

Yoga in Mysore Part 2

Bharat Shetty of YogaIndia teaches in Gokulam the same suburb that Pattabhi Jois has his new Shala in.

Bharat has a very deep and yet soft personal practice, he has studied the Sivananda system to an advanced level and also studied with BKS Iyengar in Pune and certified by the Indian Yoga Institute (Vivekananda Kendra). Bharat is 27 years old and has been teaching for seven years.

Bharat invited me to take part in some of his classes and was exceptionally friendly, communicative and enthusiastic. He teaches many classes each day to the local Indian population focusing on lifestyle and well-being. Heart disease and diabetes connected with overweight are a massive problem in India amongst the wealthy and often very sedentary Indian middle classes. He also teaches classes focused on beginners, foundation course, children's yoga, yoga therapy, back pain, stress management, backbending and advanced asanas.

I really enjoyed his class and his teaching style was detailed and flowing, the influences from his training were

apparent although unlike Iyengar he doesn't use props unless absolutely necessary.

As a westerner you could come and study a foundation course with Bharat, his foundation course includes practice and analysis of asana, it is a step-by-step approach to developing practice, small convivial classes of up to eight students with individual coaching as necessary. Bharat's English is also good which makes a huge difference in communication for westerners seeking to study Yoga in India.

Bharat also does a five hundred hour teacher training accredited with the Yoga Alliance that lasts four months. This is intensive and involves a month of Yoga therapy, anatomy and chanting. The second month focuses on asana and asana development. The third month is assisting in classes and working on advanced asanas. The fourth month is hands on teaching, teaching local Indians about management of weight, stress, back pain and the various therapeutic applications of Yoga, also foundation courses and children's Yoga.

Bharat only takes six students at a time on his teacher-training course.

BNS. Iyengar is a student of Krishnamacharya and teaches at the Sri Parakalamutta, the temple where Krishnamacharya himself taught.

The old and atmospheric practice space is a wonderful place to practice and Iyengar teaches early morning and evening Vinyasa Ashtanga asana classes here.

He also teaches course on mudras, pranayama, philosophy, meditation and teacher trainings. Mr. Iyengars English is not always the best and sometimes it is difficult to understand him, which can make seeking information harder. Many eminent teachers praise Mr. Iyengar and come to the temple to work with him over and over again.

I went to work with him and he was reluctant to answer questions, maybe he is jaded by the number of westerners seeking Yoga? He wont answer questions till you have paid your five thousand rupees for the asana class and your five thousand rupees for an afternoon class

on mudras or whatever topic you choose to study with him.

Iyengar has a wicked sense of humour and it is possible to sense his disdain for the grand-master of ashtanga up in Gokulam. In fact Iyengar's school is called Vinyasa Ashtanga whilst Pattabhi Jois's is called Ashtanga Vinyasa. Iyengar's is called the Yoga Research Institute and Pattabhi Jois's is called the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute. I don't think either organisation do what we in the west consider to be research, double blind empirical testing with reproducible results, but such is life!

It is interesting to see the old temple, to practice there and to imbibe some of Mr. Iyengars wisdom and humour.

I did wonder if he lives under the double shadow of Krishnamacharya and Pattabhi Jois, but that is for him to say. Iyengar teaches the old school style of Ashtanga which involves a few extra postures including hand standing and there are only the original four series instead of the six that Pattabhi Jois has expanded it to become. Mr. Iyengars adjustments are a little cursory, yet if you

want quality, intelligent, sensitive adjustments India is perhaps not the place to come!

So if you want to learn Vinyasa Ashtanga from the hands of someone who learnt from Krishnamacharya and who passes on the original four series as well as his other trainings then you would do well to study with him.

Two of Mr. Iyengar's students also now teach in Mysore. The first is Sheshadri, fifty three years old, an ex-farmer and former Yoga champion who teaches at the Mysore Mandala.

Sheshadri has forty years of Yoga practice behind him, his father also being a Yogi.

He teaches Ashtanga classes in his unique way early in the morning at six am and in the evening at five pm.

Sheshadri also teaches pranayama classes as an extra possibility and teacher trainings where you can learn his strong adjustment style.

I met about a dozen people who had been hurt, knees, hamstrings and backs are the usual complaints at classes at the Mandala, however I really enjoyed Sheshadri's

strong style which involved him doing Mayurasana (peacock) on my back whilst I was in Paschimottanasana, standing on my hips when I was in Kapotasana (pigeon) and Urdhva Dhanurasana (upward bow/backbend) and so on. I think if you can relax into his adjustments or you can clearly say no, then you will be fine. He teaches the old style Krishnamacharyan versions of the Ashtanga sequences.

Sheshadri also emphasised to me the importance of theory saying it is like two wings of a bird, theory and practice. He called himself a 'baby in yoga' compared to the greats like Krishnamacharya, Pattabhi Jois, BKS Iyengar and BNS Iyengar his former teacher.

Sheshadri other than being naturally humble is also a very friendly, very happy and delightful man, and this enthuses his teaching space. I really enjoyed practising with him.

The Mandala is a wonderful space for people new to India who need a little sanctuary, there is a small café serving western oriented food in it's delightful garden space. They also run course in Ayurvedic massage, Sanskrit, Chanting

of the Sutras, Hatha Yoga, South Indian Classical dance and bone setting. There are two Ayurvedic doctors who also work in the space, Drs Manjunath and Nagaraj, they also teach Yoga therapy. The Mandala also helps westerners find accommodation and if your lucky you might get a space in the beautiful old Sudharma house set like a crumbling jewel in its delicious gardens and it is just across the road from the Mandala.

Ajjay Kumar teaches from his newly appointed Shala, Sthalam 8 in Laxmipuram. Ajjay is twenty one years old and has been practising Yoga since he was ten years old. His main teacher was BNS. Iyengar and again he teaches the old school approach to Ashtanga, the traditional Yoga Chikitsa and Nadi Shodana series along with Advanced A and B series. Ajjay clearly states that the real work is the first two series and the Advanced series are 'funky stuff' to engage the Yogi in new exploration. He is currently engaged in studying his thirteen-year degree in Sanskrit. Ajjay is young and obviously does not have the experience of the older teachers in Mysore. He has small

classes of about eight students so you are guaranteed attention, he adjusts well and he stops if you ask him. Sometimes it is good for us to be taken beyond our self-imposed limits but only when one is ready and ripe. All of Ajjay's students I spoke to, were very happy with his class, felt they were learning and progressing and were not being injured. Students in his class included refugees from the overly busy Gokulam Shala and those who had received injuries/openings in other Shalas.

Ajjay held a disciplined convivial space and though young is developing as a gifted teacher. He has already demonstrated his competency in practice and he does well in communicating the practice. Again I really enjoyed his teaching style, his good adjustments and his ordinary simple kindness.

It is good to see the vibrant city of Mysore still thriving as a Yoga city, to sense its diversity of teaching engaging and benefiting the local population as well as serving international Yoga tourism and Yoga education in a way that is uniquely Indian. In terms of sensitive, intelligent physical adjustment I have never experienced as good

adjustments as one can receive from exquisite western teachers such as John Scott and Shiva Rea, in terms of clear explanation of esoteric practice I have not received any better than western teachers such as Swami Satya Prakash and Swami Pragyamurti however for the Indian experience of Yoga, Mysore along with Rishikesh and Chennai (TKV Desikachar, Krishnamacharya's son) has to be a place to visit.

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