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Posted: Sat, Jun 26 2010. 1:00 AM IST

Published on page 3

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LOUNGE REVIEW/YOGĀCARĀ

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A few years ago, the opening of a newfangled yoga institute would excite me. Sufi Yoga, Pilates Yoga, Hot Yoga—suddenly, there were so many. We imported back from the West what was our hottest export to it, repackaged and with fancy new names. Now, there seems to be fatigue for New Age yoga. When I checked last month, classes in the traditional institutes, such as the Iyengar Yogashraya in Lower Parel in Mumbai and Mumbai University's Ashtanga Yoga classes, were booked for the next two or three months.

When Radhika Vachani's Yogacara opened for an introductory trial period, I decided to try out a class. The brochure claimed it adopted a "traditional approach towards healing".

Tucked away in a breezy corner of Rewa House, the Maharani of Rewa's estate in south Mumbai, Yogacara overlooks a large expanse of the Arabian sea, which includes the Haji Ali mosque. The room where we were to do a 1-hour session of asanas and a massage directly overlooked the sea. The sea was in a rumble when I walked in, agitated by gathering monsoon clouds.

The good stuff

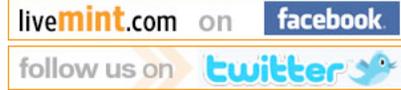
Vachani, who owns Yogacara and teaches yoga here, has been a practitioner since the early 1990s. She learnt Iyengar Yoga and also trained under gurus of the Bihar school of yoga while pursuing her career as a business director in a brand strategy firm. This year, she qualified to be a teacher and quit her job.

She uses props used in Iyengar Yoga such as wooden bricks, blankets, ropes and chairs—inventions of B.K.S. Iyengar. The approach is easy; I gradually warmed up from basic poses to slightly more advanced variations of the same poses. The goals: accurate alignment of body parts involved in a particular asana, stretching the right muscles and holding a position for the right time—the three tenets of the purest forms of Hatha Yoga, of which Iyengar and Ashtanga are offshoots. In the 1-hour session, she taught me the fundamentals, which includes ensuring there's intelligence in my knees and toes—which means keeping the knees tightly stretched upwards and toes and feet rooted.

I practised four variations of standing asanas, two of backward bends with the help of props, and two sleeping asanas. My lungs got a healthy expansion and muscles all over the body got some stretch. After a break, I got the Yogacara Special massage—a combination of Shiatsu, Balinese massage and reflexology. There was no pummelling with handfuls of oil. The masseur knew the strained and painful areas, and focused on them. My weak areas, the upper back and elbow, felt unknotted for a few hours. I walked into the wet outdoors with a sense of exhilaration.

The not-so-good

The traditional Iyengar approach is not known to excite those who are looking for yoga that pushes the body to degrees which make it the equivalent of a heart-pumping, sweaty workout. The movements are not quick and dynamic, and unless done for at least six months, you are not likely to see the result—a flexible, strong



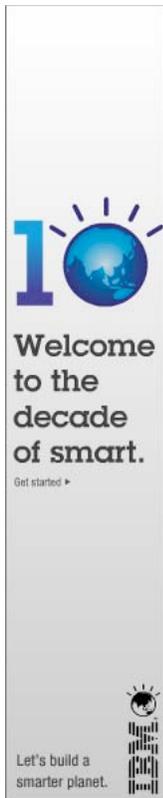
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and toned body.

The course is not for those who already know the fundamentals of Hatha Yoga and are looking to intensify and master asanas.

Talk plastic

For the monthly membership (a minimum of three months), there are three packages. For Rs6,800, three sessions of yoga every week, one session of Pranayam and meditation every week and two massages every month. The Rs8,000 package is only for massages—four every month; and the third, for yoga/and/or Pranayam only, includes three sessions every week. Service tax is extra. Till 30 June, there's a free trial period of one each of the yoga, Pranayam and massage sessions.

For more details and appointments, call 9833198371.

Sanjukta Sharma

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