us, allowing our civilization to flourish uninterrupted for 5,000 years. It's the people who came from outside who identified it as a religion. Every Hindu follows different beliefs, prays to different gods. Does this happen in religion? The fact that the UN created the International Yoga Day is a guarantee of its secular nature.

■ Why is the present government so actively involved in promoting yoga?

Suppose you found the state of mental health in the country to be very poor. You will address it, right? The Prime Minister recommended the creation of a Yoga Day because he sees what's happening in the country and outside. Economic development comes at a great cost. But if in the end you are physically and mentally sick then what's the point? Take the example of Europe. People living there have seen material wealth for the longest period on this planet. Yet, today 39% of its population is on prescription psychiatric medicines. If we are looking at economic development in India, we also need to manage our inner development.

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