

**THE HINDU**

**METRO PLUS**

## **The journey within**



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### **What could be better than learning all aspects of yoga in the hills?**

Sitting across the Nilgiris, all I see are untouched green sky-stabbing mountains. A wave of tea farms goes rumbling down the sides, crumpled at the base. The harpoon-like peaks are shrouded in ghost-grey mist.

An eight-year-old, after attending a workshop on the synthesis of yoga with parenting at the Ritambhara ashram where I am right now, tells me how it has changed her perspective on life.

Today is the last day of the class, where children along with parents re-examined mental frameworks.

Raghu Ananthanarayanan and his wife Sashikala Ananth started the ashram in Konavakarai, Kotagiri, three months back. Most people think yoga equals asanas and pranayamas.

“In reality, that’s only six sutras out of 196. Most of it is about how the mind works,” says Ananthanarayanan, who wants to increase awareness without technological distractions.

### **Retreat from the city**

“We had to choose a place which had the advantages of a metropolis but is still natural and ethereal,” said Ananth. This little heaven is a seven-and-a-half-acre property, nestled in a verdant valley, surrounded by forests. “The power of the place lies in the natural beauty. It cleanses your mind and rejuvenates you,” says Ananthanarayanan.

A student of IIT-Madras and an engineer by profession, he made his life holistic, thanks to a smith. “I was asked, despite studying western engineering, how could I not primarily understand metal? Furthermore, I contemplated whether I understood our culture. This took me to yoga,” says Ananthanarayanan, who was a direct disciple of Yogacharya Krishnamaachaarya and TKV Desikachar.

Ananth, an architect from School of Architecture, Madras University by profession and a Vaastu expert by choice, believes that one cannot run away to Western techniques and ignore our own. She says, “We intend to blend tradition with contemporary reality through the creation of the ashram.”

The couple was inspired by Dr Dharam Pal, a social scientist, to change paths. “He told us to walk back to our tradition and asked how we could make India become great by merely running behind the West,” says the yoga practitioner.

Yoga, for Ananthanarayanan, who considers Patanjali’s yoga sutras as his principle guide, is the synchronised power of the body, mind and beyond. His distress is how yoga is taught with limited knowledge.

“Unfortunately, people carry a distorted view. Just 2% would have read the Patanjali sutras,” says the behavioural scientist, who has been asked absurd questions of whether he can teleport and levitate. To which he says, “Yoga is about what is relevant for living a purposeful life. It is an inner journey.”

He admits that it is harder today to go back to one’s roots, when even our parents want us to be more ‘westernised’. “My father-in-law never introduced me as a yoga teacher but rather an engineer,” he says. He uses management and leadership techniques from *The Mahabharata* and through them coaches corporates. Apart from asanas, their workshops focus on healing by communing with nature, theatre, music and art.

Ananth, who studied under the guidance of Sri Ganapathi Sthapati, says, “If your self-image is borrowed, ennui sets in. That’s a sign to bring change.” The Vaastu specialist, who has also authored a number of books, believes that making people more self-reliant is what should be taught, and not making them dependent on their trainers.

She adds, “Our workshops are divided into three parts. It starts with ‘conversations’, where we make the student realise their thinking frameworks and patterns. The second stage is exploration of the emotional realm. The advanced stage is the ‘immersion’, which delves further into developing the sense of self.”

For the future, Ananth adds, “We will allow other people with similar ideas to use our centre. The goal is to empower more people. Our main job will be to train teachers to instruct how to live life in a holistic way.”

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*Sashikala Ananth*

*Yoga is about what is relevant for living a purposeful life. It is an inner journey*

*Raghu Ananthanarayanan*