

Don't try to politicise yoga

Yoga, as described in classical texts like Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, aimed at attaining a higher philosophical plane. The asanas that make the body supple allow a practitioner to adopt poses allowing utmost concentration as in meditation. Of course, rules aren't cast in stone, and many ancient practices have been adapted to make them relevant today. The yoga that India assiduously promotes as a health and fitness regimen is the asanas-based exercise: many Indians as well as foreigners use it to keep fit just like people go to the gymnasium. It is wonderful to celebrate this in an International Yoga Day, designated by the UN. But it's only a guess whether it goes beyond a day's photo op and inspires more to take to this Indian cultural form to seek fitness and health.

The secular form of yoga has nothing to do with religion, more with philosophy and a state of mind. It's another matter that yoga is a subject that suits the narrative the current government is aiming to build of ancient Indian wisdom being vastly superior. This is why the Prime Minister has even been heard talking of an imaginary Indian plastic surgery practice of ancient times, while his minions trumped up stories of ancient aeronautics, etc. Irrespective of whether people can master yoga to get on to the higher plane of mind control, it will remain a popular fitness regime. It's futile then to politicise it to the extent of seeing which leaders support yoga and which don't. Surely, to take to yoga is a personal choice, best left to the individual.