Iyengar Yoga for Women: A Practising Tradition in the Making

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Abstract

This article explores women-oriented Iyengar Yoga (IY) practices through a historical, textual and ethnographical analysis. These practices were inaugurated by the teachings of B. K. S. Iyengar and Geeta Iyengar and globally expanded by IY teachers. The research focuses on how these pioneer practices were formed, the way they are perceived with respect to the ancient yoga tradition, and the way they are implemented among IY teachers. Drawing on Iyengar literature and interviews with IY teachers, the article suggests that women-oriented practices are considered by Iyengar members as rooted in ancient knowledge which was illuminated by the Iyengars. Also, women-oriented IY practices manifest what might be considered as the distinct attributes of IY teachings. Women-oriented practices are perceived as a distinct, yet inseparable segment of IY practices. While Iyengar teachers express diverse standpoints regarding specialized practices’ necessity and usage, they are an inherent element of the contemporary Iyengar teaching tradition.

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References


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"Iyengar Yoga comes directly from the most classical Hatha yoga tradition, but it has evolved into a very precise and clear method that is easily understood by the modern practitioner. There is a lot of attention paid to the technical alignment of the poses to keep the mind drawn inwards, but also focused and connected to reality." - Adela Serrano. What makes it unique?

Afterwards, their training is ongoing according to standards set by the various Iyengar Associations in the world and supervised personally by the Iyengars in Pune. What are the benefits? Mr. Iyengar started practicing yoga because he had poor health as a child but with daily practice his health and strength improved and he experienced great benefits in his own body. Author of the classic guide Yoga: A Gem for Women, Geeta specializes in employing yoga to help balance and regulate the female reproductive cycle and teaches women how to synchronize their practice with ovulation, menstruation, and the pre- and postmenstrual phases. Geeta S. Iyengar's Guide to a Woman's Yoga Practice, Vol. 1, is a more scholarly work by Lois Steinberg, director of the B.K.S. Iyengar Institute of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, who had fibroid and thyroid problems when she arrived in Pune in 1993. She was taken under Geeta's wing, and "within weeks the fibroids became quiescent, and my thyroid started functioning on its own again," writes Steinberg. "Most importantly, my spirit soared." Iyengar yoga has been named after its founder, BKS Iyengar and is a form of Hatha yoga. It emphasises on the precision of asanas and breathing exercises. According to the official website of BKS Iyengar, "Iyengar yoga is meant for all and is a way of life. The use of props, designed by Guruji, such as wooden gadgets, belts, ropes helps the practitioner to achieve perfection in any asana. Regular practice of 'Iyengar Yoga' definitely integrates the body, mind and emotions." This style of Yoga makes use of different styles of props like, blocks, straps, harness, belts and bl