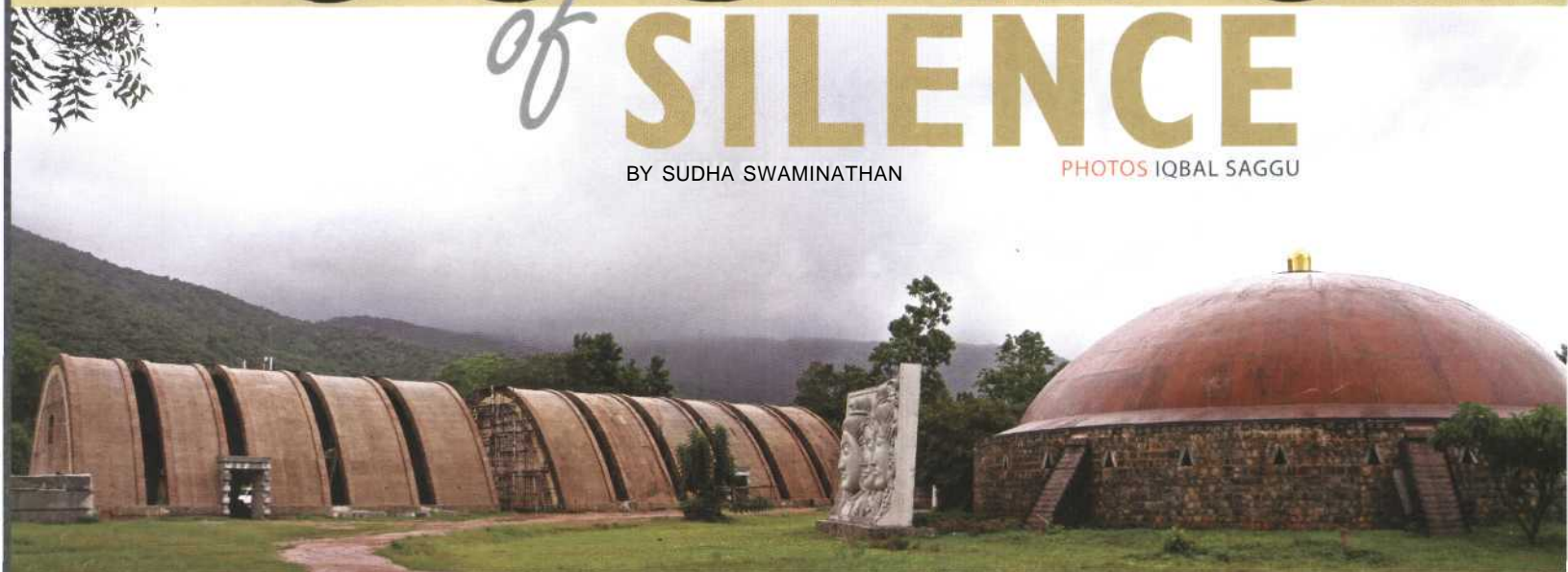


the SOUNDS of SILENCE

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PHOTOS IQBAL SAGGU



The epitome of a sound that is universal and yet rare



"IT'S a sleepy city," quips my friend, the moment I reveal my destination to her. I have no plans of exploring the city, but the enthusiastic taxi driver is proud to point out how it is changing, slowly but surely. He adds that the textile city has little to offer for a city dweller in terms of a night life, but Coimbatore has an ancient lineage and there are temples, parks and spiritual stops aplenty.

The Dhyanalunga Yogic Temple being one such example. Ever since I became a volunteer with the Isha Foundation, a non-profit, non-religious organisation, founded by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, I have wanted to visit this 'unique, first-of-its-kind temple', located 35 kms from Coimbatore, at the foothills of Velliangiri Mountains. What intrigued me is that this temple is 'not ancient' and the minute I sight the temple spire - its roof standing on huge un-carved granite pillars with cascading iron snakes, I am hooked.

At the main temple, I am directed to the reception area located within the temple precinct that gives an introduction to the inception, making and significance of the Dhyanalunga Yogic Temple (the first temple to be consecrated in 2000 years). Clad in pristine whites, the volunteer at the reception area explains that the shrine does not ascribe to any religion and is built on the fundamental principles of yoga. It has been created purely for meditation and hence there is no pooja or prayer nor any other form of ritual performed in the temple. What about the *linga*? Isn't that a religious symbol? I get a scientific explanation: The shape of the *linga* retains energy better than any other shape, and the first form in the existence is an ellipsoid, the shape of a *linga*. And thus begins the temple tour.

Starting with a circumambulation of the temple, we make our way to a water pool called Theerthakund, made with massive granite blocks and bricks. A water pond is a significant element of ancient temples, and devotees are meant to take a dip before entering the



temple. This *kund* has also been created for the same purpose, informs the volunteer, and the water of the Theerthakund is energised with a *linga* made of solid mercury. Shower stalls and robes are provided for men and women wanting to take a dip. I am led to the less crowded 'ladies' side of the pool, and I am amazed how everything is conducted in absolute silence. I swim across to touch the Rasalinga. The water is thick; the buoyancy of the water seems to be too high for a tank with water of five feet. Perhaps it is the energy of the *linga*...

At the main entrance of the shrine stands a huge white granite monolith, the Sarva Dharma Sthambha etched with symbols of all religions, announcing that the place is beyond religion and welcomes all.

While the temple has been built on the principles of temple science, the architectural presentation is very distinct. In sharp contrast to other temples where the sanctum sanctorum is covered with a towering roof, at the Dhyanalinga it is in a dome shape. The open *parikrama* (pathway surrounding the temple) which leads to the central dome is flanked by covered aisles. Sculpted stone panels that depict the life of south Indian yogis are embedded within the walls covering the *parikrama*. Patanjali, considered the father of yoga, is presented in his famous half-human half-snake form on a sunken platform.

I finally enter the dome. Here, silence is the only sound. A magnificent *linga* stands at the center of the dome. I am ushered in by a monk who speaks in gestures. I sit down in one of the cells inside the dome in a crossed leg posture with palms facing upwards as instructed.

I have been told that I am in time for the Nadha Aradhana, an offering of sound held twice a day at the shrine. The soothing music of vocals and instruments sets the tone for visitors to slip into meditation with ease.

Visitors to the temple also have the opportunity to get initiated into the timeless 'Aum' meditation that helps strengthen physical and mental composition. This free course is organised every day between 1230h to 1310h.

I am too overwhelmed with feelings that I cannot describe, so I merely nod a heartfelt 'thank you' to the volunteer and leave. Somewhere at the back of my mind, I have made a decision that I shall come back again, and soon.