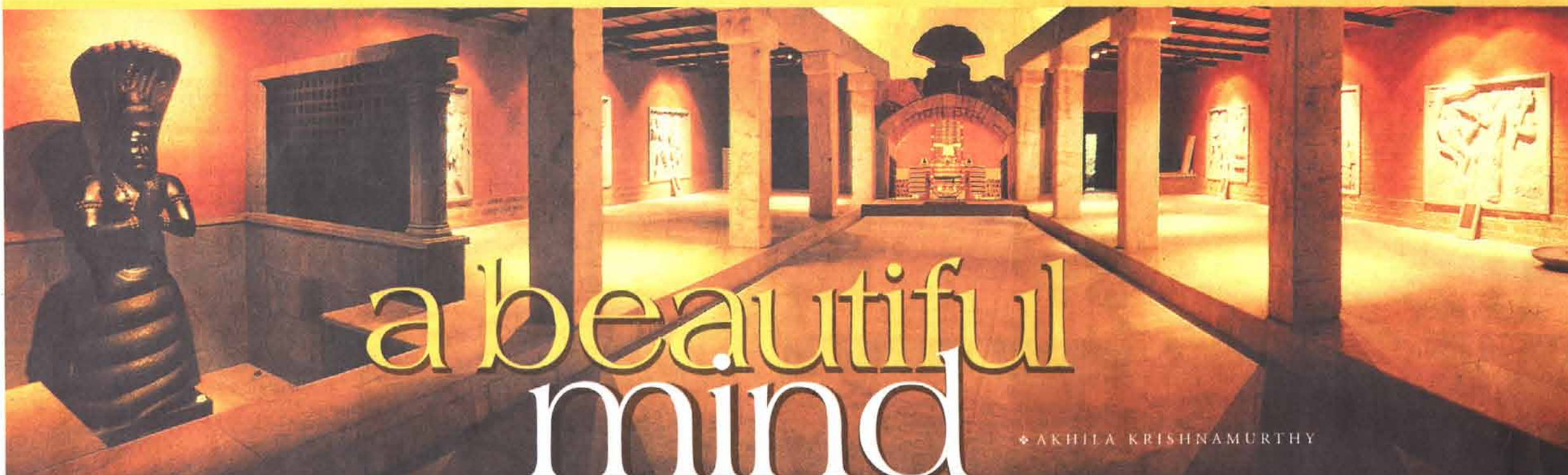


1 Identity

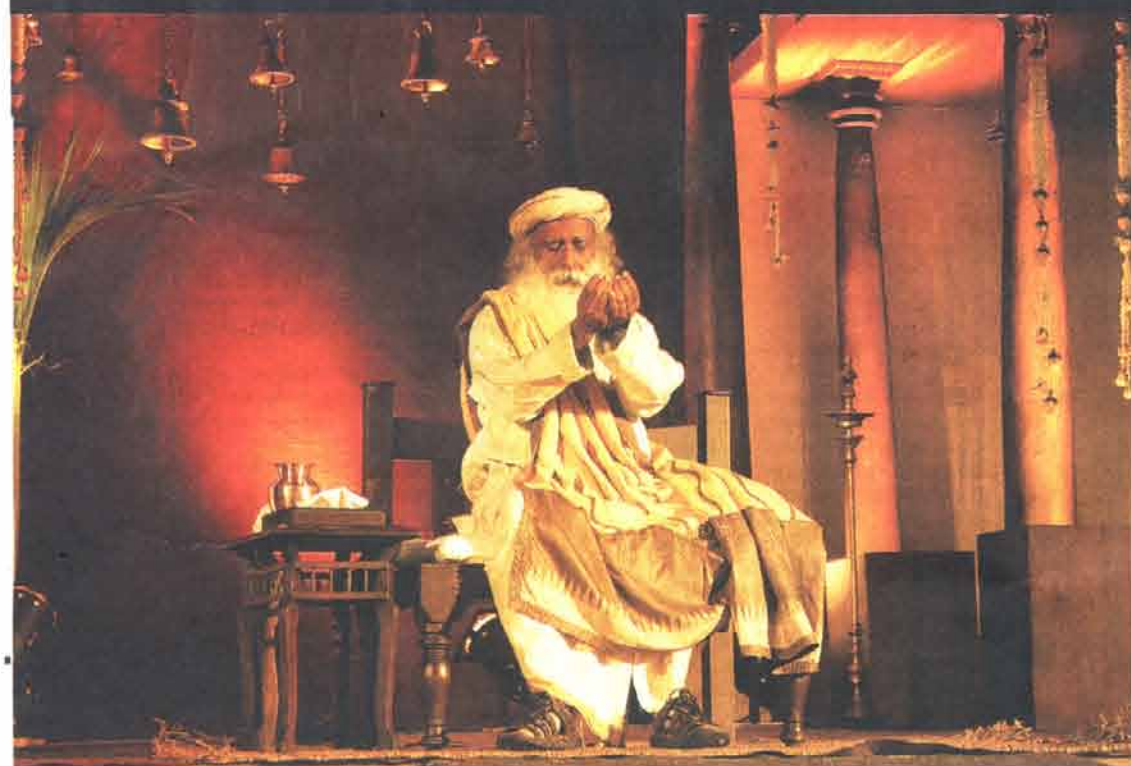
The spiritual process is basically a process of turning inward. It is the process of understanding the mind. The more you master the mind, the better you can use it. As regards space, space and atmosphere are aids in the process of meditation



a beautiful mind

AKHILA KRISHNAMURTHY

"THE MIND IS A SOPHISTICATED GADGET," SAYS SADHGURU JAGGI VASUDEV IN AN INTERVIEW THAT TRACES THE PROJECTS OF THE ISHA FOUNDATION, THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDITATION AND OF COURSE, THE VELLANGIRI HILLS...



From the time you began the Isha Foundation, how far have you come in realising your dream of initiating people on the path of physical and emotional well-being? Dreams are seamless; they keep

growing all the time. I had a vision for Isha; when these things first happened to me, I'd be overcome by ecstasy. I'd think of making the whole world ecstatic. Over the years, I've grown older. I've most certainly touched a few million people but a few million is still not the world. I've consciously

restricted the focus of the Isha projects to Tamil Nadu. Today, if you travel in any village in Tamil Nadu, you'll see they know about Isha. So in that sense, Isha has come a long way.

How has Inner Engineering, a programme for personal

growth, impacted people? How has it changed their lives?

Honestly, I don't want Inner Engineering to be a programme; I want it to be a culture. A spiritual process, I believe, should not be taught by a guru. It should be like how your mother teaches you to brush your teeth; she makes it a part of your life. The other thing is, we live in a country whose spiritual ethos is really what holds it together. Everything is different in this country.

How did you discover that?

As a youngster, I have criss-crossed the length and breadth of this country on a bike. There's one thing common that I found across one and all in India, irrespective of caste, creed, class, religion - Mukti. Even an illiterate man in a remote corner of the country, who hasn't read the Vedas, for example, will tell you that he wants Mukti. That understanding of the fact that there is a way to transcend physical limitations, is ingrained in our DNA. It is embedded in our culture. I realised, as I went along that if I didn't do anything to strengthen that spiritual thread, it would be very hard to hold this country together.

You also discovered the Velliangiri hills on your mo-bike, right?

Yes. As a child, I'd constantly be flooded with the image of a mountain peak. It was constantly there in the background of my eyes, whether I was asleep or wide awake. When I was about 16, I began my search of these mountains. I biked my way from Karwar to Kanyakumari and even went up

the Himalayas but didn't find what was in my mind's eye. Then one day, I found it. I broke through the dense forest and knew I had to buy this land. I did it on the eleventh day, it was registered to us.

What is meditation? How important do you believe is space in the context of meditation?

The spiritual process is basically a process of turning inward. It is the process of understanding the mind. If you have a mobile and you'd like to use it well, you'll do what it takes to understand it better, right? Likewise with the mind. It is a sophisticated gadget. The more you master it, the better you can use it. As regards



space, I think for beginners, space and atmosphere are aids in the process of meditation.

We also live in a world where more and more people are turning towards spirituality, right?

Well it's because people are realising that everything you looked for in life is with

you, and yet it doesn't fulfill you. People are understanding that material wealth alone is not enough.

Can you share with us experiences of one of the many projects the Isha Foundation has pioneered?

I think we've touched the lives of people and the world we live in, in many tangible ways. Project Greenhands is one such. As part of it, we've planted as many as 15 million trees and as many as 1,100 nurseries are being managed. All this hasn't been easy. I spent the first six years of my life planting trees in people's minds, which is the hardest terrain. The other thing about this project is that it has spawned off so many other similar organisations that have realised the importance of a green cover.

Among your focus areas is also education. Can you tell us a little about it?

I think what is lacking in the current educational system is inspiration. Education needs to be child-driven. In Isha, we don't see education as a mere cramming of information. In the Isha Home School that is a hundred percent voluntary organisation, the ratio of teacher per children is 1:6. We are also in consultation with the government in Tamil Nadu to make a sea change in rural education. We are hoping to adopt schools in rural areas and evolve a parallel system of education. In the next six to seven years, we are hoping to adopt as many as 6,000 schools. I believe this is a great way to make a difference.

living in the ashram

SRAVANTH



It has been nine months since I moved into the ashram, and it seems like I walked in just yesterday. Somehow, the hours have merged into days and the days have merged into months and all of a sudden I realise that I've been riding the Isha wave for nine months now. One of the most frequent questions that visitors of the ashram ask me is, "Why did you give up everything and move here at such a young age?" Frankly speaking, I don't see what I gave up. As far as a spiritual seeker is concerned, there is no better place to be. The Dhyanalinga Temple, Linga Bhairavi

and Theerthakund are fantastic supports for someone on the spiritual path. Apart from that, even if you look at the other aspects of the ashram, the people are great, the accommodation is great, the food is great, the weather is great, the mountains are great and to top it all, the ashram is right in the middle of a lush green forest. Being woken up by an alarm clock can simply not be compared to being woken up by a peacock call. So I really didn't give up anything at all. As

far as I can see, moving into the ashram was the best decision I took. It has been like a nine-month vacation and my only complaint is that 24 hours in a day is too little for me to experience everything here. There is a lot of activity and work to be done around the ashram. But the beauty of the whole thing is,

TINA JABR

The tiny nudge of awakening that I experienced during the Isha Yoga programme revealed to me, an irresistible longing that swept me away from the almost royal comfort I had at home. I adapted effortlessly to the cultural differences, though I was not receptive enough to feel the submerging, vibrant energy loading every particle here. No. The stones here would have been more receptive than I was.

However, I could not miss noticing the human beings living here. What a relief to finally have proof that people could live naturally, joyfully, ecstatically and intensely, in harmony with nature and in touch with that truth that seems

to pervade even the soil. It took me a long time to understand that this was not about being perfect, but rather a genuine seeking and altruistic dedication that made them, and everything around them, shine. This "living space" bloomed into my sight, more colourful every day. I discovered the softness of this sacred space, where life seemed to sing the most melodious tune, the stillness of the early mornings and the dark nights, the feeling of being cradled by nature, the love and attention poured into every action, the laughter, the spontaneous celebration, and the treasure of having a live guru speak, share, and live among us.

The colours outside were beautiful, but something within was aching to explode. The first time I stepped into the

Dhyanalinga temple and saw people prostrating, the Christian in me rebelled. Yet, the dome was so inviting that I ignored the imposing black stone and the activity around it; I closed my eyes. There, for the first time in my life, I drowned in an ocean of stillness. My new found aliveness gave me eyes to see that everything here was resonating with life, pulsating like nowhere else I had experienced. The mountains, the sky, the earth, the food, the water I drink and bathe in, the air I breathe, the flowers, bees and butterflies, the roots, the birds, the buildings and even the stones seemed to have an extra song to them.

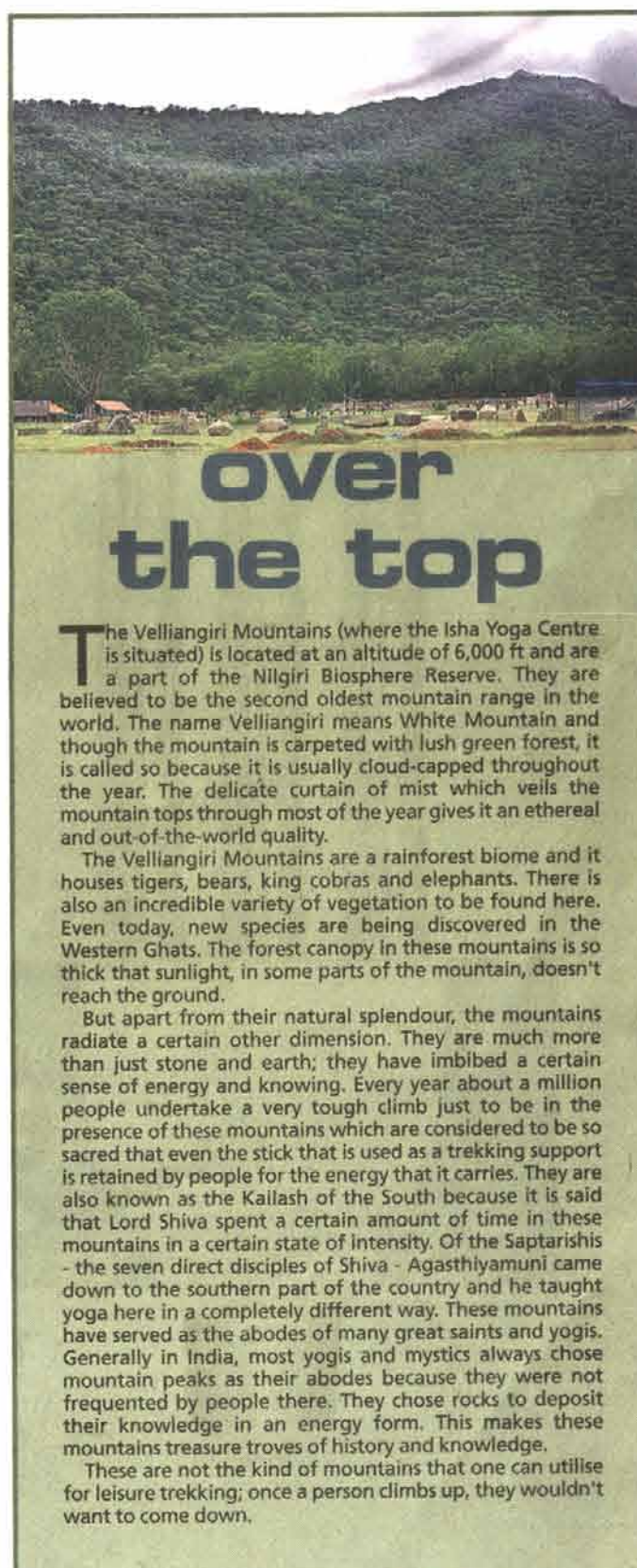
The writer who is from Lebanon is a full-time volunteer at the Isha Yoga Centre



The Dhyanalinga Temple, Linga Bhairavi and Theerthakund are fantastic supports for someone on the spiritual path

when you and the people around you enjoy what you are doing, it really doesn't seem like "work" at all. I think the fact that everybody in the ashram has volunteered to be here - they are here out of choice and not out of compulsion - plays a big role in making the ashram a wonderful place to live in.

The writer, aged 26, gave up a corporate career to become a volunteer at the Ashram



over the top

The Velliangiri Mountains (where the Isha Yoga Centre is situated) is located at an altitude of 6,000 ft and are a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. They are believed to be the second oldest mountain range in the world. The name Velliangiri means White Mountain and though the mountain is carpeted with lush green forest, it is called so because it is usually cloud-capped throughout the year. The delicate curtain of mist which veils the mountain tops through most of the year gives it an ethereal and out-of-the-world quality.

The Velliangiri Mountains are a rainforest biome and it houses tigers, bears, king cobras and elephants. There is also an incredible variety of vegetation to be found here. Even today, new species are being discovered in the Western Ghats. The forest canopy in these mountains is so thick that sunlight, in some parts of the mountain, doesn't reach the ground.

But apart from their natural splendour, the mountains radiate a certain other dimension. They are much more than just stone and earth; they have imbibed a certain sense of energy and knowing. Every year about a million people undertake a very tough climb just to be in the presence of these mountains which are considered to be so sacred that even the stick that is used as a trekking support is retained by people for the energy that it carries. They are also known as the Kailash of the South because it is said that Lord Shiva spent a certain amount of time in these mountains in a certain state of intensity. Of the Saptarishis - the seven direct disciples of Shiva - Agasthiyuni came down to the southern part of the country and he taught yoga here in a completely different way. These mountains have served as the abodes of many great saints and yogis. Generally in India, most yogis and mystics always chose mountain peaks as their abodes because they were not frequented by people there. They chose rocks to deposit their knowledge in an energy form. This makes these mountains treasure troves of history and knowledge.

These are not the kind of mountains that one can utilise for leisure trekking; once a person climbs up, they wouldn't want to come down.

